



Family Peer Advocate (FPA) Credential Information for Applicants FAQ-Traditional

What is a Family Peer Advocate?

Family Peer Advocates go by many names: Parent Partner, Family Mentor, Peer Partner, Family Support Provider, Family Advocate, Family Specialist, Family Advisor, etc. In naming this credential, we chose to highlight the fact that these individuals 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 on empowering family members to find their voice, acquire new skills, and learn how to plan and partner effectively on behalf of their child. In the course of their work, they are also practicing constructive advocacy at all levels, modeling and mentoring families in those same skills.

Family Peer Advocates (FPA) have ‘lived-experience’ navigating one or more of the systems that serve children and families. They are the parent (biological, foster, adoptive) or primary caregiver of a child/youth with significant social, emotional, developmental, medical, addiction and/or behavioral needs. They receive training to develop skills and strategies to empower and support other families. The core required training for this is the Parent Empowerment (PEP) training, but advocates receive a wide range of other training as well.

Family Peer Advocates provide family peer support services in a variety of settings – including independent community-based family support programs, schools, clinics, residential programs, care management and waiver programs, health homes, hospitals, and other community-based organizations. New York’s Family Peer Advocates work in partnership with parents and with service providers from all ‘systems’ including social services, education, mental health, developmental disabilities, juvenile justice, health, and substance abuse. This ‘cross-systems’ work comes naturally to FPAs because family needs cross all systems. FPAs are skilled at supporting parent-professional partnerships. They can also be a tremendous resource as providers adopt family-driven and youth-guided practices.

Family Peer Advocate job descriptions vary depending on the setting, but typically include working with parents/caregivers to provide outreach, support, guidance, skill-building and mentoring. Among the roles a Family Peer Advocate might play are the following:

- providing information and referral
- conducting outreach and engagement
- working with families to discern their strengths, needs, and priorities
- providing 1:1 assistance to help families connect to and participate in services
- accompanying parents to meetings to assure their voice is heard
- increasing parents’ feelings of self-efficacy
- reducing stigma and feelings of isolation
- serving as members of wraparound and child and family planning teams
- helping families identify goals and track progress
- supporting families to develop their ‘informal’ networks of support

- participating as the FPA in specific evidence-based treatment models (e.g. MFG)
- empowering parents by increasing their knowledge and skills
- coaching in constructive self-advocacy skills
- coaching in effective parenting strategies
- initiating and supporting parent groups
- helping families learn about special education services, procedures, and rights
- serving as cultural brokers within organizations and systems
- helping families understand mental health diagnoses, medication, and treatment options
- facilitating effective family-provider partnerships

For additional information on the work of FPAs, please refer to the Family Peer Support Services Definition. This definition was crafted through a consensus process and has been endorsed by the New York State. It is available on-line at www.ftnys.org.

What are the benefits of obtaining a Family Peer Advocate Credential?

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

- Having an FPA Credential is increasingly becoming a hiring requirement and/or preference. Employers will know that anyone with an FPA Credential has common core training and that they are engaged in ongoing professional development.
- Families who work with Family Peer Advocates can also be assured that the FPA has met standard requirements and agreed to follow a code of ethics.
- In the near future, certain services will be billable to Medicaid only if provided by a credentialed Family Peer Advocate. This has the potential to bring new sources of funding into family support programs. 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 the Family Peer Advocate to formally document his/her experience and training and may lead to career advancement opportunities as the profession continues to mature.
- 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 FPA role, specific skills set, and value.

Is the Family Peer Advocate Credential required?

There are a number of changes taking place at state and national levels. These changes will increase the demand for family peer support services and will require that providers of this service be credentialed. In New York State, the recognized credential for family peer support services providers is the FPA Credential.

It is currently a requirement that all providers of family peer support services under the Home and Community Based Services Waiver hired after November 1, 2013, obtain the FPA Credential within two years of being hired. In the near future, it will also be a requirement of all providers under Medicaid managed care.

What are the requirements for the Family Peer Advocate Credential?

FPA Credential Requirements At-A-Glance*	
Lived Experience	Applicants must be the parent (foster, adoptive, or biological) or primary caregiver of a child or adolescent with significant social, emotional, behavioral, mental health, medical, addiction or developmental needs with onset prior to the age of 21 (Child can be older than 21 at time of application)
Age	Applicants must be at least 18 years of age.
Education	HS diploma or TASC (In exceptional cases, documentation of comparable skills may be accepted.)
Training	Successful completion of Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) training.
Work or Formal Volunteer Experience	1000 hours documented service providing peer-to-peer family support and advocacy services to other parents/caregivers in either a paid or 'formal' volunteer capacity.
Complete Application	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervisor's Letter of Recommendation ▪ Two Additional Letters of Recommendation ▪ Signed Family Peer Advocate Code of Ethics ▪ Statement of Lived Experience ▪ Resume ▪ Proof of age

**Please see the Family Peer Advocate Application for complete details.*

Am I eligible if I am not a parent or primary caregiver of a child with social, emotional, developmental, medical, addiction and/or behavioral challenges?

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

This is not, in any way, intended to discount the commitment and expertise of others who provide services to children and families. 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.

Therefore, applicants must be the parent (foster, adoptive, or biological) or primary caregiver of a child or adolescent with significant social, emotional, developmental, medical, addiction and/or behavioral, needs with onset prior to the age of 21. (That child may now be an adult, but the applicant has experience navigating the children's service system and parenting a child with these challenges.)

It is critical that applicants be able and willing to talk about their experience as a parent/caregiver and is able to draw on lived experience as they work with families, providers and policy-makers

Is a PEP Training Certificate of Completion the same as the FPA Credential?

No. Successful completion of PEP Training meets the *training requirement* for the Family Peer Advocate Credential, but it is not the only requirement. We hope that everyone who has completed PEP Training will consider applying for the FPA Credential.

Does the PEP training I took a few years ago ‘count’ to meet FPA Credential requirements?

Yes. Regardless of when you completed your PEP training (the old or new version), it will fulfill the training requirement for the FPA Credential. Carefully read the FPA Credential page of the FTNYS website for instructions on which application to use. If you have additional questions, feel free to call our office at 518-432-0333, ext. 18.

What is the difference between a Professional and a Provisional FPA Credential?

FPA's applying for FPA Credential using the Traditional Credential application will meet both the training and experience requirements necessary to obtain a Family Peer Advocate Professional Advocate Credential. The PFA Professional is valid for 2 years and is renewable with 20 hours of Continuing Education

The FPA Provisional Credential is an option for those FPA's who have taken Traditional PEP training but do not yet meet the 1000 hours of work experience requirement. The FPA Provisional Credential allows an individual to receive a time-limited provisional credential. With a valid Provisional Credential, your employer will be able to bill Medicaid for your work. The FPA Provisional Credential is valid for 18 months and is not renewable.

What are the requirements for a Provisional FPA Credential?

An applicant who has completed the Traditional PEP Training can be provisionally credentialed if they:

- Have completed the Traditional FPA Credential Application;
- Meet all the requirements for the Credential, but have not completed the 1000 hours of required work/formal volunteer experience;

The Provisional Family Peer Advocate Credential will expire 18 months from the time it is granted. If ALL requirements have not been fully met within that timeframe, the applicant will lose their Provisional FPA Credential.

How do I ‘upgrade’ my Provisional FPA Credential to a Professional Credential?

If during the 18-month time period you fulfill the remaining requirements to receive a Professional FPA Credential, you should submit an updated Experience Verification form to us for review. In some instances, we will ask you to submit an additional letter of recommendation from your supervisor. If you have a Provisional FPA Provisional Credential and believe you have met the requirements for a Professional FPA Credential, please get in touch with our office.

It is important to note that the new expiration date for your FPA Credential will be two years from the date you were initially issued a provisional FPA Credential.

For example: if you received your Provisional FPA Credential on January 31, 2011 and you then

complete the requirements for a Professional FPA Credential in March 2012, your new FPA Credential expiration date will be January 31, 2013, two years from the original date NOT two years from the date you moved from Provisional to Professional.

Do I need to change my title to ‘Family Peer Advocate’?

No, you do not. Your title is determined by your employer.

Once advocates have obtained a Family Peer Advocate Credential, we encourage them to include it as a part of their title. We use the following format: name, FPA-C. For example: Mary Jones, FPA-C or Michael Samuels, FPA-C. Be proud of your accomplishment and help raise awareness by letting people know you are a Credentialed Family Peer Advocate!

What is the process for reviewing applications?

Applications will be reviewed by trained FTNYS staff members who will make a determination as to whether the applicant meets the criteria to be credentialed. If the applicant does not meet the criteria their application will be denied. If it is unclear whether they meet the criteria, the application will be referred to a subcommittee of the Workforce Development Advisory Committee 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 your application 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 requires further review.

Will I need to renew my credential?

Yes, starting in 2016, you will need to renew your credential every two years. We will provide you with additional information at the time you are credentialed. This information will also be available on the FTNYS website.

In order to successfully renew your application you will need to do the following:

- Complete an FPA Credential Renewal Application and submit it 30 days prior to the expiration of your FPA 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 on-line courses.
- Complete occasional required trainings on special topics. If required, we will assure that these trainings are widely available through a web-based format.
- There is a fee for FPA Credential Renewal.
- See the FPA Credential Renewal Application FAQ and Application for more information. This is available at www.ftnys.org

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. We can be sure that the requirements for the Family Peer Advocate Credential will change. There may be specific required continuing education courses or topics that you would need to complete in order to renew your Credential, but these would be announced well in advance and would be delivered in a manner that would assure they are accessible to you.

Is there an application fee? Who pays this fee?

There is no application fee at this time.

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

Having a Family 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 any questions or if you require assistance to complete your application, please contact us at fpacredential@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 Family Peer Advocate!