

WINTER 2025

MILKWEED NEWS

Official Newsletter of Milkweed Connections LLC



The Warmth Within

The new year has brought frigid temperatures, but the Milkweed team has stayed metaphorically warm by providing support to participants, each other, and the community. Shelley and Rachel have stepped up to lead in capacities outside their regular roles (see page 3). In addition, Milkweed is pleased to introduce a new offering: parent peer support; read on to learn more about this exciting new program. We are looking forward to 2025 and all the ways in which we can both help and learn from others in our many roles.



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Program Spotlight

Parent Peer Support

Milkweed is pleased to announce parent peer support as our newest offering. Certified Parent Peer Specialists (CPPS) are similar to regular peer supporters, as both draw on lived experience to inform their work. However, CPPS have specific experience parenting youth with mental health and/or substance use challenges. Just like standard peer specialists, they receive additional training to help them better support the people they serve.

CPPS work with parents, caregivers, and families to provide non-judgmental support and advocacy. The help empower parents in a number of ways, from helping to navigate service systems to modeling and teaching parenting skills and behaviors to simply letting folks know that they are not alone in their experiences.

Our first team members to complete CPPS training were Tricia Brown (below, left) and Charlie Sunn (below, right), who completed training in 2024. Not only were they the first members to be able to provide this service, they also gave a presentation to the team about CPPS and its benefits, and helped admin with program development. They are both able to provide this service at the time of writing.

Parent peer support is still relatively new. Wisconsin was one of the first states to certify Parent Peer Specialists in 2018, and today there are fewer than 100 people who work as a CPPS. Milkweed is excited to both offer this service and continue to expand it. As of 2025, we have joined with Polk, Dunn, and Chippewa counties to expedite support for families in need. We are also pleased to announce that team members Hope Remus, Marie Reynolds, and Dan Strehlau are training to become CPPS; together with Tricia and Charlie, this group will help families in CCS and through our partnership with the aforementioned counties.





Milkweed Leads

Certified Peer Specialist Advisory Committee



Milkweed Connections is proud to have a member serving on the statewide Certified Peer Specialist Advisory Committee (CPSAC). This committee exists to advise the Wisconsin Department of Health Services in its support and oversight of Certified Peer Specialists and Certified Parent Peer Specialists. Milkweed's Shelley DeSmith (pictured, left) has served on CPSAC for a year and a half. In addition to serving on the committee, she also sits on the professional development subcommittee, a group that tackles various projects that support and improve initial CPS training and continuing education endeavors for peer and parent peer specialists. Shelley joins other peer specialists from around the state, as well as state and agency representatives, on the CPSAC. Thanks to Shelley for doing this important work!

Emerging Leaders Program

Congratulations to Rachel Hayden (pictured, right), who has been selected by Wisconsin DHS to participate in the Emerging Leaders Program in 2025. The program prepares the next generation of behavioral health leaders, who are community-based direct service providers, to engage and support underserved communities and populations and each other. Over the course of 8 months, each participant attends training, works with a mentor, and develops and completes a project that will address health needs in their underserved communities. The program aims to increase representation in community leadership and to help provide much-needed services to people who currently lack them.





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The Milkweed team doesn't get to see each other often because we don't work together in one location. Now, we've begun holding social events so we can get to know each other better. The first outing was to Bowl Winkle's, where Jason, Terra, Leah, and Dominique met to enjoy each other's company.



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