



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 and 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
- Have a minimum of 12 months mental health recovery

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

Applications are due 5 business days before the session start date.

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 or 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 – not only do course topics address the how/why of the peer profession, but the knowledge, tools and skills that form 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. Each week in the program, you'll attend our Networking & Career Support group and meet with an Employment Specialist to support your job search.

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

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

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

Volunteer or work 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 Networking & Career 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 can be accepted in lieu of volunteering.

III. Competitive Employment Support

Upon completion of the internship, you can then move on to the final phase of the program – employment! This class provides you with mutual support for your job search. Also, agencies seeking peer providers often contact us directly to fill part-time and full-time positions. We discuss these in the weekly Networking & Career Support group meetings. We also offer free Employment Support Services from resume building to on-the-job coaching.

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 that work 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 work with an employment support specialist during your training and they will support you all the way through to employment obtainment and retention.

Annual Graduation Ceremony

We celebrate the accomplishments of MHA graduates by providing a graduation ceremony where you, your invited guest(s) 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 and the Family Peer Advocate Certification are both 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 Specialist 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 Family Peer Advocate 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. Each student is expected to support their own well-being while abiding by the program's structure and design. Students often find support through each other in the classroom, and job coaching is available at no cost to you.

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

The entire program – from classroom training through volunteer or 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. *A maximum of 3 days can be missed, any more than 3 will result in having to withdraw from the program. Students who withdraw have the option to re-enter the program at a later date.*

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 15 min 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 transportation assistance 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. *The program carries a strict 3 missed day policy.*

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 typically 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

(This list is not all-inclusive and there may be other convictions that may prevent successful employment in human services)

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 and per diem peer specialist jobs available. Please check on the websites www.ccsi.org or 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 offers an Intensive Supported Employment (I.S.E.) Program – a supportive employment service to help people in mental health recovery gain 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.

9. *Is there any support for me once I start working?*

The MHA offers job coaching and mentoring services to help people in mental health recovery maintain employment of their choosing. In addition, we offer work related benefits advisement services to assist you in making decisions regarding SSDI/SSI/Medicare/Medicaid benefits while working, as well as help you with regular wage reporting to Social Security. If interested, please call our main line 585-325-3145 and ask to speak to someone regarding these services.

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 indicated at the bottom of page 8.

All documents must be submitted together - not individually. *If submitted separately, your application will not be reviewed until all documents are received.* Once received, you will get 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:
Mental Health Association of Rochester/Monroe, Inc.
320 N. Goodman St. Rochester, NY 14607
Attn: Peer Training Academy

Applicants will know their status before the training term starts via email.
(If contact information changes after application is submitted, it is your responsibility to inform MHA of these changes.)

Applications are due 5 business days before the start date

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

These documents are vital to your application.
Your application is not reviewed until all items are received.

FACE SHEET:

Please complete pages 9-10: Demographic, Entitlements, and ACCES –VR Involvement.

CO-EXPERIENCE:

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

2 PAGE ESSAY – Please answer all 4 questions fully and succinctly:

- *What is the role of a peer provider as you understand it?*
- *How long have you been in recovery? Please describe your journey.*
- *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 2 page typed; single spaced.

COPY OF EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMA COMPLETED:

Please submit your high school diploma or high school equivalency (HSE/GED), if this is not available a college degree, or transcript from High school or college is also acceptable. Transcripts must clearly state graduation date. 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.

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

**These documents are vital to your application.
Your application is not reviewed until all items are received.**

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** – 2-page essay (typed preferably) about your interest in attending the MHA Peer Training Program. In your essay please answer the following 4 questions:
 - *What is the role of a peer provider as you understand it?*
 - *How long have you been in recovery? Please describe your journey.*
 - *Why do you want to become a peer provider?*
 - *What do you intend to do after completing the MHA Peer Training Program?*
- 3. **Copy of an educational document(s)**
This can be a high school or college diploma or a transcript.
If submitting an official transcript, it must have graduation date clearly stated.
- 4. **TWO Letters of Reference**
These should be 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 5 business days before each start date

Sessions occur in: *January, March, May, July, September and November.*

Please contact us or go to our website calendar to get the start date and time.

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: _____ PRONOUNS: _____

BIRTH DATE: _____ SS#: _____ - _____ - _____ GENDER: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____ APT #: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER: _____ COUNTY: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

RACE: _____ ETHNICITY: Hispanic Non-Hispanic

PRIMARY LANGUAGE: _____ SECONDARY LANGUAGE: _____

U.S. CITIZEN: YES NO

HAVE YOU ACCESSED EMERGENCY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

(This does not include regular therapy or counselling sessions)

Y N IF Yes, enter date: _____

ENTITLEMENTS *(Check all that apply):*

DHS/SNAP Medicaid SSI/SSD Unemployment Insurance Other: _____

MARITAL STATUS: Single Married Partnered Divorced Separated Widowed

EDUCATION *(Check highest degree completed):*

HS Diploma GED/TASC Trade Associate Bachelor Master PhD

LIVING SITUATION *(Check all that apply):* Alone With Relatives With Roommates

Supported Homeless Own Home Rental Apartment Community Living

Do you participate in any other Mental Health Association programs?

(Check one) Yes No

If yes, which: CWO Drop-In Center Employment 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

Which 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

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

CARE GIVER: Do you have experience caring for and navigating services on behalf of a child and/or youth with behavioral or mental health challenges? YES NO