



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

### **What is a Youth Peer Advocate?**

A Youth Peer Advocate (YPA) is an individual between 18 and 30 years of age who has self-identified as a person who has first-hand experience with emotional (mental health), behavioral challenges, and/or co-occurring disorders. YPAs are able to use their lived experience with a disability, mental illness, or involvement with juvenile justice, special education, substance use disorder, or foster care to assist in supporting youth in their resiliency/recovery and wellness.

YPAs receive training to develop skills and strategies to empower and support other young people. The core required training for this is the Youth Peer Advocate Training, though advocates receive a wide range of other training too.

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

Youth Peer Support (YPS) services are formal and informal services and supports provided to youth, who are experiencing social, medical, emotional, developmental, substance use, and/or behavioral challenges in their home, school, placement, and/or community centered services. These services provide the training and support necessary to ensure engagement and active participation of the youth in the treatment planning process and with the ongoing implementation and reinforcement of skills.

Youth Peer Support activities must be intended to develop and achieve the identified goals and/or objectives as set forth in the youth's individualized treatment plan. The structured, scheduled activities provided by this service emphasize the opportunity for the youth to expand the skills and strategies necessary to move forward in meeting their personal, individualized life goals, develop self-advocacy skills, and to support their transition into adulthood. This service is available for children from birth to 21 years of age.

Please refer to the **Youth Peer Support (YPS) Services Definition** for additional information regarding this service. This definition was crafted through a consensus process and has been endorsed by the New York State Office of Mental Health. <https://www.ftnys.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/YPS-Services-Definition-6.25.24.pdf>

### **What are the benefits of obtaining a Youth Peer Advocate Credential?**

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

- Having a YPA Credential is increasingly becoming a hiring requirement and/or preference. Employers will know that anyone with a YPA Credential has specialized training and they are engaged in ongoing professional development.

- Young people and their families can also be assured that the YPA has met standard requirements and agreed to follow a code of ethics.
- Youth Peer Support Services will be billable to Medicaid only if provided by a credentialed Youth 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 your credential provides a structure for a Youth Peer Advocate to formally document their experience and training which may lead to career advancement opportunities.
- 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 YPA role, specific skills set, and values.

### Is the Youth Peer Advocate Credential required?

There are several changes in Medicaid that have taken place at state and national levels. These changes will increase the demand for Youth Peer Support and will require that providers of this service be credentialed. In New York State, the recognized credential for Youth Peer Support service providers is the YPA Credential.

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

YPA PROVISIONAL Credential Requirements At-A-Glance*	
<b>Lived Experience</b>	Be an individual 18 to 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. Be able to use lived experience with a disability, mental illness, or involvement with juvenile justice, special education, substance use disorder, or foster care to assist in supporting youth in their resiliency/recovery and wellness.
<b>Age</b>	Applicants must be 18-30 years of age (YPA Credentials automatically expire and cannot be renewed on your 31 <sup>st</sup> birthday)
<b>Education</b>	HS diploma, HS Equivalency or a State Education Commencement Credential. (In exceptional cases, documentation of comparable skills may be accepted).
<b>Training</b>	Completion of YPA Training Level One (online self-paced modules)
<b>Letters of Recommendation</b>	2 letters of recommendation in support of the applicant's qualifications and readiness to maintain high professional standards while working with children/youth.
<b>YPA Code of Ethics</b>	Applicants are required to read and understand the YPA Code of Ethics. Applicants will sign an attestation to uphold these ethical standards.
*For complete details, access the <b>YPA Provisional Credential Application</b> on the Families Together in NYS website under the Workforce Development tab: <a href="https://www.ftnys.org/yp-ypa-credential/">https://www.ftnys.org/yp-ypa-credential/</a>	

Employment as a YPA is **not** required to take YPA Training Level One (online self-paced modules) or to apply for the YPA Provisional (temporary) Credential.

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

YPA PROFESSIONAL Credential Requirements At-A-Glance*	
<b>YPA Provisional Credential</b>	Applicant must hold a valid YPA Provisional (temporary) Credential
<b>Training</b>	Completion of YPA Training Level Two (online self-paced modules) Completion of YPA Virtual Live Training Completion of YPA Coaching Call Series
<b>Supervisor Recommendation Letter</b>	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.
<b>Work Experience</b>	600 hours of work experience as a YPA (paid or formal volunteer work accepted)
<b>YPA Code of Ethics</b>	Applicants are required to read and understand the YPA Code of Ethics. Applicants will sign an attestation to uphold these ethical standards.
<b>Renewal</b>	The YPA Professional Credential must be renewed every two years. 20 hours of continuing education credits (including at least 2 hours of DEI content) are required. See the <b>YPA Professional Credential Renewal and Continuing Education FAQ</b> for more information: <a href="https://www.ftnys.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/YPA-Professional-Renewal-CE-FAQ-FINAL-June-2024-combined-1.pdf">https://www.ftnys.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/YPA-Professional-Renewal-CE-FAQ-FINAL-June-2024-combined-1.pdf</a>
*For complete details, access the <b>YPA Professional Credential Application</b> on the Families Together in NYS website under the workforce Development tab: <a href="https://www.ftnys.org/yp-ypa-credential/">https://www.ftnys.org/yp-ypa-credential/</a>	

### 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.

### Am I eligible if I am not a young adult, peer, or do not have experience with the child serving systems (i.e., juvenile justice, special education, substance use disorder, or foster care)?

No. This credential is designed specifically for individuals working as peers to provide support and advocacy to young people experiencing similar challenges.

This is not intended to discount the commitment and expertise of others who provide services to young people. 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.

It is critical that applicants be able and willing to talk about their lived experience as a young person and be able to draw on that experience as they work with young people, providers and policymakers.

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

When we receive your application, we will send you an email acknowledging receipt. If your application is complete and in good order it can take up to 4-6 weeks to review and issue your credential. This time period may be shorter when there is a low volume of applicants. This time period may be extended if your application is incomplete and/or requires further review.

Your application will be reviewed by trained FTNYS staff members who will determine whether you meet the criteria to be credentialed. If you do not meet the criteria, your application will be denied. If it is unclear whether you meet the criteria, your application will be referred to the Youth Peer Services Advisory Council so that a final determination can be made.

### **Is a YPA Training Level One Certificate of Completion or Transcript the same as the YPA Provisional 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 One will consider applying for the YPA Provisional Credential.

### **Does the YPA Training expire?**

No. Regardless of when you completed your YPA training, it will fulfill the training requirement for the YPA Credential. If you have additional questions, please email [YPAcredential@ftnys.org](mailto:YPAcredential@ftnys.org). There are other requirements in addition to training, as outlined in both applications.

### **Can past hours working as a YPA be used towards the credential?**

Yes. The Professional Application requires a supervisor signature verifying that you have fulfilled the required 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 Credential?**

Your YPA Provisional (temporary) Credential is valid for 18 months and cannot be renewed. Extensions are available for advocates who are not able to meet the training and/or work experience requirements during the 18 month period. Email us at [YPAcredential@ftnys.org](mailto:YPAcredential@ftnys.org) for more information.

Your YPA Professional Credential will need to be renewed every two years. See the **YPA Professional Credential Renewal and Continuing Education FAQ** for more information: <https://www.ftnys.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/YPA-Professional-Renewal-CE-FAQ-FINAL-June-2024-combined-1.pdf>

### **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.

### **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:

Provisionally (temporarily) Credentialed Youth Peer Advocates = YPA-P

Credentialed Youth Peer Advocates (Professionally) = 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 Workforce Development tab:

[ftnys1.gtdsystems.com/youthpower](http://ftnys1.gtdsystems.com/youthpower)

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

Having a Youth 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	Proof of citizenship/immigration status
Child sexual abuse registry clearance	Criminal background checks
Mandated reporter training	Driving record/insurance
Safety training	Reference checks
Agency required orientation training	Training in evidence-based practices

### **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!