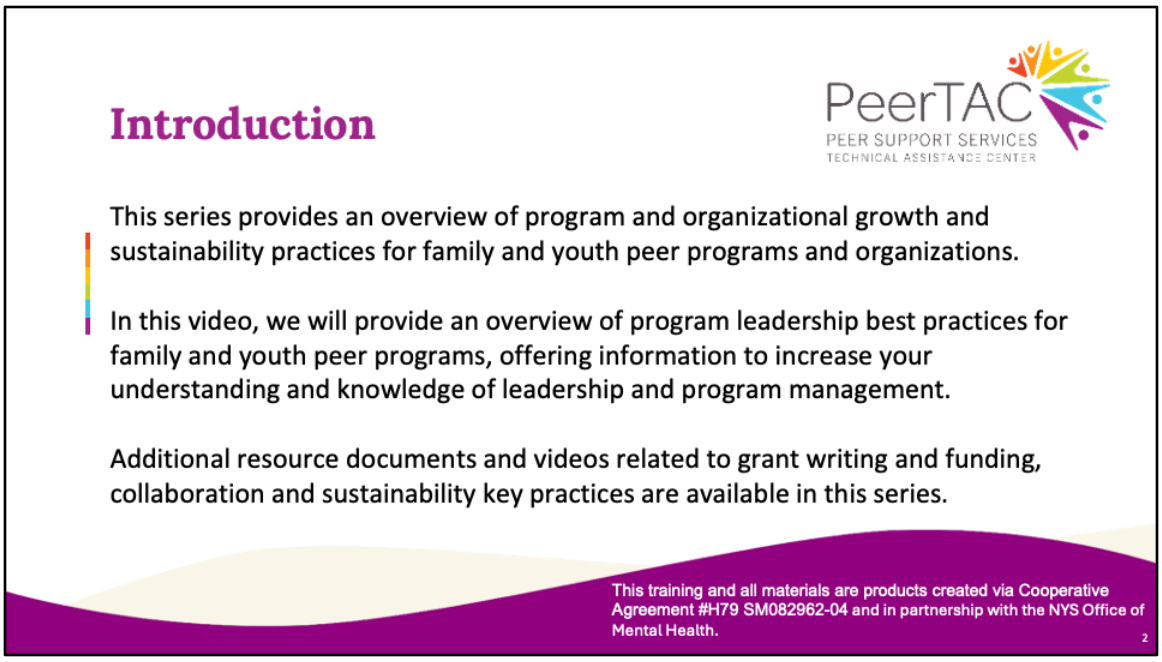
Thank you for viewing this video in our series on organizational growth. We are sharing this information on capacity building and program leadership to support the growing demand for peer support services and to support the key practices for organizational peer program expansion.

My name is Rebecca Evansky, I am the Executive director of the Wellness Collaborative of New York, Independent Practice Association. The WCNY IPA is a collective of peer led organizations from across New York State that leverage their expertise and share best practices, support executive operations and advance the awareness and effectiveness of peer support.

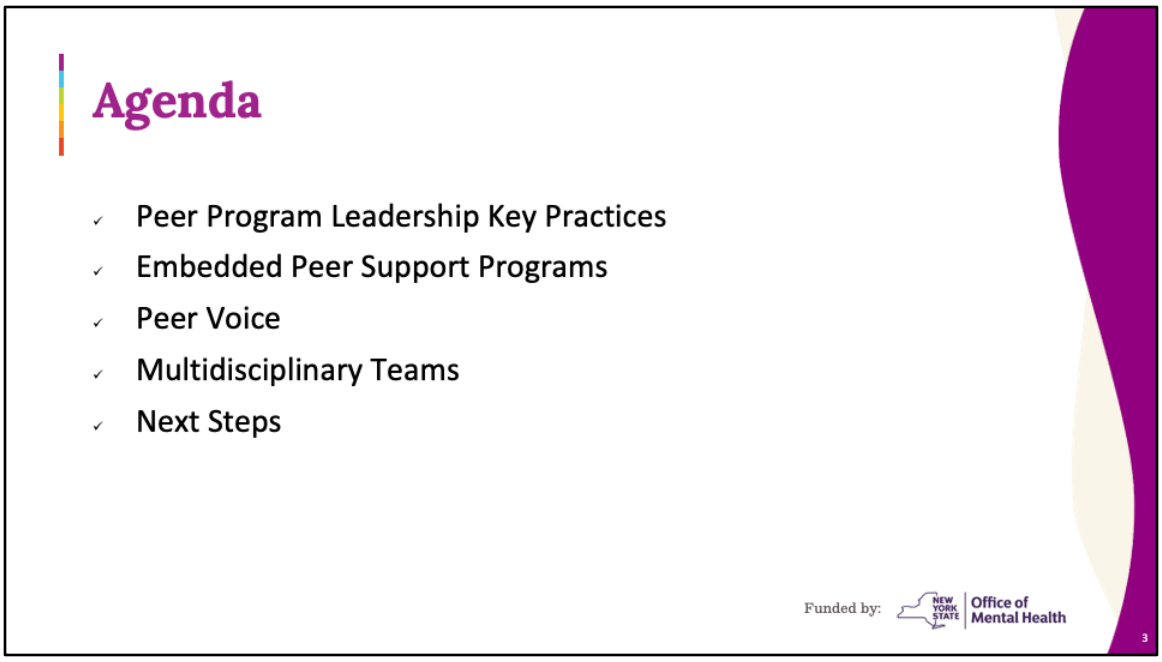
This training and all materials are products created in partnership with the NYS Office of Mental Health Under the NYS System of Care Project and is intended to support the growth of family and youth peer led programs across New York State.



This series provides an overview of program and organizational growth and sustainability practices for family and youth peer programs and organizations.

In this video, we will provide an overview of program leadership best practices for family and youth peer programs, offering information to increase your understanding and knowledge of leadership and program management.

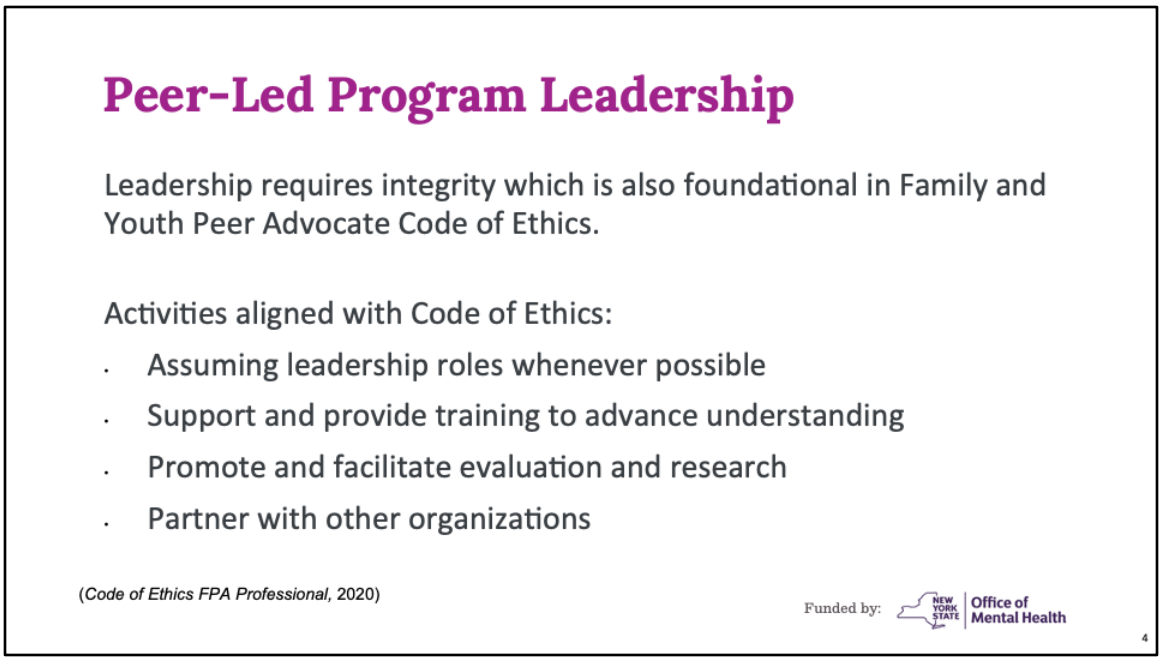
Additional resource documents and videos related to grant writing and funding, collaboration and sustainability key practices are available in this series.



Our agenda for this video includes several key components that contribute to a strong leadership for family and youth peer program management.

We hope to increase your understanding and ability to lead a team of peer providers and keep the peer voice present amongst other program executives and multidisciplinary teams.

We will review the importance of being a family and youth peer leader as part of an embedded program and as a standalone nonprofit.



The culture of leadership as a family and youth peer advocate requires maintaining fidelity to the code of ethics and integrity to peer practices. There are several activities listed within the code of ethics that you can reference to ensure you maintain authenticity and integrity while advancing as a leader and providing family and youth peer support.

- **You should consider assuming leadership roles whenever possible** - participation on other boards, coalitions that pertain to mental and behavioral health initiatives, trauma and recovery efforts at the county government level, educational boards and parent forums, youth advocate events and any community outreach or networking opportunities.

- **Support and provide training to advance the understanding of family and youth peer support practices.** This can apply to each interaction with a community organization. It's possible you will meet someone with little or no knowledge of family and youth peer advocacy. Use these opportunities to educate and "act as" a leader for the movement.

- **Promote and facilitate education and research.** Be curious in your discussions

with other organizational, clinical, government and community leaders - ask questions and pose thoughtful responses for the value family and youth peer support brings to the individuals you connect with. Research where family and youth peer support is being utilized in your region, who the other youth peer advocates and family peer specialists are - connect with them.

- **Partner with other organizations** to advance the opportunity to connect with family members and youth who may need peer support. This is explained in more detail in our video as part of the organizational growth series regarding collaboration and strategic relationships with community providers.

Leadership Key Strategies

- Authentic and Approachable
- Strategic Thinker
- Curiosity
- Adaptability
- Self Awareness
- Perseverance
- Open Mindedness
- Clear Direction

(Forbes Nonprofit Council, 2024)

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Leadership strategies for family and youth peer advocates are like other health and wellness professionals. Utilizing a combination of lived experience and the ability to connect with individuals through common experiences increase the opportunities for peer professionals to build trusting relationships because they are authentic and approachable. Many times these character traits and ethical considerations will naturally lead to advancement opportunities in an organizational setting.

Being a strategic thinker and considering what your program can accomplish if provided the fiscal resources is a first step in “thinking like a leader” or executive. Individuals who work as part of your team, both peer professionals and other team members will need to trust your vision and believe in the message you are sharing and teams also work best when they feel safe in their work environment.

Great leaders are curious, they ask questions, do research and utilize your experience to help you navigate new experiences.

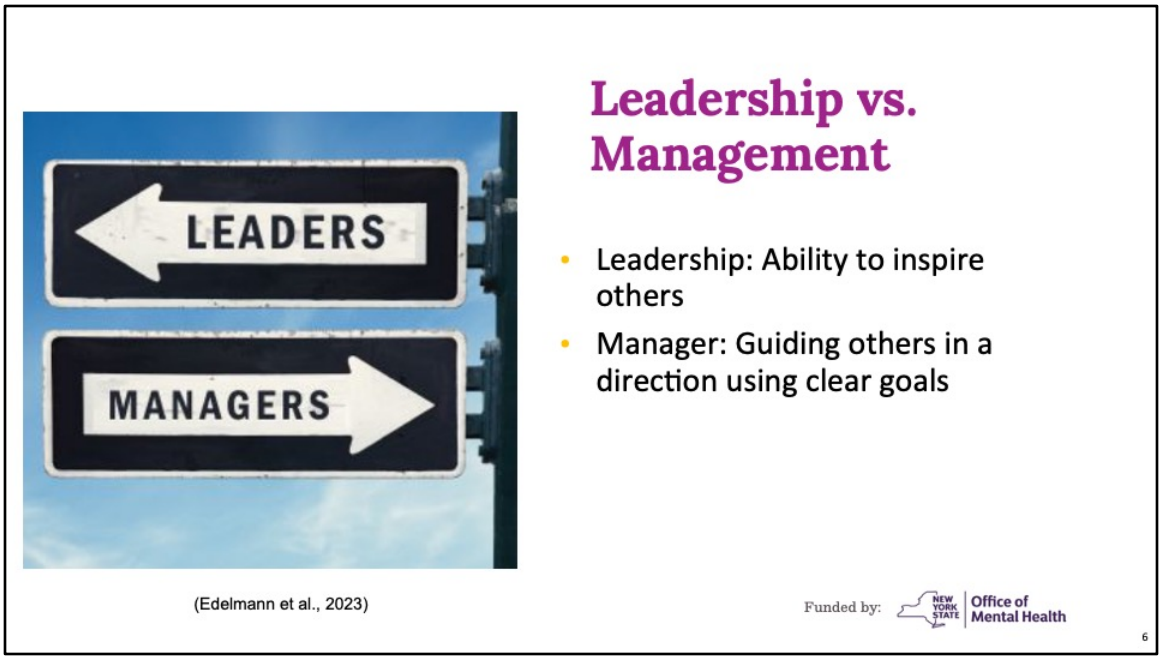
Be adaptable to change. As a youth peer advocate you will be working yourself out of a job every day based purely on your age qualification for certification. Stepping up for a leadership role as a youth peer advocate includes the same strategies - having a

vision, asking good questions and offering training, understanding and support in a variety of settings. Family peer advocates should consider the ever-changing shift in culture, technology, and requests for family support in new settings.

Self awareness is key for leaders in non-profit. Be aware of your limitations either based on grant funding or programmatic goals. By being self-aware, you are also better able to identify emotions and recognize triggers, especially in challenging leadership situations.

Perseverance is required to stay the course when things get more challenging and open mindedness to other team members and community professionals ideas is important.

Finally, a clear direction for the organization and vision of what is possible is required. This list is not exhaustive and there are many great resources for family and youth peers to explore a leadership mindset.



You may consider professional advancement at some point in your career, family and youth peer specialists have a unique understanding of the way individual experiences are strengths in a professional workplace and these can translate into a leadership style.

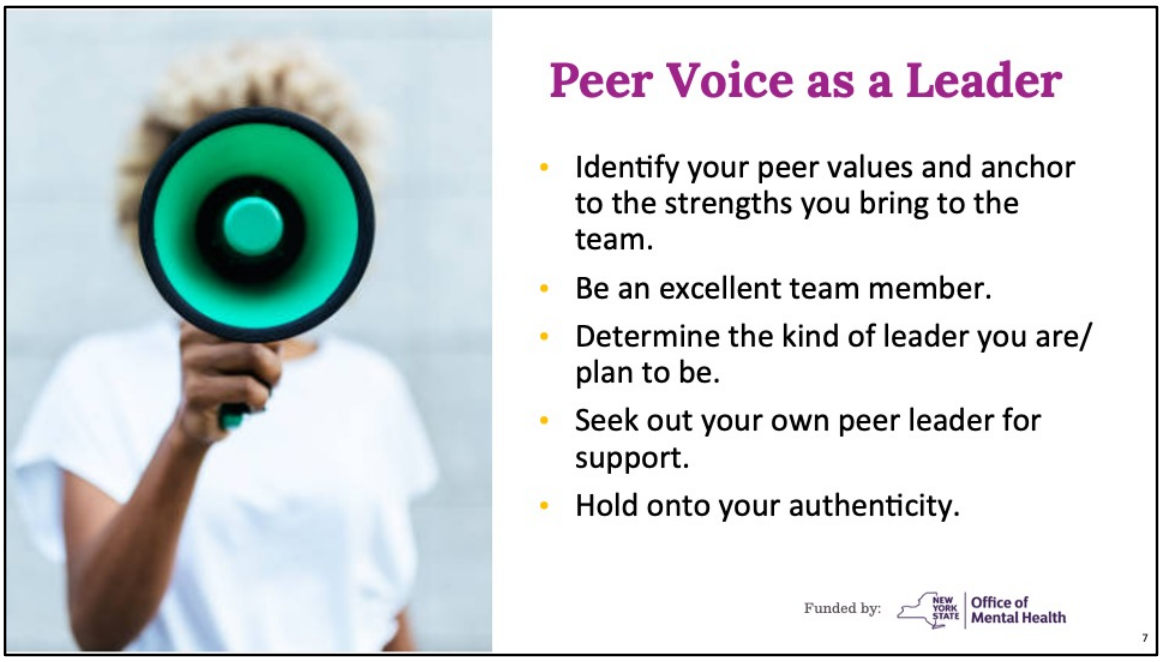
One of the ways you can consider your role as a family and youth peer provider and helps to consider moving from a peer role into a management or leadership responsibility is being able to understand your strengths and match them to the best role.

A few ways to help identify yourself as a leader, manager and peer include considering that you may have been hired in a peer advocate role with responsibilities that are guided by the family and or youth peer specialist code of ethics. When you combine that foundation with organizational policies and procedures, willingness to meet individuals where they are, plan for overcoming barriers and challenges, you are already working as a leader in your field. You are also giving others you support the ability to inspire hope and build a life path with plans and resources.

A manager is defined as someone who leads a team or offers direction. This will generally include a set of action items and goals, driven typically by a grant funding source. At times, there may not be a lot of flexibility outside of the grant or program guidelines, but by using your lived experience in managing your own course, you are already skilled in this area.

Leadership of a larger organization or clinical model may be driving the peer program and provide governance for how referrals are shared. An important consideration is to build connections and relationships with leaders of other programs to advance the understanding of family and youth peer support regardless of your current role in the organization.

Many organizations operate with a traditional leader or executive model but are shifting shared management responsibilities across various programs. Seeking the opportunity to engage and support tasks traditionally attributed to formal leaders is a great opportunity to learn the leadership role as a family or youth peer advocate within a larger organization.



Ensuring that family and youth peer advocates are included in overall organizational values can be a challenge if the organization is well established and peer support is just being added to a menu of an organization's supports and resources.

A few ways to advance the family and youth peer voice at an organization is by being able to identify your peer values. As a representative of the family and youth peer community, anchor to those values and be able to speak to them with other organization team members and with in the community at outreach and networking events.

Be an excellent team member - as a peer advocate, it's within the scope of peer support code of ethics to make a commitment to partnership. Share your resources and knowledge to advance the overall peer support model. This could be in providing education and training on family and youth peer roles and program information within your community. Be a model for the family and youth peer movement, share information with others and seek input and feedback from those you are supporting. Ask the families and youth who are receiving support about additional resources or support they could use, if available, or how you as a peer supporter can improve on providing support.

If you are seeking a leadership role, consider the type of leader you hope to be and seek out your own peer mentor or peer support community of practice. Request feedback from current mentors and peer leaders, ask questions that can help you improve your own peer professional development and follow through on professional goals.

Authenticity is key for both leadership and family and youth peer support,. This foundation should be held as you consider professional advancement opportunities or share information on peer support in your community.

Leadership in Multidisciplinary Teams

- Internal/ External Teams
- Culture of Sharing
- Consent Concerns
- Meaningful Support

(Kutash et al., 2014)

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Multidisciplinary teams, defined as being comprised of staff who vary in their educational and professional experiences, bring together diverse perspectives, expertise, and skills.

The benefit for a family or youth peer advocate to engage with other members of clinical and community-based disciplines is for all members to better coordinate and support the individual. External teams may include a clinical provider, county official, housing coordinator, care manager, legal or social services possibly.

From a leadership perspective, consider that the family or youth peer advocates are most closely reflecting the individual perspective. You should first make a practice to inquire with the individual if they wish for you to participate on an external multidisciplinary team, regarding their care.

For internal multidisciplinary teams within an organization of various programs, a family or youth peer advocate can contribute as a leader by providing education on the peer support model, a guide on what family and youth peer advocates can provide and clarify the referral process and connections to a peer.

Multidisciplinary teams have become commonplace across health and mental health settings and are widely considered fundamental to service delivery. As a family or youth peer leader, an important role is to advance the culture of sharing what the mission and model of peer support encompasses.

This culture of sharing and communication of what is meaningful to contribute to the team is a key collaboration in both peer support and building relationships.

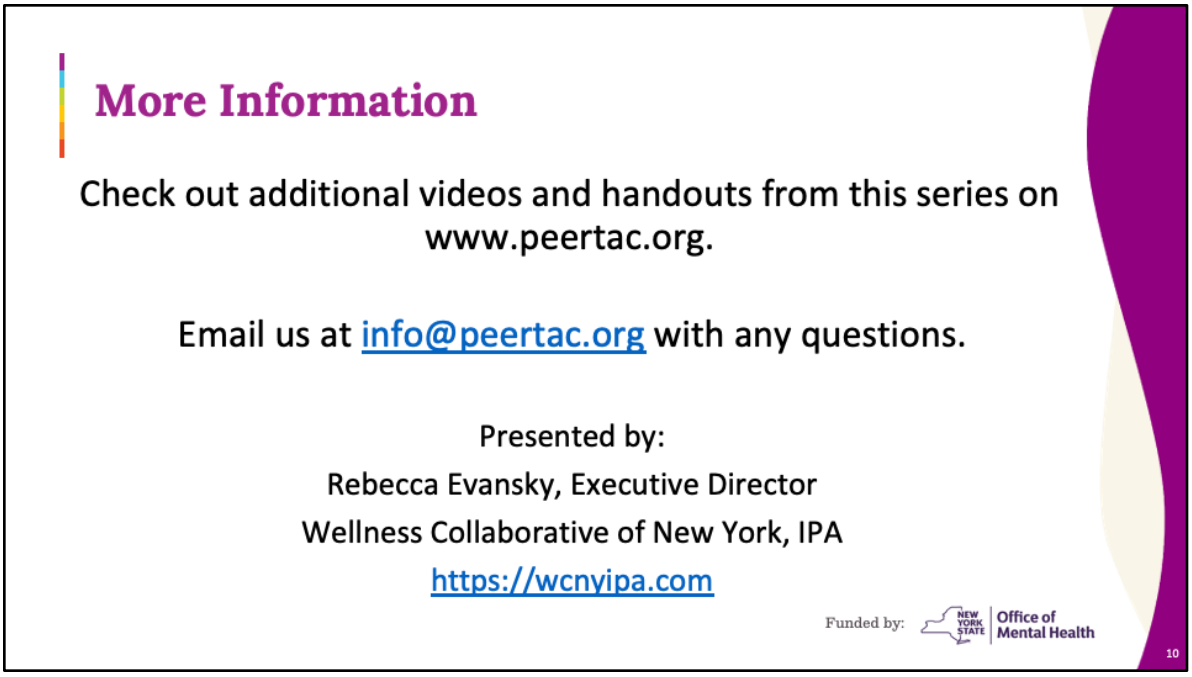
The next steps in leadership for a family or youth peer advocate can be defined by the personal goals you have set for yourself. They might be different if you are just starting out in the field or have been navigating peer work for many years. Family and youth peer providers are stepping into a new path where peers are being sought after for a variety of community and clinical settings and you may find that professional opportunities arise in both peer-led programs and embedded within larger organizations.

This first step is to always lead by example. Promote family and youth peer advocacy by networking and providing outreach in the community. Consider new or innovate partnerships that you haven't explored previously.

Stay engaged and knowledgeable on peer advocacy initiatives, seek out new training opportunities and remain self aware of any areas you need more training and resources.

Communication is key. As a family or youth peer advocate or organizational manager or leader, talk about peer support in and outside of your organizations.

Be willing to provide training and resources on your area of experience. If you don't have a resource available in your region, know what other peer led providers are offering family and youth peer support and offer a connection. Consider utilizing resources such as the WCNY IPA, Families Together, Youth Move, National Federation for Families, National Association for Peer Supporters or other national resources to guide others toward the mission of family and youth peer work.
If you are a leader or strive to be a leader of a peer led organization, consider collaborative goals amongst your internal team. Just as you would in working with an



This video provided an overview of program leadership best practices for family and youth peer led programs.

Please see the other videos and handouts in this series for more information on organizational growth and capacity building.

Thank you for listening to our series. Questions can be emailed to info@peertac.org.

Resources

- Edelmann, C. M., Boen, F., Stouten, J., Vande Broek, G., & Fransen, K. (2023, December 19). *The power of peer leaders: Exploring the link between peer leadership behaviors and sustainable work outcomes*. Behavioral sciences (Basel, Switzerland). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10813210/
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- Forbes Magazine. (2024, August 13). *Council post: 20 key characteristics needed in today's nonprofit leaders*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2023/06/02/20-key-characteristics-needed-in-todays-nonprofit-leaders/
- Kutash, K., Acri, M., Pollock, M., Armusewicz, K., Serene Olin, S. C., & Hoagwood, K. E. (2014). Quality indicators for multidisciplinary team functioning in community-based children's mental health services. *Administration and policy in mental health*, *41*(1), 55–68. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0508-2

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The following resources were utilized when creating this material.