Help and Tips for

For Lived Experience or Peer Workers

TRANSITIONING BACK TO THE WORKPLACE AFTER COVID-19

Leaders have observed amazing leadership skills in their Lived Experience Workforce as they adapted to the changes brought about by the pandemic. It is important to acknowledge the transition back to the workplace will be difficult for some people and may need to occur in diverse ways to ensure all staff feel safe and comfortable.

The resilience, knowledge and skills that lived experience workers bring is critical in supporting this transition. Despite the challenges, the COVID-19 has also presented some benefits for lived experience workers.

- Isolation is not a new concept for many people with mental health challenges.
- Strategies learned from past experiences have been very helpful for many.
- Technology has allowed meetings and support to include people in regional areas who may not have been able to access services otherwise.
- People have been able to use technology to 'see' each other rather than contact just by phone.
- Some programs have been expanded through technology without restrictions such as travel.
- More frequent connections with teams and consumers.

Open conversations

It will be important to have open discussions with your line manager, team leaders, peer supervisors, etc. Talk about things such as:

- Challenges for you in transitioning.
- Debriefing.
- Positive learnings from the COVID-19 experience.
- Potential for different ways of returning to work. This might be flexible working arrangements, gradual return to the workplace.
- Be open to negotiation.

Develop ways of transitioning back

This will be the key for lived experience workers and your clients.

- Negotiate a gradual return to the office if you feel it would be more helpful for you.
- Be prepared for the impact of returning to work. This will be different for everyone.
- Be aware of the emotional impact of seeing everyone again.
- Make time for leaving home and travelling.
- Know changes to travel and other restrictions, ie public transport, numbers in lifts etc.
- Adjust to working alongside your colleagues again.
- Manage physical distancing restrictions including any feelings you might have of being around others.
- Be aware of your workload as you return.
- Ensure your work time is realistic, be careful of early burnout or any blurring of boundaries as more might be expected of you during the transition period.
- Consider personal information you are prepared to share or take in. People can want to talk about COVID-19, others will just want to get on with work.

- Discuss debriefing strategies to meet your needs in the transition.
- Develop self-care strategies and make sure you action these.
- Be patient – with others and with yourself.
- Reflect on connecting with each other beyond work if this is something that may assist ie social (staff lunches) celebrating achievements etc.
- Engage with building team rapport.

There have been significant changes in how services are delivered now and into the future.

Some lived experience workers may prefer the 'new' ways of connecting. Not everyone finds connecting to meetings online a positive experience.

People have been forced to work from home, alone in most cases. Transitioning back may be easier for some. There may be some emotional fallout from these experiences, and these need to be acknowledged as we all step into the future.

We wish to acknowledge and thank participants of the Lived Experience Workforce Program, Mental Health Coalition of South Australia for the information gathered from workshops and meetings with the NGO lived experience workers and leaders who co-designed the information for this Tip Sheet.

Disclaimer:

LEWP, MHCSA and LEA acknowledge the source of material for this resource as Lived Experience Workforce Program, Mental Health Coalition of South Australia. This particular resource has been adapted for the purposes of transitioning back into the workplace after COVID-19. While we have taken care in the development of the content, we are not responsible for any action taken in response to it. Lived experience or peer workers accessing this resource are advised to seek help from their GP, mental health support worker or Lifeline if they are distressed by any of the content.

Developed: June 2020

Review: December 2020

© Lived Experience Australia, 2020

www.LivedExperienceAustralia.com.au

LEWP LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE PROGRAM

Mental Health Coalition OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Lived Experience AUSTRALIA