

The New York City Youth Peer Advocate Coalition Overview

What is the New York City Youth Peer Advocate Coalition?

The New York City Youth Peer Advocate Coalition (YPAC) is a youth-guided group comprised of organizations who are invested in the workforce development and support of Youth Peer Advocates (YPAs) in the mental health system. The Coalition has the following mission: *To develop and maintain a quality workforce of youth peer advocates across the mental health service system utilizing the policy and practice recommendations from the NYC YPA survey report released in January 2019 by the NYC Health Department and the NYC Field Office- Office of Mental Health.* This Coalition is unique because it puts lived experience at the forefront of all advocacy approaches and initiatives.

Vision:

- Youth peer advocacy is seen as an integral part of practice in social service settings across the NYC mental health service system
- YPAs have access to comprehensive skills training and ongoing opportunities for professional advancement
- YPAs are supported in navigating the challenges of their own recovery and wellness.

What is a Youth Peer Advocate?

YPAs are individuals between 18-30 years of age who self-identify as having firsthand experience with social, emotional, medical, developmental, substance use, and/or behavioral challenges as a young person or as having received services in any one of the child-serving systems (mental health care, juvenile justice, foster care, special education, or addiction recovery). YPAs use their lived experience to promote resiliency, recovery, wellness, and self-efficacy in young people and promote the practice of youth-guided and family-driven services.

Why was this Coalition formed?

As peer support gains traction across New York State, there is a need for increased peer services for youth as well as for continuously improving peer services in general. Recognizing the value and importance of youth peer support services within the mental health service system, the Coalition formed to allow a diverse group of organizational stakeholders from the mental health system to work collectively towards common goals in support of the YPA workforce. They will utilize their expertise to create shared power, responsibility, and accountability as they work to operationalize recommendations from the NYC YPA survey report.

What does the Coalition do?

- Convenes a group of stakeholders including government agencies, employers, funders, YPAs and advocacy organizations to improve the efficacy of youth peer services within the mental health service system;
- Utilizes the policy and practice recommendations from the NYC YPA report to develop and sustain the workforce of YPAs;
- Engages and support mental health providers to successfully maintain their YPA workforce;

- Supports and advocates for youth with firsthand experience navigating the mental health system who may be interested in joining the YPA workforce.

Who can join the Coalition?

Membership is currently open to representatives from government agencies, employers, funders, and advocacy organizations that:

- Work directly with or support the workforce development for YPAs;
- Work directly with youth who have lived experience and meet the qualifications to become a YPA;
- Are willing to adopt best practices, policies, and recommendations developed by the Coalition;
- Are committed to advancing the mission and vision of the Coalition.

What are the expectations of member organizations?

Member organizations of the Coalition will:

- Appoint (2) representatives who will attend, actively participate in, and contribute to Coalition meetings and assigned workgroup activities;
- Serve on at least one of the Coalition's workgroups;
- Act as a liaison to receive organizational feedback and authorization on Coalition-related activities or items;
- Support and participate in coalition activities related to youth peer advocates and the development of the workforce;
- Read minutes, reports, and emails to keep abreast of Coalition decisions and activities;
- Provide sincere and respectful feedback to the co-chairs and Steering Committee regarding coalition governance and activities
- Keep Coalition informed of member organization's activities related to the YPA workforce.

How can I get involved?

We welcome your participation! Organizations that are interested in joining the Coalition must sign an agreement and designate up to two representatives to be a part of the Coalition membership.

Please direct any questions or concerns to Njackson2@health.nyc.gov for further information.

Thank you,

NYC YPA Coalition Steering Committee:

Nivea Jackson - The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Coalition Coordinator)

Jazleen Garbutt - Families on the Move (Coalition Administrative Assistant)

Cathy Richburg – NY Foundling

Shainek Edmondson – NY Foundling

Alia Pierre – Families Together of NYS' Youth Power!

