

# Illinois AFL-CIO Peer Outreach Project



Facilitating Worker and Community Involvement:

## Illinois AFL-CIO Peer Outreach Project

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# Why Peer Outreach Counselors?



Federal Rapid Response assistance is available through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) for dislocated workers who lose their jobs due to a plant closing or substantial layoff. One of the key components of a successful strategy to assist these dislocated workers is a method to ensure participation in available programs by the worker group that has been laid off. In order to address this need, the Illinois AFL-CIO Member Assistance Program and the State Rapid Response Unit developed the Peer Outreach Counselor Program.

# Why Peer Outreach Counselors?



Unemployed workers are often in a state of emotional upheaval. Contact with someone familiar, such as a respected co-worker or former co-worker, can be reassuring. Apprehension over choosing from available services, filling out forms, taking assessment and placement tests, and meeting time deadlines can be minimized by providing dislocated workers with the opportunity to interact with one of their co-workers to assist them in accessing available programs.

# Who are Peer Outreach Counselors?



The Illinois AFL-CIO provides assistance to the affected local union in identifying and selecting appropriate peer outreach counselor candidates to refer to the Workforce Investment Areas. The candidates must be individuals from the affected workforce. Peer Outreach Counselors must have an established rapport with and the confidence of the affected workers. All positions are full-time temporary positions appointed for three months with the option of extension depending on the layoff status and participation level. Peer Counselors are hired by the Illinois AFL-CIO Peer Outreach Program.

## Who are Peer Outreach Counselors?



The Peer Outreach Counselors are "experts" who bring with them their own life experience and their knowledge of the particular workplace and population that the programs will be serving. They are also familiar with the local community in which the dislocation is occurring. The Peer Outreach Counselors know the territory. By combining that knowledge with training on local WIA programs and other partner programs, the Peer Outreach Counselor can contribute significantly in the design and delivery of effective dislocated worker services.

# Peer Outreach Counseling is a State of Mind



Peer outreach counseling skills imparted in training are used in every part of the program. They aren't skills to be used only when "counseling" someone. Training is geared toward a common sense approach to communications skills that can be used anywhere, in or out of the program. The skills are used when performing outreach, orientation sessions, in formal meetings, classrooms, planning sessions, when providing information and referral, and interviewing.

# Peer Outreach Counseling is a State of Mind



The social support provided to workers by the Peer Outreach Counselor is aimed at removing barriers and solving problems for individuals who are facing a real and immediate crisis in their lives. Therefore, Peer outreach counseling isn't something that happens at fixed hours in fixed places. Whenever a Peer Outreach Counselor talks with anyone about program activities and services, he or she is acting in the role of a Peer Outreach Counselor.

## Why Peer Outreach Counseling Works



Peer Outreach Counseling works because it is built on a kind of trust that comes from sharing a common work reality. Dislocated workers feel more comfortable with someone who has shared that experience. Talking with someone who knows what it's like to be in their situation is much easier than talking to a professional who has never seen the inside of a plant. Common ground builds trust, and trust is the keystone of making programs work.



# Why Peer Outreach Counseling Works



The role of a Peer Outreach Counselor is to be a friend who can help dislocated workers navigate the "ins and outs" of the program, get to the right place at the right time, and follow up to make sure everything has gone alright. Peer Outreach Counselors combine their own personal experience and knowledge with their specialized training to help provide services to people very much like themselves. In many programs, Peer Outreach Counselors are like the connecting gears that make the whole thing run better.

# Training the Peer Outreach Counselor



Peer Outreach Counselors are trained in the following areas:

- ☐ The World of the Dislocated Worker
- ☐ Counseling Skills
- ☐ Program Applications
- ☐ Local WIA Policies and Procedures

# Training the Peer Outreach Counselor



Peer Outreach Counselor training on The World of the Dislocated Worker includes the following areas:

- ☐ What is a dislocated worker?
- ☐ Health effects of unemployment
- ☐ Profile of the "typical" dislocated worker
- ☐ Psychological issues facing dislocated workers
- ☐ The seven stages of unemployment
- ☐ The stress of unemployment
- ☐ Family Issues

# Training the Peer Outreach Counselor



Peer Outreach Counselor training on Counseling Skills includes the following areas:

The role of the Peer Counselor

- ☐ Listening and Communication Skills
- ☐ Responding with Empathy
- ☐ Leading Effective Groups
- ☐ Counseling Framework
- ☐ Counseling Issues
- ☐ Counseling Issues: Exercises

# Training the Peer Outreach Counselor



Peer Outreach Counselor training on Program Applications includes the following areas:

## Outreach and Recruitment:

- ☐ Interviewing
- ☐ The Referral Process
- ☐ The Importance of Follow Up
- ☐ Job Clubs
- ☐ What makes a Successful Dislocated Worker Program

# Duties of the Peer Outreach Counselor



The overall goal of the Peer Counselor is to assist dislocated workers to make the transition to meaningful employment as smoothly as possible. This entails a wide variety of duties, which are listed below:

- ☐ Complete training on the local WIA Delivery System so as to understand and be able to explain to co-workers how it functions.
- ☐ Gain a working knowledge of the various local social service agencies and their services in order to be able to make appropriate referrals to those agencies.

# Duties of the Peer Outreach Counselor



- ☐ Maintain working knowledge of all programs and services provided by the WIA and its service providers. compile and maintain lists of all workers including name, address, social security number, and other appropriate information.
- ☐ Counsel and motivate affected workers to utilize Workforce Investment Act programs and services.
- ☐ Assist workers who are registering in programs by helping to fill out forms and obtaining required information.

# Duties of the Peer Outreach Counselor



- ☐ Evaluate progress of workers, watch for signs of stress, and make additional referrals to appropriate services as necessary to ensure program completion. Monitor program attendance and remedy poor attendance.
- ☐ Function as the workers' advocate to ensure all appropriate services are available to them.
- ☐ Track each worker after termination utilizing a tracking method compatible with WIA information requirements and forms.