

The Community Autism Peer Specialist (CAPS) Program pairs an individual with autism who has completed a peer support training program with other individuals with autism to achieve personal wellness and community integration goals. Activities are chosen by the participant to build employment and/or postsecondary education and leadership skills, to live independently, care for their own health, navigate interpersonal relationships, use public transportation, engage in the community, and other areas of growth.

## CAPS Objectives

- ➔ Assist participants in identifying areas of interest, meaningful activity, and personal wellness
- ➔ Encourage community living and participation
- ➔ Promote self-discovery and self-advocacy, individual choice and active involvement in personal wellness/resiliency
- ➔ Share information to increase awareness of behavioral health issues
- ➔ Support the development of healthy relationships and connections

## Program Development

### CAPS Curriculum

Val Paradiz, a self-advocate and mom of a son with autism, developed a CAPS curriculum for young adults and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (160 lessons/modules).

### CAPS Training Program

The development of the 75-hour CAPS training program was led by Mary Kay Tuohy, a mom of a son on the spectrum and former supervisor of a CAPS program. The training program pulled concepts covered in mental health certified peer specialist training programs with a focus on how CAPS can use the curriculum developed by Val Paradiz.

### CAPS Recruitment

To become a Community Autism Peer Specialist (CAPS), individuals must meet the criteria listed below and formally apply when a training is being offered. We anticipate the next training will be offered in Fall of 2021.

- ➔ Lived experience: Individuals who are 18 years of age or older with a diagnosis of autism and/or a co-occurring mental health diagnosis
- ➔ Education/employment history:
  - » A high school diploma or GED
  - » Within the past three years, have maintained at least 12 months of successful full- or part-time paid or voluntary work experience, or obtained at least 24 credit hours of post-secondary education

## CAPS Trained

- ➔ 20 individuals on the spectrum have completed the CAPS training program.
- ➔ Mental Health Partnerships has hired six CAPS since the start of the program.
- ➔ CBH has hired one part-time CAPS, who also works part-time on a peer-delivered travel training research study at Temple University.
- ➔ DBHIDS has hired one full-time CAPS in the Wellness Engagement Unit.
- ➔ Two CAPS have secured employment doing advocacy and peer support at agencies outside of Philadelphia County.
- ➔ 31 members have been enrolled in the CAPS service.
- ➔ Referrals are being accepted.

## CAPS Participant Spotlight

Luke Tomczuk began his journey with CAPS in May 2019, after graduating from college. At the time he wasn't completely sure what he wanted to do but felt that the CAPS program seemed like an interesting opportunity.

After completing the CAPS program, Luke was interested in a full-time CAPS position. He now has a full-time position that is split between Temple University and CBH.

As a peer support specialist, Luke helps participants of the Temple University Travel Training Study learn how to take public transportation. He also connects providers and clinical care managers with the tools they need to stay up to date on matters relevant to the autism community and acts as a chief advocate for individuals who utilize CBH services.

“His insight and guidance as an individual with lived experience has been an immense asset to educating others on the beauty and uniqueness of individuals on the autism spectrum. His advocacy and passion for helping others on the autism spectrum connect to highly beneficial resources in the community is truly valued by his team, families, and the individuals we have promised to serve,” said Cynthia.

Luke says the best part about his role is being able to provide support and be a resource to other autistic individuals.

