



**MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION**  
*FIND WELLNESS.*

## MHA Peer Training Academy

### Information and Application packet

The MHA Peer Training Academy offers a 4-week classroom training and up to a 12-week internship experience that gives people in mental health recovery an opportunity to use and develop their lived experience into a professional supportive role in mental health services.

To apply, applicants must (at a minimum):

- Have a mental health diagnosis
- Have earned a high school diploma (or GED/TASC equivalent) or more
- Be a resident of Monroe County

We seek applicants with diverse experiences. People with mental health conditions who also have co-experiences such as a history of incarceration, homelessness, substance use, military service or identify as LGBTQ+, for example, are strongly encouraged to apply.

***Application deadlines:***  
***Applications are due 30 days before start date***  
***We offer start dates each month***

# ***MHA Peer Training Program***

## **Overview and Outcomes**

The MHA Peer Training Academy provides a 4-week classroom-based training and up to a 12-week volunteer work experience to specifically train people in mental health recovery to work as Peer Specialists in human service agencies. With your full participation and commitment to our program, you will be able to seek employment as a Peer Specialist or Family Peer Advocate and gain skills necessary to become certified in NYS.

The MHA Peer Training Academy consists of three parts:

### **I. 4-week Classroom Training** (approximately 60 hours)

Our classroom curriculum is designed to develop you in three key areas of workplace effectiveness:

Professional Development - course topics not only address the how/why of the peer profession, but the knowledge, tools and skills that inform a well-rounded practice of Peer service provision.

Work Readiness - these courses offer comprehensive training in obtaining and maintaining competitive employment in a field you enjoy.

Individual Wellness - our training provides a solid foundation of self-directed recovery tools that every effective employee needs.

### **II. 12-week Volunteer Work Experience** (work week max of 20 volunteer hours)

Upon completion of the classroom training, you get to interview with a diverse group of partner agencies from across Monroe County for your volunteer work experience.

Volunteer opportunities you may obtain include: group facilitation, peer coaching, navigating health/benefits systems and advocacy. You'll work up to 20 hours per week on a volunteer basis. You'll also attend a weekly Employment Support Group at the MHA to facilitate an optimal learning experience as well as further enhance peer community around your employment goals. Employment offers may be extended to you from local agencies during this period and these positions will be accepted in lieu of volunteering.

### **III. Competitive Employment Support**

Upon completion of the internship, you'll then move on to the final phase of the program – employment! Each week you'll attend our Employment Lab and meet with your Employment Specialist to enhance your job search. This group provides you with mutual support for your job search. Also, agencies seeking peer providers often contact us directly for employees – part time and full-time positions – which we distribute in these weekly meetings.

## **Benefits of the MHA Peer Training Academy**

Although it is not necessary to attend and complete MHA's Peer Training Academy in order to become employed as a peer, our program offers unique opportunities and benefits that other employment outlets do not offer.

### **Classroom Instruction**

You'll be taught by professionals working in the field. You'll practice the material along with your classmates to develop your competency and understanding: studying alongside your peers, discussions with trainers and staff bring the information alive in real-world ways. And most important to our students – you will not be alone in the process.

### **Teamwork Education (Cohort based)**

Both students and staff work together to secure a safe learning environment. You'll learn to work in a group setting and be part of team – as workplace skills require.

### **Supportive Peer Staff**

Our staff provides support throughout your participation in the program. As a peer run program, we understand the strengths that peers bring to the recovery process. Our intention is that you discover for yourself your greatest asset – your own personal lived experience. You'll be assigned to an employment support specialist during your training and they will support you all the way through to employment obtainment and retention.

### **Annual Graduation Ceremony**

Each June, we celebrate the accomplishments of MHA graduates by providing a graduation ceremony where you, your invited guests and our program supporters come together for a luncheon program. Graduates receive certificates of completion; partner agencies receive recognition and awards and everyone experiences a great afternoon of community!

### **Peer Certification Preparation**

The New York State Peer Specialist Certification process and the Family Peer Advocate Certification is a simple, but detailed process. Your training at MHA will support you in obtaining the state certification as well as increase your chances of obtaining employment.

Note: The Peer Certification is a New York State initiative of the Office of Mental Health – Consumer Affairs, and is separate from our peer training program. For more information about the New York State Peer Certification process/application, please contact:

*New York Peer Specialist Certification Board*  
11 North Pearl Street, Suite 801 Albany, NY 12207  
<http://nypeerspecialist.org>

Note: The FPA Certification is a New York State initiative of Families Together NYS, and is separate from our peer training program. For more information about the Family Peer Advocate Certification process/application, please contact:

*Families Together in NYS - Department of Workforce Development*  
737 Madison Avenue Albany, NY 12208  
<https://www.ftnys.org/workforce/family-peer-advocate-credential/>

## Considerations for Successful Completion of the MHA Peer Training Academy

The MHA Peer Training Academy's design works on a group level: All expectations, standards, structures and rules support the safety and success of the entire group of students as a group. The standards ensure equity to all students and offers effective methods for employment preparation as well as self-directed recovery.

The MHA Peer Training Academy is employment focused, which means:

The training and staff are solely focused on your ability to obtain and maintain work as a peer specialist in human services (though the skills acquired are transferable to other aspects of life) Each student is expected support their own well-being while abiding by the program's structure and design. Students often find support through each other in the classroom.

The MHA Peer Training Academy is meant to be followed "as is", which means:

The entire program – from classroom training through volunteer work experience completion – offers a very specific structure to be followed as designed and within the time structure allotted. Any student who deviates from the structure may face difficulties in completing and graduating the program. As such, the program cannot be 'divided' up and students are expected to commit to the entire program as a whole.

## ANSWERS TO MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *1. What is a typical class like in the MHA Peer Training Academy?*

Each day for the 4-week classroom portion of the program, we encourage all students to arrive ½ hour before class begins. You'll have time to settle into your classroom, have a snack, chat with your classmates and take care of any personal needs before the session starts. Classes are usually 4 hours, with a short break midway.

### *2. How much does the MHA Peer Training Academy cost?*

MHA programs are free of charge for all participants. We receive funding from the Office of Mental Health (OMH), ACCES – VR, as well as grants and generous donations from private funders.

We do request that if possible, students apply for ACCES VR services to help fund their own needs that would support their participation in our program.

### *3. Do you offer any financial help/bus-fare during the training?*

We don't offer financial support but if you are assessed as able to work and attend the MHA Peer Training Program through an MHA Employment or Basic Needs staff member, you can apply through the site coordinator at the Life Skills Center for busfare to attend our training.

### *4. I'm interested in attending the MHA Peer Training Academy, but I have a long-standing weekly appointment that conflicts with classroom time. What should I do?*

If you are accepted into the MHA Peer Training program, please note we have guidelines regarding absenteeism to ensure each student's knowledge and competency from the various trainings. We suggest that you make your appointments so that they do not conflict with your classes.

*5. I'm concerned about my history of incarceration and/or convictions. How will that affect my chances of actually getting work?*

It depends on the conviction. Convictions that prohibit or limit employment in human services:

- Sexual assault charges
- Arson
- Felonies against vulnerable populations (such as children, elderly, disabled persons)
- Violent crimes within the past 10 years

Please check the Justice Center's website for more details

<https://www.justicecenter.ny.gov/criminal-background-check-cbc-process>

*6. I want to keep my SSI/SSDI benefits. Can I work part time as a peer specialist?*

Yes, there are part time peer specialist jobs available. Please check on the websites [www.ccsi.org](http://www.ccsi.org) or [www.indeed.com](http://www.indeed.com) for examples of work available. In addition, you have the option of utilizing our Certified Work Incentives Specialist who can assist you in determining how work can affect your benefits.

*7. This program requires a great commitment of time – can you guarantee me employment?*

The Mental Health Association has established and maintained strong relationships and a positive reputation among local agencies that employ peers. We partner with local agencies and connect them with the MHA Peer Training Academy for employment candidates. Due to the breadth of topics in our training, our peers have the option of seeking positions as peer providers as well as other jobs in human services not necessarily designated as peer positions. We've spoken to working MHA Peer Training Academy graduates and their supervisors across Monroe County to ensure we offer information and training that supports real life situations. This program works if you work it!

With all that said – we can't guarantee you work. It really is up to you to commit to the program as well as to your personal growth and competency to work in the field. Our staff will work with you to identify employers with gainful opportunities.

*8. The MHA Peer Training Academy sounds great – I'd like to help empower others in their recovery, but I need to start working now. What should I do?*

The MHA also offers an Intensive Supported Employment (I.S.E.) Program – a supportive employment service to help people in mental health recovery gain and maintain employment of their choosing. The program is an on-going, year-round enrollment basis. If interested, please call our main line 585-325-3145 and ask for an employment specialist.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Please read and follow the application instructions and directions of this packet.  
Please print all responses neatly.

Once you have collected and completed all the required documents, please submit the entire packet to our offices by the deadline provided.

All documents must be submitted together - not individually. Once received, you will receive a confirmation that your application was accepted. If you submitted a complete application, you will be contacted soon after the deadline to attend a mandatory group orientation.

Applications can be submitted in the following ways:

- 1) Dropped off in person to our office at  
320 N. Goodman St. Rochester, NY 14607
  
- 2) Mailed to:  
MHA Peer Training Academy  
Mental Health Association of Rochester/Monroe, Inc.  
320 N. Goodman St. Rochester, NY 14607

Each month we will accept up to 12 students into the training cycle.  
Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we cannot accept more than 12 students.

Applicants will know their status before the training term starts via email.

### Admission Status:

**ACCEPTED** – An email or verbal invitation will be extended to those who are accepted into the class.

**WAITLISTED** – Once the term has reached capacity, you may be extended an invitation to join the class if space becomes available. Any applicants remaining on the waitlist after orientation will be given priority acceptance for the following month.

**REJECTED** – If your application is rejected, we will provide the reason for the rejection and how you may be able to re-apply with recommended changes. Rejections only occur if the application requirements are not met.

## APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

FACE SHEET – Demographic and Entitlements, ACCES –VR Involvement

CO-EXPERIENCE – Please complete all the information requested truthfully and accurately. Misrepresenting, omitting and/or providing false information is not recommended.

1 PAGE ESSAY – Please answer all 3 questions fully and succinctly:

- What is the role of a peer provider as you understand it?
- Why do you want to become a peer provider?
- What do you intend to do after completing the MHA Peer Training Program?

Please limit the essay to 1 page typed; single spaced.

**COPY OF EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMA COMPLETED:** All employers in human services, as well as the NYS Peer Certification Board, and Families Together NYS require applicants to have at least a high school diploma or GED/TASC in order to be hired and certified. Since our program is employment-focused, we want to make sure each student has at least this educational requirement. If you have more than a high school diploma, please only submit your high school diploma. (College Degrees are not accepted as proof of High School Completion)  
Transcripts must clearly state graduation date.

**TWO LETTERS OF REFERENCE** – We are looking for people to speak about you in a way that demonstrates your commitment to self-direction, self-awareness and personal responsibility for your own recovery as well as a commitment to contributing to others. Examples of references: friends, co-workers, religious leaders – anyone who can talk about your recovery journey. **No relatives or current and past providers please (including therapists.)**

## MHA Peer Training Academy Application Checklist

If you are interested in applying to our MHA Peer Training Academy, please complete all items on the checklist below and submit:

- \_\_\_ 1. Application - pg. 9-10- Please complete the information requested on pages fully.  
*Applicants do not need to be enrolled with ACCES-VR to apply to MHA Peer Training.*
- \_\_\_ 2. Essay – 1-page essay (typed) about your interest in attending the MHA Peer Training Program. **In your essay please answer the following 3 questions:**
  - What is the role of a peer provider as you understand it?
  - Why do you want to become a peer provider?
  - What do you intend to do after completing the MHA Peer Training Program?
- \_\_\_ 3. Submit a Copy of High School/GED/TASC.  
If submitting an official transcript, it must have graduation date clearly stated.
- \_\_\_ 4. TWO letters of reference from people who know you, your potential in human services and/or your recovery journey. In the letters these individuals should tell us how long, in what capacity they have known you and why they would recommend you for certification.
- \_\_\_ 5. Resume (if available) or an outline of work/volunteer history for the past 10 years.

Once you completed all 5 items, please submit all materials at the same time to our office.

You're welcome to bring them to our office or mail them to:

**Mental Health Association of Rochester/Monroe Inc.**  
**320 North Goodman Street**  
**Rochester, New York 14607**  
**Attn: MHA Peer Training Academy**

Once you've submitted your application with all supporting documents, you'll be contacted about your eligibility after the deadline. For more information about the admissions process, please refer the FAQ section of this application.

***Application deadlines:***  
***Applications are due 30 days before start date***  
***We offer start dates each month***

Any application received after the deadline may be considered for the current term if space is available. Otherwise, the application will be considered for the next available term.

# APPLICATION INFORMATION

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

LEGAL NAME (First & Last):

\_\_\_\_\_

PREFERRED NAME:

\_\_\_\_\_

BIRTH DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ SS#: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ GENDER: \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ APT # \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP : \_\_\_\_\_

DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER:

\_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS:

\_\_\_\_\_

RACE: \_\_\_\_\_ ETHNICITY (circle one): Hispanic Non-Hispanic

PRIMARY LANGUAGE: \_\_\_\_\_ SECONDARY LANGUAGE \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. CITIZEN: YES NO RELIGION: \_\_\_\_\_

ENTITLEMENTS (circle all that apply): DHS/SNAP Medicaid SSI/SSD

Unemployment Insurance

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

MARITAL STATUS (circle one):

Single Married Partnered Divorced Separated Widowed

EDUCATION (Circle highest degree completed):

HS Diploma GED/TASC Trade Associate Bachelor Master PhD

LIVING SITUATION(Check all that apply): \_\_\_Alone \_\_\_With Relatives \_\_\_Supported

\_\_\_Homeless \_\_\_Own Home \_\_\_Rental Apartment \_\_\_Community Living

Do you participate in any other Mental Health Association programs? (circle one) Yes No

If yes, which:

\_\_\_CWO \_\_\_Drop-In Center \_\_\_Affinity Place \_\_\_Life Skills \_\_\_Basic Needs(benefits)

## ACCES-VR INFORMATION (formerly VESID)

ARE YOU CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN ACCES-VR?  Yes  No

IF NO: Were you ever enrolled in ACCES-VR/VESID?  Yes  No

Year: \_\_\_\_\_

IF YES: ACCES-VR Counselor: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of last Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Has ACCES-VR sponsored you for other trainings?  Yes  No

What training?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## CO-EXPERIENCE SURVEY – (optional)

The Mental Health Association Peer Training Academy welcomes a diverse student makeup of persons with co-experiences – people with a mental health diagnosis who also have other lived experiences, such as military veterans, LGBTQ+, incarceration, homelessness and/or substance abuse. This diversity of experience reflects the needs and perspective of mental health service users – the very people MHA graduates will be supporting in their work. It's important to us as a peer program that our classroom reflect the people we support.

Please complete the following questions as accurately and thoroughly as you can.

INCARCERATION: Have you experienced incarceration for more than 6 months?  YES  NO

SUBSTANCE USE: Do you have alcohol/substance use recovery experience?  YES  NO

HOMELESSNESS: Do you have homelessness experience?  YES  NO

LGBTQ: Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ community?  YES  NO

Military Vet: Are you a military vet?  YES  NO