

## Measure X Draft Letter, Delta Peers

Greetings Measure X Board, Jo Bruno here, peer specialist and lived-experience expert. Currently, I hold the consumer seat on the Council for Homelessness and I'm the founder of Delta Peers. I'm coming to you with a shared voice of our community members. A little about me first, I was born and raised in Pittsburg, east Contra Costa County. I come from a family who suffered from alcoholism and mental health issues, but never sought to get help. I'm not even sure they knew help was an option. As an adult, I've realized that I wish someone would have gotten involved with my childhood because I came from an abusive, traumatizing household. I too suffered during my young adult life because of PTSD of that childhood, which grew into severe anxiety, self-harm and depression as an adult. I too became the abuser. I was nearly 30 when I learned that the way in which I was raised and the lifestyle I lived wasn't normal for a lot of folks, but common in many cultures. That started me on a path of education, self-reflection, and an understanding of trauma. That journey took me through school that allowed me to capture the truth behind psychological effects of trauma on a child. I learned, through writing and anthropological studies, that millions of people have been affected by trauma and suffer from PTSD in many ways. Having the opportunity to hear the traumatic, but also inspiring stories of so many others, set me on the path I am currently walking. I've been advocating for peer support in Contra Costa County for nearly five years now. It's something deeply embedded in the work I do for our unhoused community and those living in a mental health crisis.

The lived-experience, peer story is essential as new policy is being developed within Contra Costa County. Especially now, when there are plenty of 80's babies who are coming into their adult livelihoods with the lens of childhood trauma in the county you're representing. Most importantly, I have to say thank you! Thank you for listening and hearing the story of the community you're serving. Throughout attending the Measure X committee meetings, the lived-experience was part of the discussion. Thank you. It's been a long time coming, and I am finally under the impression that Contra Costa is ready to move forward in partnership with the community members. It wasn't until I had a second 5150 hold that I ended up in an algorithm, which connected me with a community connects worker. That relationship grew as I continued living in my crisis, eventually becoming homeless and without any form of income after COVID hit. The community connects worker helped me get insurance, find a therapist, and even got me warm clothing for the winter months as I slept in my car. It was that relationship and the racial equity work I was doing in our region that led me to get involved with policy change in east Contra Costa County, specifically Antioch, where I created Delta Peers. While I was homeless, observing the culture of homelessness in Antioch, a network of peer specialists was created. We've been sharing our stories with each other, giving me content to further share with the System of Care. So, that's what I'm doing now. Building community partnerships and motivating advocates.

Not only is getting the stories of the community you're serving important, it's directly tied to policy change. Nothing about us without out! So, I am asking that the Measure X Board set aside money for Peer Specialists. Support the Office for Consumer Empowerment (OCE) and the Service Provider Individualized Recovery Intensive Training (SPIRIT) program. Put the Measure X money toward empowering and supporting the experts in each of the departments pertaining to

our System of Care. Peer Specialists are the experts in each category of services, so it's essential to capture their voice so the departments know how to improve their services. The Measure X money needs to go toward implementing peer respites in every region of our county, not just one for the entire county, but multiple peer respites for multiple purposes. Set aside Measure X money for community partnerships, safe places where community members can gather and share their livelihoods with other peers. The funds that Measure X will accumulate need to be allocated to the peer-ran programs like Putnam Clubhouse and the Hume Center, expressing the importance of more peer-ran programs in our county. It must be spent on supporting our community members who are living in crisis of homelessness, so making sure the homeless shelters are implementing the peer model. Again, each department within our System of Care needs to have peer specialists advising them how to support whichever community they're serving. Put money aside for that, making sure each department has the funds to adequately compensate the peer specialists for their expert opinions at the table of discussion.

In closing, I must once again say thank you for listening and hearing the voice of the community members you're providing resources for. Their expertise is the one building brick that will continue to build bridges between the community members and the system in which it is serving them; you. Thank you for seeking innovated ways to gather the story, share the story, and put that story into motion when you make decisions as big as these decisions. To keep doing the work, we must put this money toward our peer specialists. So, like the old saying goes, put your money where your mouth is. It seems you're doing that, so keep doing that, all while making sure each peer specialist is heard and respected with compensation. Peers need a place to congregate. We need space to share our experiences and help influence policy change. We need a place to rest, a place to play, a place to live, and a place to sleep and work. Peer Specialists need to be recognized for who we are, not what's happened to us, so I hope you decide to put Measure X money aside, specifically for Peer Support Specialists in Contra Costa County.