

EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA



Employment First Success Stories: Employment Services

Peer Support Specialists at Meridian Behavioral Health Care Empower Treatment Teams and People in Recovery

People in mental health recovery may receive support from a behavioral health treatment team: a psychologist, a case manager, and other specialists to help with housing, employment, family issues, and other areas of life. The team will sometimes include a certified recovery peer specialist (CRPS). CRPSs are professional staff who have gone through treatment and recovery themselves, either related to a mental health disorder or to substance abuse or addiction, and have completed training to assist others in recovery.

CRPS training in Florida is provided through Medicaid funds and administered by the Department of Children and Families, usually at no cost to those being trained. CRPSs keep up their certification through ten hours of continuing education units per year and pay an annual fee to renew the certification. Many CRPSs choose to join the Florida Peer Support Coalition, a training, employment and support organization of CRPSs and interested family and friends.

Meridian Behavioral Health Care, Inc., in Gainesville, Florida includes CRPS staff on almost all their treatment teams, including the psychosocial treatment teams, the mobile response team, and the homeless outreach program. CRPSs work in either full- or part-time paid positions within the department, with anywhere from 10 to 20 clients.

One of Meridian's successful CRPSs is Enrique. Enrique received treatment at the behavioral health center and initially held on-site jobs as part of his recovery. With help from a supported employment coach, he worked in their kitchen for several months, helping with meal prep and cleaning. After that, he did administrative tasks in the addiction treatment office. However, when Enrique learned about CRPSs and the opportunity to become one, he became inspired to pursue this career.

In March 2019, Enrique completed one of the training requirements with 40 hours' worth of training in advocacy, mentoring, recovery support, and professional responsibility. He is now moving toward becoming certified by the Florida Certification Board, completing 500 hours working with individuals in mental health recovery.

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Enrique's role as a CRPS includes supporting clients both on-site and in the community. Some of his responsibilities are helping clients identify their future goals, doing motivational interviewing with clients, and working with each of them to develop a unique Wellness, Recovery, and Action (WRAP) plan. WRAP plans focus on clients' individual strengths and available supports to help them remain well in the future.

Lessons learned:

Enrique describes working as a CRPS as being a client's ally while sticking to important boundaries established by the certification process and by the behavioral health center's policies. For example, he might meet someone out in the community to support them before a job interview, but instead of driving the person to the appointment, he will help them plan to get there independently and on time. Enrique describes this boundary as "acting as a back-brace supporting people to get things done, rather than as an exoskeleton moving their bodies and doing everything for them." He believes that this way of supporting people is more powerful for them in the long run.

Enrique and his supported employment job coach also note that working as a CRPS is a way to not only support other clients, but also to improve your own recovery. He checks in weekly with his job coach about his progress and communicates with her more often if needed.

Enrique also enjoys working closely with the other members of the treatment team, learning what their jobs are like, and communicating with them regularly to discuss clients' needs and to share resources.

For more information, contact:

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Learn more about becoming a CRPS in Florida:

<https://flcertificationboard.org/certifications/certified-recovery-peers-specialist/>

Find out about the Florida Peer Support Coalition:

<https://www.peersupportfl.org>

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The Employment First Florida Success Stories Series highlights examples of innovative employment services, creative state agency employment practices, and individual employment success stories in Florida.

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