



In our own words: 'I've been able to set and accomplish goals confidently'

Submitted by **Rachael**

Hello, my name is Rachael. I've attended the Clarity PROS program in Wellsville for four years now. There are so many ways this program has helped me. "Anger Management" has taught me many coping skills to help handle times when I've gotten upset and frustrated. By attending "Goal Attainment," I've been able to set and accomplish goals confidently.

I've taken many groups to help me with anxiety, depression, and self-worth. I've been through many traumatic and difficult events that I have been able to overcome and rise above by being in the groups that PROS teaches and by immersing myself in the knowledge I'm learning. One such event was going through the breakup of a relationship I had been in for 11 years. It was tough for me. I had relied on him for so much of my worth and self-esteem that I had to re-learn who I was as a person on my own.

Thankfully PROS, my one-on-one counselor, and the wonderful clients that attended were there for me. I've also been able to get sober and stay clean by using the skills and tools that PROS has taught me. One of the top goals that are deeply personal and important to me is getting my son and eventually my daughter back to living with me.



With the help of this facility, its groups, and its providers, I'm just one step away from being together with my son. I still need to find an apartment but once I do, he'll be home. Then I'll be able to focus on getting my daughter back and I know I'll be able to handle anything that comes my way because I have my super awesome counselor, the other staff, and these wonderful, informative, and helpful groups.

Editor's Note: *Rachael, thank you for sharing your journey with us. It's heartening to learn how you've managed to surmount challenging situations and develop coping mechanisms that have enabled you to progress toward your goals!*

Do you or someone you know have a PROS Success Story to share?

Contact the editor, [Stephanie D. Rodriguez](#), for more information on how to be featured in the Newsletter!

New NYAPRS CORE Peer Navigator Project!

We are excited to announce the brand-new CORE Peer Navigator project! CORE can work hand-in-hand with PROS in several ways. Eligible participants (meaning those who are HARP enrolled or HARP-eligible and HIV/SNP or MAP Plan enrolled) can:

- Receive PROS + CORE Peer Support, with Peer Support acting as a wrap-around service for those who would benefit from more support.
- Transition from PROS to CORE Services as a "step down" upon discharge from PROS.
- Transition from PROS to CORE Services as a "step up" if they're unable to engage in or benefit from PROS at this point in their recovery.

Ready To Connect? It's Easy!

HARP eligible individuals can use the contact information below on their own, or with your help, to get connected to a NYAPRS CORE Peer Navigator with knowledge of CORE Services in your area. Navigators can text, call, video chat, or meet individuals in person. Call 1-855-PEERNAV (1-855-733-7628) or email PeerNav@nyaprs.org to get started!

Encouraging and Engaging Participants Returning to On-Site

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, many participants with underlying health conditions did not want to come on-site. **Kristie Evangelow**, Program Director at Helio Health PROS in Syracuse, began using hybrid groups, like many other programs.

For several months, intakes were the only service offered on-site, with no more than five people in the building at a time. As restrictions began to ease, participants remained apprehensive about returning. Over time, Helio Health has been successful in bringing people back on-site, with an average of 125 individuals throughout the week (excluding those who come multiple times per week). Here are some of the tips Kristie shared to encourage participants to return to on-site services:

Creating a Recovery-Oriented Environment

First, to encourage participants to feel safe and comfortable coming on-site, staff promoted the program's safety measures such as wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and frequently cleaning and sanitizing the premises. They also took advantage of the emptier space to invest in décor and reimagine the program space. The goal was to create an inviting, recovery-oriented environment that would help participants feel more at ease.

As part of this effort, two wall wraps were installed, showcasing the “Eight Dimensions of Wellness” (top photo) and an “Emotions Wheel” (bottom photo). These tools have been instrumental in helping participants better understand and manage their mental and emotional health. The Emotions Wheel particularly has been a helpful tool for participants to learn about emotions and effectively communicate their feelings with others. The wheel displays a range of emotions and provides synonyms, allowing participants to label their emotions accurately, especially during times of distress.

Supporting Staff and their Creativity

Kristie emphasizes that the staff are the heart of the community, and their energy and enthusiasm set the tone for participants. Staff support each other and encourage each other to take time off when needed, which helps in keeping up the positive energy level and preventing burn-out.

It is crucial that the staff are passionate about the groups they run. Participants can easily tell if a staff person is not engaged in the activity. To prevent this from happening, at the beginning of every schedule cycle, staff members are encouraged to be creative and come up with new ideas for groups. Some of the staff-created groups have become so popular that they are now held on Fridays, which is typically a slower in-person day. This has led to increased participation on site, and Fridays have now been dubbed “Fun Day Fridays!” by participants.

One of the more popular groups currently offered on Friday is “Cartoons & Coping” (WSM – Coping Skills Training): Various clips of cartoons and media are played on TV. The group then discusses how the interaction went and if there were areas the characters could have reacted in a more productive way. Seeing characters in this scenario has made it easier for participants to relate to situations without feeling judged and has led to improved coping-skill development.

Fun Day Fridays have become a highlight of the week, increasing participation, and fostering a sense of community among participants. The program's success demonstrates the power of creativity and community in promoting recovery and wellbeing.



Back row, from left: **Kristie Evangelow, Jaclyn Abbott, Alex Polito, Kyle Holst, and Sage Mulroy-Robbins**. Front row, from left: **Ally Stephens, Tavia Black, and Jill DeLand**.



From left: **Jill DeLand, Jaclyn Abbott, and Kyle Holst**.

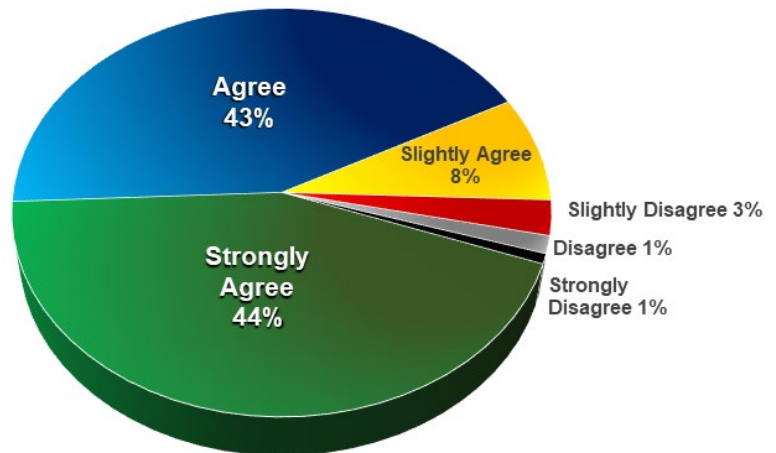
PROS Participant Survey Results

The OMH Office of Advocacy and Peer Support Services (OAPSS, formerly Office of Consumer Affairs) and Rehabilitation Services Unit want to thank everyone that took part in the PROS Participant Survey and shared with others to complete this past winter. The feedback that was provided will be instrumental in helping with PROS redesign. A total of 600 participants across the state completed the survey!

Below, you will find just a selection of the survey results which you may wish to share with participants in your program.

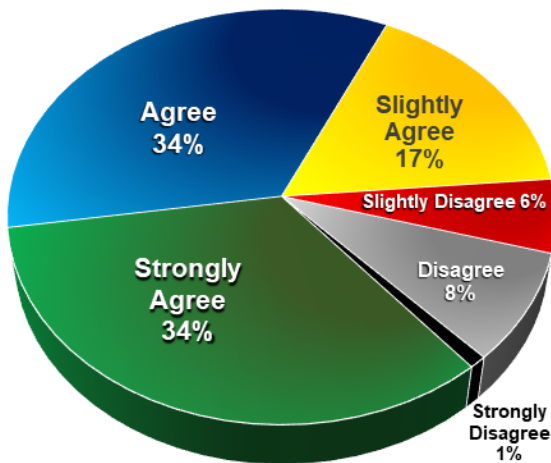
PROS participants, much like PROS staff, believe that the PROS model supports employment.

PROS model supports employment.

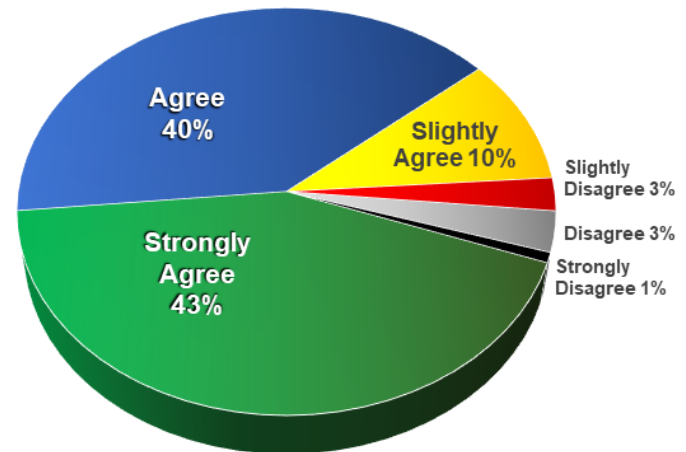


We are often hearing anecdotal feedback that participants would like to have more clinical counseling and therapy. The survey found mixed results between participants who feel that this need is met in their program vs. those who would like a high frequency of these services.

I would like a higher frequency of clinical counseling and therapy.



My PROS provides the frequency of clinical counseling and therapy I need.



Other Topics from Survey Results:

- **Groups/Classes** – Overall results indicated that PROS participants feel that programs are offering a wide variety of groups/classes with varying curricula.
- **Telehealth** – Overall, participants believe that telehealth allows them to better engage with staff and that it can be delivered effectively. When participants were asked to further clarify the effectiveness of audio-visual vs. audio-only telehealth, the survey results indicated that audio-visual was marginally more effective.

The survey was a great opportunity for PROS participants to provide feedback on the way the model currently operates. The information gathered will continue to be very useful throughout the redesign and modernization process. If you have any additional feedback, please feel free to contact our PROS Redesign Project Manager, [Shokri Enbawe](#).

Breaking Barriers: Overcoming Challenges in Hybrid Group Dynamics

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many PROS programs have begun using hybrid groups to engage PROS participants. **Lisa Turnquist**, from Venture PROS in Rochester, has several hybrid groups that are not only popular but have led to some telehealth only participants coming on-site for the first time! Although the groups are successful now, it was challenging at first to get people to interact with each other. Here are some of the helpful tips Lisa shared on how staff run an engaging hybrid group.

Set Participants Up for Success

Many participants have never had an audio-visual group at PROS. Participants were taught to use Zoom before being enrolled in hybrid groups. Zoom links are also sent out to participants before group, so it can easily be found via email or a printout.

In addition to this, program admins have copies of group links so participants can call the main program phone number for assistance if they lose their link. Having a number to call for lost links has led to increased group attendance. For participants who are telehealth-only, all materials are dropped off by staff or mailed out prior to the group starting.

Group Room Technology

Big-screen televisions, quality cameras, speakers, and microphones were purchased for group rooms. Laptops are the only computers used by staff, because this makes accessing materials and curriculum easy for staff as it travels with them between group rooms. Docking stations are in each group room, which allows staff to easily connect to technology, such as the TV, set-up in the room. Groups are started quickly by plugging in a cord from the docking station and connecting to Zoom.

Participants who join groups via Zoom are shown on the TV at the front of the room. The camera on top of the TV helps virtual participants feel a part of the group, because they can see the room and they know the room can see them.

Engagement During Hybrid Groups

For groups in which participants didn't know each other, icebreakers and introductions were done at the beginning of every group. After a few classes, participants were typically a lot more comfortable participating.

Staff found Cognitive Remediation (CR), Structure Skill Development and Support (SSDS), and other classes that require a lot of physical exercises or materials to be the most challenging hybrid groups to run. Conversely, processing/conversational groups, such as Intensive Relapse Prevention, seemed to work best, because it was already structured to get participants engaged verbally. For IR groups staff use a "1-2-3 priority" system, in which each participant picks a number at the beginning of group: 1 (don't want/need to talk), 2 (medium priority), and 3 (highest priority, needs to share). Participants are prioritized to speak based on the number they have chosen. This has helped participants feel comfortable to speak up in group.

The PROS Community

Over time, participants were able to create a virtual community with their peers, and this has helped participants bridge from telehealth-only to being comfortable enough to come on site. They were greeted by their peers with "Hey I know you from group on the screen!" Participants have especially encouraged each other to come to the site for special events, like the holiday party, pet therapy, and participant-run activities.

Resources

The [Center for Rehabilitation & Recovery \(CRR\)](#) provides training and technical assistance in psychiatric rehabilitation, which is open to all New York State mental health support providers!

At this time, live virtual training is available through Zoom. Free continuing education units (CEUs) are available for licensed social workers (LMSW/LCSW), licensed mental health counselors (LMHC), and credentialed alcoholism and substance abuse counselors (CASAC). [Be sure to check this page for upcoming trainings!](#)

The **New York Psychiatric Rehabilitation Training Academy** has begun! If you missed it, the [virtual kick-off is archived here](#) and the [first podcast is archived here](#). In-person training will begin in **Summer 2023** with more information on dates to come. Check the [Training Calendar](#) regularly to stay up-to-date and register for upcoming trainings.

To access past newsletters since 2022: <https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/pros/newsletter.html>. Newsletters from 2015-21 are archived at: Resources – Rehabilitation & Recovery Clearinghouse (<https://pros.nyaprs.org/resources/>)



Office of
Mental Health

This newsletter is written by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and Care Coordination at the New York State Office of Mental Health.

Please distribute to all PROS staff.