

# LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE PROGRAM

## *Interview Questions: Lived Experience Skill Set*

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### Background

As well as interviewing to other criteria included in the Job Description, it is important to ask questions about the person's Lived Experience knowledge and skills – it is, after all, one of the main essential criteria of a Lived Experience/Peer work role! What we know is that many people are uncomfortable and unsure as to what to ask when it comes to doing this. The information in this document has been adapted from training that the LEWP provides for Leaders of Lived Experience workforce. Ideas have been co-designed by Lived Experience workers and Line Managers, to support organisations in building understanding of asking about Lived Experience as a skill set and increasing confidence in recruiting for it.

Asking the right questions about the person's Lived Experience knowledge and skills, in relation to the position being applied for, is important. It will help ensure the organisation recruits the right person for the position: someone who has a solid understanding of what they have learned through their own Lived Experience and how to apply it in order to meet the needs of the role. ***Not everyone who has Lived Experience will be an effective Lived Experience/Peer worker!***

It is vital that interview questions are purposeful and that they come from a Trauma Informed Perspective: questions should *not* be constructed through a risk/mental health challenges lens. Rather, consider the unique perspectives, strengths and wisdom that comes with Lived Experience. These are what brings value to the role and the organisation.

### Mental Health Lived Experience Skill Set

Effective Peer work requires more than just having Lived Experience. Peer workers need to have the skills and expertise to apply what they have learned to practice. Lived Experience as skill set consists of:

#### 1. Experiential Knowledge:

- Information acquired through the process of one's own mental health challenges and periods of healing/recovery (personal Lived Experience) or through supporting someone else who has mental health challenges (carer/family)

#### 2. Experiential Expertise:

- The ability to transform this knowledge into the skill of helping others to achieve and sustain periods of healing/recovery.<sup>1</sup>

The way in which a Peer worker utilises their Lived Experience will vary according to the role they are employed in, the needs of the organisation, team, the program and those receiving support. For example, sharing from their story purposefully to educate, to challenge viewpoints, to connect and build relationships, to support someone in their recovery, to support carers/family to navigate systems and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from White and Sanders *Periods of healing/recovery Coaching Training Manual* 2006

Effectively trained/experienced Peer workers will have learned to do this skillfully and from a Trauma Informed Care perspective. Drawing from their Lived Experience should be purposeful, provide hope, focus on strengths rather than risk or diagnosis and should NEVER do harm – it should not add trauma to that which a person has already experienced, nor should it add trauma to the Peer worker. Expectations around sharing or drawing from Lived Experience should be clearly articulated in the Job Description, clarified and demonstrated during the interview and discussed during induction and orientation. The person should be in control of their Lived Experience and what is shared, what isn't and how.

## The Values and Principles of Lived Experience work

Peer workers should know the foundations that underpin Lived Experience work such as Human Rights and the Lived Experience Movement: these are what define Lived Experience work from other support roles. They should also know the Values and Principles that guide ethical practice and how to 'live' these in the role (the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer work teaches this in relation to Peer work roles). When planning interview questions, consider ways of asking someone to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in these areas.

**Table 2:** Core values of Lived Experience work

Core values	What does it mean?
Hope	Belief in people's fundamental capacity to overcome challenges.
Equality/equity	Working from a place of common humanity and vulnerability. Actively working to minimise power imbalances.
Mutuality	Being in a relationship with another person where both people learn, grow and are challenged through the relationship. Sharing responsibility in relationships.
Empathy	Understanding another's experience from a point of common experience and genuine connection.
Choice	Acknowledging and respecting each person's choices, dignity of risk and boundaries. Acknowledging that the person is the expert of their own experience.
Respect	Honouring another's view and experience without judgement or making assumptions.
Authenticity	Integrity, being open, honest, trustworthy, and transparent in work practices and relationships. Valuing the use of lived experience and vulnerability in the service of others transforms these from what may have been perceived as weaknesses into strengths.
Belonging/inclusion	Respecting and understanding the value of inclusion and impact of exclusion. Recognising intersectionality and valuing diversity culture, spirituality, membership in chosen groups and community.
Interdependence/interconnectedness	Recognition that we exist in relationships and that the relationships with families and/or social networks are often impactful in our lives and important to healing.
Justice/Human Rights	Understanding the impact of social justice/inequity on identity and opportunity e.g. race, culture, sexual orientation. Recognising that equal access to resources and support is an important factor in everyone's recovery and healing. Recognising the consumer movement as a response to the history of social injustice and discrimination towards people with lived experience. Recognising how Lived Experience work is connected to the human rights movement and upholding the human rights of people with lived experience.

**Table 3:** Guiding principles

Principles	What does it mean?
<b>Lived experience as expertise</b>	The expertise that arises from a lived experience is of equal value to other types of expertise, including academic qualifications.
<b>Self-determination</b>	Respecting individual choice and personal agency.
<b>Recovery-focused</b>	Recognises that individuals can define what recovery/healing means to them, and each person can create a life that is meaningful for them. Interactions are underpinned by hope.
<b>Person-directed</b>	Service access and individual recovery planning/journey is directed by the person themselves and recognises the person as the expert of their own experiences. Respects where each individual happens to be in their journey of recovery/healing, and recognises that goals, values, spirituality, beliefs, and choices will be unique to each person.
<b>Strengths-based</b>	Identifying and drawing on existing strengths to support growth, recovery and healing. Recognising the value/learning that can come from experiences of crisis.
<b>Relational</b>	Relationships are the basis of practice, and connection is used to build relationships of trust. Recognises relationships built on trust and respect as foundational to working effectively with other Lived Experience workers and within multi-disciplinary environments.
<b>Trauma-informed</b>	Acknowledges the impact and prevalence of trauma, negative experiences and loss of control and power. Emphasises the need for physical, psychological and emotional safety. Creates opportunities for empowerment and for people to take an active role in their own healing/recovery. This is also captured in the lived experience conviction that it is better to ask "What happened to you?" not "What is wrong with you?"
<b>Humanistic</b>	The relational nature of Lived Experience work is recognised for its effectiveness to engage people through human connection and a holistic focus.
<b>Voluntary</b>	Participation is always voluntary (not coercive) and Lived Experience workers often take an active role in working towards eliminating forced treatment and restrictive practice.

Byrne, L., Wang, L., Roenfeldt, H., Chapman, M., Darwin, L., Castles, C., Craze, L., Saunders, M. *National Lived Experience workforce Guidelines: Growing a Thriving Lived Experience workforce. 2021, National Mental Health Commission.*

## Sample Interview Questions

### Scenarios for demonstrating Lived Experience

- In our work we sometimes hear “but we all have Lived Experience.” Can you describe the differences between a designated Lived Experience Peer work role and a non-designated Lived Experience role, held by someone with Lived Experience?
- Can you describe your understanding of the Periods of healing/recovery Approach, and how you would utilise what you have learnt through your Lived Experience of periods of healing/recovery in supporting someone with their journey?

- The role of Peer worker requires a great deal of professionalism and responsibility while supporting people in difficult situations. You may be exposed to situations that have the potential to trigger retraumatisation. How would you deal with a situation like this in the role?
- The Peer worker will work with a range of people from diverse backgrounds and walks of life. They may have personal values that are very different to your own. Can you describe a time when you have experienced this and how you handled it?
- We value the confidentiality of individuals. At the same time, we need to be aware of legal responsibilities that must guide practice. What would be your response when a consumer (or carer) states that he/she is about to tell you something in confidence? What would you consider before reporting what was said to the Team Leader?
- A young person who is couch surfing and experiencing anxiety and depression has been referred to this service. Drawing from your Lived Experience knowledge and skills, how would you start a conversation with this young person that would build rapport and trust?
- During a visit, a person you are supporting tells you they have been thinking about suicide. How would you a) draw from your Lived Experience knowledge and skills to connect with the person and b) how would you handle the situation?
- You are working in a service that operates under a model that presents challenges and ethical dilemmas to Peer work practice. Describe strategies you might use to advocate for and uphold the integrity of Peer work within this environment.

**For more support with recruitment, contact LEWP**

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