

PEER COUNSELING

The federal definition of peer counseling: counseling, teaching, information sharing, and similar kinds of contact provided to consumers by other individuals with disabilities. Peer counseling may take place by phone or in person. This activity **MUST** be provided by an individual with a disability.

EXAMPLES

- Peer support to assist an individual in coping with a disability
- Peer support to assist with problem solving
- Peer employment mentoring

Peer counseling can come in different forms: groups of people, online groups or one-on-one.

- Group counseling includes low vision support groups that can be found in most local communities. Support groups usually blossom from a few people who find a common issue (i.e. low vision) and get together to talk about it.
- Online groups are very popular because they allow people to connect from different cities, states and even countries.
- One-on-one counseling can be very rewarding for both individuals. Sometimes the two are paired as a mentor and mentee to have one person lead the other and give examples of what he/she went through. Other times the pair may be going through the same phases of a disease or disability at the same time and use each other for support. Once a person realizes his/her barrier(s) a Center for Independent Living can help find another person with the same barrier(s) or an individual who has already overcome those same barrier(s).

Peer counseling provides the individual with some comfort knowing that someone else has been through similar experiences, knows how the consumer feels, and can sympathize with him/her.

A consumer at a focus group overheard another consumer talking about her hardships. Later, he called the Center for Independent Living and offered to mentor her since he has been blind for over 15 years. When told that another person who has no vision is able to live at home independently, the consumer's spirits lifted and she said she would call him.

There are also several associations a person who has low vision can join.

Kansas associations

Kansas Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – www.kabvi.com

Northwest Kansas Low Vision Association

Southwest Kansas Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Topeka Association for the Visually Impaired

National associations

American Association for the Deaf-Blind – www.aadb.org

American Council of the Blind – www.acb.org

American Foundation for the Blind – www.afb.org

National Association of Blind Students – www.nabslink.org

National Association for the Blind Veterans – www.nabv.org

National Federation of the Blind – www.nfb.org

Low vision support groups in Kansas

(contact person, address and phone number)

Emporia – Ann Pearce 629 Poyntz Avenue Manhattan 785-776-4741

Fort Scott – Shelia Marque 320 S Broadway Pittsburg 620-231-5300

Garden City – Western Kansas Low Vision 620-275-7248

Great Bend – Paul Berscheidt CKAVI 3600 Broadway Great Bend (620) 792-1232

Hays – NKAVI 2502 Sherman Ave. Hays, KS 67601

Hutchinson – David Sieg Delos V. Smith Senior Center 620-662-9403

Independence – Shelia Marque 320 S Broadway Pittsburg 620-231-5300

Iola – Shelia Marque 320 S Broadway Pittsburg 620-231-5300

McPherson – 500 W Bluestem North Newton 316-284-2900

Ottawa – East Central Kansas Area Agency on Aging 785-242-7200

Pittsburg – Shelia Marque 320 S Broadway Pittsburg 620-231-5300

Topeka – KABVI 603 SW Topeka Blvd # 304 Topeka 785-235-8990

Wichita – Envision 610 N Main Wichita 316-440-1600

Yates Center– Shelia Marque 320 S Broadway Pittsburg 620-231-5300

Contact the Department of Aging to find a senior center in your area for other support groups not listed above.

www.agingkansas.org

If you still cannot find a low vision support group in your area, contact any member of iKan for assistance.