

# Promoting Peer Support in Child Welfare



## Toolkit for Congressional Outreach

Engaging and educating Members of Congress about the value of peer to peer support is critical to advancing peer support as an effective method of assisting children, youth and families.

This toolkit is designed to provide you with a range of tools and opportunities to reach out to your Members of Congress.

### ***Background: Promoting Peer Support in Child Welfare***

***Peer support programs are crucial for children and families***, particularly when children are removed from their parents, whether or not it is through the formal child welfare system. For children, youth, parents, and the caregivers that support them, the ability to turn to individuals in their communities who understand what they are going through is a vital lifeline. Peer support programs offer services and support delivered by individuals who have been through similar experiences - such as navigating the child welfare system or caring for relatives. However, despite their demonstrated efficacy and their unique ability to build trust with children and families, most peer support programs serving families in and around child welfare cannot access the key funding and support opportunities available to other programs. Still, grassroots peer support programs across the country must attempt to leverage community resources and a patchwork of funding to support families during the most difficult times of their lives.

### **Here are some ways to engage your members of Congress:**

1. **Spread the word on social media.** *Help build visibility for peer-to-peer supports by posting messages on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook! Tag your members of Congress in the posts and ask them for their support.*

## Media & Social Media Sample Tools

- For youth and families in #childwelfare, knowing how to get the help you need can be tough. #PeerSupport can help. Learn more about how we provide peer support: [Link to your program's website] #StrengtheningFamilies
- #Peersupport helps [youth/parents/kinship caregivers] feel like they aren't alone. Learn more about how we provide peer support: [Link to your program's website] #StrengtheningFamilies
- #DYK Peer support programs are a critical support for children and families? [Insert your peer support program/organization] is a peer support program for [youth/parents/kinship caregivers] that [add detail re: your program]. Learn more: [Link to your program's website]
- @[Congressperson] #DYK that there's a peer support program in your [state/district] that provides support to [youth/parents/kinship caregivers]? Learn more: [Link to your program's website]
- Peer support programs help ensure children and families involved in the child welfare system can navigate the system and connect with existing services alongside individuals who truly understand what they are going through. Have you or someone you know benefitted from peer support? Share your story with us so we can uplift the power of peers! [Click here to share!](#)

2. **Share your story.** *Have you or someone you know benefited from peer support? Share your story with us so we can uplift the power of peers! [Click here to share!](#)*

3. **Speak up at a Town Hall event.**

Many members hold public events during their Congressional in-district recess periods. Invite a group of partners to attend these event(s) and speak up about the importance of peer supports. Follow your members on social media, check their website, or even call their local district office to see when they will host any public meetings or opportunities to connect.

- a. *Sample volunteer announcement: customize this language to encourage local advocates to attend events*

Dear friends,

As you may know, Congress members always look for opportunities when they are home in [STATE] to meet with constituents. Now is a critical time for us to engage with our elected officials and ask them to support peer support programs like [NAME OF PROGRAM]. Please join me at [DATE, time, Location] for [Representative XX's Town Hall/other event] and help spread the word about our important work.

[Additional details and meet-up information, including who from your group will take the lead on asking questions if allowed].

Sincerely, [Your INFO]

**4. Request a meeting in their district office(s) or host a site visit.**

- a. Find your members of Congress:
  - i. House of Representative member via this [link](#).
  - ii. U.S. Senators via this [link](#).
- b. Sample Meeting / Site Visit Request:

*Customize this message including the relevant representative name, any previous relationship you have.*

Dear [STAFF NAME],

[I've met with you before, I look forward to building a relationship, I have a connection to the office, etc. – whatever is applicable]. I am writing to request a meeting with Rep/Sen [NAME] or you when you are home in the district [preferred dates].

As a [YOUR ROLE] with [ORGANIZATION/PROGRAM] and constituent/resident of [STATE/DISTRICT], I would like to speak with [Rep/Sen X] about how peer support programs like [NAME OF LOCAL PROGRAM] help improve the well-being of children and families.

Peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, and emotional, social, or practical help to each other. In the child welfare system, these services are delivered by youth and young adults, parents, and kinship caregivers with experience in the system to individuals facing similar circumstances.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with REP/ SEN NAME and share more about the value of these programs. We also would be pleased to host REP / SEN NAME for a site visit to our program when they are in-district.

I am available for an in-district meeting [DATES] and would welcome a meeting to discuss these issues further at any time convenient to you.

Thank you!

Best,

[Your info]

### **Congressional Outreach Follow-up [Report Form](#)**

Use this [link](#) to tell us about your meetings / contacts with Congressional office - whether it's social media, attending a town hall or having a meeting.

### **Talking Points**

You can use the toolkit linked below to inform what you share with your Member of Congress. What's most important is that you share why this is important or matters to you! We encourage you to share stories or examples of how peer support benefited you, someone you served or loved ones. This will help staffers and Members understand the real-life benefits of peer support.

- [Talking Points - Congressional Leave-Behind](#)