

Using representatives from lived experience populations has been on an upward evolutionary process for over two decades. An increase in the requirement by funding sources to include peer representatives and a shift towards a more family and youth driven or youth guided approach to serving vulnerable populations has driven this growing trend. Aside from organizational and funding requirements, research indicates lived experience provided services, particularly peer roles, has multiple benefits. Including but not limited to:

- Improved sense of hope,
- Empowerment,
- Increased engagement in services
- Positive outcomes for families, children, youth, individuals, and systems.

Lived experience refers to **the things that someone has experienced themselves, especially when these give the person a knowledge or understanding that people who have only heard about such experiences do not have.** ([Lived experience - Wikipedia](#))

The utilization of lived experience representatives' cross systems is a recognized and growing best practice in North Carolina. This document provides descriptions, distinction(s) and position requirement(s) from systems utilizing the lived experience position across the state.



*This resource is being provided to you by Mental Health Transformation Alliance (MHTA) A National and State (North Carolina) 501c3 Family Run Organization. MHTA strives to ensure families, youth, and community and state partners have access to the support and resources needed to implement a family driven youth guided system of care.*

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***Family Partner Coordinator (FPC)***

A Family Partner Coordinator is a person who can articulate lessons learned from his/her own lived experience parenting a child (youth or emerging adult) up to age 26 and has needed multi system support. The FPC has specialized training to assist and empower families raising children (youth and emerging adults) who experience emotional, developmental, behavioral, substance use, or mental health concerns.

The term Family Partner Coordinator is from the System of Care network.

**Distinction:**

- Lived experience parenting a child/youth with social/emotional or behavioral challenges.
- Focus is on building partnerships with community stakeholders.
- Builds and educates on the importance of System of Care (SOC) within their local communities.
- Mentors, supports, recruits and trains Family Partners. (May supervise Family Partners)
- Focus is on the child serving systems: mental health, education, juvenile justice, pediatric and child welfare.
- Flexibility to address the continuous needs of the child and family.
- Nationally Certified

**Requirement(s):**

Requirements for a Family Partner Coordinator depend on where the position is located and what agency or organization the position is partnering with.

***Family Navigator***

A Family Navigator is a person who has lived experience as a primary caregiver for a child who has/had mental health or substance abuse challenges. A Family Navigator also has experience in navigating any of the child and family-serving systems and teaching family members who are involved with the child and family serving systems.

The term Family Navigator is from the Integrated Health Network.

**Distinction:**

- Lived experience parenting a child/youth with social/emotional or behavioral challenges.
- Focus is on parent/family, child and siblings.
- Focus is working in partnership with: Systems Navigator, family organization, juvenile justice and child welfare.
- Flexibility to address the continuous needs of the child and family.
- Provides ongoing technical assistance to build family leadership, family and professional partnerships, and implement family driven practices.
- Participates as a member the team and works within Tiered Case Management.
- Nationally Certified

**Requirement(s):**

Families and child/youth must meet Tiered Case Management requirements.

***Family Navigators-IDD***

Family Navigators are people who have lived experience as a person with an intellectual or developmental disability or TBI or are the parent or primary caregiver of a person with an intellectual or developmental disability or TBI who use their own experience to help others navigate every changing systems.

The term Family Navigator is from the Mental Health and Substance Use Peer Support model.

**Distinction:**

- Lived experience as a person with an intellectual or developmental disability or TBI or are the parent or primary caregiver of a person with an intellectual or developmental disability or TBI.
- Focus is on the individual/family.
- Provide advocacy assistance, resources and support to the family/individual.
- Provide outreach and information including answering warm line, grievance and appeals process and raise awareness and reduce stigma.
- Facilitate community connections and natural supports.

**Requirement(s):**

Individuals must have Medicaid and any I/DD or TBI diagnosis. Individuals on a Medicaid Standard Plan or Innovations Waiver are not eligible for this service.

This service is for individuals who are 3-64 years old who reside in Pitt, Beaufort, New Hanover, or Pender County.

***Family Partner  
(Mental Health & Juvenile Justice)***

A Family Partner is a person who can articulate lessons learned from his/her own lived experience parenting a child/youth with social/emotional or behavioral challenges and has specialized training to assist and support families raising children/youth who experience social/emotional, developmental, behavioral, substance use, or mental illness concerns. A Family Partner collaborates with child and family serving systems and family and youth organizations to improve family outcomes and strives to eliminate stigma and discrimination.

The term Family Partner is from the System of Care network for Family Driven Approaches.

**Distinction:**

- Lived experience parenting a child/youth with social/emotional or behavioral challenges.
- Focus is on parent/family, child, and siblings.
- Focus is on the child serving systems: mental health, education, juvenile justice, pediatric and child welfare.
- Flexibility to address the continuous needs of the child and family.
- Nationally Certified

**Requirement(s):**

Requirements for a Family Partner depend on where the position is located and what agency or organization the position is partnering with.

***Family Support Advocate***

A Family Support Advocate is a person hired or contracted to work with families to support or educate families in order to give the family information about available services and programs. A Family Support Advocate must have a dedicated spirit to help families. Having “Lived Experience” is not a requirement. The Family Support Advocate embraces the System of Care values and principles. They promote a System of Care model which builds on individual and community strengths and makes the most of existing resources to help children and their families achieve better outcomes. Family Support Advocates ensure families and professionals access to an effective advocacy support system within their area.

The term Family Support Advocate is from the Professional Systems Framework for Helping Families.

**Distinction:**

- Lived experience parenting a child/youth with social/emotional or behavioral challenges NOT required.
- Focus is on parent/family, child and siblings.
- Focus is on the child serving systems: mental health, education, juvenile justice, pediatric and child welfare.
- Flexibility to address the continuous needs of the child and family.

***Family Partner (DSS)***

A youth or adult who has received services or is the caregiver/parent of someone who has received services and who has firsthand experience with the child welfare system. Therefore, when we refer to Family Partners we are speaking of both youth and adults.

**Levels of Engagement:**

**FAMILY LEADERSHIP EXPLORATION (TIER ONE)**

*Families with personal experience with the child welfare system are asked to participate in activities.*

- Families participate in trainings, workshops, and/or conferences to better understand child welfare issues
- Families participate in focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and/or panels to share their experiences
- Families participate in family support and educational groups such as parenting classes to learn additional skills

**FAMILY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (TIER TWO)**

*Families are actively involved in educating, supporting, and facilitating family perspective.*

- Families serve on Family Engagement Committees (FEC)
- Families training DSS staff and/or other parents; and/or co-facilitating discussions in community.
- Families providing peer support to other parents.



**CHILD WELFARE FAMILY ADVISORY  
COUNCIL  
(TIER THREE)**

*Families are actively involved in educating, supporting, and facilitating family perspective.*

- Families are advising on specific child welfare topics, policies, and systemic issues.
- Families participate on various state-level stakeholder committees to represent family voice.

**Distinction:**

- Lived experience as someone who has received services or as a parent/caregiver who has firsthand experience with the child welfare system.
- Focus is on parent/family, child and siblings.
- Focus is on the child welfare system.
- Flexibility to address the continuous needs of the child and family.

**Requirement(s):**

Families and child/youth must have/had DSS involvement.

***Consumer Peer Support***

Person living in recovery with mental illness and / or substance use disorder and who provides support to others who can benefit from their lived experiences.

**Distinction:**

- Distinction:
- Lived experience as a consumer of behavioral health or Substance Use services.
- Focus is on an individual living in recovery.  
Focus is on adult goals and systems: courts and housing.

**Requirement(s):**

Requirements for Consumer Peer Support depend on where the position is located and what agency or organization the position is partnering with.

***Youth Support***

A person who can articulate lessons learned from their own lived experience as a child or adolescent who had mental health or substance abuse challenges and has experience in navigating the child and family-serving systems. A Youth Support Partner collaborates with child and family serving systems and family and youth organizations to improve youth outcomes and strives to eliminate stigma and discrimination.

**Distinction:**

- Lived experience as a child or adolescent who had mental health or substance abuse challenges and has experience in navigating the child and family-serving systems.
- Focus is on the youth
- Focus is on the child serving systems: mental health, education, juvenile justice, pediatric and child welfare
- Flexibility to address the continuous needs of the youth

**Requirement(s):**

Requirements for Youth Support depend on where the position is located and what agency or organization the position is partnering with.

