RI International
Peer Employment Training Overview

In Peer Support, mind and heart matter. Since 2000, we have successfully recruited and trained Peer Support Specialists at RI International (formerly Recovery Innovations) - and all of what we’ve learned over the years is reflected in our Peer Employment Training Program. Our program is successful because it engages both the mind and the heart – and that is how we would like to share our story with you.

Some Facts and Figures

- RI International has one of the largest peer workforces in the world with 63% of its workforce or 1000+ individuals, employed as Peer Support Specialists working in dedicated peer support roles, leadership roles and executive roles in clinics, respite, hospital transition, community-based, housing, education, employment and other service programs.

- PET graduates have long-term career success.
  - 76% of graduates on average obtain employment as Peer Support Specialists. In one program in California, peer supporters trained by RI have obtained work at a rate of 100%. Additionally, with the support of RI, they have also achieved longevity of more than 14 months (when the program ended). Studies of trainees in the State of Arizona are consistently employed at a rate of 76% or more. In states like Pennsylvania, the hire rate is over 80%. Through the contract with the Veteran’s Administration of the United States, trainees are employed at 100% and also retain work over 90% of the time.
  - 89% job retention across all Peer Employment Trainings for a minimum of 12 months.
  - 60% move to full time employment within 12 months.
  - 14% or more have moved into supervisory and leadership positions (AZ and CA).

Thoughts from graduates

“I learned more about how to strengthen my own recovery so that I could be there for another. I learned the necessary skills – listening, validating, reflecting, conflict resolution and sharing these tools with other.” Ted

“This learning experience was exciting, challenging, uplifting, encouraging, motivating and positive.” Sally

“It was a very positive experience in every way. It gave me “real world” knowledge and skills that I’ll be using in my job, and that I’ve already started to use in my peer relationships.” Tom
• Over 8,500+ people have graduated worldwide from our Peer Employment Training since August 2000.

• In the US and New Zealand, Singapore, Puerto Rico, Scotland and England individuals have graduated our training. Twenty one states including Arizona, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Louisiana, North Carolina, Delaware, as well as the Veterans Administration of the United States have adopted the RI International Peer Employment Training as a certification program for Peer Support Specialists. In England, Peer Employment Training is part of the Recovery College curriculum.

• RI’s Peer Employment Training (PET) will be required coursework at Alliant International University for all bachelor, master, and medical doctor training. This should begin Fall, 2018. Currently, PET is offered for three units of credit, for certificate learners and bachelor level learners at Alliant.

RI Background and History. Truth be told, the heart of all we do at RI International lives in the Peer Employment Training Program. Within the curriculum – and its delivery - are all the tools needed to support people on their path to recovery and employment. But, as we all know, training can provide tools, but not necessarily inspire action. This is where PET shines. PET graduates take with them, hope, an intense belief in the reality of recovery and resilience, and more importantly, the inspiration to do peer support work.

PET inspires students because it communicates the vision that Lisa St George and others put into practice when they developed the program in the year 2000. At the first stage of development, Anne Rider and Lisa St George, utilized an Advisory Board of the recovery pioneers including Mary Ellen Copeland, Shery Mead, Pat Deegan, and Bill Anthony. They provided support and feedback as we built our training. The first class graduated in October 2000, and the content has been revised using the information learned from the students, colleagues, and systems to enrich and broaden the training. Since then, each revision and new edition (currently in its 5th edition) of the materials has refined the curriculum so it reflects what we understand and observe that peer support specialists need know. In essence, the program reflects everything we’ve learned from our own peer support specialists and their work with others in RI’s diverse service programs.

PET: Structure and Content. The PET curriculum is highly interactive, skill based, and incorporates adult learning principles. It includes a copyrighted text, Peer Employment Training: A Peer/Recovery Support Specialist Certification Course (PET) 5th edition, 2015. In addition to the text, the curriculum includes a book. The Exercise Book contains skill based exercises, and role plays designed to ensure that participants take away both knowledge and hands-on skills. The program consists of 16 modules that are delivered as an 76-hour two-week intensive. The curriculum includes tests that establish competency in the required knowledge and skills. An 80% score is required for all course work and a comprehensive final exam. Participants are further evaluated on acquired skills through role-plays,
interaction in the class, attendance on required days, and overall attendance that includes not missing more than 8 hours of class.

Curriculum content includes:

Part I: Personal Development: Knowing Yourself
- Recovery
- The Power of Peer Support
- Developing Self-Esteem and Managing Self-Talk
- Community, Culture, and Environment
- Meaning and Purpose
- Emotional Intelligence

Part II: Turning Point: Preparing Yourself for Work
- Telling Your Personal Story
- Employment as a Path to Recovery

Part III: Skill Development
- Communication Skills
- Conflict Resolution
- Understanding Trauma and Developing Resilience
- Substance Use and Co-occurring Recovery
- Being with People in Challenging Situations
- Peer Support in Action: Partnering with Other Professionals

At RI International, we have known for a long time that transformation occurs in each PET class. It is that transformation that is hardest to describe and communicate. It’s the change that takes place in the students – and sometimes in the facilitator – as they learn more about themselves and each other. Through their interactions, participants experience a deeper awareness of their own and others’ strengths and resilience. As students explore meaning and purpose, the dream of having meaningful work becomes a real possibility. And as students practice skills in helping and supporting others, the seed of transformation from patient to helper is planted.

Program Evaluation

Studies conducted by Boston University continue to guide the development of our Peer Employment Training.

“I feel more sure of myself and my ability to work with others without trying to fix people but helping them to figure things out for themselves.”

“The greatest growth I see is preparing me for re-entry to work. And, learning to talk with others in a relational way.”
The first study, published in 2006, was “one of the only evaluations to test a structured and formal peer support training program.” The purpose of this study was to determine the personal and vocational impact of a peer support training intervention on individuals with serious psychiatric disabilities.\(^1\)

Methods: Sixty-six individuals participated in an evaluation of the program. Participants were assessed prior to and after the training on measures of recovery, empowerment, and self-concept. Job acquisition and retention data were also examined at posttest.

Results: The standardized peer support training program was successful in increasing participants’ knowledge and attitudes toward recovery and their sense of empowerment. Gains were also observed in the measure of personal self-worth. These data suggest that peers experience positive changes on these subjective psychological measures after participating in peer provider training. Trainees went on to obtain peer provider positions within the agency in which they received training and 89% of those trained retained employment at 12 months.

Conclusions: Findings suggest that a standardized program designed to provide peer training was used successfully and participants’ recovery and employability were improved.

In a formal Review of Peer Support Specialist curriculum conducted by Hutchinson and Rogers at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University, (Unpublished report, July 2007), the following impressions and observations were made:

“...extremely comprehensive workbook ...achieves its purpose in providing inspiration, understanding and awareness about recovery and the role that peer support can play in that process. It presents a wonderful blend of perspectives within the recovery framework: theoretical, personal/lived experiences and behavioral approaches.”

In Program Evaluation Results Peer Employment Training (Unpublished Report, October 2007), senior staff at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University provided support in the development of a pre and post training test of peer support competencies. After careful development and review, the test was administered before and after training to 15 trainees in the summer of 2007. Tests were sent to the Center for data entry and analysis. Results indicated there was a highly significant gain in correct answers of all items in the test from pre to post test, suggesting that the trainees mastered the material in the training to a high degree.

What Happens in the Classroom? PET students learn a way of being; as well as a way of partnering with people, that requires they become increasingly comfortable with themselves (being authentic), and also cultivate skills in communicating and connecting with others.

The pre and post testing tells us that students master the information. What the paper and pencil tests can’t capture is the depth of skills participants develop as they practice in the classroom. Rather than following a routine lecture format, the instructors use a facilitative approach that is based on adult learning principles. The classroom is learning centered and builds peer support competencies from simple to complex. For example,

- From the start, students begin to apply skills in recovery language in the Introduction;
- In Module 1 they learn what empowering interactions are, and use them in role play.
- In Module 2, the students are actually performing a basic peer support interaction by using a role play. First, the instructor models the skills for the class, and then each student uses those modeled skills with a partner.
- By Module 10, after many classroom and written exercises, tests and other role-plays the students bring the skills together and perform the peer support approach in a role play for evaluation before the class. It is this role-play that becomes part of their score on their Final Exam.

All of the materials have been developed, refined and are contained in the manual and exercise book – the companion volumes for the Peer Employment Training 5th Edition.