

Stacie
Peterson

Testimony

Chairman Wanzek and members of the committee my name is Stacie Peterson. I am the Treatment Coordinator here at the North Dakota State Prison. I am here to talk about our peer support specialist program.

The role of the peer support specialist has been defined by SAMHSA as “offering and receiving help, based on shared understanding, respect and mutual empowerment between people in similar situations.” Here at NDSP our Peer Support Specialists are RECOVERY-ORIENTED meaning they hold out hope to those they serve, partnering with them to envision and achieve a meaningful and purposeful life. The support provided is personalized to align with the specific hopes, goals, and preferences of the individual served and to respond to specific needs the individual has identified. The program is totally VOLUNTARY and participation in peer recovery support services is always based on peer choice. Peer Support Specialists are RELATIONSHIP-FOCUSED being respectful, trusting, empathetic, and collaborative.

The Peer support program started here in June 2019. Since that time, we have trained 54 Peer Support Specialists and served over 100 residents. The Department of Health and Human Services provides training to our peer support specialists about twice a year. The training is the same training provided to community members. Once the training is completed, specialists can pay to take a test and they can be certified and employable when released. After the training we provide weekly ongoing training to build on skills and to provide support and assistance to our peer support specialists.

We currently have 14 peer support specialists who are providing services to approximately 38 residents in this facility. We also have 3 peer support specialists housed in the Orientation Unit who provide peer support while individuals are waiting to be classified and moved to general housing. This program has shown to reduce observation placements, mental health decompensation, and negative behaviors of our residents. It has been an asset to the facility and to the treatment department.

To tell you more about the program I would like to welcome up one of our peer support specialists Thomas Mason.