

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 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/young person with significant social, emotional, developmental, medical, substance use 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 Program (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, health homes and HCBS, hospitals, and other community-based organizations. New York State’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 use. 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
- engaging families in services
- 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 child and family planning teams
- helping families identify goals and track progress
- supporting families to develop ‘informal’ networks of support

- participating as the FPA in specific evidence-based treatment models
- empowering parents by increasing their knowledge and skills
- coaching in constructive self-advocacy skills
- coaching in effective parenting strategies
- initiating and supporting parent support and skills 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 New York State.

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. 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.
- Family Peer Support Services are billable to Medicaid only if provided by a credentialed Family 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 a credential provides a structure for a Family Peer Advocate to formally document their 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 in Medicaid that have taken 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.

What are the requirements for the Family Peer Advocate Credential?

FPA Provisional 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, substance use 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 GED (In exceptional cases, documentation of comparable skills may be accepted.)
Training	Successful completion of Traditional PEP or PEP Level 1 training.
Complete Application	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two Letters of Recommendation ▪ Signed Family Peer Advocate Code of Ethics ▪ Statement of Lived Experience ▪ Resume ▪ Proof of age
The Provisional Family Peer Advocate Credential is valid for 18 months	

**Please see the Family Peer Advocate Provisional Application on the FTNYS Website for complete details.*

FPA Professional Credential Requirements At-A-Glance	
Current Provisional FPA Credential	Applicant must hold a valid Provisional FPA Credential and/or meet all the requirements to apply for a Professional FPA Credential
Training	Successful completion of Traditional PEP or PEP Level 1 and 2 training.
Complete Application	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Letter of Recommendation from a supervisor ▪ Signed Family Peer Advocate Code of Ethics ▪ 1000 hours of paid or formal volunteer work
The Professional Family Peer Advocate Credential is valid for 2 years	

**Please see the Family Peer Advocate Professional Application on the FTNYS Website for complete details.*

Am I eligible if I am not a parent or primary caregiver of a child with social, emotional, developmental, medical, substance use 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 Level 1 Training Certificate of Completion, Transcript or the Traditional PEP Certificate of Completion the same as the FPA Provisional Credential?

No. Successful completion of PEP Training meets the *training requirement* for the Family Peer Advocate Provisional Credential, but it is not the only requirement. We hope that everyone who has completed Level 1 or Traditional PEP Training will consider applying for the FPA Provisional Credential.

Does the PEP training I took a few years ago 'count' to meet FPA Credential training requirement?

Yes. Regardless of when you completed your PEP training, it will fulfill the training requirement for the FPA Credential. The application you will use to apply for the FPA Credential is different, depending on the training that you completed. Carefully read the FPA Credential page of the FTNYS website for instructions on which application to use based on the training you completed. If you have additional questions, feel free to call our office at 518-432-0333, ext. 18. There are other requirements in addition to training, as outlined in both the applications.

Do I need to change my title to 'Family Peer Advocate'?

No, you do not. Your title is determined by your employer. Many who have obtained their Family Peer Advocate Credential are including the letters 'FPA-C' as a part of their title. For example: Mary Jones, 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 determine 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 the applicant meets the criteria, their application will be referred to 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 is incomplete and/or requires further review.

Will I need to renew my Credential?

Your FPA **Provisional** Credential is valid for 18 months. ***If you are concerned about completing the training and/or experience requirements during the 18-month time period, please contact us to discuss your options.*** Under special circumstances, you may be eligible to de-activate and/or extend your provisional credential expiration date. Some valid challenges advocates face include, but are not limited to:

- Not working enough hours to reach 1000 hours in 18 months
- Not able to attend the in-person training or complete the coaching calls within the 18-month timeframe
- Illness
- Family Leave
- Job Loss

Your FPA **Professional** Credential will need to be renewed **every two years**. We will provide you with additional information at the time you are credentialed. This information is also available on the FTNYS website.

To check your credential status, you can use the [Credential Verification Tool](#) located 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 no more than 60 days and no less than 30 days prior to the expiration of your FPA Credential.
- Complete a minimum of 20 hours of approved continuing education every two years. We are 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 for an initial Provisional and Professional Credential at this time. As mentioned above, there is a fee to renew a credential.

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!