

### **What is a Youth Peer Advocate?**

Youth Peer Advocates (YPA) are peers who are in a unique position to draw on their personal experience to engage and inspire hope. The focus of their work is empowering young people to find their voice, acquire new skills, and learn how to plan and partner effectively with their parents/caregivers and service providers. In the course of their work, YPAs are also promoting constructive advocacy at all levels, modeling and mentoring young people in those same skills.

YPAs are individuals between 18 and 30 years of age who have self-identified as a person who has first-hand experience with social, emotional, medical, developmental, substance use, and/or behavioral challenges. They are able to use their lived experience with a disability, mental health challenge, substance use disorder and/or experience in juvenile justice, special education, and/or foster care to support young people in their resiliency/recovery and wellness journeys. YPAs receive training to develop skills and strategies to empower and support other young people. The core required training for this is the Youth Peer Advocate Training, but advocates receive a wide range of other training as well.

### **What does a Youth Peer Advocate do?**

YPAs work with young people (primarily between ages 14-21) who are experiencing social, medical, emotional, developmental, substance use, and/or behavioral challenges in their home, school, placement, and/or community. These services provide the training and support necessary to ensure the active participation and engagement of young people in the treatment planning process and in the development and reinforcement of skills. The structured activities provided by this service emphasize the opportunity for young people to expand the skills and strategies necessary to move forward in meeting their personal, individualized life goals, develop self-advocacy skills, and to support their transition into adulthood. Youth Peer Advocate job descriptions vary depending on the setting, but typically include working with young people to provide outreach, support, guidance, skill-building and mentoring.

For additional information on the work of YPAs, please refer to the Youth Peer Support Services Definition. This definition was crafted through a consensus process and has been endorsed by New York State. It is available on the Families Together in NYS website [www.FTNYS.org](http://www.FTNYS.org) under the Workforce Development tab.

### **What are the benefits of obtaining a Youth Peer Advocate Credential?**

There are many benefits to you as a professional, to the field, and to young people. These include:

- Having a YPA Credential is increasingly becoming a hiring requirement and/or preference. Employers will know that anyone with a YPA Credential has specialized training and they are engaged in ongoing professional development.

- Young people and their families can also be assured that the YPA has met standard requirements and agreed to follow a code of ethics.
- Youth Peer Support and Training (YPST) services will be billable to Medicaid only if provided by a credentialed Youth Peer Advocate. Employers will be looking to hire staff with the right credentials to be able to generate sustaining revenue.
- The process of becoming credentialed and maintaining your credential provides a structure for a Youth Peer Advocate to formally document their experience and training which may lead to career advancement opportunities.
- Credentialing (or a similar process) is a standard practice in most professions. This gives the profession credibility and helps to promote a broader understanding of the YPA role, specific skills set, and values.

**Is the Youth Peer Advocate Credential required?**

There are a number of changes in Medicaid that have taken place at state and national levels. These changes will increase the demand for Youth Peer Support and Training and will require that providers of this service be credentialed. In New York State, the recognized credential for Youth Peer Support service providers is the YPA Credential. YPAs and agencies can check the status of their credential through the YPA Credentialing Verification tool on the Workforce Development page of the FTNYS website.

**What are the requirements for the Youth Peer Advocate Credential?**

<b>YPA PROVISIONAL Credential Requirements At-A-Glance*</b>	
<b>Lived Experience</b>	A Youth Peer Advocate is someone who has self-identified as a person who has first-hand experience with social, emotional, medical, developmental, substance use, and/or behavioral challenges. They are able to use their lived experience with a disability, mental health challenge, substance use disorder and/or experience in juvenile justice, special education, and/or foster care to assist in supporting young people in their resiliency/recovery and wellness.
<b>Age</b>	Applicants must be 18-30 years of age.
<b>Education</b>	HS diploma, HS Equivalency or a State Education Commencement Credential. (In exceptional cases, documentation of comparable skills may be accepted.)
<b>Training</b>	Successful completion of YPA Training Level One (online).
<b>Complete Application</b>	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two Letters of Recommendation</li> <li>• Signed Youth Peer Advocate Code of Ethics</li> <li>• Statement of Lived Experience</li> <li>• Proof of age</li> </ul>
<b>Renewal</b>	The Youth Peer Advocate Provisional Credential is valid for 18 months and cannot be renewed.

\*Please see the Youth Peer Advocate Provisional Application on the Families Together in NYS website under the workforce Development tab for complete details.

YPA PROFESSIONAL Credential Requirements At-A-Glance	
<b>Current YPA Provisional Credential</b>	Applicant must hold a valid YPA Provisional Credential and meet all the requirements to apply for a YPA Professional Credential
<b>Training</b>	Successful completion of YPA Training Level Two (online and in-person).
<b>Complete Application</b>	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letter of Recommendation from a supervisor</li> <li>Resume</li> <li>600 hours of paid or formal volunteer work</li> <li>Job description</li> <li>Signed Youth Peer Advocate Code of Ethics</li> </ul>
<b>Renewal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Youth Peer Advocate Professional Credential must be renewed every two years</li> <li>20 hours of continuing education credits are required to renew.</li> </ul>
*Please see the Youth Peer Advocate Provisional Application on the Families Together in NYS website under the workforce Development tab for complete details.	

**Am I eligible if I am not a young adult, peer, or do not have experience with the child serving systems (i.e., mental health, substance use, child welfare, foster care, developmental disabilities, juvenile justice, special education)?**

No. This credential is designed specifically for individuals who are working as peers to provide support, training and advocacy to young people who are experiencing similar challenges.

This is not, in any way, intended to discount the commitment and expertise of others who provide services to young people. It is, however, intended to recognize that ‘lived experience’ (coupled with appropriate training and specific competencies) affords individuals serving in this role a perspective that is invaluable in engaging and empowering others.

It is critical that applicants be able and willing to talk about their lived experience as a young person and be able to draw on that experience as they work with young people, providers and policy-makers.

**Is a YPA Level One Training Certificate of Completion or Transcript the same as the YPA Provisional Credential?**

No. Successful completion of Level One of the YPA Training meets the training requirement for the Youth Peer Advocate Provisional Credential, but it is not the only requirement. We hope that everyone who has completed Level One will consider applying for the YPA Provisional Credential.

**Can past hours working as a YPA be used towards the credential?**

Yes. The Professional Application requires a supervisor signature verifying that you have fulfilled the required hours providing or supporting youth peer support services for young people with social, emotional, behavioral and developmental challenges.

In addition to this, you are required to submit a job description or a summary of your work in order to attest that your role aligns with the definition of the YPA role.

### **Do I need to change my title to ‘Youth Peer Advocate’?**

No, you do not. Your title is determined by your employer but you can let people know that you are credentialed by adding YPA-C to your signature.

### **How do I let others know that I’m credentialed?**

Once you are approved for a Youth Peer Advocate Credential, include YPA-C to your signature to signify that you are credentialed. For example: Michael Samuels, YPA-C. Be proud of your accomplishment and help raise awareness by letting people know you are a Credentialed Youth Peer Advocate! Additionally, YPAs and agencies can check the status of their credential through the YPA Credentialing Verification tool on the Workforce Development page of the FTNYS website.

### **What is the process for reviewing applications?**

Your application will be reviewed by trained by FTNYS staff members who will determine whether you meet the criteria to be credentialed. If you do not meet the criteria, your application will be denied. If it is unclear whether you meet the criteria, your application will be referred to the Youth Peer Services Advisory Council so that a final determination can be made.

When we receive your application, we will send you an email acknowledging receipt. If your application is complete and in good order when it arrives in our office, it will take approximately 4-6 weeks to review it and issue your credential. This time period may be shorter when there is a low volume of applicants. This time period will be extended if your application is incomplete and/or requires further review.

### **Will I need to renew my Credential?**

Your YPA Provisional Credential is valid for 18 months and cannot be renewed.

Your YPA Professional Credential will need to be renewed every two years. In order to successfully renew your credential you will need to do the following:

- Complete a YPA Credential Renewal Application and submit it no more than 60 days and no less than 30 days prior to the expiration of your YPA Credential.
- Complete a minimum of 20 hours of approved continuing education every two years. We plan to be very flexible about what will be approved as continuing education. Local trainings on a variety of topics will qualify, as will your participation in leadership activities, structured independent study, conference participation, webinars and online courses.
- Complete occasional required trainings on special topics. If required, we will assure that these trainings are widely available through a web-based format.

See the YPA Credential Renewal Application FAQ and Application for more information. It is available on the Families Together in NYS website [www.FTNYS.org](http://www.FTNYS.org) under the Workforce Development tab.

### **What will happen if the credential requirements change in the future?**

In any profession, the requirements of being credentialed change over time. This reflects new understanding from research and practice about what competencies and training lead to the best outcomes. It is likely that the requirements for the Youth Peer Advocate Credential will change over time.

There may be specific required continuing education courses or topics that you would need to complete in order to maintain your credential. These would be announced well in advance and would be delivered in a manner that would assure they are accessible to you.

### **Are there any fees?**

There are no fees for the training or the Provisional and Professional applications at this time. There are also no fees for the renewal at this time.

### **What other requirements will I have to meet to be hired?**

Having a Youth Peer Advocate Credential does NOT guarantee you a job - although it may make it easier for you to obtain a position in this field.

The Credential does NOT take the place of other possible employer requirements that might include, but not be limited to:

- Standard Interviewing and Hiring Practices
- Child Sexual Abuse Registry Clearance
- Mandated Reporter Training
- Safety Training
- Agency-required orientation training
- Training in Evidence-Based Practices
- Proof of Citizenship/Immigration Status
- Criminal Background Checks
- Driving Record/Insurance
- Reference Checks

### **Questions?**

If you have further questions or if you require assistance to complete your application, please contact us at [YPACredential@ftnys.org](mailto:YPACredential@ftnys.org) or call 518-432-0333 ext. 18. We look forward to assisting you to join your colleagues as a Credentialed New York State Youth Peer Advocate!