

LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE PROJECT (LEWP)

Exploring a Career in Lived Experience Work

Updated September 2018

The aim of this document is to provide ideas that you can explore for getting involved in the Lived Experience 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!

Shandy Arlidge and Belinda Brown
Lived Experience Workforce Project (LEWP)

Understanding Peer Work

There is so much to understand about peer work before taking on the role. For example, simply having lived experience of mental health issues and recovery does not make someone an effective Lived Experience Worker. Effective Lived Experience Workers are highly skilled and trained in how to apply what they have learned through their journey, to their work practice.

It is not necessarily about 'telling your story'. Whilst some roles may call for you to do so purposefully (e.g. community education, presenting, public speaking), it is more often about the ability to *draw from* your own experience purposefully, to promote hope and support recovery. Peer work is intentional, professional and purposeful. Peer work is underpinned by unique values, principles and core skills, and operates within guiding frameworks such as recovery and trauma informed approaches.

To better understand what peer work is, what it isn't and peer work values and principles, you might like to begin by exploring the research and evidence. The following are just some of the people and organisations who have done some incredible work in this area:

To better understand what peer work is, what it isn't and peer work values and principles, you might like to begin by exploring the research and evidence. The following are just some of the people and organisations who have done some incredible work in this area:

- Intentional Peer Support <http://www.intentionalpeersupport.org/> – also look at publications by Shery Mead and Chris Hansen
- Peer Zone <http://www.peerzone.info/about-us> – also look at publications by Mary O'Hagan
- Dr Louise Byrne (Australia)
- Professor Mike Slade (UK)
- Pat Deegan
- Helen Glover
- Charter of Peer Support (Australia)

- Peer Work Hub Australia - <http://peerworkhub.com.au/>
- Peerlink - <https://www.peerlinktac.org/>

Non-Government and Government Lived Experience Workforce in SA

Whilst the essential criteria of lived experience and operating from peer values is common to all designated lived experience roles, the position titles and duties performed will vary according to 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.

Making time to chat with people in different roles, programs and organisations can be helpful in understanding what the role would 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 www.mhcsa.org.au/our-members/ 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: <http://jobs.sahealthcareers.com.au/caw/en/listing/>

You can read more about working at SA Health here:

<http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/careers+at+s+a+health/mental+health+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:

- 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, 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 are the gaps – do I meet the requirements of a peer work role?
- 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 career journey. Try these as a starting point:

- Seriously consider the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work; the only peer work-specific qualification. It meets the benchmark qualification for working in the mental health sector. Theory, evidence and practical activities help develop lived experience into an employable skill set https://www.tafesa.edu.au/xml/course/aw/aw_TP01024.aspx
- Not ready to commit to a qualification? Mind Australia sometimes hold a one-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 www.mhcsa.org.au and sign up to eNews to stay informed. Look for us on Twitter and Facebook
- Creative or enjoy other people's creativity? Visit mindshare www.mindshare.org.au
- Join the LEWP Mailing List. Contact Bel at belinda.brown@mhcsa.org.au
- Our friends at the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist (SA Health) manage a mailing list called the Statewide Mental Health Lived Experience Register. To subscribe, email the OCP Health.StatewideLivedExperienceRegister@sa.gov.au
- Join the SA Lived Experience Leadership and Advocacy Network (LELAN). Read more at www.ourvoicesa.org or contact info@ourvoicesa.org.au
- Keep an eye on the SA Mental Health Commission's website samhc@sa.gov.au
- Attend Mental Health Week activities during October each year – many are free. Information can be found at our Events Calendar leading up to and during Mental Health Week <http://www.mhcsa.org.au/mhcsa-events/>
- To chat about the Government Lived Experience Workforce (SA Health), email Matt Halpin matthew.halpin@sa.gov.au or Taegan Soper Taegan.soper@sa.gov.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. Keep your eye on our website www.mhcsa.org.au/lewp-training-and-professional-development/ or contact us:

Belinda Brown, Senior Project Officer – LEWP belinda.brown@mhcsa.org.au

Shandy Arlidge, Project Manager – LEWP shandy.arlidge@mhcsa.org.au