

LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE PROJECT (LEWP) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Peer Worker Interview Question Examples

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 – it is, after all, one of the main essential criteria of a Peer Work role! What we know is that many people are uncomfortable and unsure as to what to ask when it comes to someone's personal journey. The information in this document has been adapted from training that the LEWP provides for Leaders of Lived Experience Workforce (LEW). Ideas have been co-designed by Lived Experience Workers (LEWs) and Leaders, to support organisations in building understanding of the Lived Experience skill set and increasing confidence in recruiting for it.

Asking the right questions about Lived Experience 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. Scenario questions are a great way to have an applicant demonstrate their understanding of their own journey, what they have learned and how they have/will apply it in practice.

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

The Values of Peer Work

Peer Workers should know the values that underpin the role and how to 'live' those through work practice. There are many publications on the values of Peer Work from people such as Mary O'Hagan, Pat Deegan and Shery Mead to name a few. While lists may vary, the points below capture the generally agreed upon values:

- Hope
- Resilience
- Self-determination
- Strength
- Equality
- Respect
- Reciprocity and mutuality

Demonstrating Peer Work Values

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.

Examples taken from the Scottish Recovery Network's document:

- 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 of mental illness and recovery'. Peer Workers need to have the skills and expertise to use what they have learned in practice.

Lived Experience as an employable skill set consists of:

1. Experiential Knowledge:

- Information acquired through the process of one's own recovery.

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 White and Sanders *Recovery Coaching Training Manual* 2006

Drawing from Lived Experience Purposefully

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. Whether it is drawing from or sharing their story to provide direct support, for the purposes of education or to respectfully challenge and provide another point of view, effective Peer Workers have learned to do so skillfully and from a Trauma Informed Care perspective. That is, drawing from Lived Experience should be purposeful, provide hope, focus on strengths rather than illness and should NEVER add trauma to that which the person has already experienced.

Expectations around sharing or drawing from Lived Experience should be clearly articulated in the Job Description and can be further clarified during the interview.

Sample Questions

Scenarios for Demonstrating 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 to facilitate theirs?
- The role of Peer Worker requires a great deal of professionalism and responsibility while supporting people in difficult situations. There may be situations that could bring up past issues in relation to your Lived Experience. How would you deal with this in the workplace?
- The role of Peer Worker requires working 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 encountered 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 take into account before reporting what was said to the team?
- A young person who is couch surfing and experiencing anxiety and depression has been referred to this service. Using your Lived Experience, 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 draw from your Lived Experience to connect with the person and how might you handle the situation?