



# **YOUNG ADULT PEER MENTORING PRACTICE PROFILE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**Y**oung Adult Peer Mentoring is a specialty expertise based on sharing one’s lived experience of mental health challenges with purpose and intent to inspire hope and motivation in another young adult (YA) who is struggling with similar concerns. Young Adult Peer Mentors (YAPM), use their lived experience as an active ingredient in a therapeutic process.<sup>1</sup>

Young Adult Peer Mentoring in Massachusetts is not a stand-alone service but, rather, a specialty expertise embedded in other service categories, such as Therapeutic Mentoring (TM)<sup>2</sup>, the Caring Together Continuum, and Intensive Residential Treatment Programs. Young Adult Peer Mentoring can make traditional behavioral health services more accessible and appealing to young adults as they manage their transition to adulthood and the underlying mental health conditions that complicate progress toward independence.

Young Adult Peer Mentoring adds the dimension of lived experience – “I have walked in shoes like yours” — to enhance authenticity and peer acceptance that is especially validating for transition-age young adults. By sharing lived experience with purpose and intent, YAPMs show, through their own examples that recovery is within reach.

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this document the term Young Adult Peer Mentors (YAPM) will be used to refer to the individuals that deliver Young Adult Peer Mentoring. The term young adult(s) or YA will be used to refer to the individual(s) who are receiving Young Adult Peer Mentoring.

<sup>2</sup>The specialty expertise of Young Adult Peer Mentoring within CBHI TM is appropriate when a young adult is recommended by a CBHI “hub” service AND the youth receiving services is at least 14 years old and less than 21 AND the young adult and/or the family (for youth under 18) agrees AND peer support, in addition to typical TM work, would be valuable in at least one of the following ways: engaging the young adult in services, reducing isolation, or helping the young adult find their voice in goal setting, navigating systems and building supports for their goals, and/or developing hope for a healthy future.



YAPM “lived experience” is defined as:

***The personal experience of living with and overcoming a mental health/substance abuse/traumatic life concern which has caused problems in one or more areas of life. A person with lived experience will also have had valuable experience in navigating or using community resources, therapeutic services, or other supports to overcome the challenges.***

“Purpose and intent” describes the YAPM’s thinking prior to sharing lived experience. Who benefits from the YAPM sharing this experience? Is the YAPM’s experience relevant to the young adult’s challenges? Is the young adult ready to hear about this experience, or might it be harmful? Is this something that the YAPM is comfortable with colleagues and others hearing?

Lived experience is the thread that runs through all elements of the Young Adult Peer Mentoring practice. Best practice requires that the YAPM be close enough in age and experience to be credible and relatable to young adults; that they are trained in using self-awareness, hopefulness, and interpersonal skills; and that they have sufficient stability to model resiliency and self-care.

The Practice Profile identifies the basic functions, or Core Elements, of Young Adult Peer Mentoring. There are six (6) Core Elements described in the Practice Profile. Each Core Element begins with an overall definition. After the definition of each Core Element, a table details how to put the element into practice. Each table consists of rows that describe the specific component practices that make up that element. The rows in each table are separated into columns, which are labeled Ideal Practice, Developmental Practice, and Insufficient Practice. The Ideal Practice column shows the level of expertise that we aspire to achieve consistently in Young Adult Peer Mentoring. The Developmental column describes stages that naturally occur when practitioners are learning a new area of practice. Finally, the Insufficient column lists actions that are unacceptable. They may be harmful, do not meet basic standards for YAPM, or should not occur.

Although the Core Elements are described separately, they overlap and often occur at the same time. The six Core Elements of Young Adult Peer Mentoring and abbreviated definitions of each follow:



## **PRACTICING CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS**

Practicing cultural responsiveness is: 1) the ongoing process of learning how the values, beliefs, attitudes and traditions that grow from racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status, disability status, or other affiliate groups contribute to our own and other people's culture; 2) learning about personal circumstances that influence people's thinking, behaviors, and roles; 3) being mindful of power and privilege differences; and 4) using this knowledge to work effectively with young adults.

Using lived experience with purpose and intent while practicing cultural responsiveness also means sharing aspects of the YAPM's experience without assumptions about how it is the same or different from that of other young adults; exploring ways in which experiences in the mental health/child welfare system and/or other traumatic situations influence attitudes and behaviors; demonstrating an understanding of "youth" culture based on young adult exposure to contemporary conditions, technology, social media, expressive language, and other cultural markers that are significantly different from the previous generation; and mutual exploration to identify developing cultural values and meaning throughout the transition to adulthood.



## **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & COLLABORATION**

Building relationships and collaboration requires making connections and maintaining trust with young adults and their family members, providers, other adult allies, and young adult peer groups through respectful curiosity about strengths, needs, and goals. Listening for understanding, validating experiences, communicating clearly, considering the perspectives of others, managing conflicts honestly, and treating all colleagues fairly contributes to healthy relationships.

Using lived experience with purpose and intent to build relationships and collaboration means sharing the YAPM's own lived experience with purpose and intent to encourage young adults' unique gifts; acknowledge the possibility of mutuality ("when I help you, I help myself"); listen from a peer perspective to young adult challenges, hopes, and goals; foster communication between young adults, family members, and allies; and support young adults to communicate effectively.



## **SUPPORTING YOUNG ADULT VISION AND GOALS**

Supporting young adult vision and goals is the art of collaborating with young adults and their care teams to encourage a vision for the future based on young adults' aspirations promote goals that align with the vision, create a plan to reach the goals, and end services with a purposeful transition that encourages independent sustainability. Supporting young adult goals requires choosing effective approaches and celebrating incremental steps toward positive growth, even when setbacks interrupt the flow of progress.

Using lived experience with purpose and intent to support young adult vision and goals means working with the care team to ensure that the young adult's vision guides decisions; focusing on aspirational life goals, such as education, employment, healthy relationships, and independence; supporting young adults in building the skills and structure that they need; and preparing a purposeful transition to greater independence.



## **ROLE MODELING**

Role modeling is demonstrating, through actions, words, and demeanor, the types of behavior that will contribute to young adults' success and personal growth, including a range of skills in communication and strong, confident, reliable behavior that supports young adults' progress toward independence, wellness, emotional regulation, successful problem-solving, self-advocacy, healthy interpersonal interactions, and meaningful community life.

Using lived experience with purpose and intent to function as a positive role model means that the YAPM actively models when and how to share lived experience effectively and safely, helps young adults to recognize the impact of their behaviors, respects without judging the risks inherent in self-discovery and uses lived experience as evidence that a process of overcoming challenges is real and possible.



## **PROMOTING SELF-CARE**

Promoting self-care involves demonstrating resiliency and self-advocacy and providing empathic encouragement to safeguard the overall emotional and physical health of both the YAPM and young adults.

Using lived experience with purpose and intent to promote self-care means modeling overall healthy habits in daily life; encouraging engagement in safe, healthy activities that reduce stress; demonstrating self-awareness of triggers and coping skills; supporting young adults in knowing their rights to education, employment, housing and other fundamental needs; and sharing resources and strategies for self-care that have been helpful to the YAPM.



## **DEMONSTRATING SAFE, ETHICAL, & PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR**

Demonstrating safe, professional, and ethical behavior requires that YAPMs adhere to practices that promote integrity, dignity, and emotional health while working with young adults. For YAPMs, demonstrating professional, ethical behavior centers on good communication, accountability, and learning opportunities. It also includes rigorous attention to professional boundaries and the rights and self-determination of others.

Using lived experience with purpose and intent to demonstrate professional behavior includes taking precautions to guard young adult and YAPM safety in potentially risky situations, homes, neighborhoods, and groups; seeking opportunities for professional learning; keeping realistic work commitments; fully considering the purpose and intent of all self-disclosure with young adults; respecting confidentiality at all times; and always disclosing any prior relationship with a referred young adult; ensuring that peer support relationships are transparent and not confused with other possible relationships, such as friendship or romantic interest.