



## Employing people with lived experience: A guide

The value people with lived experience can bring to our health and social care system is increasingly being recognised. One of the ways we can incorporate people with lived experience in our work is through creating lived experienced roles. Thus far, the most prevalent lived experience roles are peer support roles, often in mental health and substance misuse services, although there are other roles where people with lived experience can thrive and add value in health and social care, such as Healthcare Support Worker roles.

### Why is it a good idea?

People with lived experience can offer a unique perspective on our health and social care services based on real experience. They can tell us first hand what it is like to experience a certain issue or service. On an organisational level, people with lived experience can help us to make our services better and improve outcomes for our population.

[The South East Partnership's Fulfilling Lives Toolkit for Employing People with Lived Experience of Multiple and Complex Needs](#) tells us that for the person being employed, some of the benefits are:

- A chance to make something out of a negative experience
- Being invested in their work
- Growing professionally in a structured and supportive environment
- An opportunity to develop confidence and new skills.

For more on how employing people with lived experience can benefit both the people employed and the services they are employed into, the RIC Hub have made a film showcasing Stacey and Joanna's Story. A breakdown of the process taken to recruit these roles as an example of best practice can be found later in this guide.

While employing people with lived experience is gaining traction, turning a nice idea in principle into real life practice might seem unclear. Cardiff and Vale RIC Hub have created this guide to give you a place to start. Drawing upon existing resources and literature, we've co-ordinated information on common challenges, barriers and enablers of employing people with lived experience. You can find all of the resources we've looked at the end of this guide.



## Where to begin

### Buy in from senior leaders

Buy in from senior leaders is crucial to the development of lived experience roles and can ensure a culture where lived experience is valued. Understanding the strategic context and how lived experience roles can benefit your organisation will be key to this. [You can read more about understanding strategic context here.](#)

Support from senior leaders is not only important for creating lived experience roles in the first instance, it can also be of huge benefit when trying to change workplace attitudes to the value of lived experience and for developing organisational policies that enable people with lived experience to thrive in employment.

### Creating the role

Checking if there are already lived experience roles in your organisation is a great place to start. There might already be similar job descriptions that you can adapt to your service area. There are some further tips on this on the next page. Adapting existing roles, such as health care assistant posts, or developing trainee and apprenticeship roles is another avenue you could pursue when looking to create a lived experience job opportunity.

Starting off with a pilot role might be beneficial if there is uncertainty about how the role would work in your area as there is less risk involved. If the pilot is successful, it will be easier to mainstream the role and secure funding. For more information on successful pilots, [take a look at our guide.](#)

### Funding

The first place to start is to assess current resourcing and see if you can fund the role within core budget. One of the ways you could do this is to see if there are currently vacancies that aren't filled in your service area and explore repurposing for the lived experience role.

If you are looking to create a lived experience role in your commissioned service, you could discuss taking on these roles with your commissioner to understand if it fits with the requirements.

If you are unable to fund the role internally, explore external funding, such as from Welsh Government. Look at the criteria for funding and see if the role you want to create meets that criteria. If you go down this route, consider where the funding will come from for the posts after the grant funding has ended. It is important to consider the benefits of the role, such as evidencing improved service outcomes, social return on investment and values-based care. [Take a look at our guide on Performance and Outcome Metrics for more information.](#)

### A step further?

Creating specific lived experienced roles isn't the only way we can incorporate lived experience in employment. We all have lived experience of something, so why don't we ask if candidates have lived experience that might be a benefit to the role and team? Doing so would contribute to the cultural change of recognising lived experience as a valuable asset and can ultimately improve our health and social care system.



### The Job Description

There isn't one standard lived experience job description, it will need to be tailored to the position. A job description for a peer support role in substance misuse services will be vastly different to a job description for a healthcare support worker in learning disability services.

Be clear about what the expectations of the role are and ensure that the essential and desirable criteria in the person specification are a true reflection of this. This will help applicants decide whether it is something that is suitable for them, ensure the employer and team know what they can ask of the employee and can ensure good team working.

### Where to advertise

When seeking applicants for lived experience roles, you may not get many applicants if you only advertise through your organisations website or through job listing sites, so it is beneficial to reach out to established networks. Third sector organisations and County Voluntary Councils will be able to help identify where you can go to reach the groups you're looking for.

### The interview

Job interviews can be a daunting experience for all of us. Making sure the interview process is accessible and friendly as possible is one way of putting applicants at ease. You can see more about this below.

Another way of improving the interview process is by including people with lived experience in the interview panel or having an additional interview focusing on the lived experience aspect of the role. Including people with lived experience in interview panels can make applicants feel more comfortable in sharing their lived experience and might ask questions you may not think to ask.

### Accessibility

Be mindful of the accessibility needs of the people you want to attract for the role. Here are some tips from [The South East Partnership's Fulfilling Lives Employment Toolkit](#):

- Creating a simpler application form with tips and guidance on how to complete the form
- Valuing volunteering and experience alongside work experience
- Not expecting people to justify gaps in employment
- Creating interview questions that are focused more on emotional intelligence and psychological aspects rather than technical skills
- Printing off the Interview Questions and giving them to the candidate during the interview
- Allowing plenty of time for candidates to answer questions including breaks if needed
- Really considering each time how we could put people at ease as much as possible

### Providing Feedback

Unsuccessful applicants might be deterred from applying for similar positions. Providing feedback for unsuccessful applicants by explaining why they didn't get the job and areas they can improve on can overcome this challenge and encourage people to apply for similar positions in the future.



## During employment

### Flexibility

Flexible organisational policies can enable people with lived experience to thrive in employment:

- Where possible, flexible working hours and the ability to work from home can be particularly helpful for people with disabilities who might find it challenging to travel to a place of work, or for unpaid carers who might need to be at hand to support the person they are caring for.
- Developing flexible sickness absence policies and putting reasonable adjustments in place can ensure that people with lived experience aren't disadvantaged by their circumstances. Doing so can also contribute to a supportive working environment.

### Training

Training is an important aspect of employing people with lived experience. It can support people in the transition into work and help build confidence as well as skills. Creating an induction pack for new employees can be a great place to start, with information about the organisation, team members and what to expect in the first few weeks of their new role.

Training all staff on topics such as the value of lived experience, co-production and health inequities can help avoid issues such as marginalisation and ensure that people with lived experience are seen as assets by all.

### Career Progression

Employing someone with lived experience shouldn't just be a means to an end. People with lived experience can bring value to the organisation they work in but there should also be a focus on developing skills and opportunities to progress into other roles. Supporting people in lived experience roles to develop their skills and move into different roles is part of the social value benefit of employing people with lived experience. Training, shadowing and mentoring are great ways for people with lived experience to grow their skills.

### Understanding the emotional burden

Working in a lived experience role can sometimes be emotionally demanding, as you are sharing your experiences with people you work with as part of the role, whether that be with fellow staff or service users. Being mindful of this and putting in place wellbeing support can ensure the emotional aspect of the role is manageable.

Supportive supervision where employees feel safe to share their circumstances can minimise the challenges associated with this. Training on supportive supervision and leadership is available in most organisations to ensure that managers are able to respond to these situations appropriately and confidently.

It can also be helpful to signpost to existing support groups or create opportunities for people employed in lived experience roles to connect with each other. Many organisations have employee networks that might be relevant and your areas County Voluntary Council will be able to provide you with information about groups outside of the organisation. For Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, this is Cardiff Third Sector Council and Glamorgan Voluntary Services.



## A Case Study

*"We often talk about people with learning disabilities being intrinsic to our work and essential and I think one day we looked up and thought we have nobody employed with a learning disability which makes absolutely no sense." - Alun Phillips, Team Manager Cardiff and Vale Community Disability Services*

### Securing funding and creating the role

Following a partnership project in which people with lived experience co-produced 'Our Health, Our Voice', it was highlighted that the voice of people with lived experience shouldn't just be part of project work but embedded into core service delivery. The lead nurse from the Learning Disability Team approached the region's Learning Disability Partnership Board to develop lived experience roles in the service. By taking a partnership approach, the team were able to secure buy in from senior leaders to get the idea off the ground.

Funding was secured through Welsh Government via the Regional Partnership Board, who allocated Regional Integration Fund money to support Cardiff and Vale to address the gap in the voice of lived experience in their work and develop innovations across the area.

### Advertising and recruitment

The team developed an Easy Read job advert, which was checked over by people with a learning disability to make sure it was understandable while still being a true reflection of the job role. The team utilised their existing networks by reaching out to Cardiff People First and Vale People First, two local third sector organisations, to advertise the roles. They knew that there would be far more interest by reaching out to people this way than solely using traditional job advertising avenues.

Following this, the team worked with the region's Learning Disability Partnership Group and People First to hold an event for people with learning disabilities to come along and learn more about the roles. By doing so, potential applicants were able to get an understanding of what the role entailed and what would be expected of them, so they could decide whether or not it was something they would be interested in pursuing.

Taking this a step further, potential applicants were also given assistance in filling out the accessible job application form if they needed it, to further reduce any barriers to applying for the roles. In the application form, applicants were asked to share any experiences that would make them a suitable candidate for the role, not limiting applicants to only work experience, which is an important part of recruiting to lived experience roles.

After this, the team held a half day interview session. Maintaining a partnership approach, the interview panel consisted of people from across agencies, such as the third sector and both Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Local Authorities, as well as people with lived experience. Five applicants were highlighted as being suitable for the roles, before narrowing it down to Joanna and Stacey who were successful and started in post in September 2021.

### Success

Following the success of the roles, Joanna and Stacey met with the Director of Operations for Primary Care and Intermediate Care, who is responsible for the funding of the positions, to discuss the roles in more detail and further understand the impact that lived experience roles can have in our health and social care system.

Funding has now been confirmed for 2023 to 2025 and there is great appetite for more lived experienced roles in the service.



## Additional Resources

[Fulfilling Lives: Employing People With Lived Experience of Multiple and Complex Needs \(MCN\)](#)

Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership have created this great toolkit for employers with advice for employing people with lived experience. It focuses on multiple and complex needs but the information is transferable to other groups

[Valuing lived experience in the workforce](#)

This resource created by West Yorkshire - Finding Independence features brilliant information on key principles, challenges and good practice of employing people with lived experience

[Fulfilling Lives South East Employment Programme: Learning So Far \(2019\)](#)

This looks at the lessons learned from the Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership employment programme. It features information about impact, barriers and recommendations.

[Seeing the whole person: reflections on a journey into employment](#)

In this blog post, a person working in a lived experience role share their experience of employment. It focussing on the challenges they have faced and what has helped them in their role.

[Involving people with lived experience in the workforce](#)

This evaluation of the Fulfilling Lives programme aims to help leaders and staff in organisations understand how and why they might involve people with lived experience in the workforce.

[What if lived experience was viewed and utilised as a valuable asset?](#)

In this blog post, Lucy Watts MBE, who is a person with a disability, discusses lived experience as an asset and how this can be achieved.

[Employing people with lived experience](#)

Watch this session hosted by Homeless Link to hear about successful models and best practice of employing people with lived experience within third sector organisation Shelter and Birmingham Changing Futures Together programme.

[Developing and evaluating mental health lived experience practitioner roles in an NHS Trust](#)

This research paper looks at developing and evaluating mental health lived experience practitioner roles in an NHS Trust. It focusses on role creation, recruitment and evaluation.

[Promoting Lived Experience Perspective](#)

This research paper discusses ways to promote lived experience participation in the mental health sector in Queensland, Australia.

Visit the [Regional Innovation Co-ordination Hub website](#) to see more of our work or get in touch by emailing [Dylan.John4@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:Dylan.John4@wales.nhs.uk) if you have an idea you'd like to explore together

