



LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE PROGRAM

Interview Questions: Lived Experience Skill Set

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/illness lens. Rather, consider the unique strengths and wisdom that comes with lived experience. These are what brings value to the role and the organisation.

The Values and Principles of Peer Work

Peer Workers should know the values that underpin the role and how to 'live' those through work practice (the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work teaches this). When planning interview questions, consider ways of asking someone to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in these areas:

- Mutuality and Reciprocity
- Shared power
- Honesty
- Open mindedness
- Uniqueness of the individual
- Real choices
- Attitudes and Rights
- Duty of care vs dignity of risk
- Partnership and communication
- Empathy
- Understanding
- Non-judgmental
- Respect
- Shared responsibility
- Trust
- Connection
- Hopefulness
- Empowerment
- Strengths-based
- Person centred

Demonstrating peer work values and principles

The Scottish Recovery Network has published a fabulous document which explains the values of Peer Work, with examples of what these may look like in practice.¹ Understanding this can support organisations to develop interview questions that demonstrate values in action. For example:

- Intentionally sharing experiences and stories of hope and recovery
- Help peers explore and broaden personal identity and worldview
- Accepting peers where they are at, avoiding judgement and interpretation
- Encourage responsibility for self-care, wellness and recovery
- Take a strengths-based approach focusing on hopes, aspirations and self-defined goals
- Being alongside and partnering peers – not doing to or for
- Encourage peers to challenge themselves and to mitigate for potential risks
- Support peers to explore meaning and purpose in their lives
- Maintaining and building on skills and learning whilst keeping current with emerging knowledge on peer support and recovery
- Be a reflective practitioner and learn from experience
- Encourage the reframing of setbacks and help identify ways to learn from them
- Take personal responsibility for your own self development, self-care, wellness and recovery
- Constructively challenge non recovery focused, stigmatising and discriminatory practices

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 distress and recovery or through supporting someone else (carer/family/supporter)

2. Experiential Expertise:

- The ability to transform this knowledge into the skill of helping others to achieve and sustain recovery.²

¹ ©2012 Scottish Recovery Network *Experts by Experience: Values Framework for Peer Working*

² Adapted from White and Sanders *Recovery Coaching Training Manual* 2006

Drawing from lived experience purposefully

The peer work/person relationship is not about the Peer Worker; it is about the person and what the Peer Worker has learned through their own journey, and how that might be able to support someone else. Peer Workers draw from their Lived Experience with a very clear purpose at all times. The way in which this is done will vary according to 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 with someone, or drawing from their experiences to offer someone ideas for recovery pathways they may like to explore.

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 illness and should NEVER do harm – it should not add trauma to that which the 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 during the interview and discussed during induction and orientation. The person should be in control of their story and what is shared, what isn't and how.

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 Recovery Approach, and how you would utilise what you have learnt through your lived experience of 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.

Your Questions/Areas for Consideration