

# STATE OF KANSAS

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### **Peer Support Program Now Available for Families with Children with Special Needs** *Supporting You* launches, families who can offer support and guidance asked to volunteer

**TOPEKA** – Families of children with special needs benefit from the care and support that can only be offered by others who have shared their experience. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and the Special Health Services Family Advisory Council (SHS-FAC) announce a new peer-support initiative in Kansas that will enable individuals and families who have similar experiences to communicate and gain support from one another, by sharing ideas, resources and strategies to meet the needs of their children.

“The program offers participants the opportunity to express their grief, concerns and questions, without feeling judged,” said Heather Smith, KDHE Special Health Services Director. “We know that peer support is one of the strongest measures of individual/family support.”

Implementation of the network will occur in **three phases**, Support Peer Recruitment, Support Peer Training, and Peer Matching. We are actively recruiting Support Peers—those who has navigated various service systems, have experience with advocating for a loved one or themselves, and have learned lessons that can be shared with others. It does not take specialized training, specific experience with services or systems, or any kind of degree to be a Support Peer. It simply takes a caring individual who has a desire to help others and shares experiences with caring for a child with special health care needs.

In the next phase, Support Peers will provide training on confidentiality, communication, active listening and helping families who are dealing with loss, grief or fear. Training will take place in-person and online through November and December. The final phase, Peer Matching, will take place in early 2019, and begin matching those looking for supports with the trained Support Peers recruited.

*Protect and Improve the Health and Environment of all Kansans*

Two existing programs are part of the initial launch, the Kansas Special Health Care Needs program and the Kansas School for the Deaf, to connect families of children served through these programs with peer supports.

*Supporting You* will be administered by KDHE's Special Health Services Section, within the Bureau of Family Health. The network has been developed by the SHS-FAC, which will provide oversight to monitor consistent practices and fidelity among partnering organizations, ultimately ensuring that participating programs are meeting the needs of the families served through the network.

More information can be found on the *Supporting You* website at [www.supportingyoukansas.org](http://www.supportingyoukansas.org) or by contacting Heather Smith, Special Health Services Director, at 785-296-4747 or [Heather.Smith@ks.gov](mailto:Heather.Smith@ks.gov).

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