

# Integrating Court Liaisons and Forensic Peer Mentors into Treatment Courts and Judicial Processes

---

**BE D·B·H·D·D**

Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities  
Office of Adult Mental Health  
Judicial Services Unit

**Rebecca Nix, LPC, MAC**  
**Andriea Washington, LPC**  
**Tara Zellous, LPC, NCC, CADC-II**



# Forensic Peer Mentor Panel

---

- **Angela Murphy**, CPS, FPM, TIC, DTR, Project Director Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network
- **Ladji Ruffin**, CPS-MH, CPS-AD, FPM Atlanta Metro Re-entry Prison
- **Curtis Hall**, CPS, FPM, WH, Highland Rivers Health Appalachian Judicial Circuit, Pickens Accountability Court
- **Ramona Burkett**, CAC-I, CPS, CARES, WHAM, Adult Drug Court , Cobb County Superior Court
- **Sharon Allison**, CARES, CPS, FPM, Avita Community Partners





**D·B·H·D·D**

Georgia Department  
of Behavioral Health  
& Developmental  
Disabilities

**BE D·B·H·D·D**

**BE COMPASSIONATE**

**BE PREPARED**

**BE RESPECTFUL**

**BE PROFESSIONAL**

**BE CARING**

**BE EXCEPTIONAL**

**BE INSPIRED**

**BE ENGAGED**

**BE ACCOUNTABLE**

**BE INFORMED**

**BE FLEXIBLE**

**BE HOPEFUL**

**BE CONNECTED**

**BE D·B·H·D·D**

# Liaison Coverage and Responsibilities



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a blue pen, poised to write on a spiral-bound notebook. The notebook's pages are white, and the black spiral binding is visible on the left. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brown surface.

**BE INFORMED**

# Mental Health in America

**1 in 5** American adults experience a behavioral health challenge each year

**1 in 25** Americans live with a serious mental illness

- Chances are you or someone you know has experience recovering from or living with a behavioral health concern
- This lived experience can be used to support others in their recovery.

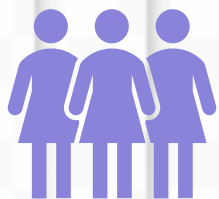


## The Need for Peer Support within the Criminal Justice System

- The U.S. Department of Justice reports that about **16% of the population in prisons or jails at any given time has a behavioral health diagnosis**, and over the course of one year, approximately 10 million people enter U.S. correctional facilities.



# Prevalence of Mental Illness in Georgia State Prisons August 2019



4,027



Total Inmates 55,096

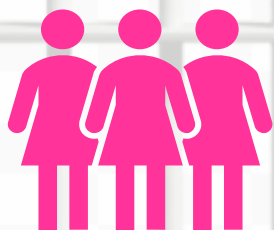


51,069



20%

Total Inmates with a Mental Illness Level 2 and above  
11,296



2,397



8,899



# Peer Mentor Movement in Georgia

---

- Over 20 years ago, Georgia pioneered training people in recovery from a mental illness who could work in community settings to promote the recovery of others.
- First state to approve this service as a Medicaid reimbursable service in 2001.
- Over the past 20-30 years, peer support has expanded and is now recognized as a vital element in an individual's recovery process.
- Peer support has become increasingly integrated into reentry and diversion programs. States including New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and now Georgia are successfully using forensic peer specialists/forensic peer mentors.

# Peer Mentor Movement

Georgia's Peer Mentoring Project  
established in 2005

Georgia Certified Peer Specialist  
training and/or Georgia Certified  
Addiction Recovery  
Empowerment Specialist training

Fundamental to a Recovery-  
Oriented System of Care

# Certified Peer Specialist (CPS)

## Adult Mental Health

Promotes socialization, recovery, wellness, and self-advocacy

## Whole Health

Support peers with overall health and wellness through coaching using Whole Health Action Management Training

## Adult Addictive Disease

Promotes socialization, recovery, wellness, and self-advocacy

## Youth

Provides support to youth peers who are living with a behavioral health diagnosis

## Forensic

provides valuable transition and re-entry support for returning citizens

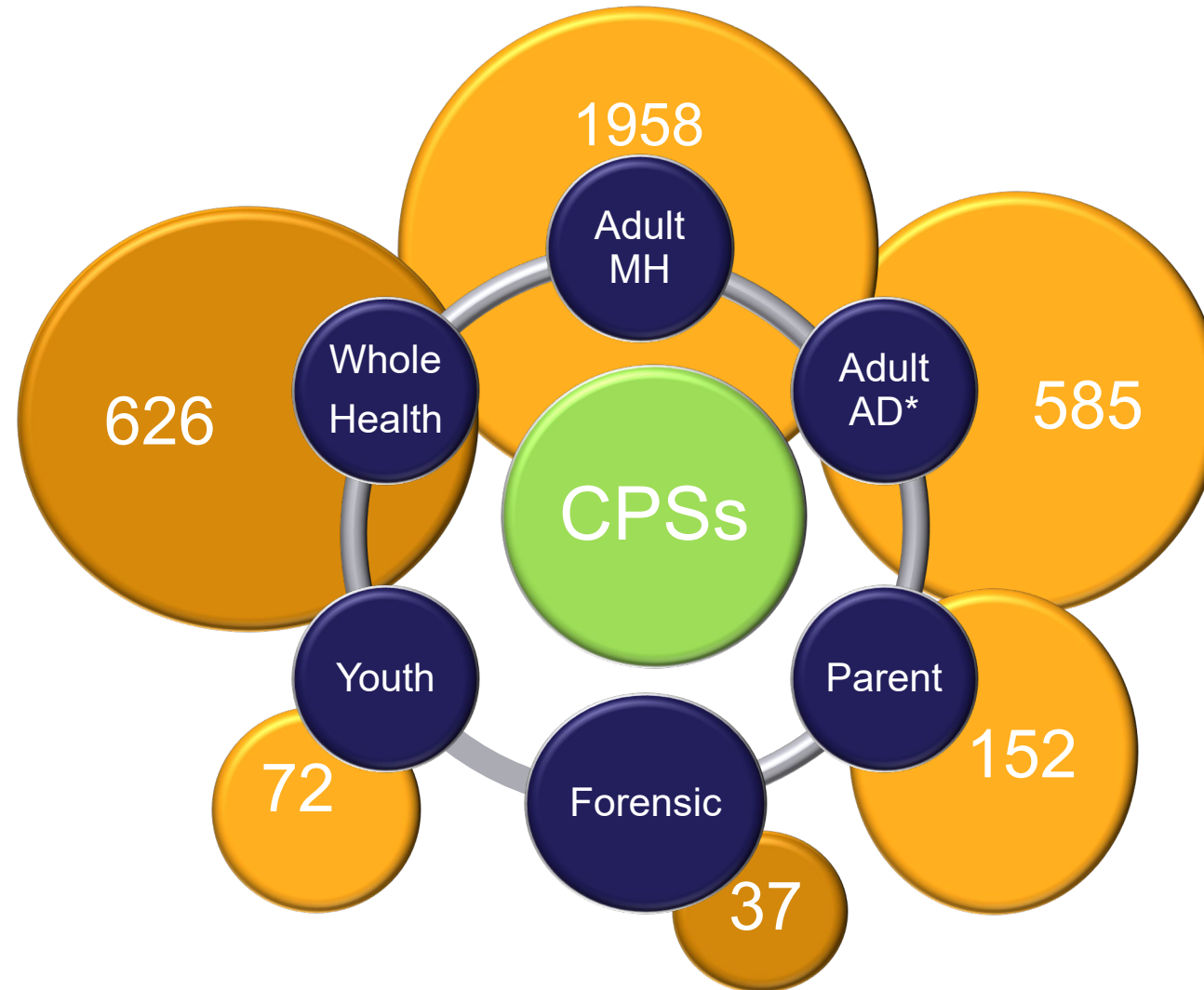
## Parent

Provides support to parent/guardian who is raising a child living with mental health, substance abuse or a co-occurring diagnosis.

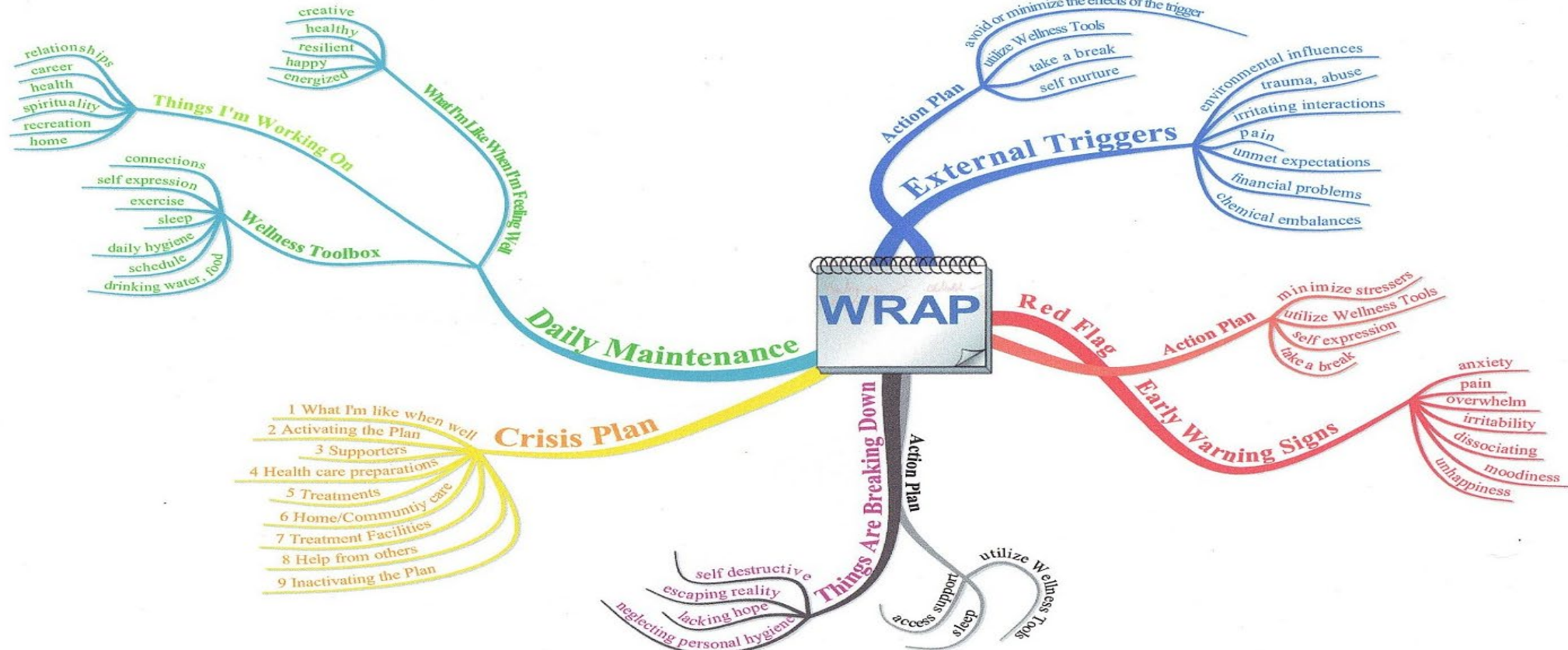
# Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) Certification



Approximately  
2,500 unduplicated  
Certified Peer  
Specialists (CPSs)  
are certified in  
Georgia.



# Incorporate wellness tools (crisis plans, WRAP, SMART)



# Success of Peer Mentoring

- Led to development of Forensic Peer Mentors







**BE INSPIRED**

**Forensic Peer Mentor Program**

# Power in Partnership

- Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)
- Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network (GMHCN)
- Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC)
- Georgia Department of Community Supervision (DCS)



# From Prison to Purpose

## From Prison to Purpose

Georgia's Forensic Peer Mentor Program



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crzN6wV93uY>

# Peer Mentor Evolved to Forensics

---

- **What is a Forensic Peer Mentor?**

- Individuals with histories of involvement with the criminal justice system and behavioral health needs who help people who are leaving jails or prisons successfully reenter the community.
- Forensic peer mentors are key in interrupting the cycle of recidivism.
- Unique qualifications: shared, lived experience, credible models of recovery, engagement skills

# Additional Training

- Certified peer specialist (CPS)/certified addiction recovery empowerment specialist (CARES) + lived experience in the correctional system
- **Plus additional 5 full days of forensic training**
  - Sequential Intercept Model: how to interface with the criminal justice and mental health systems
  - Effective engagement
  - Boundaries
  - Orientation to the GDC and DCS systems
  - Overview of community resources for mental health and substance abuse





# Forensic Peer Mentor Goals

- Participate in transition planning
- Mentor
- Small caseload (1:20)
- Bridge between returning citizen and community
- Link participants to services and supports
- Reduce recidivism
- Reduce psychiatric hospital re-admission





# Georgia's Forensic Peer Mentor Workforce

- Prisons and Transition Centers
- Day Reporting Centers
- State Psychiatric Hospital
- Mental Health Treatment Courts



Support people throughout stages of involvement with the criminal justice system (from arrest to life after release).



## Connect with Community

**A part of the Forensic Peer Mentors role is to connect to valuable resources in the community that will provide assistance and support to returning citizens. (Ladji Ruffin-Atlanta Metro)**



# Forensic Peer Mentor Program

## PLACEMENT OF FORENSIC MENTORS

### 6 State Prisons

- Lee Arrendale State Prison
- Pulaski State Prison
- Baldwin State Prison
- Phillips State Prison
- Rutledge State Prison
- Metro Atlanta Re-Entry Prison

### 6 Day Reporting Centers

- Atlanta DRC
- Griffin DRC
- Morrow DRC
- Gainesville DRC
- Columbus DRC
- Rome DRC

### 2 State Hospitals

- Georgia Regional-Atlanta
- West Central State Hospital

### 6 Accountability Courts

- Appalachian Judicial Circuit
- Cobb County
- Hall County
- Dawson County
- Macon-Bibb
- Spalding County





# Success of Forensic Peer Mentoring with Justice Involved

Led to development of Forensic Peer Mentors in Accountability Courts

# **Accountability Court Forensic Peer Support (What we do)**





Promote recovery principles, including self-advocacy



Advocate for recipients of behavioral health care when they are unable to advocate for themselves



# Educate all stakeholders in the criminal justice system about behavioral health recovery



Reduce the time behavioral health consumers stay in jail/prison due to the lack of community supports, housing options, and resources





Inspire hope through shared life experiences



# Develop positive relationships that facilitate reintegration





# Assist individuals with understanding and navigating the criminal justice system



# Educate individuals about recovery



## Aid individuals to understand and complete parole/probation requirements



Offer an effective base of services provided by competent, supportive staff



# Aid in finding and using resources to support behavioral health needs





Focus on the needs of individuals with serious psychiatric disorders and/or co-occurring challenges



# Returning Citizen Success



Ramona (right) with The Honorable Judge Mary Staley, Cobb County Superior Court

“Having been in the system as a convicted felon in that revolving door of substance use, illness, and trouble with law enforcement, as well as my experience with homelessness, despair, estrangement from family and profound loneliness [gives] me a perspective that comes with that lived experience. I know that if I can recover, anyone can. I try to offer unconditional positive regard and carry hope for others until people find it for themselves, because Recovery is Real and Possible and available to All.”

--Ramona Burkett, Forensic Peer Mentor  
Cobb County Mental Health Court/Cobb Douglas CSB

# Providing Peer Support to Treatment Courts

- Georgia as leaders in Treatment Courts and Other Judicial Reforms
- Collaboration with Georgia's Council of Accountability Court Judges
- Implementation of Behavior Health Treatment Court Liaisons



# Continued Efforts



Q&A



# BE D·B·H·D·D

Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities

