



## Optum's NYC BHO peer support initiative promotes behavioral health recovery through effective provider collaborations

*(Originally published in Behavioral Health News, Winter 2014)*

Optum supports recovery-focused care for mental health and substance use conditions. This approach is best achieved when services are delivered in collaboration with providers and organizations that embrace the principles of person-centered care that is strength-based and recovery-oriented. Optum has successfully developed and implemented community based collaborations that bring together service organizations that support a continuum of care. Resiliency is promoted when Peer Support Services provide community-based assistance that foster hope and empowers recovery.

In New York City, Optum has developed key partnerships with recovery-oriented organizations that can provide a full spectrum of services for mental health and substance use conditions. As the New York City regional Behavioral Health Organization (NYC BHO), Optum subcontracted with a consumer-run organization to pilot a peer services model that would target individuals hospitalized for a psychiatric or substance use disorder diagnosis in order to enhance community tenure upon discharge and reduce the need for further hospitalizations. The two collaborators for this project include the Kingsboro Addiction Treatment Center and the Baltic Street Resource and Wellness Center. These are both person-centered facilities that provide a safe and supportive environment to promote sobriety and foster recovery.

The Kingsboro Addiction Treatment Center, located in Brooklyn, NY, provides inpatient addiction treatment for up to 70 adults. As a state-operated provider of addiction treatment, Kingsboro admissions are among the most complex with high acuity for comorbid physical health concerns and co-occurring mental health diagnoses. Their core mission is to provide care in a nurturing, safe, and supportive environment. This is achieved through core values that support teamwork, respect and dignity, honesty, accountability and a commitment to excellence. The Kingsboro program offers inpatient recovery-focused services to empower consumers to attain and maintain sobriety beyond their involvement in the program.

The Baltic Street Resource and Wellness Center, also located in Brooklyn NY, is a peer-run organization that provides peer support, advocacy, and culturally competent social skills development to empower adults who experience substance use and mental health conditions to foster hope and promote recovery. Baltic Street provides a relaxed, friendly, community-based environment where people can gather, get assistance for their basic needs, socialize and help one another. In particular, Baltic Street's peer-led services help people establish a recovery plan and support for their long-term maintenance. Peer staff assist people with the identification of personal goals and help develop strategies and supports necessary to achieve them. The focus of the plan is promote not only the recovery and whole health of the individual, but to encourage better engagement and integration into the community where they live.

The inpatient residential program at Kingsboro is designed to assist individuals with their challenges and struggles to overcome alcohol and chemical dependency conditions. In order to be eligible for services at the facility there must be a need to have 24-hour supervised care, which is often determined by failures at less restrictive or intensive levels of care. This highly structured program includes medically supervised withdrawal services, physical and psychiatric evaluations,

social work services, and counseling groups. Person-centered care guides all services, and recovery-oriented goals support long-term sobriety. In partnership with the Optum BHO, Kingsboro identified a need to better serve those individuals who left the treatment against medical advice and were open to implementing creative and innovative evidence-based practices to address this need.

In order to improve transfers between levels of care, the Optum NYC BHO partnered with Kingsboro and Baltic Street to implement a peer support program in March 2013. In this pilot program, peer specialists from Baltic Street actively engage consenting individuals on the inpatient unit during their stay at Kingsboro's detox or inpatient rehabilitation. During both the hospitalization and the post-discharge transition, the peer specialist works closely with the individual to establish a wellness and recovery plan that may include weekly face-to-face meetings or phone contacts, and post-discharge support.

Baltic Street's peer support services are an effective resource to help connect people to others to foster hope and demonstrate that recovery is possible. People will often disclose issues in their life to a Peer Support Specialist that they have not previously told other service providers. The trusting and safe connection that can be established in peer support may be one of the first opportunities that someone has had to share their experiences, fears, and hopes for the future. The Baltic Street program provides these services and expands the continuum of services that are available to foster resiliency and promote recovery.

Through this unique collaboration the Optum NYC BHO, Kingsboro and Baltic Street are integrating peer specialists into the inpatient multi-disciplinary teams. The peer begins engaging and working with individuals while on the unit and continues this work into the community. Peer Support Services can be particularly effective at engaging people with necessary services, helping to activate them for effective illness self-care, and promoting long-term recovery goals and strategies.

The mission of the peer program has been to support, encourage, and foster wellness and recovery through a supportive community. As an active member of the supportive community, the peer specialist helps the participant establish healthy community connections. They engage people and provide community-based supports including transporting participants to the food pantry, doctors' appointments, the pharmacy and parole or probation. Participants have indicated high levels of support and satisfaction for this program, and have reported that the peer specialist's accessibility, active support and problem solving had helped prevent additional hospitalizations and the need for crisis services, and in some cases even the violation of conditions of probation.

Optum supports services for people with substance use and mental health conditions that are designed to be person-centered, strength-based, and recovery-oriented. This care must span the full continuum of needs that individuals have, and make successful health outcomes a priority. This is accomplished by helping to assure that people get the care that is necessary, at the appropriate level of service and setting, and engages them in the design and implementation of treatment and recovery plans that focus on the individual. Individually, the Kingsboro and Baltic Street programs are examples of these types of services. Together with Optum, their collaboration promotes a full continuum of resources and assures favorable recovery-focused outcomes.

1. Results from a subsample of adults referred to the NYC BHO Adult Peer Program in Q1 2013, agreed to participate, had a closed peer program case at the time of analysis, continuous eligibility 12 months pre- and post-referral, and at least one behavioral health claim during that period.

---

#### Results:

Among 60 participants with a history of multiple admission who engaged within Q1 2013, 32 (53%) **had no subsequent admissions** in the 12 months following their engagement in the program.<sup>1</sup>



All Optum trademarks and logos are owned by Optum. All other brand or product names are trademarks or registered marks of their respective owners. Because we are continuously improving our products and services, Optum reserves the right to change specifications without prior notice.

© 2014 Optum, Inc. All rights reserved. OPTPRJ4018 10/13