



GPS Facilitator Training for MA DPH Bureau of Substance and Addiction Services (BSAS) 2024



REPORT



GPS

GROUP
PEER
SUPPORT

Learning Impact Report: GPS Facilitator Training Spring 2024

MA DPH Bureau of Substance and Addiction Services (BSAS)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2019, GPS Group Peer Support (GPS) has contracted with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance and Addiction Services (BSAS) to provide facilitator training to the BSAS workforce. Through this endeavor, over 650 BSAS-affiliated providers and recovery coaches have been trained in the GPS model of group-based support. As a result, GPS Support Groups focused on recovery from substance use disorder are available to diverse populations across the Commonwealth through BSAS-affiliated programs.

GPS Group Peer Support (GPS) is a mental wellness intervention that mitigates the long-term effects of stress, strain, and trauma. Incorporating elements of mindfulness-based stress reduction, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, peer-to-peer support, psychosocial education, and other evidence-based modalities, GPS is designed for the rapid implementation of essential mental health support during times of stress, crisis, and change. The GPS model has been successfully implemented among diverse populations. It can be delivered by mental health clinicians or trained, non-clinical workers with relevant lived experience.

The GPS Facilitator Training delivered in Spring 2024 was successful, with all participants (100%) reporting that they would recommend the training to a colleague. Pre- and post-training surveys found statistically significant increases in confidence levels across all measured areas of learning. Participants also reported that the GPS training was unique, helpful, and powerful.

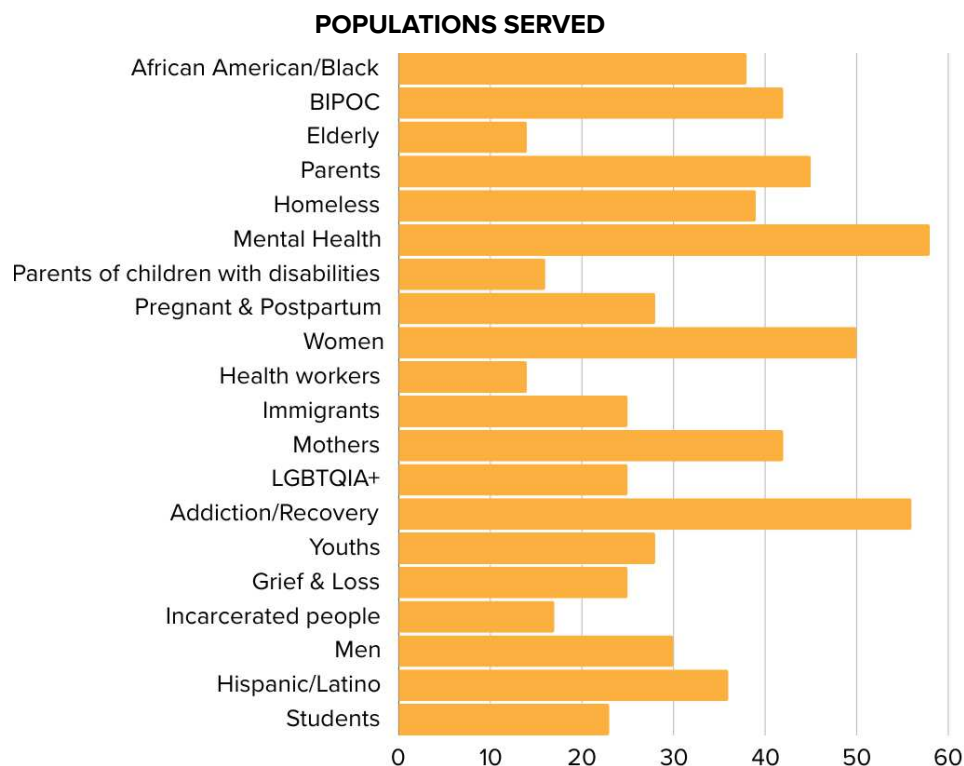
TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

Demographic Information for Training Participants

BSAS had 44 participants attend this training. Among participants ages 18 to over 60, White participants made up 49% of the training, while 13% were Black, African American, or African, 16% Hispanic/Latino(a), 16% Asian or Asian American, and 5% Middle Eastern or North African. Of participants, 81% identified as women, 16% identified as men, and 2% as non-binary. While 95% of participants were comfortable communicating in English, 12% could communicate in Spanish, and 3% in Arabic. Further, 21% of participants identified as a person with a disability or other chronic condition.

The majority of participants (63%) had not received group facilitation training in the past even though 70% of participants currently run support groups. This training was accessible to a wide range of educational backgrounds, as only 27% had master’s degrees, and the remaining participants had varying amounts of higher education (bachelor’s degree 30%; associate’s degree 6%; some college 16%), and 11% reported having a GED or high school degree.

Participants serve a wide range of populations, with the largest two being addiction/recovery and mental health.



EVALUATION METHODS

Training participants were asked to complete pre- and post-training electronic surveys. The surveys were anonymous. The pre-survey included demographic information, as well as questions about their work, their experience running support groups, and their confidence levels in the various aspects of running support groups which would be covered in the training. The post-training survey included some of the same questions from the pre-survey to measure change (specifically confidence levels), as well as several debriefing questions regarding the participants' experience in the training.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Participants fully recommend this training to their colleagues.

All participants who completed the post-training survey overwhelmingly responded that they would recommend the facilitator training to their colleagues (100%).

Training Experience

When asked questions about their experience in the training, expertise of trainers, the GPS Group Peer Support model, and GPS support groups, participants overwhelmingly responded positively. When it came to their overall learning experience, the majority of participants (63%) rated the training “excellent.” Seventy-five percent of participants rated the overall expertise of GPS trainers as “excellent,” while 70% found the GPS model itself to be “excellent.” Finally, 75% of all participants felt that the online support they received during the training was “excellent.”

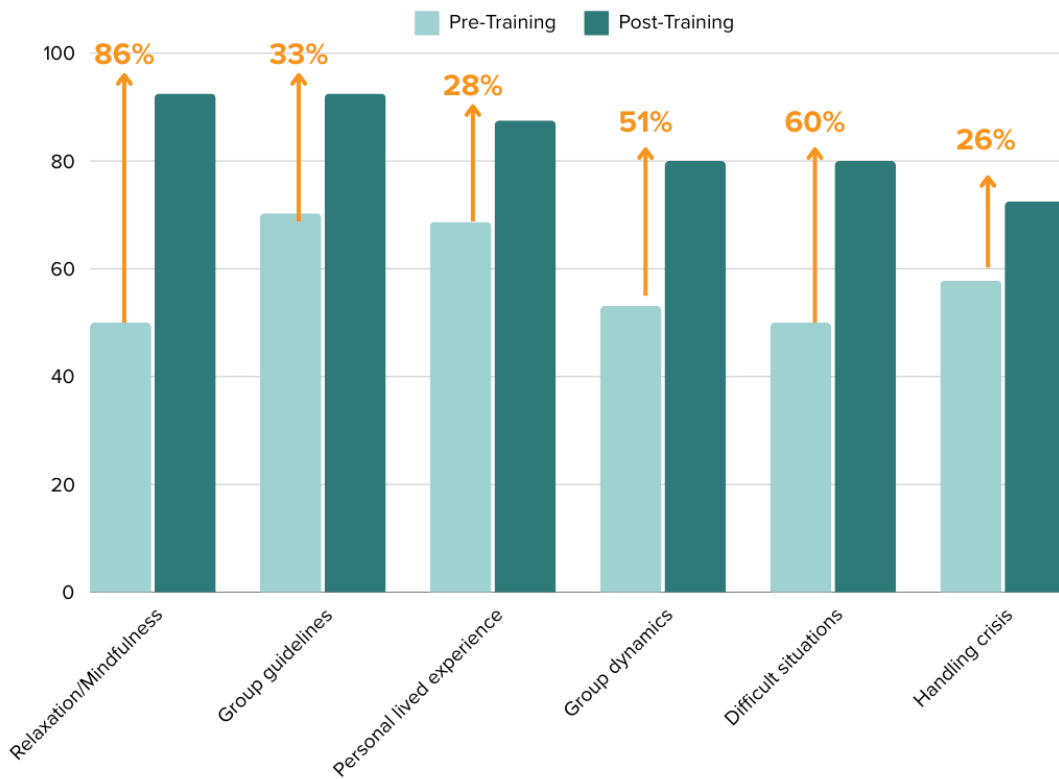
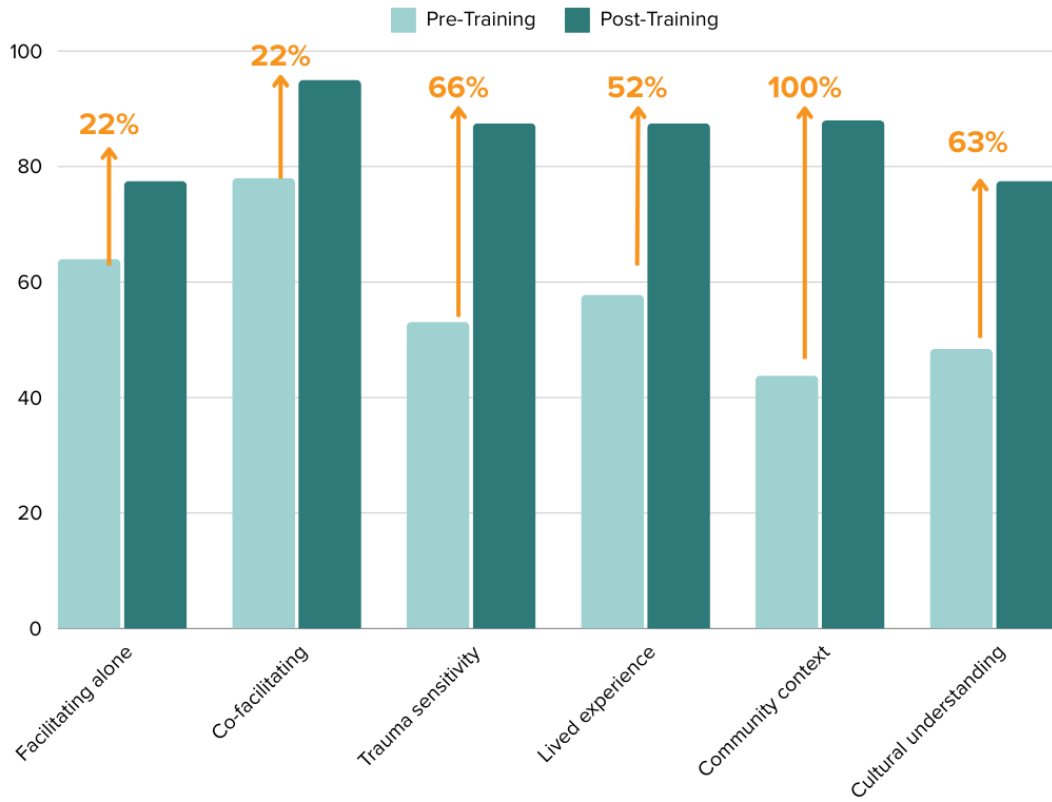
Confidence Within Leading a Support Group

The graphs below show the change in confidence levels of participants before and after the training. Confidence levels increased in all areas, with a baseline increase of at least 21% across every category, including **an 86% increase in confidence levels when it comes to leading relaxation/mindfulness exercises for groups.**

The following areas were measured (abbreviated below):

- Facilitating groups alone
- Co-facilitating groups with another leader
- Creating a trauma-sensitive setting and using trauma-informed skills in leading groups
- Including content related to the lived experience of group members
- Discussing the community context of individuals in group
- Cultural understanding and implementation in leading groups
- Leading relaxation/mindfulness exercises for groups
- Explaining group guidelines
- Sharing personal lived experience appropriately as a facilitator
- Managing group dynamics
- Managing difficult situations
- Appropriately attending to individuals in crisis

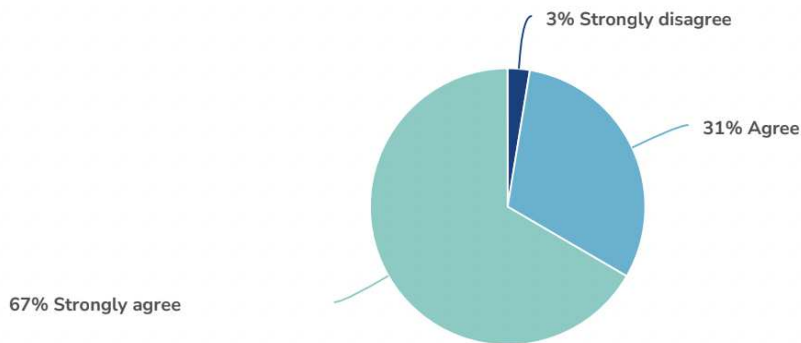
CONFIDENCE LEVELS



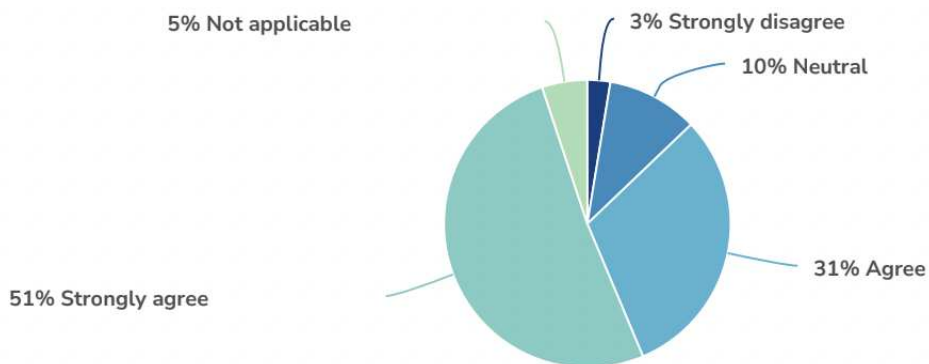
Measuring Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

GPS Group Peer Support has a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Across all of its programming, it is crucially important that everyone feels seen, heard, and validated. In order to ensure that our training is meeting the needs of the diverse populations we serve, participants were asked several questions on this topic. When asked if the training created a safe space for people of all identities, 92% of participants agreed that it had done so. A total of 97% agreed that diverse perspectives were actively sought and valued during the training sessions. When asked if GPS takes appropriate action to address issues related to discrimination or bias, 82% of participants agreed. Finally, 89% of respondents felt that the training had helped them to better understand the intersection between trauma and race, culture, ethnicity, and identity.

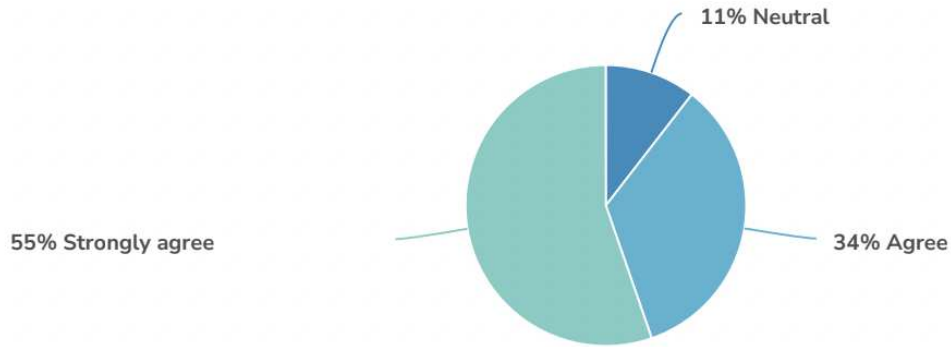
Diverse perspectives were actively sought and valued during training sessions



GPS takes appropriate action to address issues related to discrimination or bias

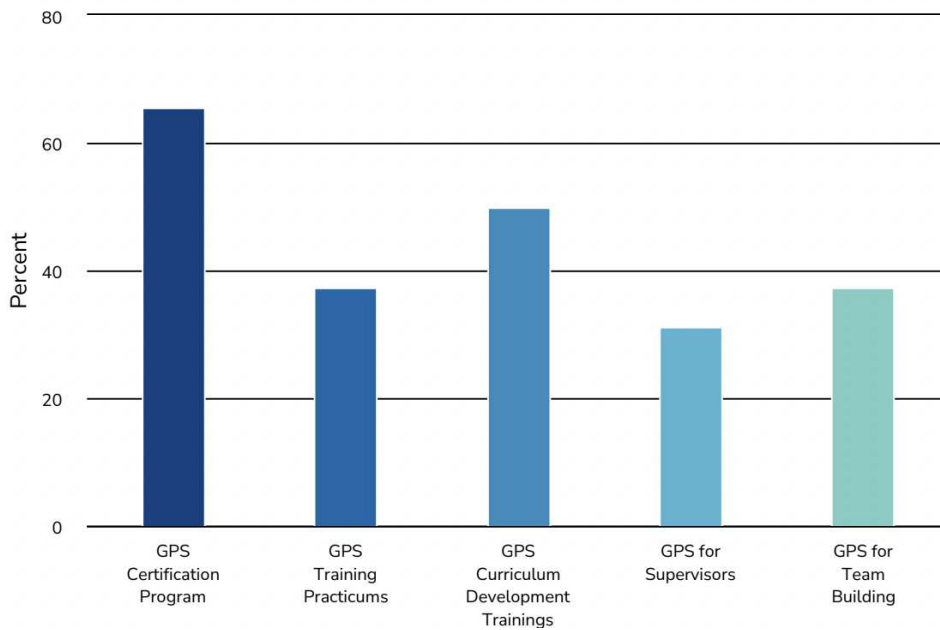


Training helped better understand the intersection between trauma and race, culture, ethnicity, and identity



Interest in Future Learning Opportunities with GPS

The graph below shows that participants indicated a strong interest in attending future GPS training programs. Most notably, 66% of respondents hoped to take next steps to become certified in the GPS model.



Qualitative Responses

Facilitator training was specifically helpful for participants' day-to-day work.

Participants came from a variety of professional backgrounds, but the overwhelming consensus was that the training they received would be useful and supportive in their job.

“The trauma-informed lens aligns perfectly with my own therapeutic lens, so the GPS model helps to reinforce many aspects of my work.”

— Spring 2024 Facilitator Training Participant

- “This training will help me in facilitating groups for families of people in recovery”
- “The training was especially useful in many ways. Trauma-Informed Skills: Essential for creating safe spaces for trauma survivors. Cultural Competence: Enhanced my ability to understand and support diverse clients. Group Facilitation: Improved skills in managing group dynamics and difficult situations. These aspects are crucial for effectively supporting my clients in their healing and empowerment journey.”
- “The trauma-informed approach of GPS and language offered will be very useful in leading these groups.”

Participants had the opportunity to improve and strengthen their skills and education.

Participants noted that their confidence in their skills and ability increased significantly across a variety of areas.

“I improved the most in creating trauma-sensitive environments and using trauma-informed skills. This has greatly enhanced my ability to support group members effectively.”

— Spring 2024 Facilitator Training Participant

- “Having a script that includes all the elements that are needed but is also comfortable for me and in my own words so that it flows naturally and genuinely.”
- “Why it's important to be prepared and trauma-informed. There is an art and a flow to this that's safe and works for everyone.”

- “Knowing that it is okay to not have an answer to everything and being an active listener is sometimes what people want. The power of saying ‘no’ and giving participants that power to say no.”

Facilitator Training is valuable and necessary.

Participants found the training to be incredibly worthwhile, and 100% of them would recommend the training to colleagues.

“GPS training is a chance to see trauma-informed approaches to groups in action. This is different than simply saying ‘we take a trauma-informed approach.’ Trainers and participants shared experiences and approaches I found very helpful.”

— Spring 2024 Facilitator Training Participant

- “This is a great place to start with learning how to create a space where people can begin to process the experiences that they are living with others having a similar experience.”
- “It was an active way of receiving training for facilitating support groups. You will learn or adapt new things to be able to bring to your support groups. It will change the perspective of how ‘perfect’ a group has to be.”
- “I would highly recommend it as a way to decrease the stress and uncertainty of running support groups.”
- “This is an excellent training program for anyone wanting to learn about group facilitation, whether as a new or experienced practitioner.”

IMPACT AND NEXT STEPS

The positive impact on individuals who are trained in the GPS model is clear. Their confidence levels in all areas of group facilitation increased. Their commitment to running trauma-informed support groups in their community grew. Their desire for additional professional development and training in the GPS model was clearly indicated. The majority of participants were already running support groups, and yet, they were eager and ready to implement the GPS model in their groups. The GPS model and facilitation training fills a previously unfulfilled need for group facilitation structure that is trauma informed, accessible, and culturally adaptable. The more we build the capacity for peer support in the recovery communities, the higher quality of care we will be able to provide.

ADDENDUM

TRAINING CONTENT AND OVERVIEW

- The GPS Spring Facilitator Training took place over four weeks. Each training session was 2.5 hours on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.
- Training was conducted virtually on Zoom.
- Participants were required to attend their opening and closing practicums live. The remainder of the training was available as live sessions or recordings.
- Training dates: May 7th - May 30th, 2024
- Total training hours: 20

Training Schedule

Week 1: Tues, Wed, Thurs – Opening Practicums

- The Opening Practicum invites individuals to experience a GPS support group firsthand as a participant. Practicum Sessions are experiential opportunities to apply learning, practice skills, and build confidence in facilitating the model.

Week 2: Tues – Introduction to GPS & The Power of Groups

Wed - Mindfulness Rest Stop

Thurs - GPS Trauma-informed Guidelines

Week 3: Tues - Realities of Life & Principles, Values & Strengths

Wed - The Role of the GPS Group Facilitator and the Process of Check in

Thurs - Reflective Listening, Weaving, Grounding, & Closing for the GPS Group

Week 4: Tues, Wed, Thurs - Closing Practicum in small groups

- The Closing Practicum allows participants an opportunity to practice what they learned throughout the training, by co-facilitating a live GPS support group of fellow facilitators.

About GPS

GPS Group Peer Support (GPS) is a mental wellness intervention that mitigates the long-term effects of stress, strain, and trauma. Incorporating elements of mindfulness-based stress reduction, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, peer-to-peer support, psychosocial education, and other evidence-based modalities, GPS is designed for the rapid implementation of essential mental health support during times of stress, crisis, and change. The GPS model has been successfully implemented among diverse populations. It can be delivered by mental health clinicians or trained, non-clinical workers with relevant lived experience.

A note about the language used throughout: GPS values inclusion and diversity, and strives to use respectful terms and language for individual and community identities. Throughout this material, whenever possible, we have used terms that are most widely accepted by the communities they represent in order to refer to people through the language they use for themselves. We recognize that language is frequently changing around topics such as gender, race, sexuality, and other identity or community labels and terms. As we learn and grow as an organization, and as terms change or evolve to be more inclusive and respectful or preferred within communities, we will update our manuals, curriculums, and reports.

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