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**CITY PROGRAM CONNECTS NEW YORKERS IN RECOVERY TO FULL-TIME POSITIONS AS PEER ADVOCATES WITH NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS**

*City's Partnership with One of the Country's Largest Behavioral Healthcare Providers Creates Pipeline to Support Pressing Workforce Needs and Help Address Opioid Crisis*

**New York** - NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS) Commissioner Gregg Bishop and NYC Health + Hospitals today announced that graduates of a City program will be hired to help individuals seeking or sustaining recovery from a substance use disorder. The SBS *Certified Recovery Peer Advocate (CRPA) Training Program* has led to full-time employment offers for 14 recent graduates of the program. The program, a product of SBS' New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (NYACH), provides professional training to unemployed or underemployed New Yorkers with a personal history of, or experience with, substance use recovery. Graduates become certified to support, guide, and motivate others who are seeking or sustaining recovery from a substance use disorder. The 14 graduates will work in the emergency departments at NYC Health + Hospitals facilities.

Each year, over 13,000 individuals arrive at NYC Health + Hospitals emergency departments with a substance use diagnosis, accounting for nearly 40,000 annual visits and necessitating a larger pool of qualified advocates to serve this growing need. CRPAs are increasingly valued as the City addresses the growing opioid crisis. Peer support services are found to reduce hospitalizations, hasten recovery times, and result in improved patient experiences.

"Not only are New Yorkers with personal histories of or experience with substance use gaining meaningful employment, but area hospitals are also gaining valuable staff to effectively support substance use treatment," said **Gregg Bishop, Commissioner of the NYC Department of Small Business Services**. "Our Certified Recovery Peer Advocate Training Program goes a long way to support the local economy as well as the city's need for quality behavioral health services."

"These certified recovery peer advocates will do important work, connecting with patients on a 'lived experience' level," said **Luke Bergmann, PhD, assistant vice president, Office of Behavioral Health, NYC Health + Hospitals**. "With the new skills that they've acquired as part of the SBS training program, we know they will help us connect meaningfully with more patients and help save more lives."

Given the initial success of this program, NYC Health + Hospitals has committed to working with SBS' NYACH to continue hiring CRPAs to work in high-need areas and scale the model citywide. The latest program graduates will be employed by NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem, NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan, and NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull. In addition to the participants offered positions by NYC Health + Hospitals, Community Care of Brooklyn has offered employment to an additional nine graduates.

## **CRPA Training Program Success**

Barbara Bell was born and raised in Jamaica, Queens and reflects on a positive, family-oriented childhood where she regularly attended church, belonged to a Brownie troop, and attended dance school. Her substance use began after she became pregnant in high school and left before graduating. She began with smoking marijuana, progressed to cocaine use, and finally, the use of crack cocaine. She found herself living on the street and in shelters with her daughter, who was eventually taken care of by her mother. Barbara spent four years in prison and was in and out of treatment three times.

In 2001, in her fourth recovery program, Barbara achieved her goal of sobriety, which she has since maintained. She became a certified substance use counselor, but found it difficult to reach clients due to limitations on counselors sharing personal experiences with clients. In 2010, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and by 2013 she left her job to focus on her health. During this break from employment, Barbara reflected on her work as a counselor and began exploring other roles in the recovery space, which is when she learned about SBS' CRPA Training Program. She was drawn to the peer role and the way it would allow her to use her lived experience to inform her work and build relationships with clients.

The CRPA Training Program allowed Barbara to connect with others with shared experience and work towards the same goals. She credits the program with helping her become a better person. After four years out of the workforce, Barbara is now a certified CRPA and has accepted an offer from NYC Health + Hospitals for a full-time CRPA position in an emergency department. Barbara sees the CRPA role as an opportunity to follow her passion in a meaningful role that allows her to connect with others by sharing her experience.

"I am excited about this position and new journey as a CRPA, not as a counselor, but helping someone as a peer," said Barbara Bell. "I know what it is to feel rejected and not loved, and wanting to give up."

## **About the Certified Recovery Peer Advocate Training Program**

The *CRPA training program*, developed at Queensborough Community College, provides a three-month, eighty-hour curriculum that covers need-to-know topics, such as peer advocacy, ethical responsibilities, mentoring, and wellness, to fully prepare participants to become certified and begin work as CRPAs. Peer advocates can help peers develop recovery plans and -monitor their progress, model effective coping skills, attend court and other system meetings as a support, and support peers in advocating for effective services.

New Yorkers interested in learning more about the *CRPA Training Program* should contact Madeleine O'Neill at [mo'neill@sbs.nyc.gov](mailto:mo'neill@sbs.nyc.gov) or visit [www.nyc.gov/accesstraining](http://www.nyc.gov/accesstraining) for more information.

## **Acknowledgements**

This initiative has been developed in collaboration with City University of New York, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services.

### **About NYC Health + Hospitals**

NYC Health + Hospitals is the largest public health care system in the nation, serving more than a million New Yorkers annually in more than 70 patient care locations across the city's five boroughs. A robust network of outpatient, neighborhood-based primary and specialty care centers anchors care coordination with the system's trauma centers, nursing homes, post-acute care centers, home care agency, and MetroPlus health plan—all supported by 11 essential hospitals. Its diverse workforce of more than 42,000 employees is uniquely focused on empowering New Yorkers, without exception, to live the healthiest life possible. For more information, visit [www.nychealthandhospitals.org](http://www.nychealthandhospitals.org) and stay connected on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NYHealthandHospitals> or Twitter at @NYCHealthSystem.

### **NYACH**

NYACH is an Industry Partnership, bringing together multiple stakeholders of the healthcare workforce development system in order to address the industry's rapidly changing labor force needs. NYACH is an initiative of the public-private partnership amongst the NYC Department of Small Business Services, the Workforce Funders, and JPMorgan Chase Foundation. For more information, visit <http://nyachnyc.org>.

### **About NYC Small Business Services (SBS)**

SBS helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building vibrant neighborhoods across the five boroughs. For more information on all SBS services, go to [nyc.gov/sbs](http://nyc.gov/sbs), call 311, and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).