

Virginia Association of Recovery Residences

Residential Peer Leadership Best Practices
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Introduction

A cornerstone in most recovery residences is peer leadership, and the residence's success often depends on the residential peer leader. The Virginia Association of Recovery Residences (VARR) puts emphasis and focus on this with a strong desire to help organizations develop residential peer leaders. While there is no formula for a "perfect" peer leader, the purpose of this *Residential Peer Leadership Best Practices* document is to help the recovery residence organization better understand the importance and effective application of residential peer leaders, as well as to gain knowledge and insight to more effectively train and develop peer leaders in line with an organization's mission, policies, procedures and the principles of recovery. There is a *Recovery Residence Operator Journal* at the end of this document to be completed. The journal will help the recovery residence operator perform an inventory of their organization as it relates to residential peer leaders.

Defining a Residential Peer Leader

A peer leader is a person in recovery who demonstrates leadership qualities, a desire to be of service, and the willingness to engage with other peers. Peer leadership within a recovery residence setting can be the catalyst that encourages an individual to pursue peer support service work professionally. Many peer leaders are recovery coaches or peer recovery specialists, some have credentials and some don't.

Residential Peer Leaders are those individuals in leadership positions within a recovery residence. In the recovery residence space, residential peer leaders go by many titles at different organizations, to include but not limited to: house leader, house manager, resident advisor, peer leader, assistant house leader, assistant house manager, assistant residential peer leader, etc.

Characteristics & Qualities of a Peer Leader

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| ○ In recovery | ○ Leader | ○ Mutual respect |
| ○ Integrity (walks the walk) | ○ Compassionate | ○ Reliable |
| | ○ Patient | ○ Teachable |

Peer Leader Skills

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| ○ Good listener | ○ Advocates for others |
| ○ Communicator | ○ Motivator |

- Empowers
- Sets boundaries

- Recovery Principles
- Conflict resolution

Purpose of Residential Peer Leader

The heartbeat of a recovery residence is the Social Model of Recovery, so first and foremost residential peer leaders help to facilitate this within the home. The residential peer leader serves as a point of contact and liaison in the recovery residence for staff while also being a resource and/or recovery mentor to other residents. While staff of the recovery organization cannot be present in a residence at all times, the residential peer leader helps to fill this gap. An organization's ability to implement and creatively utilize the residential peer leader is key to a successful recovery residence. Since they themselves are residents, peer leaders have their "finger on the pulse" of a recovery residence and spend more time with the residents than the organization's formal staff do. They help uphold organizational policy and procedure, promote recovery, and spearhead the Social Model of Recovery in the residence with support from staff. Residential peer leaders are expected to function within the same set of policies and procedures as all residents; this helps to maintain mutuality within the residence.

Roles & Responsibilities of Residential Peer Leaders

Recovery residences utilize residential peer leaders in different capacities. Below is a list of some of the responsibilities that may be expected of such individuals in leadership positions. For any staff or peer position, operators should have clearly written roles, responsibilities and guidance.

- Communicate with staff issues and successes occurring in the residence
- Uphold organizational policy & procedure
- Identify and leverage recovery capital
- Welcome new residents
- Motivate and encourage residents to engage in a program of recovery
- Maintain cleanliness of residence
- Report maintenance issues to staff
- First contact for grievances in the residence
- Facilitate house meetings
- Administer drug screens / report results to staff (**at the operator's discretion*)
- Monitor medication (**at the operator's discretion*)

Developing & Training Residential Peer Leaders

Residential peer leaders have similar functional capacities across all recovery residence organizations, although the nuances of the role are unique to each organization. The differences often are demonstrated in each individual organization's application of its policies and procedures, and the residential peer leaders' understanding of those policies and procedures. Roles and responsibilities assigned by an organization to their peer leader may differ amongst recovery residence organizations as well. *It is the responsibility of a recovery residence operator to identify how they want to incorporate residential peer leaders into their systems and day to day operations.* The following page outlines guidance and some suggested practices for organizations to consider in their processes of developing and training residential peer leaders.

Guidance & Recommended Practices for Organizations

- Have written responsibilities, role descriptions, and guidelines for residential peer leaders (*see Appendix C*)
- Routine training for peer leaders (*involve those interested in peer leader roles as well*)
- Check-ins with peer leaders to address their own personal recovery, promote self-care, and celebrate successes
- Peer leaders informed of and sign the organization's *Code of Ethics*
- Identify “assistant” peer leaders who can act in place of peer leaders when they are not present (*serve as contingency plan for abrupt termination of a peer leader as well*)
- Make available “interest forms” in the residence that a resident can fill out to advocate for their inclusion in peer leadership (*see Appendix A*)
- Educate peer leaders on specific policies and procedures key to the recovery residence (*i.e. Search Policy, Recurrence of Use Policy, Good Neighbor Policy, etc.*)
- Train peer leaders on Narcan (naloxone) administration and how to respond to suspected overdose
- Evaluate peer leaders periodically to determine whether to keep them in their position or make an organizational change

Identifying Residential Peer Leaders

- Listen! Often, individuals express their desire to be a peer leader to staff
- Ask! Some individuals want to be peer leaders, but don't voice their interest until empowered to do so
- Are they teachable?
- Do they follow organizational rules and hold others accountable?
- Do they connect with other peers?
- What do other residents have to say about them?
- Are they trustworthy?
- Do they model a lifestyle of recovery?

APPLICABLE NARR STANDARDS

[NARR 3.0 Standards](#)

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| ○ Standard 1, A,2. g. | ○ Standard 3, G,21. c. |
| ○ Standard 1, C,7. e. | ○ Standard 1,D,10.a. |
| ○ Standard 1, C,8. a. | ○ Standard 1,D,12.a.-c. |
| ○ Standard 1, C,8. b. | |
| ○ Standard 1, C,8. c. | |

Disclaimer

This best practice guide is not intended to convey how your organization specifically should go about choosing and developing *Residential Peer Leaders*. Rather, this is a guide based on the experience, knowledge and successes of VARR staff and operators in the VARR network.

Recovery Residence Operator Journal

Complete these journal questions in reflection of how your organization approaches *Residential Peer Leadership*. We hope that your time in reflection will reinforce that your approach to *Residential Peer Leadership* is effective, and if it doesn't, encourage you to make appropriate changes.

1. List 5 characteristics your organization looks for in a residential peer leader.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
2. How is your organization creatively utilizing residential peer leaders?
3. What is the "chain of command" for your organization, and who are the direct reports for your residential peer leaders?
4. What information do you want reported by a residential peer leader to staff?
 - a. Immediately:
 - b. Not Immediately:
5. Does my organization do check-ins with residential peer leaders? If not, how would implementing this look like?
6. Because a person has been in recovery for a significant amount of time, does that mean they will be an effective residential peer leader? Why or why not?
7. How are you as an organization supporting your residential peer leaders?

Appendix A

The **Residential Peer Leadership Interest Form** is a document to be made available in the recovery residence, available to all residents who have interest in becoming a leader. This is a great opportunity for residents to advocate for themselves. It is good practice that current *Residential Peer Leaders* remind other residents on a continued basis that this interest form is available, what it is, and how to submit it. Recovery residence organizations should develop their own internal process of reviewing the application, engaging the resident, and what next steps are. It is suggested that applications are stored with the resident's records. Below is a sample template *Interest Form* for organizations to use as a blueprint for their own interest form.

Residential Peer Leadership Interest Form (sample template)

Resident Name: _____

Date: _____

Phone Number: _____

Recovery Milestone (date): _____

Recovery Experience and/or Achievements: (list anything that you're proud of related to your personal recovery, or feel it's important to share) _____

Tell Us a Little About Yourself: _____

Please Give an Example of How You Have Demonstrated Leadership in Your Recovery

Residence: _____

How Would You Improve the Recovery Residence Experience: _____

Submit this to _____ [enter where here] _____, staff will contact you within [time frame]. Thank you for interest and we look forward speaking with you.

Appendix B

The **Residential Peer Leader Agreement** is a document to be signed by the *Residential Peer Leader* and a staff member. This document outlines the duties and responsibilities of the role, as well as any agreed upon terms of compensation for the voluntary position of *Residential Peer Leader*. Feel free to use the template below as the foundation of your organization's **Residential Peer Leader Agreement**.

Residential Peer Leader Agreement (sample template)

_____[Organization Name]_____*Residential Peer Leader* is a voluntary position accepted by a resident. Upon accepting the role as *Residential Peer Leader*, _____, [Name of resident], accepts the following duties and responsibilities:

Duties & Responsibilities (*add and takeaway as needed to fit your organization*)

- Communicate with staff issues and successes occurring in the residence
- Uphold organizational policy & procedure
- Identify and leverage recovery capital
- Welcome new residents
- Motivate and encourage residents to engage in a program of recovery
- Maintain cleanliness of residence
- Report maintenance issues to staff
- First contact for grievances in the residence
- Facilitate house meetings
- Administer drug screens / report results to staff (**at the operator's discretion*)
- Monitor medication (**at the operator's discretion*)
- *Insert other duties and responsibilities*

Additional Terms of Agreement: _____
_____ *Good place to insert any terms of compensation or other related information* _____

_____[Organization Name]_____ reserves the right to review the *Residential Peer Leader* role and make any organizational changes to the role at any time. *Residential Peer Leaders* will do check-ins with staff routinely and their performance will be evaluated.

I, _____, [Name of resident], accept the terms of the **Residential Peer Leader Agreement**. I understand this is a completely voluntary position and that if I choose to step down as *Residential Peer Leader* at any time, I will not face any consequences or be treated unfairly.

_____[Date]_____

_____[Resident Signature]_____

_____[Staff Signature]_____

Appendix C

Residential Peer Leader Role Description (sample)

Title: “Residential Peer Leader” or (*insert the title that your organization uses*)

Description: A *Residential Peer Leader* is the individual in the leadership position of a recovery residence. They are a person in recovery who demonstrates leadership qualities, a desire to be of service, and the willingness to engage with other peers. (*insert your organizations description here*)

Duties & Responsibilities (*add and takeaway as needed to fit your organization*)

- Communicate with staff issues and successes occurring in the residence
- Uphold organizational policy & procedure
- Identify and leverage recovery capital
- Welcome new residents
- Motivate and encourage residents to engage in a program of recovery
- Maintain cleanliness of residence
- Report maintenance issues to staff
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- Facilitate house meetings
- Administer drug screens / report results to staff (**at the operator’s discretion*)
- Monitor medication (**at the operator’s discretion*)
- *Insert other duties and responsibilities*

Skills & Qualifications (*add and takeaway as needed to fit your organization*)

- In recovery
- Active listener
- Problem solver
- Role Model
- Mentor
- Patient
- *Insert other skills and qualifications*