



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

DBSA Awarded VA Contract to Train Veterans as Peer Specialists

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 8, 2013, Chicago, IL—The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has awarded the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) a second contract for training and certification of peer support staff employed by VA facilities across the country. A peer support specialist is an individual with the lived experience of a mental health condition who has been trained and certified to help peers gain hope and move forward in their own recovery.

Training prepares individual Veterans to assume roles in VA medical centers and other facilities as part of major expansion of peer support services within VA facilities. DBSA's initial training contract began in October 2012, and the new contract provides for DBSA to train an additional 160 Veterans during 2013. The first training course kicked off in February 2013.

"DBSA's long history of success in providing skills-based training for peer specialists makes it a strong partner for our efforts in this arena," says Dan O'Brien-Mazza, National Director of Peer Support Services for the VA Office of Mental Health Services.

The rapid increase in peer support positions results from an executive order, issued on August 31, 2012 by President Barack Obama, to improve access to mental health services for Veterans. The order directed the VA to expand its peer workforce by an additional 800 individuals.

These new positions will only go to Veterans who have recovered or are recovering from a mental health condition and who are trained and certified according to VA requirements.

DBSA President Allen Doederlein is honored to bring DBSA's nationally recognized training services to Veterans. "We know from 30 years of promoting and fostering peer support and peer leadership that sharing experience of a mental health condition has a unique power to affect understanding, acceptance, and a belief that recovery from debilitating mental health symptoms is possible," says Doederlein. "To bring this peer perspective into the lives of our nation's Veterans who need mental health care is an opportunity to celebrate their selfless dedication to our nation's safety and give back to those who give so much."

Under the contract, DBSA provides comprehensive instruction in 34 competency areas through a combination of distance learning and face-to-face training courses. Trainees must satisfactorily complete both a written exam and in-person skills observation. Trainers all have the lived experience of a mental health condition and a minimum of three years experience as peer specialists.

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*The **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)** is the leading patient-directed national organization focusing on depression and bipolar disorder. The organization fosters an environment of understanding about the impact and management of these life-threatening illnesses by providing up-to-*



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date, scientifically-based tools and information. DBSA supports research to promote more timely diagnosis, develop more effective and tolerable treatments and discover a cure. The organization works to ensure that people living with mood disorders are treated equitably. Assisted by a scientific advisory board comprised of the leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders, DBSA has nearly 700 peer-run support groups across the country. Support groups and chapters serve more than 50,000 people every year, and DBSA's educational materials, public programs, and media activities reach more than 2 million individuals each year. DBSA's mission is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders.

For more information, please visit www.DBSAAlliance.org or call (800) 826-3632.