



MEDIA RELEASE
CT Department of Labor Communications Office
Commissioner Kurt Westby



**APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM LAUNCHED BY CT DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
OFFERS EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR THOSE IMPACTED BY OPIOID CRISIS**
First Registered Apprentice Enrolled in "Recovery Works" Program

March 5, 2020

A first-of-its kind apprenticeship program to support and employ people impacted by the nationwide opioid epidemic has been launched by the Connecticut Department of Labor and its partners.

As part of a \$4.7 million federal grant, the first registered apprentice in the state "Recovery Works" program has been enrolled in a program that will lead to him becoming a proficient Peer Recovery Navigator.

Navigators provide specialized support to individuals in recovery from substance abuse seeking to enter the workforce.

Navigators, who are recovering themselves, work with clients in a variety of settings, including social service agencies, halfway houses, emergency rooms, and American Job Centers across the state supported by the Department of Labor and its partners.

The goal is to prepare clients for new careers and help them obtain employment that is particularly suited to their recovery efforts.

"Recovery Works and the navigators help address barriers to employment, including the stigma which is often associated with those in recovery," Labor

Commissioner Kurt Westby said. “This program will create employment opportunities that offer a living wage and a solid direction forward for those affected by opioid addiction.”

The first apprentice, Sami Hajrula, was officially enrolled last week at the American Job Center in Waterbury, where he will be based. He is currently working as a recovery specialist for the non-profit Career Resources in Waterbury.

Hajrula, 37, of Watertown, said his own experience with opioid addiction before becoming sober about ten years ago is invaluable in effectively dealing with the needs of clients.

“I understand what kind of hell they and their families are in,” he said, noting that he has lost several friends to addiction. “I have a passion for helping people and this apprenticeship is going to give me a foundation to be able to make a real difference.”

Each American Job Center – in Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Hamden and Montville - will be enrolling Peer Recovery Navigators in the apprenticeship program in the coming weeks.

Peer Recovery Navigator apprentices must complete 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and all required related instruction, during which they are paid.

The Department of Labor also will work with employers to provide training on creating “recovery friendly workplaces” with the goal of encouraging them to work with employees who are in recovery.

Recovery friendly workplaces encourage a healthy and safe environment where employers, employees, and communities can collaborate to create positive change and eliminate barriers for those impacted by addiction.

Funding for the program is through a federal Dislocated Worker Grant that became available in 2017 after the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared the opioid crisis a national public health emergency.

Information about the Recovery Works program and how to apply for an apprenticeship can be found at:

<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/opiodgrant/recoveryworks.htm>

Partners in the program include:

CT's Workforce Development Boards

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

CT Alcohol and Drug Policy Council

CT Department of Public Health

CT Department of Corrections

CT Department of Social Services

CT Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

CT Judicial Department

CT Certification Board

CT Community for Addiction Recovery

CT Counseling Centers

CT and Federal OSHA

International Union of Operating Engineers – Local 478