

Role Titles and Descriptions for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce

Lived Experience roles exist in diverse organisations and settings, spanning entry level to executive leadership roles. While it's true that everyone has some experiences of distress and adversity, not everyone has significant challenges that take their lives in an entirely new direction. Lived Experience roles are primarily informed by life-changing challenges and experiences.

Roennfeldt, H., Byrne, L., Wang, Y., Chapman, M., Darwin, L. Role Titles and Descriptions for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce. 2019, Queensland Government: Brisbane.

Take Home Messages

- Lived Experience workers apply an understanding of marginalisation, loss of identity and citizenship in their work to benefit others and contribute to system change
- Position descriptions can help to ensure role clarity and uniqueness of Lived Experience roles
- Lived Experience roles span across direct support to specialist and leadership positions

- Common principles of Lived Experience work include the capacity to convey hope, a personal identification with mental health experience and willingness to share experience
- Position descriptions include values, skills and theories underpinning Lived Experience work. These are described as personal qualities and core competencies for the role.

Developing and Maintaining the Uniqueness of Lived Experience Roles

This document assists in writing position descriptions that ensure the clarity and the uniqueness of lived experience roles are upheld. Position Descriptions are important as they can support the uniqueness of Lived Experience roles by reflecting the distinction between Lived Experience work vs. the work of non-designated roles.

Lived Experience work is about how experiences of marginalisation, loss of identity and citizenship are understood and applied to benefit others and contribute to system change. These roles exist across direct support and entry-level positions to specialist roles and leadership positions.

Lived Experience workers identified the following principles that were common across all these roles:

- Capacity to convey hope

- Personal identification with experiences of a mental health challenge
- Willingness to share experiences

Lived Experience roles include advocacy and identification as a change agent – that is, having the ability to challenge harmful practices and contribute more effective mental health service delivery.

Values, Skills and Theory

Position descriptions list key criteria, core competencies and adherence to frameworks of practice. Position descriptions can also be broken down into values, skills and underpinning theories in Lived Experience Work.

Values

Organisational values are reflected in an organisations mission statement and the position descriptions of employees should reflect the value of Lived Experience work.

Below are the values underpinning Lived Experience practice.

Non-judgemental

Capacity to be vulnerable

Respect

Dignity of risk

Empathy

Openness

Human rights

Authenticity and personal investment

Social Justice

Skills

Lived Experience work requires diverse skills across a variety of areas and roles. These roles include direct work and indirect work. Importantly, the processes of Lived Experience work are emphasised as “not so much what you do, but how you do it’.

What makes Lived Experience roles

effective?

Direct Work

Individual support and facilitating groups, sharing experiences, advocacy, connecting to resources, community building, relationship building, mentoring, building social connections, creative and strengths-based activities.

Indirect Work

Planning and developing programs, administration, staff training, communication, supervision, peer training, promotion, research and evaluation

Skills associated with Lived Experience work:

Working with groups

Coaching or mentoring

Communication skills

Purposeful use of experience

Working collaboratively

Strategies to overcome adversity

Think radically but act diplomatically

Linking to community

Appreciating Other's world views

Theories

Lived experience workers have identified working from the following theories and approaches:

- recovery framework
- psychosocial approach
- trauma-informed framework
- humanistic approach
- strengths-based framework
- holistic approach
- recovery framework
- psychosocial approach
- trauma-informed framework
- humanistic approach
- strengths-based framework
- holistic approach
- recovery framework

- psychosocial approach
- trauma-informed framework
- humanistic approach
- strengths-based framework
- holistic approach

Training recommended by Lived Experience Workers include Intentional Peer Support, Trauma Informed practice and Hearing Voices training. Connection to the wider community and Lived Experience networks are also important to ensure sustainability of the workforce.

Personal Qualities and Core Competencies

Core competencies and personal qualities reflect values, skills and underpinning theories.

Core competencies are described in clear statements and reflect what is fundamental to effective Lived Experience work.

Use the box below to see some of the personal qualities and core competencies of Lived Experience work in the words of Lived Experience workers.

Quote 1

“Someone who can weigh up a situation and think critically. We want people who have a good understanding of personal recovery and the consumer

movement and to hold services accountable. Someone who can identify undertones and not just say 'yes' to things. To stand strong in a clinical environment. Also, diplomacy to know when to stand up and where to hold back and slowly chip away. You have to have fortitude and patience. Change can take a long time so you can't make a revolution quickly. It is small wins. It is about the individual work and the difference you make and contributions to individuals. Think radically but can act diplomatically when needed. Be strategic and be willing to stay for the long haul and do the hard slog."

Quote 2

"Inspiring hope, overcoming adversity, challenging, because you can see the potential of others, focusing on a life beyond illness, connecting with people from the place of shared experience, and identifying the tools or strategies that the person can use to move to a desired place."

Quote 3

"The person has to have moved past their experience that was challenging to an extent, but be able to walk back and face that, and still have an identification with that experience. It is a sophisticated knowledge of self and sits closely to capacity to empathise."

Quote 4

"Empathy developed through life experiences and life interruptions, managing emotions, navigating the system and use of recovery story to support peers."

Quote 5

“This position requires the utilisation of personal knowledge and skills, gained from overcoming the impacts of life adversity to provide support and act as a resource to clients in strengthening their own recovery resources.”

Quote 6

“One of the most important things is emotional maturity. Social and emotional agility is important because you have to adapt and handle the environment that you are working with and build relationships. Also, being reflective and know your personal boundaries and regulate your own emotional reactions. Self management is so important in an emotional environment.”

Quote 8

“Capacity to build an empathetic relationship based on a structure of support. Holding the tension of I am here beside you and I am doing this with you, but I am also employed to deliver a service. There is a mutuality and yes, I may benefit from being in this relationship within this experience of working together but primarily the other person is the focus.”

Quote 9

“Willingness to learn and to learn mistakes. Have a go and learn but it is okay to get it wrong and fail.”

Shared Skills and Specialisations

There is overlap between Direct Support and Indirect Support Roles, where both may require some direct support and management skills.

Specialisations can occur in both direct and indirect support roles and may include working from the perspectives of:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds
- People Identifying as LGBTQIA+
- People with Experiences of Family Violence
- Veterans
- People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds
- Child and Youth (or Carer Youth and Families)
- People Identifying as Neurodivergent
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- People from the Deaf Community
- Involuntary Treatment
- Perinatal Mental Health
- Suicide
- People with a Disability
- Eating Disorders
- Incarceration
- Homelessness

- Other Diverse Experiences

Direct Support: Example Role Titles and Position Description

Example Role Titles

- Peer Worker (also Consumer Peer Worker etc.)
- Family and Carer Peer Support Worker
- Peer Mentor (and Recovery Mentor)
- Consumer Rehabilitation Support Worker
- Wellbeing (and Lived Expertise) Coach

- Peer Artist
- Lifestyle Facilitator
- Lived Expertise Group Facilitator
- Recovery Worker (and Assistant)

Core Competencies

1. Advocate for consumers
2. Support consumers to make positive changes towards recovery by identifying strengths
3. Serve as a positive role model
4. Well-developed communication, both verbal and written, to work collaboratively across multidisciplinary teams

5. Provide feedback and advice to multidisciplinary team members regarding consumer and/or carer participation
6. Provide education and guidance on recovery-oriented practice.
7. Work within appropriate boundaries and draw on knowledge and expertise gained through reflection on own lived experience.

Core Attributes

1. Provide recovery-orientated, 'consumer' and/or 'carer' focused peer support
2. Advocate for consumers
3. Support consumers to make positive changes towards recovery by identifying strengths
4. Serve as a positive role model
5. Well-developed communication, both verbal and written, to work collaboratively across multidisciplinary teams
6. Provide feedback and advice to multidisciplinary team members regarding consumer and/or carer participation
7. Provide education and guidance on recovery-oriented practice.
8. Work within appropriate boundaries and draw on knowledge and expertise gained through reflection on own lived experience.

Qualifications

1. Certificate IV in Mental Health or Mental Health Peer Work (Desirable)

Indirect Support: Example Role Titles and Position Description

Example Role Titles

- Director (and Manager)
- Peer Support Supervisors (and Coordinators)
- Carer (and Consumer) Consultant
- Carer (and Consumer) Coordinator

- Team Leader
- Service Manager
- Consumer Participation Coordinator
- Lived Experience (Consumer) Academic

Key Duties

1. Advocacy and development of the Lived Experience workforce
2. Supervision and mentoring
3. Business development
4. Education, training and research
5. Expert advice on policy, planning, evaluation, process and strategic direction
6. Lived experience perspective to support decision making
7. Advocacy

Core Attributes

1. Communication skills
2. Negotiation skills
3. Ability to influence
4. Ability to establish strategic partnerships
5. Knowledge of recovery and service systems
6. Knowledge of legislation
7. Skills in training, education and research

Qualifications

1. Ranges from Certificate IV to postgraduate qualifications
2. Relevant previous experience

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