



## Youth Peer Advocate (YPA) Credential Information for Applicants Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Thank you for your interest in the Youth Peer Advocate Training & Credential program administered by Families Together in NYS, Inc. (FTNYS) and sponsored by the NYS Office of Mental Health (NYSOMH).

### What is a Youth Peer Advocate?

A credentialed Youth Peer Advocate (YPA) is an individual 18-30 years old who has self-identified as a person who has first-hand experience with emotional (mental health), behavioral challenges, and/or co-occurring disorders. YPAs must be able to use lived experience receiving services in child-serving systems as a youth such as mental health, special education, juvenile justice, foster care, or addiction recovery. YPAs share relevant aspects of their personal experience when providing services to youth who are facing similar challenges.

YPAs are an essential part of New York State's system of care — valued as professionals and multidisciplinary partners in treatment, rehabilitation, and support services, including community-based crisis, residential, inpatient, and outpatient services.

### What are Youth Peer Support (YPS) services?

Youth Peer Support (YPS) services are provided by a Credentialed Youth Peer Advocate to youth from birth to age 21 experiencing social, emotional, developmental, substance use or behavioral challenges. Youth Peer Advocates utilize their own lived experience to engage, empower, and support youth by providing the following core service categories:

- Skill Building
- Coaching
- Engagement, Bridging, and Transition Support
- Self-Advocacy, Self-Efficacy, and Empowerment
- Community Connections and Natural Supports

Please refer to the **Youth Peer Support (YPS) Services Definition** for additional information regarding this service:

<https://www.ftnys.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/YPS-Services-Definition-6.25.24.pdf>

### Is the Youth Peer Advocate Credential required?

Provisional (temporary) Credential applications will **only** be processed from candidates currently employed in NYS Office of Mental Health (NYSOMH) licensed, designated or funded programs providing Medicaid reimbursable services of Youth Peer Support or other state approved programs.

Since inception, the Youth Peer Advocate (YPA) Credential is **only** required at the above-mentioned programs. We remain committed to supporting the statewide youth peer workforce through job readiness and quality provision of peer support services. The self-paced, online training modules hosted by our partners at the NYU McSilver Training and Technical Assistance Centers remains publicly available to allow a broader audience to

access free training and explore the youth peer support profession. We continue to encourage supervisors and program management to also access our public training to support Youth Peer Advocates.

### Are there any fees?

No. There are no fees associated with our YPA Credential Trainings. There are also no fees associated with any of the YPA Credential applications.

### What are the eligibility criteria for the Youth Peer Advocate Provisional (temporary) Credential?

YPA PROVISIONAL Credential Requirements At-A-Glance*	
<b>Lived Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An individual who has first-hand experience with emotional (mental health), behavioral challenges, and/or co-occurring disorders.</li> <li>Be able to use lived experience receiving services in child-serving systems as a youth such as mental health, special education, juvenile justice, foster care, or addiction recovery to assist in supporting youth in their resiliency/recovery and wellness.</li> </ul>
<b>Age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicants must be 18-30 years of age</li> <li>(YPA Credentials automatically expire and cannot be renewed on your 31<sup>st</sup> birthday)</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HS diploma, HS Equivalency or a State Education Commencement Credential.</li> <li>(In exceptional cases, documentation of comparable skills may be accepted).</li> </ul>
<b>Employment Verification Form</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently employed in NYSOMH licensed, designated or funded programs providing Medicaid reimbursable services of Youth Peer Support (YPS) or other state approved programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completion of YPA Training Level 1 (online self-paced modules)</li> </ul>
<b>Letters of Recommendation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 letters of recommendation in support of the applicant's qualifications and readiness to maintain high professional standards while working with children/youth.</li> </ul>
<b>YPA Code of Ethics Attestation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicants are required to read and understand the YPA Code of Ethics.</li> <li>Applicants will sign an attestation to uphold these ethical standards.</li> </ul>
*For complete details, access the <b>YPA Provisional Credential Application</b> on the Families Together in NYS website under the Peer Credentials tab: <a href="https://www.ftnys.org/pathway-to-ypa-provisional-credential/">https://www.ftnys.org/pathway-to-ypa-provisional-credential/</a>	

### How can I obtain a YPA Credential before I am employed as a YPA?

You cannot obtain a YPA Credential before you are employed as a YPA at a OMH licensed, designated or funded programs. If your prospective employer has questions about whether you would be eligible for the credential, they can reach out to FTNYS. You can also still complete Level 1 training and share that as evidence of your preparation for the role.

## **What is the process for reviewing applications?**

When we receive your submitted application, you will receive an email acknowledging receipt (remember to check your spam/junk folders). If your application is complete and in good order, it can take up to 6-8 weeks to review, depending on the volume of applications statewide. This timeframe may be extended if your application is incomplete and/or requires further review.

Your application will be reviewed by trained and credentialed FTNYS staff members who will determine whether you meet the criteria to be credentialed. If you do not meet the criteria, your application will not be approved. If it is unclear whether you meet the criteria, your application will be referred to the Youth Peer Advocate Credential Advisory Committee (YPACAC) to assist in a final determination.

## **Is a YPA Training Level One Certificate of Completion or Transcript the same as the YPA Provisional (temporary) Credential?**

No. Successful completion of YPA Training meets the *training requirement* for the Youth Peer Advocate Provisional (temporary) Credential, but it is not the only requirement. We hope that everyone who has completed YPA Training Level 1 will consider applying for the YPA Provisional Credential.

## **Do I need to change my title to ‘Youth Peer Advocate’?**

No. Your title is determined by your employer. However, you are a credentialed Youth Peer Advocate if you hold a valid credential.

## **How can I let others know that I am credentialed?**

Once you are approved for a Youth Peer Advocate Credential, you can use the post-nominal letters associated with the credential. Post-nominal letters are the letters placed after a person's name to indicate that person holds a position, **credential**, academic degree, accreditation and other noteworthy accomplishments.

Credentialed Youth Peer Advocate post-nominal letters are as follows:

Provisional (temporary) Credentialed Youth Peer Advocates = YPA-P

Credentialed Youth Peer Advocates (Professional) = YPA-C

For example: Michael Samuels, YPA-C. Be proud of your accomplishment!

Additionally, YPAs and agencies can check the status of their credentials through the **YPA Credential Verification Tool** available on the Families Together in NYS website under the Peer Credentials tab: [ftnys1.gtdsystems.com/youthpower](https://ftnys1.gtdsystems.com/youthpower)

## **What happens if my Provisional (temporary) Credential expires?**

Your Provisional (temporary) Credential is valid for 18 months. It is expected that you complete all credential training and work experience providing YPSS and apply for a Professional Credential during this time period. In exceptional cases, a one-time, 12-month extension may be granted at FTNYS discretion.

If your Provisional (temporary) Credential expires before you apply for a Professional, you may not refer to yourself as a YPA-P and your agency may not bill for Medicaid reimbursable services until you bring your credential back into good standing.

## What happens when I turn 31 years of age?

Your YPA Credential automatically expires on your 31<sup>st</sup> birthday and cannot be renewed. This happens regardless of the expiration date on your YPA Credential certificate. We hope agencies and supervisors continue to collaborate with advocates to create pathways for career advancement in peer-advised or supervisory roles. We invite you to explore other peer credentials available in New York State.

## What are the requirements for the Youth Peer Advocate Professional Credential?

YPA PROFESSIONAL Credential Requirements At-A-Glance*	
<b>YPA Provisional Credential</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Applicant must hold a valid YPA Provisional (temporary) Credential</li></ul>
<b>Training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Completion of YPA Training Level 2 (online self-paced modules)</li><li>Completion of YPA Advanced Virtual Training</li><li>Completion of YPA Coaching Call Series</li></ul>
<b>Supervisor Recommendation Letter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Applicant's YPA Supervisor must write a letter of recommendation describing the applicant's relevant experience, their capacity to support and empower young people, their capacity to work collaboratively with other professionals, and their capacity to work in a manner that is consistent with the principles of Youth Peer Support.</li></ul>
<b>Work Experience Verification Form</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>600 hours of work experience as a Youth Peer Advocate</li></ul>
<b>YPA Code of Ethics Attestation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Applicants are required to read and understand the YPA Code of Ethics.</li><li>Applicants will sign an attestation to uphold these ethical standards.</li></ul>
<b>Renewal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The YPA Professional Credential must be renewed every two years.</li><li>(20) hours of continuing education; including at least (2) hours of Diversity, Equity &amp; Inclusion (DEI) topics required.</li></ul>
*For complete details, access the <b>YPA Professional Credential Application</b> on the Families Together in NYS website under the Peer Credentials tab: <a href="https://www.ftnys.org/pathway-to-ypa-credential-renewal/">https://www.ftnys.org/pathway-to-ypa-credential-renewal/</a>	

## Can past hours working as a YPA be used towards the Professional Credential?

Yes. The Professional Credential application requires a supervisor signature verifying that you have fulfilled the required 600 hours providing Youth Peer Support Services for young people with emotional (mental health), behavioral challenges, and/or co-occurring disorders. More than one Work Experience Verification form may be used if necessary.

## Will I need to renew my Professional Credential?

Your YPA Professional Credential will need to be renewed every two years. For complete details, access the **Pathway to YPA Credential Renewal** on the Families Together in NYS website under the Peer Credentials tab: <https://www.ftnys.org/pathway-to-ypa-credential-renewal/>

## Additional Questions?

If you have additional questions or if you require assistance with completing your application, please email [YPAcredential@ftnys.org](mailto:YPAcredential@ftnys.org) or call (518) 432-0333 ext. 18. We look forward to supporting you on your journey to becoming a Credentialed Youth Peer Advocate in New York State!