LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE PROGRAM

Peer supervision for designated Lived Experience roles

"Lived Experience work is based on common experiences, some of which can be traumatic or draining for workers to remember and engage with. Employers need to consider this emotional cost in work planning and allocate time for processing, debriefing and ensuring access to Lived Experience supervision and networks."[1]

Find a photo of a time in your life that captures a happy moment. Sit quietly for a minute and let that image take you back in time. What do you notice? You might find yourself smiling, or recalling feelings of warmth, love or safety that accompanied that moment when it happened.

As Lived Experience workers we do this in our practice, day in day out. But drawing from our own experiences of mental health challenges and recovery/periods of healing often means reconnecting with past or ongoing trauma, feelings of hopelessness, loss of identity, stigma, discrimination and suicide. This can bring up memories and feelings that aren't warm and pleasant like those you just recalled through your photo. And we do this over and over and over.

Lived Experience work centres on building genuine, authentic relationships with others, whose experiences are unique to them, by connecting with shared experiences such as those noted above. Building relationships and actively seeking to understand a person's worldview and what's happening for them, also exposes us to *their* traumatic experiences.

On top of this, Lived Experience workers have additional responsibilities including:

- Role modelling hope and recovery practices; actively engaging in self-management
- Practicing in line with the frameworks, values and principles that guide ethical Lived Experience practice at all times
- Engaging in self-reflection, being open to respectful challenging and in turn, respectfully challenging others (including systems, practices and processes)
- Fulfilling the obligations of being an employee within our team and our organisation
- Contributing to the broader Lived Experience Movement; building the power of people with Lived Experience to change systems and perspectives

This work is draining and tiring. Physically, emotionally, spiritually…our very souls can become exhausted. At the end of the day, we can't leave our skills at the door like a baker can leave their bread-making skills at work (Bel is a qualified baker – trust us, there was zero breadmaking at home during her years in the industry. Or cooking, for that matter). We take our Lived Experience home with us. Friends and family lean on us to support them. We have to work hard to take care of ourselves. And many people in the Lived Experience workforce are involved in other advocacy activities in their own time because we care, and we know there are far too many people in the community whose voices are not (yet) heard.

[1] Byrne, L., Wang, L., Roennfeldt, H., Chapman, M., Darwin, L., Castles, C., Craze, L., Saunders, M. *National Lived Experience Workforce Guidelines*. 2021, National Mental Health Commission.

Effective, skilled Lived Experience workers are a precious and crucial (but very human) resource and with state-wide and national plans calling for the expansion of the workforce, we have an imperative to implement evidence-based strategies to effectively recruit, support, retain and grow our non-Government (NGO) Lived Experience workforce. We need to be open to new perspectives and worldviews which may require holding tension, to fully understand the purpose of Lived Experience work, create a trauma-informed environment which feels 'safe enough' for Lived Experience workers, to support and uphold ethical practice and grow a thriving workforce of people that want to stick around.

One important support mechanism is Lived Experience-specific Peer supervision. It is different to line management supervision but both are necessary, and they can work togther beautifully to support and develop the Lived Experience role. Our LEWP Peer Supervision Framework explains the purpose, scope and practice of Peer supervision and its differences to line management supervision. It also clarifies why Peer supervision is for designated Lived Experience roles as opposed to non-designated roles held by someone with Lived Experience, and that a Peer supervisor must be a qualified, skilled and experienced Lived Experience worker: https://mhcsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/LEWP-Peer-Supervision-Framework-140222.pdf
This video from the Mental Health Commission of NSW also gives a fabulous overview of Peer supervision: https://www.nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/content/what-peer-supervision

It's an emerging area and we know there are barriers for individuals and NGOs in accessing this type of support. The MHCSA is working strategically to not only ensure that models and contracts include Lived Experience workforce but that the workforce is properly understood, supported and grows.

LEWP provides Peer supervision to students of the CHC43515 Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work who are studying with Centacare's Registered Training Organisation (provider number 1004). Our work in developing a model of support for learners and their employers, through a project partnership arrangement, has provided us with evidence that connecting Peer work students with Peer supervision supports transfer of learning to ethical practice, navigating and problem-solving ethical dilemmas and promotes greater engagement and retention in the course. Read more about Centacare and their delivery of the qualification here: https://centacare.org.au/service/registered-training-organisation/

We've also developed an external fee-for-service Peer supervision service as a way of providing access to practice supervision for individuals and NGOs. Full details, including cost and how to book can be read here: https://mhcsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/LEWP-FFS-PS-Overview-300123.pdf

Our ultimate goal is for organisations to be able to provide their workforce with internal Peer supervision. LEWP has co-designed training to equip qualified, experienced and skilled Lived Experience workers with the skills and tools they need to provide Peer supervision within their organisation. Our 2-day training is free and builds on the person's high level of understanding and practice in Lived Experience work. We offer a 6-weekly online Peer Mentoring Group to people who do the training and/or deliver Peer supervision, as a way to support their practice.

We (well, Lizzie actually) will be running Peer Supervision Training twice in 2023, in March and August. A call out for Expressions of Interest will be mailed out and placed on our website in the weeks prior to each scheduled training.

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What can you do now? Plenty!

Lived Experience workers and NGOs can:

- Arm yourself with information about ethical Lived Experience practice and the required support. Download –
    - LEWP Peer Supervision Framework (refer link above)
    - National Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce Development Guidelines https://mhcsa.org.au/lived-experience-workforce-program/#resources-and-reading
    - LEWP NGO Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce Standards and Guidelines self-assessment tool https://mhcsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/LEW-MH-Guidelines_.pdf
- Have open conversations and be open to new diverse worldviews:
    - Lived Experience workers can help leaders and non-Lived Experience colleagues across the organisation to understand what ethical Lived Experience practice is, the purpose of Lived Experince work and associated practice needs
    - Leaders can help their team to understand business requirements e.g. contractual obligations, challenges and the "bigger picture" (organisation and sector-wide strategy)
    - Problem solve together and co-create strategies for addressing needs e.g. accessing external fee-for-service group or individual Peer supervision initially and working towards building your capacity to provide internal Peer supervision
    - Explore the strength, skills and Lived Experience career aspirations of the team: qualifications, experience and skills, leadership qualities etc. to identify potential candidates for the training
- Engage with LEWP's free 6-weekly online Communities of Practice. There's one for Line Managers who recruit and lead Lived Experience workers, and one for people in designated Lived Experience roles
- Leaders, consider doing LEWP's free Training for Leaders of Lived Experience Workforce which covers recruiting and leading Lived Experience roles. We'll be running this in May and November – read more here https://mhcsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/LEWP-Leaders-Training-Overview-161122.pdf

Contact Lizzie Graham, Senior Project Officer lizzie.graham@mhcsa.org.au to be added to our mailing list and receive notifications of forthcoming training and Community of Practice sessions. Lizzie can also answer questions and discuss how we can work with you to support you.

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Leading peer workforce development.

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

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