

Recovery Coaching Supervisor Role

A successful recovery coach program in a recovery center hinges on the development and maintenance of an appropriate support structure. A recovery coach supervisory position is designed to provide that structure. The Recovery Coach Supervisor will be responsible for the overall management of the Recovery Coaches (RCs) in each center.

Recovery coaching must be a collaborative process. Coaches generally work with people who are new to recovery, people who come to recovery with many unmet needs and issues that need to be addressed. In turn, a coach should work with a supervisor for support in finding people to work with, establishing good participant-coach matches, developing a realistic recovery wellness plan, and providing collaborative guidance or support in responding to difficult situations. The supervision, outreach, and training required to maintain a program of this sort will always be subject to transition. This is because responding to people during their initial stages of recovery is, by definition, fluid. People are particularly needy in early recovery.

Experience providing recovery support has demonstrated that recovery workers often need assistance and input from someone with a different perspective. This additional perspective helps a coach focus on building people's strengths while finding creative ways to turn deficits into opportunities for growth. Recovery is an ongoing process, which requires continuing adjustment, re-engagement, and encouragement. Just because someone is willing to consider recovery from the use of one drug doesn't mean that he is committed to abstinence from all substances. Just because someone is committed to recovery on Monday doesn't mean that she won't have doubts by Wednesday.

Boundaries

A Recovery Coach Supervisor has a broad purview. One important aspect of a supervisor's role is ensuring that RCs and the people they are working with are maintaining appropriate boundaries on a personal, financial, emotional, ethical, and sexual basis. Maintaining confidentiality is another supervisory challenge in recovery environments, where many people are intimately acquainted with details of others' lives as a result of open disclosure in 12-step and other recovery groups as well as in the many one-on-one conversations held. A supervisor also helps RCs maintain role clarity by helping them to avoid the tendency to move out of the coaching role and into the role of a counselor or a sponsor. The supervisor helps to ensure that frustration and anger, sometimes elicited by the symptoms of addictions, are not directed at the people seeking recovery, people whose behaviors are sometimes less than stellar. The supervisor also supports RCs in maintaining a strengths-based approach to recovery, helping them avoid the tendency to slip into a problem-focused approach common in other disciplines.

Supervision helps the recovery coach navigate relationships with professionals from courts, corrections, child protective services, and treatment, which all tend to inadvertently place the RC in a position of power over the person in recovery they are supporting. These professionals may make requests of RCs that ask them to step outside ideal coaching role boundaries. A supervisor can help the coach respond appropriately with messages such as, "My role is to be a mentor and supporter of people trying to maintain recovery." "Recovery coaches do not monitor anyone's abstinence." Or, "Recovery coaches do not provide reports on a participant's progress in recovery. Let me encourage you to speak directly with_____." A

supervisor is also responsible for responding to complaints about a recovery coach's behavior. Each recovery center has appropriate procedures in place to address concerns and assure prompt resolution of any issues that need to be addressed.

Management & Training

The Vermont Recovery Center Network (VRN) is taking on the responsibility of ensuring that all recovery coaching in our recovery centers is actively managed and supported with regular training and updates. The Recovery Centers have experience serving vulnerable populations, experience that has led to the adoption of volunteer screening processes unique to the individual centers. These screenings serve as background checks. Nonetheless, the actions of our coaches must be monitored to ensure ethical behavior. If an RC is responsible for making a poor decision or crossing an ethical boundary, the supervisor will help provide a course correction or, where appropriate, will implement a progressive discipline process. VRN-approved recovery coaches must have taken the formal week-long recovery coach training and received a certificate of completion. Coaches are expected to participate in the processes outlined below to develop and maintain their skills. In cases where disciplinary procedures have resulted in a coach being relieved of recovery coaching responsibilities, that coach will be removed from the list of VRN-approved coaches that is posted on the Network website. Reinstatement will only be considered — depending on the severity of the transgression — after the supervisor has evaluated the situation and worked with the coach on a remediation plan that addresses past behaviors.

Supervisor Roles & Responsibilities

- **Recruit and Select RCs**

Select a variety of RCs for recovery coach training. A coach should be an individual who demonstrates a strong and stable personal program of recovery and possesses a recommended minimum time of one year in recovery. A potential coach needs to have demonstrated progress in the recovery process (good recovery) and the requisite open mindedness necessary to support people on all paths to recovery. The candidate coach should pass the center's volunteer screening process. Creating a diverse group is strongly recommended. The diversity to be considered includes: gender, age, path of recovery, length of time in recovery, ethnicity, correctional / drug court involvement, and key personal experiences such as medication-assisted recovery and experience with helping family members find recovery.

- **Determine RC-Participant Matches**

The evolving service delivery model relies on the supervisor to conduct an initial interview with potential participants to determine the degree to which each participant is suited for recovery coaching; the supervisor then matches a participant with the most appropriate RC, based on individual characteristics and availability. In situations where individual RCs are doing recruitment, it is important arrange for a prompt discussion of the most appropriate participant-RC match in the team. Considerations about the frequency of participant-RC interactions are appropriate for discussion with the supervisor during the initial stages of establishing participant-RC schedules.

- **Review of Participant Progress**

The supervisor should hold meetings with coaches at least once every two weeks—more often when the RC is handling difficult cases. The supervisor and recovery coach should engage in a detailed conversation about each participant to evaluate progress. This review provides an opportunity for coaches to validate their approach and the guidance they have provided while working with participants. Presenting the participant’s situation to the supervisor provides an opportunity for an objective look and a chance to consider the supervisor’s viewpoint. This presentation also provides an opportunity to consider additional resources and/or a change in direction of coaching. Recovery is a fluid process that requires continuing re-engagement and encouragement. Ad-hoc consultation and supervision for the RCs needs to be readily available between these semi-monthly reviews.

- **Oversee the Development and Maintenance of Recovery Wellness Plans & Documentation**

Recovery coach supervisors are expected to guide and ensure that RCs are: 1) properly completing the Recovery Coach Agreement during the first meeting; 2) coaching the participants to complete a Recovery Wellness Plan within a reasonable timeframe; 3) explaining the elements in and completing the Recovery Coach Support Tool within the first three meetings, and following up with use of the tool at three-month intervals; 4) maintaining appropriate confidentiality and record controls (locked files); 5) uploading data from the Recovery Coach Support Tool to the Network website; 6) performing ongoing reviews of recovery wellness plans to help participants achieve and evolve their recovery goals; and 7) tracking individual hours spent coaching and submitting requests for reimbursement in settings where reimbursement is provided.

- **Collaborative Conversations with RCs about Boundaries, Role Clarity, Potential Referrals, and Personal Comfort**

Maintaining a balanced schedule, identifying training needs, establishing RC personal self-improvement and career goals, managing burnout, maintaining appropriate personal and work boundaries, providing suggestions on potential referral sites, and role clarity are all important parts of the supervision process. Coaches need support in Maintenance of a strong recovery coaching program requires a structure that provides regular attention to these important elements.

- **Conduct Monthly RC Meetings**

The monthly meeting provides an opportunity for RCs to describe their experiences and learn from others. This sharing will help all participants to refine the processes for delivering this new service. In the ROSC Monograph, Bill White states that, “Assertive linkage to a recovery support group is more effective than passive referral (verbal encouragement to attend), but the linkage process in most treatment programs is of the passive variety.” Supervisors need to assure RC representation in treatment settings and/or active referrals. One of the activities at monthly meetings is arranging for meeting coverage at, and referrals from, local referral partner agencies, such as treatment providers, homeless service providers, Department of Corrections, Department of Children and Families, Drug Courts, and other community service providers.