Recovery Resilience Solutions

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Peer Support Specialist Times

"Recovery and healing happen in relationship." - PSL for the 21st Century

Navigating the Peer Support Job Market

By Michael Zeeb



In my role with the Crestwood Recovery Resilience Solutions Team, I partner with graduates of our Peer Support Learning for the 21st Century course to help them find employment. While hiring timelines vary, most graduates who persist successfully secure peer support roles.

Based on my experience, here are six key strategies to stay motivated, protect your morale, and successfully navigate the job market:

1. Jump into Test Prep with Enthusiasm and Take the State Exam Quickly

Graduates with a Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification are interviewed and hired much faster. While the magic combination for passing is different for everyone, this approach works very well:

- **Apply quickly:** Start your state exam application as soon as possible after graduation. Follow our team's post-graduation guidelines if you wish to qualify for fee waiver codes.
- **Attend Test Prep classes:** You will typically wait 3–4 weeks after submitting your initial application to schedule a test date. Use this time to attend our Test Prep classes at least a few times a week. Over 90% of our graduates who attend these classes pass on their first try! Independent study helps too.

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- **Prepare your materials:** Use the 3–4 week waiting period to update your resume and research open positions. While many employers require certification upfront, some will hire you beforehand if you commit to passing the exam within the first 2–3 months of employment.

2. Maintain Persistence

Some graduates obtain employment quickly, while for others it takes longer. Even if the search takes more time than expected, staying consistent and keeping up morale are key. Continuing to practice personal recovery skills and staying connected with positive supporters are great ways to keep up morale!

3. Widen Your Net

Many job seekers target a "dream job" with perfect hours, location, or pay. While this reflects great self-awareness, focusing exclusively on ideal roles can prolong your search and lead to discouragement. Widening your net to include "acceptable jobs" provides valuable experience, networking opportunities, and a strong stepping stone toward your ultimate career goals.

4. Apply Regularly Without Burning Out

Treating a job search like a 40-hour work week often leads to exhaustion. Establishing a sustainable routine that balances regular applications with self-care is much more effective. Scheduling out "job search time" on a calendar (and sticking to it) can help greatly.

5. Volunteer Strategically

If you face a longer hiring timeline, volunteering at a peer-run program, a Warm Line, or a community organization is an amazing option. It keeps your skills sharp, fills resume gaps, expands your professional network, and boosts morale. It also frequently opens doors to unadvertised, paid positions within that organization.

6. Continue Life-Long Learning

Participating in ongoing education keeps us motivated and engaged. You can attend conferences, complete certifications like Mental Health First Aid, and/or take other classes. For example, UCLA offers an excellent, free series of mental health recovery courses in conjunction with the Department of Mental Health at learn.wellbeing4la.org.

If you are a graduate currently navigating this process, I wish you great success. Finding the right peer support role is about harnessing our passion, believing in ourselves, and staying consistent with both the job search and self-care. It is about "staying in the zone"—continuing to learn, build connections, and stay positive as we create a path to a successful career.

Viva La Evolution!

A podcast on Growth, Resilience, and Transformation



- Promote the recovery process with individuals and teams.
- Shift your organization's culture to a recovery focus that builds resilience.
- Listen to interviews with important leaders in the recovery field and hear from people who are in recovery and how they got there.
- Discover unique ways peer support specialists can support your team and enhance recovery service outcomes

Join The Conversation!

Exchanging Takeaways for Giving

By Chris W. Martin



Have you ever asked for a takeaway box from the service staff at a favorite restaurant? I know I have- many times. The work we do in recovery services, however, is more for giving rather than for taking away. We give the people we serve our hearts, our time, and our energy. We do our best to give them our patience, our praise, and our positive expectations, empowering them to recover and thrive. And we avoid taking away their hope and belief in themselves.

With our focal point mostly on the people we serve, it may be easy to lose our "giving-ness" sight for our coworkers who are serving right along beside us. Sometimes in our day-to-day work, we might feel offended by something a coworker does or does not do. Whether the offense was intentional or not, we may find ourselves taking away something from them. That something can be our kindness; our trust; our willingness to connect and see their strengths and potential; or our ability to see them in the light of the present instead of the tint from the past.

Forgiveness is a way for giving them grace and then a space… so they can show up differently. It's for giving generously so we can see what's strong and right in them. And in so giving, we can avoid taking away what we might otherwise conclude is wrong and slight in them. So, if there's one takeaway that I hope you get from this article, it's…… for giving….. to yourself and your coworkers- our fellow servers.

Offering Forgiveness – It's For Giving

Forgiveness is about giving up the hurt and resentment we may have toward someone who hurt us. It doesn't mean we necessarily let the other person off the hook, but it does mean we don't dangle ourselves up on the hook with them. Due to the nature of the offense or the other person's unwillingness to address it, forgiveness may not always end up with a reconciliation. We can, however, reconcile a plan for giving ourselves peace of mind and a commitment to move forward.

Actually, forgiveness truly is for…. giving….

- for giving the other person grace
- for giving ourselves peace of mind
- for giving others greater empathy and compassion
- for giving up our need to be right over keeping harmony with someone
- for giving ourselves release from bitterness and resentment
- for giving ourselves understanding that we too have made mistakes; we are perfectly imperfect
- for giving ourselves another chance and a new start
- for giving others a way to reconcile their conscience
- for giving the person(s) who hurt us a chance to forgive themselves
- for giving greater health to ourselves, improving our heart, blood pressure, and anxiety levels
- for giving a way to be fully connected to the present, not chained to a past hurt or wrong
- for giving up our need to be right and recognized
- for giving others the chance to heal themselves and restore their health
- for giving ourselves freedom to move forward
- for giving up our need to have the last word
- for giving ourselves less stress and a lighter load to carry
- for giving our spirit a chance to rise
- for giving those we love a closer bond
- for giving ourselves better rest and sleep
- for giving ourselves a higher way of being

"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." ~ Lewis B. Smedes



Advancing Peer Support: Building Opportunities, Resilience, and Professional Growth

Peer Support is more than a job—it is a meaningful profession with opportunities for growth, leadership, and career advancement. Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) bring invaluable lived experience, hope, and resilience to the behavioral health workforce.

Yet, many Peer Support Specialists continue to encounter workplace stigma and limited opportunities for professional advancement. Too often, Peer Support is viewed as an endpoint rather than a stepping-stone to expanded roles in recovery programming, training, supervision, and management.

It's time to change that narrative! Peer Support Specialists are essential members of the behavioral health workforce. By advocating for recovery-oriented practices, demonstrating professional strengths, and building resilience in the workplace, CMPSS can help shape the future of behavioral health services across California. CRRS encourages organizations, employers, and colleagues to recognize the value of Peer Support and invest in opportunities that allow Peer Support Specialists to grow, lead, and advance professionally.

Creating Opportunities and Strengthening the Peer Support Workforce

CRRS continues to seek opportunities to expand and strengthen the Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS) workforce. We welcome information about job openings and employment opportunities for qualified CMPSS throughout the state. We are also interested in connecting with organizations that offer volunteer opportunities, providing individuals with valuable experience and an opportunity to develop their skills in delivering Peer Support Services.

Supporting Professional Growth and Overcoming Stigma

The integration and advancement of Peer Support Specialists in behavioral health settings continues to face challenges, particularly around lingering stigma associated with recovery and resilience. Many CMPSS report difficulty advancing professionally because Peer Support Services are sometimes viewed as a career endpoint rather than a meaningful pathway into expanded roles in recovery programming, training, leadership, and management. Peer Support is a valuable and growing profession with tremendous potential for career development. It is important that CMPSS continue building resilience in the workplace, particularly when navigating stigma, misconceptions, and outdated service delivery practices. By drawing on their strengths, lived experience, and advocacy skills, Peer Support Specialists can help champion recovery-oriented practices, advocate for their role as essential members of the treatment team, and—most importantly—promote positive recovery outcomes for the individuals they serve in programs across California.

Continuing Education: Advancing Peer Services

Crestwood's CRRS team is excited to offer monthly continuing education (CE) classes focused on **Advancing Peer Services.** These free, two-hour professional development sessions are designed to support CMPSS in strengthening their knowledge, skills, and effectiveness in the workplace.

- When: The last Tuesday of every month
- Time: 2:00–4:00 PM
- Cost: FREE
- CE Credit: 2 hours toward CMPSS renewal

We encourage CMPSS to take advantage of these opportunities to continue learning, connecting with colleagues, and strengthening the Peer Support profession.

Pre-Registration Required: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TLS2L3T

Looking Ahead: 2027 Training Calendar

We are also pleased to share our new **2027 Training Calendar!** We invite CMPSS and those interested in advancing Peer Support Services to explore upcoming training opportunities and pre-register.

Pre-Register Here:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CBHI-MC-PSSC-TrainingRegistration

Together, we can continue building a stronger, more resilient, and professionally recognized Peer Support workforce—one that values lived experience, promotes recovery, and creates meaningful opportunities for growth and advancement.

- Jim Ritchie, Director of Operations