Texas is employing peer counselors to provide support to people with serious mental illness. More than 900 people have completed the statewide peer specialist training and certification program, which includes coursework in ethics, effective listening, and supporting individuals in recovery. Most certified peer specialists work in community mental health clinics and state hospitals, where they help patients with serious mental illness manage their symptoms and adopt healthy coping strategies. According to Jim Zahniser of the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, peer support is not new, but research has just recently demonstrated its effectiveness. Because they have experienced similar challenges, peers can be particularly effective at connecting with patients and encouraging them to maintain treatment. “One of the problems with mental health is we’ve learned how to keep people ‘stable’ on their medications and get them out of the hospital. But recovery is about having a life in the community,” said Zahniser. “And peer services are often focused on those things: ‘How do you get your life back?’” Texas is among more than 35 states that use Medicaid to fund peer services.

Spark Extra! Learn more about peer specialist training and certification in Texas.