

CHAPTER FOUR

Uniqueness of the Recovery Support Specialist Position: Roles and Responsibilities

1. Introduction

“Each role has a different level of competency and thus, a different area of expertise. RSS bring their intimate personal knowledge of mental illness and systems where as others in our organization may not.”

-Dr. Jennifer Aurand, Assistant Vice President of Behavioral Health, Family Counseling Center, Freeport, IL.

This chapter focuses on the roles and responsibilities that individuals providing recovery support services may fulfill at your agency. The uniqueness of recovery support services will be explored providing a picture of the complementary array of services that can be provided within an agency.

The roles and responsibilities of an RSS include the same ethical and professional conduct standards as any other agency staff. They are responsible for making referrals to other staff or programs for service needs that are not within their defined role or position within the agency. They must maintain confidentiality, report abuse and neglect, respond to risk indicators, and document services and interactions with individuals receiving services.

The expectation of self-disclosure is a unique aspect of the Recovery Support Services positions. While clinical staff with lived experience might choose to disclose if they deem it to be of therapeutic benefit to the individual served, disclosure is not a clinical practice expectation. For the RSS, however, the expectation of self-disclosure is the cornerstone of their role.

2. Best Practices: Defining Roles and Responsibilities of RSSs

- a. The leadership of each agency, preferably in consultation with staff and representatives of individuals receiving services, should define the specific RSS roles and responsibilities. It is also important for the leadership to decide which programs and supervisors are the best fit. If the RSSs are going to be required to obtain the CRSS credential, then their work experience, education, and supervision must develop around the four domains (defined in Chapter 2) of the credential: Advocacy, Mentoring, Professional Responsibility, and Recovery Support.
- b. Responsibilities in the ADVOCACY domain may include:
 - i. serving as an individual’s advocate
 - ii. explaining self-advocacy as an important element of recovery/wellness
 - iii. practicing effective communication skills to help individuals self-advocate
 - iv. collaborating with individuals to identify, link, and coordinate pertinent resources

- v. helping to ensure that the methods and programs of the agency promote person-centered, recovery-oriented services
- vi. recognizing the importance of a holistic (mind, body, spirit, environment) approach to recovery/wellness
- vii. applying the principles of individual choice and self-determination
- viii. serving on an individual's recovery team
- c. Responsibilities in the MENTORING domain may include:
 - i. serving as a role model of recovery and wellness to individuals receiving services
 - ii. maintaining a relationship which includes self-disclosure as needed
 - iii. promoting social learning
 - iv. teaching common life skills
 - v. promoting individual choice
 - vi. educating on rights and responsibilities
 - vii. teaching effective self-advocacy skills
- d. Responsibilities in the PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY domain may include:
 - i. promoting throughout the agency the 10 Guiding Principles of Recovery as detailed by SAMHSA
 - ii. offering hope for recovery to individuals receiving services
 - iii. pursuing ongoing understanding of cultural differences to relate to and advocate for individuals of all cultures
 - iv. holding oneself accountable to individuals receiving services, fellow RSSs, and the agency where one works
 - v. maintaining the confidentiality of individuals receiving services
 - vi. setting and keeping clear boundaries with individuals receiving services and with other staff
 - vii. documenting all topics and encounters relating to an individual's treatment plan
 - viii. identifying and responding appropriately to each person's stressors, triggers, and risk indicators
- e. Responsibilities in the RECOVERY SUPPORT domain may include:
 - i. assisting individuals with goal-setting
 - ii. engaging individuals as active members of their recovery team
 - iii. helping individuals identify their strengths and resiliencies
 - iv. assisting individuals in identifying options for recovery
 - v. working with individuals to encourage development of problem-solving skills
 - vi. assisting individuals to access the services and supports needed to reach their recovery goals
 - vii. helping individuals to develop tools for effective outreach and continued support
 - viii. pursuing recovery education, including Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP)
- f. A commitment to recovery principles is woven throughout Recovery Support Services. Quality services include:
 - i. identifying as an equal rather than a superior
 - ii. holding out hope for the individual's recovery

- iii. maintaining a strengths-based focus that works from individuals' strengths rather than weaknesses
- iv. promoting choice and self-determination
- v. seeing the whole person
- vi. applying effective coaching techniques such as Motivational Interviewing
- vii. serving as a role model of recovery
- viii. being sensitive to the impact of trauma (focus on what happened to a person, not what is "wrong" with them)

The following quotes highlight RSS's roles and responsibilities as well as the benefits of recovery support services.

"(The RSS) is an easy person to talk to. I feel that they can relate to me and some of my concerns. I think it's great when a staff member like that can share some challenges in their life and then I don't feel like I'm the only one in the world with problems. (The RSS) also gives me hope that if they can do it, so can I."
-Individual Receiving Services

"Recovery-oriented practices are based on an appreciation of each person's right to determine, to author, his or her own life [and of] the central role that choice plays in defining who and what we are... Implementing high-quality and effective psychiatric rehabilitation and other evidence-based practices is not enough to accomplish transformation if the status and role of people in recovery is not also dramatically transformed from that of a passive 'mental patient' to that of an empowered citizen."
-Recovery-to-Practice Project Director Larry Davidson, PhD

- g. Conduct an organizational WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) self-evaluation for the agency. This is an effective way to self-evaluate the agency vision, strengths, assets and challenges. An agency's readiness to include RSSs on staff, work climate, identification of champion staff to ensure progress, and appropriate mentors within the agency are a few considerations when beginning the process of developing Recovery Support Services.
- h. Identify the specific service needs of individuals served such as crisis services, care coordination, individual counseling, and self-care. Also include basic needs such as affordable housing.
- i. Give the RSS position(s) credibility by agency-wide education that emphasizes the proof of positive outcomes when RSSs and clinical staff collaborate. The DMH (Division of Mental Health) Regional RSSs can assist you with training staff in preparation for the addition of new RSSs.
- j. Agency Exercises
List the current strengths of your agency that will facilitate the RSSs' fulfillment of their roles and responsibilities:

Examples of strengths relevant to this area:

- Active Consumer Advisory Council at agency
- Agency is prepared: Recovery Education provided for staff
- Board of Directors is on board and invested in recovery vision
- Buy-in from the larger community for appropriate referrals

List your agency's strengths:

List the specific goals you would like to pursue:

Examples of potential goals to consider:

- Define specific job responsibilities that allow for the RSSs to integrate their skills into the service milieu (example: member of the ACT team)
- Schedule regular meetings between RSSs and their supervisors to ensure the roles and responsibilities are clear, allowing for the RSSs to ask questions and express concerns

List your specific goals here:

What resources do you currently have that will help you reach your goals?

Some examples of relevant resources might be:

- Administration, Board of Directors, and staff buy-in for clarifying RSSs roles and responsibilities to them as they transition into the agency team
- Qualified interns on staff
- Relationship with DMH Regional Office and RSSs
- WRAP Facilitator on staff

List some of your relevant resources:

How do you/your staff feel about your goals?

Some examples of feelings and attitudes that may be expressed might be:

- Happy and excited about these new services to complement existing services
- Self-disclosure concerns

List feelings of you and staff about your goals:

What challenges do you anticipate you might encounter as you work toward your goals?

Some examples of potential challenges might be:

- Securing Community, Board of Directors, and/or staff buy-in
- Individuals hired being able to obtain their CRSS credential within a year

List some challenges you anticipate you may encounter as you work towards your goals:

What strategies can you use to overcome those challenges?

Some examples of relevant strategies might be:

- Recovery education at all levels of support needed that would involve research, both anecdotal and data, as well as success stories
- Close supervision by an individual well-versed in the CRSS credential and competencies

What are some examples of relevant strategies you may take?

How will you chart your progress along the way as you move toward your goals?

Some examples of ways you may consider charting your progress:

- Satisfaction surveys with specific questions about Recovery Support Services
- Annual Competency Evaluations for RSS staff

Other examples of how you plan to chart your progress

How will you celebrate when you reach your goals?

Some ways to celebrate success might be:

- Staff Recognition Awards
- Announcement/press release of the expansion of Recovery Support Services

Other ideas you may have to celebrate:
