
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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MERRY, SEMMEL AND RICHARDSON, FEBRUARY 14, 1995

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, FEBRUARY 14, 1995

AN ACT

1 Providing for the establishment of the Peer Helpers Program; and
2 making an appropriation.

3 TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 Chapter 1. General Provisions

5 Section 101. Short title.

6 Section 102. Definitions.

7 Section 103. Powers and duties of department.

8 Chapter 2. Program Initiation

9 Section 201. Planning.

10 Section 202. Commitment.

11 Section 203. Staffing.

12 Section 204. Organizational structure.

13 Chapter 3. Program Implementation

14 Section 301. Screening and selection.

15 Section 302. Training.

1 Section 303. Training models.
2 Section 304. Service delivery.
3 Section 305. Supervision.
4 Chapter 4. Program Maintenance
5 Section 401. General rule.
6 Section 402. Evaluation.
7 Section 403. Public relations.
8 Section 404. Long-range planning.
9 Chapter 5. Miscellaneous Provisions
10 Section 501. Appropriation.
11 Section 502. Effective date.

12 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
13 hereby enacts as follows:

14 CHAPTER 1
15 GENERAL PROVISIONS

16 Section 101. Short title.

17 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Peer Helpers
18 Program Act.

19 Section 102. Definitions.

20 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
21 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
22 context clearly indicates otherwise:

23 "Department." The Department of Education of the
24 Commonwealth.

25 "Program." The Peer Helpers Program.

26 Section 103. Powers and duties of department.

27 The department shall have authority for the establishment,
28 implementation and administration of the program. The department
29 shall be responsible for promulgating rules and regulations and
30 instituting procedures necessary to implement this act.

1 CHAPTER 2

2 PROGRAM INITIATION

3 Section 201. Planning.

4 (a) General rule.--Prior to implementing the program in high
5 schools, the department shall conduct careful planning to
6 address certain issues relevant to the particular high school.

7 (b) Rationale.--The department shall establish that there is
8 a clear and compelling rationale for the development of the
9 program in the high school. Development shall be accomplished
10 through conducting a formal or informal needs assessment in the
11 high school in which the program is to be implemented.

12 (c) Purpose.--The purpose of the program derives logically
13 from its rationale and shall be summarized in a formal mission
14 statement by the department.

15 (d) Goals and objectives.--The department shall develop
16 programmatic goals and objectives that are reflective of the
17 rationale and purpose of the program and that are clear,
18 realistic and achievable.

19 (e) Procedures.--The procedures and activities through which
20 programmatic goals are to be accomplished shall be laid out in a
21 clear, systematic fashion by the department.

22 (f) Compliance.--The program shall be planned and
23 implemented in a manner consistent with national, State and
24 local guidelines for programmatic standards and ethics.

25 Section 202. Commitment.

26 The program shall enjoy not simply the permission but the
27 active commitment and involvement of those who solicit and
28 maintain its services. The commitment is reflected particularly
29 in the following areas:

30 (1) Tangible evidence of a high level of administrative,

1 staff and community support and includes the formation of a
2 program advisory committee. Committee members may or may not
3 be directly involved in program implementation, but they
4 provide valuable input to program staff and help to maximize
5 a sense of program ownership.

6 (2) Sufficient financial and logistical support for
7 effective program implementation, including the provision of
8 necessary curricular and training resources.

9 Section 203. Staffing.

10 Program staff shall possess appropriate background, training
11 and characteristics to enable them to carry out their
12 responsibilities in an effective manner. Among professional
13 staff who work directly with peer helpers, the following skills
14 are required:

15 (1) Strong positive rapport with the population from
16 which the peer helpers are selected.

17 (2) Educational and practical experience that is
18 relevant to the nature and goals of the program.

19 (3) Understanding of and commitment to fundamental
20 principles of peer helping which include a readiness to
21 maximize the level of programmatic ownership and involvement
22 on the part of the peer helpers themselves.

23 (4) Close familiarity with the setting in which the
24 program is to be implemented.

25 (5) Clear grasp of program needs and goals and the
26 ability to articulate effectively the nature and purpose of
27 the program to peer helpers, other staff, the sponsoring
28 agency and the broader community.

29 (6) Recognition of the importance of serving as a
30 positive role model, both personally and professionally.

1 (7) Familiarity with different learning styles and
2 teaching strategies, including both experiential and didactic
3 approaches.

4 (8) Ability to work effectively with groups.

5 (9) Mastery of concepts and skills necessary for
6 effective training and supervision of peer helpers.

7 (10) Sufficient time and energy in order to be able to
8 carry out programmatic responsibilities.

9 Section 204. Organizational structure.

10 The department shall organize and structure the program in a
11 logical and consistent manner that provides clear lines of
12 authority, responsibility and communication and is reflective of
13 the nature and purpose of the program.

14 CHAPTER 3

15 PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

16 Section 301. Screening and selection.

17 (a) Procedure.--The program shall employ a clear, systematic
18 and careful procedure for the screening and selection of peer
19 helpers. This procedure shall include the following:

20 (1) Establishing appropriate criteria as to the
21 characteristics being sought among prospective peer helpers.
22 Among those characteristics are helpfulness, trustworthiness,
23 concern for others, ability to listen and potential to serve
24 as a positive role model.

25 (2) Conducting a formal or informal survey in the
26 program setting in order to determine which individuals are
27 felt to possess the desired characteristics.

28 (3) Making application to the program, soliciting
29 recommendations from others in the program setting and
30 structuring an interview with program staff.

(b) Final selection.--The programs in the various high schools may differ as to whether final selection of peer helpers shall occur prior to or after peer helping training. But in either case, the selection process shall be guided by the following criteria:

(1) Demonstration of appropriate helping characteristics and skills.

(2) Evidence of emotional security.

(3) Understanding of the type of services to be provided.

(4) Commitment to and availability for the provision of those services.

(5) Ability to be reflective of and sensitive to the characteristics of the population to be served.

(6) Manageability of the size of the group selected, in order to ensure quality training and supervision.

Section 302. Training.

(a) General rule.--Once peer helpers have been selected for the high schools by the department, they shall be provided with quality training in the knowledge and skills they will need to be effective in the peer-helping role. The training program that is implemented shall consist of the following:

(1) The nature and goals of the program.

(2) The age, needs and characteristics of the high school to be served.

(3) The utilization of the appropriate curricular resources and training strategies.

(4) National, State and local guidelines on ethics and standards.

(b) Trainee commitment.--Trainees shall commit to

1 participate in all aspects of training and to maximize
2 opportunities for both skill development and personal growth.
3 Training shall be an ongoing process.

4 Section 303. Training models.

5 (a) General rule.--While specific features of training may
6 vary somewhat from program to program, the following elements
7 listed are characteristic of effective peer-helping training
8 models.

9 (b) Role of peer helper.--Training in the peer-helping role
10 shall include, but may not be limited to, the following:

- 11 (1) Program orientation.
- 12 (2) Characteristics of the peer helper which include
13 caring, acceptance, genuineness, understanding and
14 trustworthiness.
- 15 (3) Self-awareness.
- 16 (4) Positive role modeling and maintaining a healthy
17 lifestyle.
- 18 (5) Avoidance of temptation to offer advice, propose
19 solutions or impose values.
- 20 (6) Positive listening skills.
- 21 (7) Recognition of limitations.
- 22 (8) Development of individual and group trust.
- 23 (9) Creation of a support system of peer helpers for
24 each other, as well as for persons being helped.
- 25 (10) Development of code of ethics and standards of
26 behavior.

27 (c) Confidentiality and liability issues.--

28 (1) Communications between peer helpers and persons
29 being helped shall be confidential, however, there are two
30 important exceptions to this general rule:

1 (i) Potential threats to the personal safety or
2 well-being of the peer helper, the person being helped or
3 others.

4 (ii) Situations or problems beyond the personal
5 experience level or expertise of the peer helper.

6 (2) It is essential that peer helpers are trained to
7 know how to recognize certain situations, are aware of their
8 limitations and responsibilities and have ready access to
9 professional staff and appropriate referral resources.

10 (d) Communication skills.--The following communication
11 skills are required:

12 (1) Basic principles of verbal and nonverbal
13 communication.

14 (2) Active listening skills.

15 (3) Facilitative responding.

16 (e) Problem-solving and decision-making strategies.--The
17 training program shall include steps in principled decision
18 making that include identifying the problem, brainstorming
19 alternatives, predicting consequences, carrying out action plans
20 and evaluating results.

21 (f) Additional issues and topics.--Depending upon the nature
22 and goals of particular programs, additional specialized
23 training may be provided by the department in areas such as the
24 following:

25 (1) Basic concepts of human behavior. While not expected
26 to function as amateur therapists, peer helpers shall have
27 some degree of familiarity with concepts such as the
28 following:

29 (i) The role of motivational and reinforcement
30 factors in behavior.

(ii) Sociocultural influences and differences.

(iii) Individual and group dynamics.

(2) Group facilitation techniques.

(3) Peer-tutoring strategies.

(4) Crisis management.

(5) Conflict resolution.

(6) Special needs populations.

(7) Telephone hotline management.

(8) Specific problem areas, including substance abuse, dropouts, depression and suicide, teen pregnancy, child abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, gangs and cults, family relations, etc.

(9) Knowledge of referral resources, services and programs.

Section 304. Service delivery.

Subsequent to training, peer helpers shall be provided with structured opportunities to engage in a variety of meaningful, productive helping roles within the program setting. The peer-helping services which are provided shall:

(1) Be consistent with and reflective of program goals.

(2) Enable peer helpers to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired during training.

(3) Enhance the personal growth and positive development of peer helpers and persons being helped alike.

(4) Recognize and accommodate the need for ongoing opportunities for continued learning and training.

(5) Establish safeguards to protect peer helpers from burnout, role confusion, inappropriate assignments or manipulation.

Section 305. Supervision.

- 1 (2) Program staffing and organization.
- 2 (3) Selection procedures.
- 3 (4) Nature and extent of training.
- 4 (5) Amount and types of services provided.
- 5 (6) Any other program-related activities.

6 (c) Summative evaluation.--A summative evaluation shall be
7 conducted to determine the degree to which the program has been
8 successful in achieving its goals and to assess the impact of
9 program participation upon both peer helpers and those who have
10 received program services. This assessment shall be qualitative,
11 including questionnaires and opinion surveys, and employ hard
12 quantitative indices of program impact. The summative evaluation
13 shall assess impact in the following areas:

- 14 (1) Student attitudes or behavior.
- 15 (2) Grade point average.
- 16 (3) Absenteeism and dropout rates.
- 17 (4) Incidence of disciplinary referrals.

18 (d) Plan revision.--Both formative and summative evaluation
19 data shall be utilized by program staff in a periodic effort to
20 determine whether and how the program needs to be revised for
21 future improvement.

22 Section 403. Public relations.

23 Program staff shall make a concerted, ongoing effort to keep
24 those individuals in the program setting, as well as interested
25 individuals and organizations in the broader community, well
26 informed about the program and supportive of its goals.

27 Techniques for strengthening programmatic public relations may
28 include production of a program brochure or newsletter,
29 maintenance of media contacts, involvement of community
30 representatives in training or program services and community

1 outreach projects.

2 Section 404. Long-range planning.

3 (a) General rule.--Program staff shall engage in long-range
4 planning to ensure that in the future, the program does not die
5 but rather becomes stronger and more firmly integrated within
6 the program setting as time goes by.

7 (b) Staffing.--It is important that the success of the
8 program not be dependent upon the particular person, or
9 personality, who happens to be coordinating it at any given
10 time. In this regard, a sense of program ownership shall be
11 maximized through such strategies as the formation of a program
12 advisory committee, and there shall always be at least one
13 individual within the program setting who is prepared to assume
14 coordination responsibilities in the event of staffing changes.

15 (c) Peer ownership.--The program shall strive to maximize
16 the level of ownership and involvement on the part of the peer
17 helpers themselves. If peers feel directly responsible for the
18 success and survival of the program, they are unlikely to allow
19 it to perish.

20 CHAPTER 5

21 MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

22 Section 501. Appropriation.

23 The sum of \$2,000 per high school, or as much thereof as may
24 be necessary, is hereby appropriated to the Peer Helpers Program
25 for the fiscal year July 1, 1995, to June 30, 1996, to carry out
26 the provisions of this act.

27 Section 502. Effective date.

28 This act shall take effect in 60 days.