



**Youth peer support (YPS)** is a service for young people between the ages of 13-26 meant to break down the power dynamic barrier that generally exists between professional practitioners and youth and young adults being supported by providing an authentic opportunity for the young people receiving peer support to feel validation and develop healthy peer relationships based on similar lived experiences. Using lived experience with purpose and intent, Youth Peer Support Specialists (YPSS), support a young person in building the skills and structure that they need to self-identify and advocate for decisions related to their wellbeing, and life goals, such as education, employment, healthy relationships, and transition to greater independence. YPSS actively model that successful life outcomes are possible and share practical information and strategies for holding hope while navigating through challenging times. YPSS work collaboratively as a part of the Wraparound team and consistently communicate with Care Coordinators and Family Peer Support Specialists to check-in as needed, prepare for, and debrief team meetings. In addition, YPSS encourage youth to be engaged in the Wraparound process by supporting them to actively participate in team meetings and other supporting programs/services. YPSS coach, support, and prepare the young people that they are supporting to become more involved in their own health and treatment decisions and provide emotional support throughout the process.

YPSS are trained to role model through actions, words, and demeanor, the types of behavior that will contribute to young adults' success and personal growth, including a range of skills in communication and strong, confident, reliable behavior that supports young adults' progress toward independence, wellness, emotional regulation, successful problem-solving, self-advocacy, healthy interpersonal interactions, and meaningful connection to community resources. YPSS inspire hope in the young people they work with by sharing their lived experiences in a way that highlights healthy lifestyle changes and resources that they found to better cope with their struggles and overcome the barriers that they were faced with, without ever straying into an attitude of "knowing better" or being in some way above the youth they support. YPSS are not mentors, a term that implies a power over the youth. YPSS work with other young people to help

them become empowered to be more engaged with their treatment and are prepared to begin to take greater control of advocating for their self-identified wellness and futures goals. YPSS help young people to develop and hone their own voices and advocacy skills to open channels of communication between family members, natural supports, and other providers who are involved in futures planning.

**To be eligible for Youth Peer Support, youth must meet the following criteria:**

- Between ages 13 -26 and Enrolled in FAST Forward
- Family AND Youth must voluntarily agree to receiving Youth Peer Support
- Family AND Youth will get support from Care Coordinator and/or Wraparound Team in completing Youth Peer Support Referral Form

**What to Expect When A YPSS Joins the Team:**

- Youth Peer Support Specialists (YPSS) works collaboratively as a part of the Wraparound team and consistently communicates with Care Coordinator and Family Peer Support Specialist to check-in as needed, prepare for, and debrief team meetings.
- YPSS supports youth in finding and expressing their voice and sharing their experiences. In preparing for team meetings, the youth and the YPSS will discuss what to expect, who will be there, and how the meeting will play out.
- If requested by the youth directly, the YPSS may speak for the young person they are supporting or co-present with them during Wraparound meetings until the young person is ready to advocate for themselves on their own. In situations where youth may feel outnumbered or be reluctant to speak about their needs, the YPSS is there to add another youth voice and advocate on their behalf.
- YPSS will encourage youth to be engaged in the Wraparound process by participating in team meetings and other supporting programs/services.
- YPSS will support the young person in developing skills to strategically share their experience and perspectives in a manner that is safe and does not adversely impact their future possibilities and opportunities in life.
- YPSS might also work with the young person they are supporting to help them connect to community resources that they may have been unaware of beforehand or disconnected from in the past. The YPSS can accompany the young person as they navigate the community and various service systems at the request of the young person and as it relates to their need in the plan of care.
- YPSS helps young people identify their goals and offers validation. They affirm the young person's goals and ideas by helping them

explore the situation, identify a plan, and come up with action steps. The YPSS consistently checks in about goals and plans, and validates the young person's perspective while supporting them to pursue and/or change their needs/goals.

- YPSS will use different methods to support each individual young person and rely on their relationship building skills to learn more about the young person and what kind of support they would like. YPSS help to “build a bridge” so that young people can better connect with other members of their wraparound team or connect with other/new formal & informal supports. In doing so, the YPSS uses an individualized approach to help young people to effectively connect and communicate with their wraparound team members and other people in their lives.
- YPSS responsibilities on a care team may also include: building trust by connecting to youth using their own lived experiences, attending wraparound family/team meetings, meeting weekly for an hour with the young person one on one, helping the young person in identifying needs, supporting reflective conversations that encourage youth to find new insight about the perspectives of other team members on their wraparound team, exploring other resources and supports available that the young person wants to know more about, promoting the importance of developing deeper self-awareness and proactive self-care strategies that feel accessible and effective to the youth. and connecting to youth using their own lived experiences to demonstrate the power of holding on to hope for a brighter future.