

Valuing lived experience in the workforce

At the WY-FI Project we believe that lived experience of homelessness, addiction, re-offending and/or mental ill health is an asset within the workforce, especially when organisations foster an inclusive culture and develop flexible and inclusive recruitment and retention practices. Here are the 10 key principles agreed by the WY-FI Project, followed by some practical suggestions on how to implement them.

We cover:

- Inclusive recruitment
- Support and development
- Organisational culture
- Retention and sustained employment

10 key principles

- 1 The WY-FI Project embraces a unified strategic approach to inclusive employment of people with lived experience of homelessness, addiction, re-offending and/or mental ill health
- 2 Recruitment is accessible, inclusive and appealing to people with lived experience
- 3 The benefits of recruiting people with lived experience in the workplace is visibly promoted
- 4 Equality and Diversity workforce training raises awareness of lived experience in the workplace to combat stigma and promote diversity ensuring an inclusive culture
- 5 HR policies, procedures and processes explore flexibility to ongoing support needs of people with complex personal circumstances
- 6 Management/HR create safe forums for open discussion and disclosure where staff can identify support needs and reasonable adjustments to enable individuals to excel at their roles
- 7 Organisations empower employees to identify forums of support inside and outside of work; enabling staff to maintain their wellbeing/recovery through the promotion of personal responsibility
- 8 Individuals with lived experience may be engaged in external networks of support and recovery that explore complex friendships/relationships and boundaries outside of traditional codes of conduct – employers should consider training and support around employee access to forums such as mutual aid/recovery groups
- 9 We value peer support as an additional system of support in the workplace, defining clear mentoring roles and expectations
- 10 Organisations proactively consult with people with lived experience and review approaches to improve delivery of a safe and responsive culture for employees with lived experience to thrive in

Inclusive recruitment

Possible challenge	Suggested good practice
Suitable roles not available to allow people with lived experience to enter the sector.	Design and review of suitable roles (part time, trainee, apprenticeships etc) to allow access to employment. People with lived experience to be involved in recruitment processes.
Role Descriptions include criteria that restricts individuals who may have needed a career break in order to focus on their recovery. An example of such restrictive criteria is admin experience in the last two years.	To review role descriptions and ensure that essential and desirable criteria are a genuine reflection of the needs of the role, with no exclusionary specifications around recent employment.
Lived experience is not always identified as a valid qualifier, or requested as evidence in interviews when on the person specification.	Employers to review recruitment processes, enabling lived experience to be presented as criteria, through tasks and questions and to qualify appropriate support of their recovery.
People may be worried about money management and transition to paid employment (travel expenses before first pay, child care, debt etc).	Employers to encourage an open, honest and safe discussion about these potential difficulties, including money management, then support/signpost people as needed.
Job Descriptions may be complicated, use jargon and alienate potential applicants with lived experience through promotion in areas not accessed often by people with lived experience.	Develop all recruitment documents to be accessible (consider advertising routes) and inclusive; and that use appropriate language.
Employers may be disproportionately risk averse around employing ex-offenders (DBS).	Employers to consider Recruit!'s 'Fair Chance' recruitment and DBS guidelines, Ban the Box Campaign and incorporate proactive use of the UK Government's Updated guidance on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 .
People with lived experience who are not successful in applications or at interview may be deterred from re-applying for similar positions.	Providing feedback, where possible, to support people with lived experience to deal with rejection and identify areas for development.

INVESTING IN
**HUMAN
RESOURCES**
IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS!



"My lived experience is the most beneficial part of my approach when I work with WY-FI beneficiaries. Beneficiaries don't see me as authoritative and they also see how it's possible to turn things around."

Louise, Peer Mentor, Leeds

Support and development

Possible challenge	Suggested good practice
Staff with lived experience sometimes overcompensate, wanting to overachieve to prove themselves. This can result in overworking and burn out.	Boundaries and expectations to be set in induction around working hours and expectations and supervision to be set regularly, collaboratively and in response to those with lived experience.
Staff who have disclosed lived experience might feel vulnerable around their acceptance by wider team members and being treated differently.	Organisational recognition of the value of people with lived experience in the workforce and support around appropriate disclosure.
Staff coming into a new sector can feel overwhelmed by expectations of tasks. Some need a little longer to adjust to new surroundings.	Regular supervision and realistic, flexible expectations in early stages. Consideration of employee mentoring schemes and coaching to provide further support.
Gaps in history when experiencing multiple needs may mean that individuals feel segregated from their peers / colleagues.	Staff induction and development should ensure team building and cohesion as an essential part of an employee's support package.

Organisational culture (including training and awareness)

Possible challenge	Suggested good practice
People with lived experience identify that social culture can be a challenge – eg make excuses if activity is linked to drinking and individual has experienced issues with alcohol. Social events can also be difficult for people who experience anxiety.	Organisations to consider team social cultures, including where nights out and seasonal parties are held. Internal culture ensures explicit permission to opt-out of social events. Management to be aware and reactive to potential peer pressure.
Professional background Vs lived experience – staff potentially not recognising the value of their colleagues in personal recovery and under-utilising the skill-set that is exclusive to those with lived experience.	Exploring the potential for those with lived experience to support training and awareness sessions around multiple and complex needs.
People may access mutual aid groups or other support where remits of anonymity are different to those of employer expectations.	Development of mutual aid guidance policy (see Bridge example) and training for managers to include a consideration of potential safeguarding, boundaries and confidentiality issues that may arise in these settings.
People may have relationships with others still in recovery or accessing the service they work for.	Development of clear and robust policy and guidance for staff about personal relationships with individuals in recovery; including opportunity for staff to declare these.
Organisations may outwardly display an understanding of the issues relating to people with lived experience but the culture of the workforce may not represent this.	All levels of staffing to be made aware of the nuances of employee diversity, including (but not exclusively) people with lived experience. An inclusive culture avoids an 'us and them' attitude.

Support, welfare and retention

Possible challenge	Suggested good practice
An individual from any background may experience new complex needs which may impact on their work.	HR policies contain guidance for managers on how to work through this fairly and supportively and to directly include all the 4 HARM areas.
Individual not feeling that management are aware of their circumstances and that they are fearful to disclose these.	Create spaces where disclosure is safe and encouraged. Manager training on robust and supportive supervision and to be aware of what disclosure may contain and how to respond. Organisations to consider using the Mindful Employer ' Making Work Work ' confidential disclosure/advance directive template.
People with multiple and complex needs may trigger performance or sickness related polices earlier than their counterparts.	Create / re-develop relevant HR policies, in coproduction with experts by experience. Organisational wide agreement on how to apply those policies consistently; confident in their understanding of the Equality Act 2010 and its guidance on reasonable adjustments .
Access to mutual aid and other recovery forums may become more limited eg due to time constraints / transition into employment.	Access to support groups should be encouraged throughout employment and not just at the start of their recovery journey but at any time during their working life when they may find the support beneficial.
Limited opportunities for people with lived experience to compete in more senior roles.	Progressive opportunities including training, packages that support development, appropriate move-on roles and opportunities to progress into management (leadership programme).

"Lived experience is managed differently. However, you have to be careful not to give those with lived experience their own policy. You do have to take into account that they may have meetings that would aid their sustained recovery and may have appointments that are important to attend."

Richard Foster, Team Leader,
WY-FI Leeds



connecting people, services and commissioners