



For October, November, and December 2022, Vol. XV

[www.rockingrecovery.org](http://www.rockingrecovery.org)

**When building anything significant, the most critical step is the first one, laying the foundation.** This is true whether talking about a physical structure, the framework for an organization, or choosing a career path in life. The foundation determines the outcome, the ability to grow in the future, or the endeavor's success.

With this in mind, Ripple has started a new conversation, and the goal is simple. We want to see a solid foundation put into place from which all future peer-supported services in Connecticut can grow. This is long overdue, and to fully understand how we arrived at this point, we should look at how we got where we are now. For more than a decade, people with lived experience with mental health and addiction challenges have been able to train to use what they have learned over their lifetimes so far. From the very first class, the questions of what peer support should look like, how it should be administered, and how those practicing it should be reimbursed have not been answered to anyone's satisfaction. In fact, the only thing that has never been questioned is the overall value of what peer support brings to the community.



Advocacy for change really didn't get off the ground until 2017. That year after identifying several problems incorporating peers into the traditional mental health workforce, a bill was brought before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. (For your reference: HB = House Bill and SB = Senate Bill)

HB-6887 An Act Concerning Mental Health Care Services and Substance Abuse Services Provided By Certified Peer Counselors. The bill's stated purpose: "To require that certain health insurance policies cover nonmedical mental health care and substance abuse services provided by certified peer counselors." That bill failed to pass. Over the years, other similar bills were introduced, HB-5279 in 2019, HB-5248 in 2020, and HB-5550 in 2021.

In 2021 we narrowed our focus. The stated purpose of HB-5550 was "*To establish a task force to study the possible certification and education of peer support specialists in this state, the peer support services that would be delivered by such certified peer support specialists and possible health insurance coverage for such services.*"

During the legislative session, this bill was merged into several other mental health-related proposals and became part of HB-6588. It eventually got combined again into SB-1, where it passed. The problem is that the peer task force seemed lost in the mix, and the peer support task force was pushed back to page 22 of the 28-page document. Among other things, it states, "*Not later than January 1, 2022, the task force shall submit a report on its findings and recommendations to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to public health, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.*" [sic]

As of today, nine months past the deadline for the report, the task force has not yet had its first meeting. It died because politicians who were part of the process never finished making all necessary appointments to establish the task force.

So, where are we now? As some of you know, Yale/DMHAS put together a Subject Matter Expert panel and Peer Advisory Committee to begin yet another new attempt to get something on paper and implemented. The Advisory Committee originally had eight peers with lived experience. After seeing the list of those selected, Jeffrey Santo, Ripple's Executive Director, made a few observations and began advocating for expanded inclusion on the committee. He noted that everyone appointed was already working in the field, lived nowhere near the poverty line, and all had completed higher levels of education.



After pointing out the selection process failed to include three key demographics representing a large cross-section of those in the recovery community, the committee was expanded. Jeffrey and two others joined to form a group raising the number of peers to eleven.

**The new conversation and why...** It seems to some as if we are heading down the same road making the same mistakes. One indicator of this is the loss of interest by the peer community in the current process. Many of the concerns with proposed changes were never addressed, and the current direction peer certification appears to be heading in is not what many of us had in mind. DMHAS published an FAQ page after a few online meetings seeking public input. We know that many people are unhappy with what has been put in place so far. This observation is based on our conversations in Ripple's RSS Community Conversation meetings via Zoom and in various Facebook interactions.

The level of interest has dropped, and we say this because of what we saw during the Peer Advisory Committee's first public meeting. Held on September 28th, the highest number in attendance we saw in the zoom room was 21 people. Only five committee members showed up, which is less than half for those counting. Six of the participants were connected to Yale or DMHAS. Perhaps it is time for a new direction, and based on one question answered in the DMHAS FAQ, we feel there is no better time. The question was, can peers begin opening their own practices? The answer was *"Peer Recovery Support Certification is different from licensure by DPH as an independent practitioner, which is required in the industry for operation of "private practice."*

Over the last few years, our community has asked for peer-run respites. We all want to see peers be in roles that do not pigeonhole them into being a cheap alternative for case management. We want people trained in and dedicated to peer support able to make a living wage. We keep saying we want an equal voice at the table which will never be possible unless we start to achieve an equal footing in the "industry" itself. Continuing down the certification path will only install and maintain a pre-existing glass ceiling for anyone entering the professional peer support field. This is not a foundation many of us in recovery want to build a career on moving forward. We need more stability than the certifications will ever offer.

We need licensure and the ability to create another treatment option for those in recovery. A state-level agency should be responsible for oversight, not a random third-party nonprofit seeking to have a monopoly on all peer certification in the state. A common sentiment among those currently certified as peer supporters is that we will never live up to the full potential of what we can achieve if we are stuck within the same old way of thinking.

With licensure, peer-run respites and bridger programs would be self-sufficient. Peer practitioners could become more self-reliant, and new peer initiatives and services would soon begin coming online and fill many gaps in a very underserved community.

The bottom line is this; we are ready to take on the challenges ahead of us. Currently, our certified peers are asked to conduct themselves as a professional. Abide by professional codes of conduct, adhere to professional standards of quality and continue education. We agree that this is a good thing, but we must also point out that peers make nowhere near a professional salary, have little room for professional development or advancement, and feel like we are only along for the ride when it comes to plotting our course into the future. A peer-level license would allow us not only to look and act professional but also to actually be professional... and that is something on which to build a career.



# In Ripple News:

**MOVING:** During this quarter and into the new year, Ripple will move out of Norwalk and be in the state's Northeast corner in the Pomfret area. We will dust off our Youtube channel and post videos as we build our first-ever dedicated office. To save as much money as possible, "building" our office will be quite literal.

We will fabricate our desks' bases by welding square steel tubing together. Desktops, lighted hutches, and bookcases will be created with premium-grade plywood. There is even a plan to build a 16-foot-long conference table from scratch. We plan to have a lot of fun and share as much as possible with the community with a live stream of the process.

**Future Offerings:** On September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the Wildflower Alliance wrapped up a training at the Westport Public Library for new Alternatives to Suicide Facilitators. Ripple had the opportunity to participate in that class. After the first year, we will announce a new online Alternative to Suicide offering. Once settled into our new office, we will also begin exploring locations for in-person offerings.

*"The Wildflower Alliance supports healing and empowerment for our broader communities and people who have been impacted by psychiatric diagnosis, trauma, extreme states, homelessness, problems with substances and other life-interrupting challenges."* For more information, check them out at: [wildfloweralliance.org](http://wildfloweralliance.org)



- 10/15/2022 - The Quiet Corner Walk, Woodstock Academy, South Campus - Putnam, CT
- 10/22/2022 - Fairfield County Walk, Jesup Green - Westport, CT
- 10/23/2022 - CT Capital Area Walk, Bushnell Park - Hartford, CT



# RockingRecovery.org

Recovery Innovations for Pursuing Peer Leadership and Empowerment (RIPPLE)



## Peer Hosted Late Night Support Group

Everyone needs to talk from time to time, and sometimes there is no one else around. Many people in recovery struggle at night when the warmlines are closed. If you are one of those people, we invite you to join us. If you live with depression, anxiety, PTSD, intrusive thoughts, or need help facing an addiction, you are not alone.

**Tuesdays, Thursdays, & Sundays  
10:00 PM to Midnight**

**These meetings will be offered on the  
Zoom platform and open to anyone  
who would like to attend.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89824032752>

**One tap mobile**

**+19292056099,,89824032752# US (New York)**

**Dial by your location**

**+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)**

**Meeting ID: 898 2403 2752**

Powered by Peers....

And a  
lot of  
coffee!



**Please visit our website for more information:  
[www.rockingrecovery.org/zoom-meetings](http://www.rockingrecovery.org/zoom-meetings)**



