



Highlighting the COSSAP Success of Peer Recovery Specialists in Local Jurisdictions

Catching Up With COSSAP, June 2022



Over the past few years, the Florida Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) has received funding from the [Bureau of Justice Assistance-funded Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program \(COSSAP\)](#). Since receiving its initial award in late 2019, OSCA has been

using COSSAP funding to enhance and expand evidence-based programs in established family dependency drug courts in Florida. Treatment and services for family drug court participants and their children and families have historically been restricted by different factors, including a rapid increase in the number of participants with opioid addictions, as well as limited access to services for people who live in rural areas, who have low incomes, or both. COSSAP funds support and promote improved access to services. One of the methods used in local counties that are receiving COSSAP funding from Florida's statewide award is the utilization of certified peer recovery specialists.

What Is a Family Drug Court?

In cases of substance misuse, children may sometimes be removed from the custody of their parents or caretakers. Family drug court, according to OSCA, "allows for participants to work on reunifying with their children while receiving timely substance use treatment."¹ In Florida, evidence-based practices (i.e., early identification, frequent drug/alcohol testing, incentives, sanctions, etc.) are accompanied by traditional treatment goals (timeliness, permanency, the safety of children, etc.) to create a more innovative approach to success.

What Are Peer Recovery Support Services?

According to [Altarum](#), peer recovery support services (PRSS) "build on a person's strengths by providing individualized social support and help navigating complex health and social services systems within a community." Vulnerable individuals who are experiencing challenges with substance use or their recovery journey have access to one-on-one support, information about available resources, and insight from peers with lived experience.²

How Is Florida Using Peer Recovery Specialists?

The Broward County, Florida, Dependency Drug Court has contracted with an external entity to provide PRSS. The agency has observed an overwhelming response; indeed, within a year of initiating the role, the individual first hired for the specialist role has been promoted to a supervisory position, and the county has hired an additional specialist. The main focus of the specialist role is building and maintaining relationships to ensure a foundation of trust. Specialists are involved in appointment-keeping through the course of an individual's recovery journey, including assessments. They also provide support in court proceedings and check on the well-being of the participant. There is a heavy emphasis on modeling recovery for participants to show them what recovery truly looks like. Moreover, specialists conduct community outreach, participate in crisis intervention, and connect participants to mental health professionals.

The Orange County, Florida, Dependency Drug Court created a peer recovery position within its circuit court administration and formally hired a specialist. This specialist is one of the initial points of contact for an individual or family, even before an attempt has been made to enroll the individual in dependency drug court.

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Regardless of the decision by an individual or family to participate, the specialist stays involved in the process, supporting people in need by reminding them of court hearings, if applicable, and assisting with resources regarding recovery. The specialist also facilitates a weekly support group meeting that focuses on life skills. The specialist often will connect with participants two or three times a week to check on their well-being. As a result of the success they have experienced so far, the Orange County program is considering drafting formal policies and procedures for the specialist role.

How Is the Process Managed by OSCA?

As the main recipient of the 2019 COSSAP funding, OSCA is responsible for the oversight of the funding for local county sites that have implemented peer recovery specialists. Subgrantee sites meet monthly with OSCA to discuss questions, challenges, and successes related to their larger site-based program. Additionally, OSCA's COSSAP site-based coordinator is planning to institute a networking call specific to the peer recovery specialist role so that participants can discuss their roles and responsibilities and collaborate with one another. Buy-in from site-level stakeholders has been strong. Using this platform to focus specifically on this process and role will increase the likelihood of success across Florida.

What Advice Does OSCA Have for State Agencies?

Since the COSSAP project in Florida started in 2019, the OSCA COSSAP site-based coordinator has learned a lot about what works best in the state, especially with respect to the implementation of new programs, such as the peer recovery specialist implementation. One suggestion that OSCA's COSSAP coordinator offered is that participants connect with other state agencies as well as local jurisdictions within a state. Engaging stakeholders at the state and local levels is beneficial for understanding policies and practices that may already be in place. This could also assist in optimizing any existing strategies that agencies have previously implemented for peer recovery specialists. Maintaining an understanding of how systems and agencies work and what processes are in place is

crucial for success and efficiency. OSCA's COSSAP coordinator highlighted the importance of having a platform for open communication to discuss expectations, goals, challenges, and successes.

Additionally, OSCA's COSSAP coordinator emphasized the importance of attending trainings where possible, including those at a statewide or national level that may be focused specifically on peer recovery specialists. For COSSAP grantees specifically, this could include COSSAP-sponsored events in which other grantees are present. Educating stakeholders and project partners on what other agencies are doing and staying up to date on best practices have been greatly beneficial to OSCA. This also allows for information sharing and relationship building with internal and external providers that have critical roles with the statewide agency and other relevant parties. For more information and resources on peer recovery specialists and other relevant topics, please visit the COSSAP Online Learning Center at <https://www.cossapresources.org/Learning/Online>.

The RTI International team expresses a special thank you to Karima Anderson, the COSSAP site coordinator for the Florida OSCA.

Endnotes

1. "Dependency Drug Courts," 2022, Florida Office of the State Courts Administrator, retrieved from <https://www.flcourts.org/Resources-Services/Office-of-Problem-Solving-Courts/Drug-Courts/Dependency-Drug-Courts>.
2. "Bureau of Justice Assistance Enlists Altarum to Help Criminal Justice Organizations Implement Peer Recovery Support Service to Address Opioid Crisis," 2022, Altarum, retrieved from <https://altarum.org/news/bureau-justice-assistance-enlists-altarum-help-criminal-justice-organizations-across-us>.