

LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE PROGRAM

Exploring Lived Experience/Peer work as a Career

Updated March 2022

The aim of this document is to provide ideas that you can explore for getting involved in the mental health Lived Experience/Peer 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. If you've ever watched cooking competition reality shows, you'll 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 challenges and periods of healing/recovery does not make someone an effective Peer worker. Effective Peer workers are highly skilled and trained in how to apply what they have learned through their Lived Experience to their work practice. This may be from the perspective of either personal Lived Experience, or as a carer/family of someone experiencing mental health challenges. They also know how to draw from universal and collective Lived Experience in their work and how to make space for these unique and diverse perspectives. In addition to this, they need other important characteristics, strengths and skills to be effective in their role.

People often think Peer work is 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, as well as universal experiences, to promote hope and support recovery for someone else. Peer work is intentional, professional and purposeful. Peer work is underpinned by Human Rights, the Lived Experience Movement, evidence-based frameworks e.g. recovery and trauma-informed practice and care and guided by core values and principles that ensure ethical practice. Peer workers also need to work within organisational and contractual structures.

To better understand what Peer work practice is, what it isn't and what the guiding frameworks, values and principles are, you might like to begin by exploring the research and evidence. The following may be helpful to research:

- National Mental Health Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce Development Guidelines https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/getmedia/a33cce2a-e7fa-4f90-964d-85dbf1514b6b/NMHC_Lived-Experience-Workforce-Development-Guidelines
- LEWP video resources:
 - What is this thing called Peer work? https://youtu.be/v0Fpl-Ybh_E

- Lunch'n'Learn webinars: showcasing diverse Peer work roles: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqOjdBiIWBbErClcXBPAAtOcElvDfchVHJH>
- Using Advocacy Skills in the Peer work role: <https://vimeo.com/655806531>
- Australian and International Research publications – Lived Experience Leadership: <http://livedexperienceleadership.com.au> – also search for other publications by Dr Louise Byrne
- Peer Work Hub <https://www.nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/content/peer-work-hub>
- Intentional Peer Support <http://www.intentionalpeersupport.org/> – also look at other publications by Shery Mead and Chris Hansen
- Peer Zone <http://www.peerzone.info/about-us> – also look at other publications by Mary O'Hagan
- Professor Mike Slade (UK)
- Pat Deegan
- Helen Glover

Non-Government and Government Lived Experience/Peer workforce in SA

While the essential criteria of Lived Experience, the underpinning foundations of Human Rights and the Lived Experience Movement and operating in line with Lived Experience values and principles is common to all designated mental health Lived Experience roles, the position titles and duties performed will vary. This may be determined by 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 and what other skills and strengths are required. Making time to chat with people in different roles, programs and organisations can be helpful for understanding what the role would actually 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 <https://mhcsa.org.au/membership/>. 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:

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/careers/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 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 distress, someone whose experiences are different to mine, someone who experiences other related issues e.g. alcohol and other drugs or hoarding?
- What do I want to achieve – supporting others in their recovery, having a voice 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?
- 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, capabilities 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 the roles that interest me, or will I need to do some training?
- 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 personal and career journey. Try these as a starting point:

- The Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work is the only Peer work-specific qualification. It is 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 FREE 4-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. Read more at our website under ‘Becoming a Peer Worker’ and check for upcoming session details: <https://mhcsa.org.au/lived-experience-workforce-program/> You can also ask to be added to our mailing list so you hear about programs as soon as they’re announced. Contact lizzie.graham@mhcsa.org.au

- Mind Australia sometimes runs a 1-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 <https://mhcsa.org.au/> and sign up to our eNews to stay informed. Look for us on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook
- Creative or enjoy other people's creativity? Visit mindshare <https://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 State-wide Mental Health Lived Experience Register. To subscribe, email <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/services/mental+health+and+drug+and+alcohol+services/mental+health+services/mental+health+lived+experience+register>
 - Join the SA Lived Experience Leadership and Advocacy Network (LELAN), which focusses on Lived Experience advocacy, influence and leadership. Read more at <http://www.lelan.org.au/>
 - Sign up to receive regular mailouts from Lived Experience Australia: <https://www.livedexperienceaustralia.com.au/>
 - Keep an eye on what the SA Mental Health Commissioners are doing <https://samentalhealthcommission.com.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, peer supervision, resources and connections. Keep your eye on our website and contact us:

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Lived Experience Workforce Program (LEWP)

A program brought to you by the Mental Health Coalition of SA

<https://mhcsa.org.au/lived-experience-workforce-program/>