

Monday, April 20, 2026

Breakout Session 1 | 8:30 - 10 a.m.

1A: De-Escalation; TIC Skillset – Ray Young

Calm in a crisis is a skillset that takes practice and looks different in every situation. In this session we will work through real-life escalated situations by applying the skills that we already have and develop a strategy that avoids further harm. Join in as we apply the model of Trauma-Informed Care to support our clients when life gets bumpy and nothing else is working.

1B: Public Health and Community Efforts, Housing, SU; Cullen Bosworth

Presenting experience on coalition work, peer support and community health through the lens of substance use, homelessness in an age of synthetic drugs.

1C: Real-Life Recovery: Sober Curiosity, Mocktails, etc. - Tashemia Dean

This workshop introduces creative, real-world approaches to recovery through nonalcoholic beverages, sober events, and lifestyle exploration. Tashemia Dean guides participants through her innovative Dry Crawls and offers tools for supporting individuals curious about sobriety. Learn how to create inclusive, stigma-free environments for change.

1D: Understanding the IEP and Spec Ed Process to Support Peers - Michelle Uetz

Many youth who are supported by peers and many parents who receive parent peer support are involved in the special education and IEP process in school. This can be a difficult and frustrating process to understand. Unfortunately, schools do not make this process any easier. In this session participants will gain a basic understanding of this process from someone who has been on both sides of the table. Resources and handouts will also be provided to take with you for reference when needed.

1E: Honest, Open & Proud: How to Talk About Your Experience of Psychosis - Santee Blakey

Have you ever thought about telling someone that you've experienced a delusion or hallucination? Deciding whether to share, who to share with, and how much to say can be difficult. This interactive workshop helps participants decide if disclosure is right for them, choose safe people to share with, and learn ways to assess whether someone is supportive enough to hear about their experiences with psychosis.

Breakout Session 2 | 10:30 a.m. – noon

2A: Supporting from the In-Between: Relationship to Suicide - Lisa Marie Brodsky Auter

What happens when a peer support specialist is asked to support someone who feels suicidal while also carrying their own lived experience of losing a loved one to suicide? This session explores how peers can hold multiple identities—supporter, survivor, and person with their own history suicidal thoughts—while practicing harm reduction, non-carceral care rooted in compassion and self-awareness.

2B: Rooted in Community: Strengthening Recovery Networks in Rural WI - Kyle VanBlaircom, Samantha Bush

Rural communities have strong values of connection and resilience, yet often face gaps in recovery resources. This session will explore how peer support can bridge those gaps by lifting lived experience, building community rooted networks, and celebrating recovery publicly. Participants will leave with practical strategies to expand connection and support within their own communities.

2C: Rural Realities: Making a Big Impact in Small Tribal Communities - Robert O' Claire + Panel

This session explores the unique realities of providing peer support in rural tribal communities, where culture, ethics, and close-knit relationships shape daily practice. Through real-world examples from Bad River and Red Cliff, presenters share strategies for navigating limited resources, maintaining boundaries, and delivering culturally rooted support while honoring tribal sovereignty. Participants will gain practical insights into peer support work in rural, tribal, resource-limited settings.

2D: Peer Support Behind the Walls: Wisconsin Prisons - Tamra Oman and Juve Castaneda

This session explores how lived experience of incarceration and recovery can transform peer support within Wisconsin's correctional mental health and general prison settings. Facilitators Tamra and Juve—justice-impacted Recovery Support Specialists—share trauma-informed strategies and real-world tools for supporting Certified Peer Specialists who live and work inside prison. Participants will gain practical insight into building hope, dignity, and leadership in environments not designed for healing.

2E: Supporting Pregnant and Parenting People with a History of Using Substances - Michelle Kavouras

A Peer Doula is a trained professional who provides nonjudgmental, compassionate, and trauma-informed support to individuals navigating substance use and recovery, particularly during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. This role focuses on empowering individuals to make informed choices, advocating for their needs, and ensuring they have access to the necessary resources and support systems. Peer Doulas combine their expertise in harm reduction with an understanding of the unique challenges faced by pregnant and parenting people in recovery, offering practical, emotional, and informational support throughout their journey.

Keynote:

noon – 1:30 p.m. – Karen Iverson Riggers and Lynn McLaughlin

Breakout Session 3 | 2 – 3:30 p.m.

3A: Wellness, Movement and Connection: What's in Your Toolbox? - Connie Calderon

This is an interactive workshop that teaches individuals the importance of wellness, movement, and connection in their recovery. Attendees will learn proven statistics and dynamic activities that they can use for themselves and the participants they serve.

3B: Peer Support in Practice: Integrating Peer Specialists into Outpatient Programs

This interactive session shares real-world lessons from integrating peer recovery support into Rogers Behavioral Health's outpatient grant-funded programs, including WORTH IT and Women's services. Grounded in lived experience, resilience principles, and evidence-based practices, presenters explore role clarity, boundaries, and collaboration between peer specialists and clinical teams. Participants will gain practical insights into how peer support uniquely enhances engagement, recovery outcomes, and equity for underserved and marginalized populations.

3C: Stronger Together: Collective Leadership in Peer Support - Paula Buege + Panel

We bring together peer-run business owners from across Wisconsin to share models, challenges, and wins while highlighting the integrity and diversity of peer-delivered services. Through panel dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and small-group visioning, participants will explore what it takes to sustain peer-run organizations, from supporting staff to building community leadership. This session centers inclusive, values-aligned advocacy and elevates the collective voice of Wisconsin's peer workforce.

3D: Integrating Peer Support in Justice Systems - Nicolette Swokowski

Peer Support Specialists play a critical role in supporting individuals across justice-involved settings by promoting engagement, recovery, and continuity of care through lived experience. This session examines how Peer Support Specialists are integrated into justice systems and highlights the structural and workforce challenges that impact role clarity, supervision, and sustainability. Participants will gain insight into strategies that support ethical, effective integration of Peer Support Specialists within complex justice and behavioral health environments.

3E: Listening That Helps, Not Fixes - Kris Kelly

Motivational Interviewing starts with listening—but listening that truly helps people feel heard. In this peer-focused workshop, participants will explore how empathy builds trust and connection, and how listening can open the door to change without fixing, advising, or pushing. Through simple examples and practice, peers will learn how to listen with purpose and gently support others in moving forward in ways that honor choice, autonomy, and self-direction.

Breakout Session 4 | 4 – 5:30 p.m.

4A: Brushstrokes to Brainwaves: How Art Support Trauma-Informed Care - Heather Andresen

This session explores how the arts and creative expression can support trauma-informed care by promoting safety, choice, and emotional regulation. Participants will learn practical, evidence-informed strategies for integrating art into community-based settings without requiring artistic skill. Through discussion, real-life examples, and a hands-on, interactive, guided, collaborative art project, the session will highlight how art can foster connection, resilience, and healing while respecting the needs and boundaries of peers with traumatic histories.

4B: Development of a Peer-Guided Self-Help Mental Health Workbook for the Prison Setting – Mike Koenigs + Panel

People incarcerated in prisons face significant barriers to accessing effective mental healthcare, including limited therapist availability and concerns about trust, confidentiality, and stigma. The goal of our project is to overcome these barriers through the creation of a self-help workbook co-developed by clinical experts, Certified Peer Specialists with lived experience of incarceration, and academic researchers.

4C: Beyond the Box: Diverse Pathways to Recovery - Abigail Spanjers and Shane Sherburn

An interactive workshop exploring diverse pathways, centering lived experience, choice, and meaning-making during crisis. Participants will examine power, safety, and self-determination in healing while reflecting on the differences between conventional approaches and peer-led, trauma-responsive support. This workshop invites participants to reimagine recovery as relational, choice-driven, and rooted in each person's highest potential.

4D: Supporting Fathers - Daniel Strehlau

As a dad who has faced mental health challenges alongside my children, I've noticed that fathers are often seen as the source of problems or labeled as difficult to engage with. This perception can stem from the fact that many dads carry their own mental health issues or trauma, which they may not openly discuss. This unaddressed pain can lead to behaviors that come off as negative, making it harder for others to connect with them.

4E: Creating Professional Pathways and Long-Term Employment for Peers - RaChandra Peoples

Peer work is powerful—and complicated. This informative workshop supports WI peers and their allies in building long-term, sustainable professional pathways by navigating common role tensions (workplace norms vs. peer values), preventing burnout, addressing barriers like criminal records, and responding to role exploitation while staying rooted in authentic peer support.

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

Breakout Session 5 | 8:30 - 10 a.m.

5A: Emotional Labor Toolkit: For Peer Support Specialists - LeAnn Minor

Peer support specialists carry the hidden weight of emotional labor—holding space, maintaining boundaries, and modeling wellness even in the face of their own challenges. This session equips attendees with strategies to manage emotional energy, reduce burnout, and make their vital work visible. A practical toolkit ensures they can sustain their own resilience while caring for others.

5B: Providing Meaningful Support to Veterans in the MCVTC Peer Mentor Program - Victor Kilpatric

The Milwaukee County Veterans Treatment Court (MCVTC) program is a voluntary program designed to successfully rehabilitate veterans in recognition of their service to our country and the challenges they and their families may encounter.

5C: Turning Court Conditions into Pathways for Parent Empowerment and Recovery - Jonisha Neita + Panel

This is a session that you will explore the When parents and individuals are given the right tools—and supported through positivity, respect, and lived experience—they can transform even court-mandated conditions into stepping-stones for healing, empowerment, and long-term success. This session places a strong emphasis on parent empowerment, highlighting how Certified Peer Specialists (CPS/CPPS), including Certified Parent Peer Specialists, can help families reframe “court conditions” as supportive, confidence-building tools rather than sources of fear or shame.

5D: From Trauma to Empowerment: Supporting Recovery After Toxic Relationships and Narcissistic Abuse - Sage Breslin

Many individuals in recovery have survived toxic relationships, narcissistic abuse, and emotionally harmful environments that deeply affect their healing journey. In this session, Dr. Sage Breslin blends clinical expertise and lived experience to help peers understand the dynamics of toxic relationships and how to support survivors safely and effectively. Participants will learn practical, trauma-informed strategies that strengthen peer support, build resilience, and foster post-traumatic growth.

5E: Human Trafficking and Addiction: A Path to Hope - Lisa McCormick

This session will introduce Human Trafficking, specifically Youth Sex Trafficking, to attendees with basic knowledge of what it is, how do we recognize the signs, and how do we approach someone we believe is being trafficked through the eyes of a parent who has lived through that journey. Lisa will share portions of her son's story along with tools to help those who work with at risk youth.

Breakout Session 6 | 10:30 a.m. - noon

6A: Trauma-Informed Journal: Tools for Peer Specialists and Survivors Part One - Heddy Keith

This foundational session introduces participants to trauma-informed journaling as an accessible, evidence-informed tool for emotional regulation, resilience building, and recovery.

6B: Staying Present: Peer Support Approaches for Dissociative Disorders - Gala Gardiner

Dissociative disorders are often misunderstood, under-recognized, and stigmatized. Even within recovery-oriented systems of care. Through a recovery oriented and trauma informed lens, this presentation will examine how dissociation shows up in everyday peer interactions, why traditional peer approaches may need adaptation, and how peers can foster safety, choice, and connection without pathologizing or forcing disclosure. Emphasis will be placed on mutuality, consent and practical strategies that peers can use to support regulation, presence, and empowerment.

6C: Supervision as a Superpower: Pathway to Skill, Confidence, and Connection - Ellen Healion

Discover how peer supervision can be a dynamic force for growth, leadership, and recovery. This session offers practical strategies and tools to transform supervision into a superpower that empowers peer support teams.

6D: Trauma-Informed Relapse Prevention: How Adverse Childhood Experiences Impact Relapse Risk in Later Sobriety - Janice Johnson Dowd

This workshop examines how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and unresolved trauma affect relapses after the first year of sobriety. Using research and clinical practice, the session highlights late-stage risk factors such as emotional triggers, relationship patterns, and co-occurring symptoms, and discusses screening methods that prevent retraumatization. Participants will leave equipped with practical, trauma-informed tools to identify late-stage relapse risks and support long-term sobriety.

6E: DHS 72 – Presenter TBD

Keynote

noon – 1:30 p.m. - Aaron Hicks and Frank Davis

Breakout Session 7 | 2 – 3:30 p.m.

7A: Empowering Peers: Supporting LGBTQIA+ Individuals with Justice-Impacted Lived Experience - Kaeden Watford

This presentation will explore how to best support LGBTQIA+ peers with justice-impacted lived experience. We will provide deep insights into the rehabilitation review process and equip attendees with skills in trauma-informed care and cultural competence to address the intersectionality of these identities.

7B: HubCAP in Action: Strengthening Peer Support Across Communities - Lola Skenadore

Discover how HubCAP is transforming the landscape of peer support by promoting collaboration, elevating lived experience, and strengthening community care. Attendees will gain insight into HubCAP's approach and explore actionable steps to build more connected, resilient support systems.

7C: Walking the Walk: Bringing Peer Values into Real-World Support - Amy Polsin and Trina Marquez

This interactive workshop explores how CPPS and CPS ethics, scope of practice, and core competencies come to life in everyday peer support. Through real-plays, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving, participants will practice staying grounded in mutuality, avoiding advice-giving, and using OARS and strengths-based communication to support autonomy. Attendees will leave with practical tools and renewed confidence in applying peer values across diverse, real-world settings.

7D: Mobile Outreach Peer Support: Filling the Gaps in Dunn County - Francis Twite

Mobile Outreach Peer Support (MOPS) is a peer-led, harm-reduction-informed program designed to meet people where they are and reduce barriers to support and resources in rural Dunn County. This workshop will highlight how WIMA built and implemented MOPS through lived experience, community partnerships, and flexible outreach strategies to support individuals navigating mental health, substance use, and reentry challenges. Participants will leave with practical insights and foundational tools to replicate or adapt mobile peer support models in their own communities.

7E: When Feelings Feel Heavy: Building Emotional Intelligence for Resilient Peers and Peer Specialists - Patricia Clason

Peer support work is emotionally demanding, and unspoken feelings—ours and those of the people we serve—often drive burnout or disconnection. This interactive workshop explores core emotional intelligence skills (self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and relationship skills) as everyday tools for resilience in peer support roles and in the lives of those we support. Participants will leave with simple, repeatable practices they can use during real world conversations, crisis moments, and long-term recovery focused work.