

LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE PROGRAM (LEWP)

Exploring a Career in Lived Experience Work

Updated March 2021

The aim of this document is to provide ideas that you can explore for getting involved in the Lived Experience Workforce in SA. Information under 'Get Out There' may also be helpful for people who are looking to get involved in lived experience opportunities but not necessarily employment.

Warm regards and happy exploring!

The Lived Experience Workforce Program (LEWP) Team

Understanding Peer Work

There is so much to understand about peer work before taking on the role. We know that not everybody who can cook will make a great chef. It's the same with Peer Work - simply having lived experience of mental health issues and recovery does not make someone an effective Lived Experience Worker. Effective Lived Experience Workers are highly skilled and trained in how to apply what they have learned through their lived experience, to their work practice.

Peer work is not about 'telling your story'. While some roles may call for you to do so purposefully (e.g. community education, presenting, public speaking), peer work is more often about the ability to *draw from* your own experience purposefully, to promote hope and support recovery for someone else. Peer work is intentional, professional and purposeful. Peer work is underpinned by evidence-based values and principles that we must adhere to, as they guide ethical practice. Peer work also operates within guiding frameworks such as recovery and trauma informed approaches.

To better understand what peer work is, what it isn't and peer work values and principles, you might like to begin by exploring the research and evidence. The following are just some of the people and organisations who have done some incredible work in this area:

- Intentional Peer Support <http://www.intentionalpeersupport.org/> – also look at publications by Shery Mead and Chris Hansen
- Peer Zone <http://www.peerzone.info/about-us> – also look at publications by Mary O'Hagan
- Dr Louise Byrne (Australia)
- Professor Mike Slade (UK)
- Pat Deegan
- Helen Glover
- Charter of Peer Support (Australia)
- Peer Work Hub Australia - <http://peerworkhub.com.au/>
- Peerlink - <https://www.peerlinktac.org/>

Non-Government and Government Lived Experience Workforce in SA

While the essential criteria of lived experience and operating from peer values is common to all designated mental health lived experience roles, the position titles and duties performed will vary according to the needs of the organisation, service, program, team and so on. Exploring Job Descriptions and Vacancy Advertisements can help build an understanding of the diverse titles and duties performed. Making time to chat with people in different roles, programs and organisations can be helpful in understanding what the role would be like on a day-to-day basis.

Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Sector

A list of the Mental Health Coalition's Member NGOs can be found at www.mhcsa.org.au/our-members/ Visit each NGO's website to view their mental health programs, employment vacancies and volunteer opportunities. Many NGOs will also advertise through online employment sites such as:

- www.seek.com.au
- www.careerone.com.au

Government Sector

Positions within Government mental health services appear on the SA Health careers website:

<http://jobs.sahealthcareers.com.au/caw/en/listing/>

You can read more about working at SA Health here:

<http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/careers+at+sa+health/mental+health+careers>

About You

Once you have an idea of what peer work is, the types of roles and requirements, and services/programs that utilise lived experience in SA, have a think about your personal situation:

- Where am I in terms of my own recovery at this time? Am I managing my wellbeing effectively, in such a way that I can balance work/life, cope with the demands of the peer work role and fulfil my obligations as an employee?
- Am I prepared to work with incredibly diverse people and situations and meet them where they are at? E.g. someone whose values or beliefs differ to mine, someone in mental distress, someone who experiences mental distress that is different to mine, someone who experiences hoarding?
- What do I want to achieve – supporting others in their recovery, or influencing systemic change? Is using my lived experience through peer work the right way for me to go? Am I more interested in or better suited to using it in advocacy or representation?
- Thinking about the workforce: what did I learn from my lived experience and how might this translate into work practice, in order to offer hope and promote recovery in others (knowledge, strengths, and skills)?

- What other strengths, skills, knowledge and experiences do I have that might add value to a role (e.g. group facilitation)?
- What types of lived experience roles interest me (e.g. 1:1 support, group facilitation, education, policy, leadership)?
- What does my resume say about me – does it reflect a desired career in the Lived Experience Workforce? What knowledge, skills etc. do I need to focus on?
- What are the gaps – do I meet the requirements of a peer work role?
- What actions do I need to take to address the gaps – e.g. Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work, further training, gain experience through volunteering etc?

Get Out There!

Get to know organisations and services. Join networks, groups, mailing lists and attend programs that can increase your knowledge, broaden your perspective, develop your skills and support your career journey. Try these as a starting point:

- The Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work is the only peer work-specific qualification. It meets the benchmark qualification for working in the mental health sector. Theory, evidence and practical activities help develop lived experience into an employable skill set. Search for training providers here:

<https://www.myskills.gov.au/registeredtrainers/Search?op=0>

- Not ready to commit to a qualification? Try these as a first step:

LEWP runs a 5-6 day Orientation to Mental Health Peer Work Program, designed to provide people with an overview of what being a Peer Worker in the NGO sector is like and the training required to become an effective Peer Worker. When a program is scheduled to run, you will find details here: <https://www.mhcsa.org.au/lived-experience/>

Mind Australia sometimes hold a one-day session, providing an overview of what peer work is. This can assist you in thinking about whether it is the right career path for you. Visit <https://www.mindaustralia.org.au/work-us/peer-work> and follow the link to 'Professional Training'. You can also call Mind on 1300 286 463

- Visit the Mental Health Coalition's website www.mhcsa.org.au and sign up to our eNews to stay informed. Look for us on Twitter and Facebook
- Creative or enjoy other people's creativity? Visit mindshare www.mindshare.org.au
- Visit our allies and join their mailing lists. They're filled with what's happening locally, within SA and nationally and links for getting involved in a variety of lived experience opportunities including networks, consultations, training and forums:

The Office of the Chief Psychiatrist (SA Health) manages a mailing list called the Statewide Mental Health Lived Experience Register. To subscribe, email Health.StatewideLivedExperienceRegister@sa.gov.au

Join the SA Lived Experience Leadership and Advocacy Network (LELAN). Read more at <http://www.lelan.org.au/> or contact info@lelan.org.au

Sign up to receive regular mailouts from Lived Experience Australia: <https://www.livedexperienceaustralia.com.au/>

Keep an eye on the SA Mental Health Commission's website samhc@sa.gov.au

If you land your dream job within the NGO sector, the LEWP will be there to support you and your organisation with professional development opportunities. Keep your eye on our website www.mhcsa.org.au/lewp-training-and-professional-development/

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