

Lived Experience Workers

A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS



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From North Richmond Community Health (NRCH):

Tere Dawson
Sophie Dutertre
Achut Thuc
Brendan Coulton
Laura O'Shea

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Clare Lorenz
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INTRODUCTION



Context

This guide reflects the experience of Lived Experience Workers and managers at North Richmond Community Health (NRCH) and the North Richmond Precinct team of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH). In recent years, both organisations have recruited and employed workers who live, or have lived, on a public housing estate in the City of Yarra and are representative of the cultural diversity of the estates.

Our experience of employing those Lived Experienced Workers in entry level positions has led us to the development of two guides: one for the workers themselves, and one for their managers or supervisors.

The guides were developed through a consultation process, including:

- ✓ input from the Lived Experience/Cultural Workforce Advisory Group including representatives from North Richmond Community Health (NRCH) and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) – Yarra.
- ✓ interviews with 20 Lived Experience Workers and 15 managers that have worked with Lived Experience Workers.
- ✓ a review of existing guides and reports on this topic (See Appendix 1).

The guides are a genuine reflection on the inputs received - with potential responses and actions grounded in experience. They are not definitive guides to all things Lived Experience Workers-related. Depending on the context, Lived Experience Workers can include peer workers in Alcohol and Other Drugs services, mental health workers, peer educators...

Our cohort is specifically those working in housing and community fields. Lived Experience Workers contribute to our workforce representing the diversity of the community that we serve.

How to use this guide

It is recommended that the implementation of this guide be embedded within an organisational structure, linked to People and Culture and other relevant organisational policies (e.g. Consumer and Community Engagement

Framework; Lived Experience Framework). Supporting strategies can include:

- ✓ Organisational internal communication strategy.
- ✓ Organisational staff training program about working with Lived Experience Workers.
- ✓ Community communications strategy.
- ✓ Training program for Lived Experience Workers.

This guide is especially designed for managers of workers in entry-level/ junior roles, or in their first professional role in an Australian workplace. It is not suitable for managers of senior staff.

Definition of Lived Experience Workers

For the purpose of this guide, a Lived Experience Worker is defined as a 'designated' position¹ (where an employer specifies that a role is to be given to a person with a particular characteristic) in as much as the employer identifies them as a worker who:

- ✓ works and lives in the same community as the employing organisation (location, public housing).

Veronica works in a community engagement program. She migrated from South Sudan as a teenager, speaks Arabic and Dinka, and lives in one of the public housing high-rises in the same estate where her workplace is located. Like many other Lived Experienced Workers around Victoria, she was recruited during the Covid-19 epidemic to encourage local residents to follow public safety measures and to get vaccinated.

Veronica's role has since changed to a broader community support role, where she helps people with issues related to their housing, family relationships, or children's health. She often acts as a cultural interpreter between families and local services. She sometimes accompanies residents to appointments. She is known to all on the estate and her knowledge and skills are highly valued by the South Sudanese families, who rely on her to help solve any issue they may have – and not only during her work hours.



¹ 'Designated roles are designed to help eliminate inequalities for groups that may experience significant disadvantage when it comes to employment.' Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

- is required to work within their cultural community (culture and language).
- has self-identified as having a lived experience relevant to the role.

Benefits of employing a Lived Experience workforce

BENEFITS FOR THE ORGANISATION

Research shows that employment of Lived Experience Workers often contributes to better outcomes of clients.² This is clearly of benefit to the organisation, whose expressed mission is community well-being.

NRCH and DFFH managers consulted through the development of this guide mentioned that having Lived Experience Workers help them connect and communicate better with clients because these workers have a deep cultural understanding of the community they work in. Thus, they help managers by providing important insights to working more effectively with the communities the organisation serves.

They connect with people in a way that others can't. It's an asset. (Manager)

Among the specific benefits on employing Lived Experience Workers, NRCH and DFFH managers mentioned:

- promoting a culturally safer workplace.
- learning from other cultures.
- developing policies and protocols which reflect diversity.
- creating diversity in leadership.
- ensuring that programs are co-designed to meet the needs of diverse communities.

Further to the benefits for the organisations, the research conducted to develop this guide suggested that there are also benefits to the community and to the Lived Experience Workers themselves.

A community worker is organising a focus group with members of a Chinese community association. The community worker consults with the group to know which Chinese dialect is required when booking an interpreter. The community group is mostly Hokkien-speaking; the organiser is able to book a Hokkien interpreter for the group.

The Chinese group appreciates that it was not assumed that they would speak Mandarin, and that the worker was aware of different dialects. It shows respect and cultural awareness, which builds a sense of trust.



² Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2011. Addressing the strengths and complexities of bicultural youth and family work; Rogers et al. 2021. Cross Cultural Workers for women and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds: a mixed-methods study of service providers perceptions. BMC Women's Health. 21:222; ENLIVEN. 2018. Bicultural brilliance – A toolkit for working with and as Bicultural Workers; National Mental Health Commission. 2023. National Lived Experience Workforce Development Guidelines: Getting Started

BENEFITS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Employing Lived Experience Workers can benefit the community. For example, community members may:

- ✔ appreciate having workers that can empathise with their circumstances as they have lived experience of similar situations.
- ✔ find it easier to access information about services and processes.
- ✔ feel relieved to be supported in their language.
- ✔ get better health outcomes.
- ✔ better understand why accessing services may take longer than they wish sometimes.

BENEFITS FOR THE LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKERS

Workers in these positions recognise that these roles are beneficial to themselves. Some of the benefits of being employed in these positions include:

- ✔ supporting others in the community to access services.
- ✔ increased knowledge about working in an office environment, and about Australian workplace norms.
- ✔ new skills.
- ✔ opportunities to work and engage with diverse cultures.
- ✔ working in a community they grew up in.
- ✔ opportunities to develop strong trusting relationships with communities they support.
- ✔ being in a position to make suggestions to improve services for their community.

A community centre is having recurring issues with some groups who want to be able to access facilities when it suits their activities, regardless of opening hours.

Some community groups do not understand why they cannot use the rooms once the staff is there and feel they are being unfairly kept out. They complain to the workers that they feel they are being 'picked on' by the centre's manager and that it is related to their ethnicity.

The Lived Experienced Workers explain to the groups that the first hour in the morning is necessary for the team to have a briefing and prepare the rooms so that when the centre is open, workers are entirely available to community members. They also highlight the fact that the centre does not close for lunch, so that people can use the services continuously throughout the day.

Since the community groups have been told the reasons behind the opening hours, they have seemed happy to respect the rule and no longer arrive early.



RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT



Position Description

The Position Description (PD) must clearly describe the responsibilities and expectations of the Lived Experience Worker's role. It is an ongoing point of reference for managers and workers during supervision and can help ensure that changing or competing demands can be managed.

SUGGESTED POSITION DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE

Title: Lived Experience Worker

Business Unit:

Location:

Employment Type:

Reports to:

Organisation Information

[Insert information]

Organisational values

[Insert information]

Position Purpose

[Suggestions only]

- Referral and support
- Community engagement
- Early response and prevention
- Maintenance of a Local Reference Group to guide and monitor program implementation
- Expert consultation and support panel
- Evaluation of the program
- Occasional travel may be required

Relationships

Internal: Program Coordinator, Program Leaders, Team Leaders and other staff members as required.

External: DoH, DFFH, NFP, NGOs, Local, State and Federal Governments, etc.

Key Responsibility Areas

[Suggestions only, select a few from this list]

- Promotion of organisation and other services to community members and key stakeholders, to raise awareness of the service.
- Referral of community members to appropriate support services.
- Family and community outreach.
- Provide support to the organisation to deliver organisation-specific activities to respond to gaps in service delivery.
- Develop and assist with social and cultural events to support the local community and improve connections to services.
- Provide support to deliver culturally appropriate and responsive services.
- Ensure that individuals and communities are at the centre of programs and services.
- Operate within the policies and frameworks of the employing organisation or government department.
- Deliver workshops and training sessions to community members and professional stakeholders.
- Develop collaborative relationships with other agencies providing client services.
- Liaise with schools and network service providers.
- Advocate for families to access appropriate services.
- Participate in regular supervision with supervisor.
- Set priorities and manage time appropriately.
- Comply with organisational policies and procedures.
- Participate in other projects as required.
- Comply with relevant organisation's Occupational Health and Safety standards.

Experience - Essential

[To be completed by managers]

Desirable

[To be completed by managers]

SOURCE: [enliven \(2018\) A toolkit for working with and as bicultural workers](#)

i Tips

- ✓ Use plain language³ and avoid acronyms.
- ✓ PD to be reviewed by a diverse working group (including Lived Experience Workers) every year to ensure it is concise and clearly reflects required tasks.



³ A Plain Language Dictionary is available [here](#)

Job advertisement

When looking to recruit Lived Experience Workers, it is useful to consider a wide range of channels beside the organisational website and social media channels. Consider, for example, sharing the opportunity with community leaders, community networks, community-based organisations (e.g. Neighbourhood Houses) and WhatsApp groups.

i Tips

- ✓ Use plain language⁴ and avoid acronyms.
- ✓ Use key language that attracts the right candidates. For example, "flexible working hours to accommodate community needs", "reimbursement for follow-up phone calls, referrals or emails after community engagement".
- ✓ Consider making the application process flexible - for example, by not requiring that Key Selection Criteria be addressed in detail or by accepting video applications.
- ✓ Do not include a requirement of formal qualifications if they are not necessary for the role.

Selection of candidates

Make sure that the key elements that will be used for selecting candidates are clearly outlined in the Position Description. This will ensure that potential applicants are not discouraged by non-core attributes.

For example, if written communications skills, holding a driver's license or having tertiary qualifications are not essential to the position, then they should not be in the selection criteria, nor weigh in the selection of candidates to be interviewed.

This requires managers and recruiters to think 'outside the box' and be wary of not falling back on usual processes that may exclude workers who could bring strong skills to a designated position.

Job interviews

The advice below focuses on the recruitment of Lived Experience Workers in junior/entry-level roles, with limited experience of a professional Australian environment. It does not apply to the recruitment of more senior roles.

In the process of recruiting Lived Experience Workers in junior roles, it is important to remember that job interviews may be a new experience for the worker. Efforts should be made to ensure that the members of the interview panel have experience in working with diversity of lived experiences and that the questions asked allow the applicants to share their experiences.

INTERVIEW ENVIRONMENT

If possible, remove some of the formality of an interview by making it a 'meet and greet' outside the office environment: in a café or in a community centre familiar to the person interviewed.

INTERVIEW PANEL

Aim to have a diverse interview panel that reflects expertise of the role and, if possible, include a community member. If a community member is invited to be a member of the panel, provide them with orientation to the task and a copy of the PD ahead of the interview. Offer them the opportunity to choose which question they would like to ask or ask them if they had a specific question they would like to ask.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Ensure to include at least 1-2 specific interview questions that reassure the applicants. For example: recognising that "self-promotion" is frowned upon in many cultures, friendly probing questions may need to be used to ensure interviewees have the opportunity to talk about their experiences and strengths.

It is recommended to offer the option for candidates to come 30 minutes earlier and provide them with a copy of interview questions to prepare for the interview and reduce their stress. Some employers may even want to forward interview questions prior to the day of the interview.

Onboarding process

Employing Lived Experience Workers requires systems and processes in place to ensure safety and respect for their role. The onboarding process may take up to six months to be implemented in full. This allows opportunity for the Lived Experience Workers to ask questions and actively participate in the process of getting to know the organisation.

Organisations employing Lived Experience Workers need to acknowledge the differences between professionally trained workers and workers who have been engaged in the role due to their lived experience. Workers who have experience and skills relevant to their role, but who have acquired those outside an organisational structure, may require different support structures.

A Lived Experience Worker in a junior role may never have held a job in a professional setting, or at least not in Australia. An understanding of workplace culture can make or break someone's 'fit' in an organisation and their ability to perform their role. Hence, the onboarding process may include information not necessary for other employees; or it may put in place different ways to impart the information - for example through induction workshops, team meetings, a buddy system, mentoring or peer-to-peer support.

⁴ A Plain Language Dictionary is available [here](#)

WORK ETIQUETTE

The orientation program should explicitly include workplace etiquette such as:

- expectation around start and finishing times.
- hours and after-hours work.
- email etiquette.
- applying for leave, including the need of manager's approval.

ORGANISATIONAL CONSIDERATION

Flexible work arrangement around starting and finishing times can be negotiated with the Lived Experience Worker, as managers would with any other employee. Depending on their circumstances, some Lived Experience Workers may be affected by social and economic disadvantage that may impact their work. For example, they may be the only person in the family who has access to a car, be a sole parent with limited support, or live in a multi-generational household with responsibilities for an elderly parent as well as children. Workers should feel safe to disclose such difficulties and managers may consider making accommodations, within the limit of what the role requires.

Professional development

Lived Experience Workers have different levels of experience and skills. Their training needs should be assessed and the training to be offered to them needs to be determined in collaboration between managers and employees.

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A suggested process to determine the training needs of Lived Experience Workers and to develop a training program to support their role is outlined in a [table on the next page](#). Once the competencies are determined and the tasks associated with each competency are ascertained, a training program can be developed in collaboration with the Lived Experience Workers.

TRAINING

A training program should be developed in collaboration with People & Culture, managers, team leaders and Lived Experience Workers to meet the person's professional development needs. Some suggestions of a program include:⁵

- teamwork and relationships.
- effective representation.
- effective negotiating skills.
- influencing decision making.
- storytelling for quality improvement.
- information and literacy.

- governance and strategic planning.
- clinical governance.

CULTURAL SAFETY

An organisation employing Lived Experience Workers should develop systems and processes to ensure a culturally safe environment for the workers. Below is a list of suggestions to ensure cultural safety at the organisational, other staff, and Lived Experience Workers' levels.⁶

Organisation:

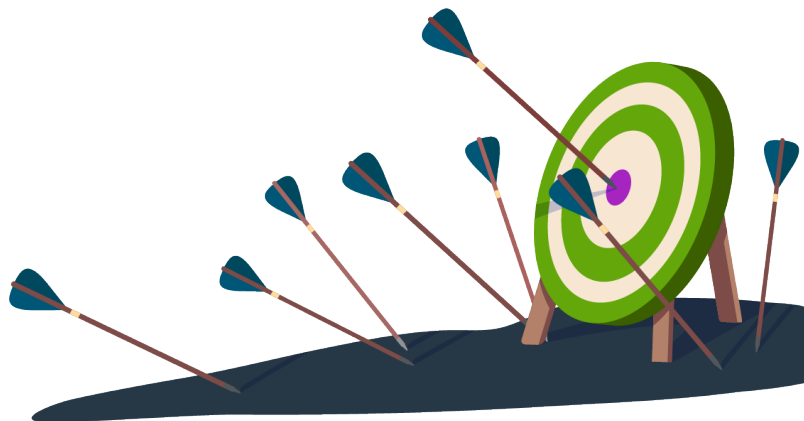
- deliver cultural safety training across the whole organisation.
- establish zero tolerance policies for racism and culture-based bullying.
- offer flexible working arrangements to allow for prayer times and other cultural/religious practices.
- challenge paternalism.
- ensure that everyone's knowledge and skills are valued.

Other staff:

- recognise how power, privilege or disadvantage influences people's decision making.
- respect a person's lived experience.
- respect cultural norms and protocols.
- commit to sharing power.
- practice self-reflection: acknowledge unconscious bias, beliefs and assumptions.
- support other staff to embrace different world views, ways of knowing, thinking and doing.

Lived Experience Worker:

- consult with Lived Experience Workers about the type of support they require. For example, external professional group supervision, specialised onsite Employee Assistance Program (EAP), or a casual community of practice led by workers.
- support Lived Experience Workers to feel able to suggest changes to the role; let them know the process to capture their expressed concerns and discuss what influence can they have within the organisation.
- encourage the establishment of networks or buddy systems to support Lived Experience Workers.



5 This list was taken from State of Victoria, Australia, Safer Care Victoria. 2020. Building your healthy community. A guide for health service community advisory committees. p. 13

6 This list includes adapted suggestions from cohealth. 2021. [Bicultural Worker Working Together](#)

Table 1: Core competencies

COMPETENCIES	DESCRIPTION	TASKS
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate inclusive and non-judgemental approach • Values of honesty and integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating all persons equally, with dignity and respect • Does not discriminate in provision of services
Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to engage with others • Work collaboratively • Ability to communicate effectively • Values of relationship focused work • Intentional use of lived experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual support • Group work • Sharing experiences • Empathic, active listening
Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate accountability and responsibility in work practices • Engage in personal and professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain records • Engage in personal and professional development • Follow policies and procedures • Self-care
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and build the Lived Experience workforce • Provide supervision and professional development opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative skills • Build capacity of the Lived Experience workforce
Lived experience perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a lived experience perspective • Lived experience values of human rights, social change, justice, emancipation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply a lived experience perspective to evaluation, design, training, education, representation, supervision based on lived experience values
System change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for system change • Co-production • Advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support systems advocacy • Engage in co-production • Develop mechanisms for consumer participation and representation • Support consumer feedback

ADAPTED FROM: Byrne, L., Wang, L., Roennfeldt, H., Chapman, M., Darwin, L., Castles, C., Craze, L., Saunders, M. 2021. National Lived Experience Development Guidelines: Lived Experience Roles. National Mental Health Commission.

Supervision

Supervision is an interactive, collaborative, ongoing, caring, and respectful professional relationship and reflective process. It focuses on the supervisee's practice and wellbeing. The objectives are to improve, develop support, and provide safety for practitioners and their practice. It is ideally strengths-based and supervisee-led, where the supervisor adapts to supervisees' preferences.⁷

Supervising Lived Experience Workers requires an additional set of skills. For many workers who grew up, or even worked, in different cultural contexts, the workplace may have been highly hierarchical, with no option to treat managers as equal. Therefore, the idea of supervision being interactive, collaborative and caring or even the very concept of supervision, may seem foreign and require support to implement.

Additionally, Lived Experience Workers experience a range of challenges that workers who are not peers to the community do not face and do not need to manage. It is the role of the person providing supervision to address these.

An estate resident has presented at the community centre frustrated and angry about some issues with her flat. They were abusive towards the centre staff.

The centre's Client Management Team met to discuss the incident, and it was suggested that two workers could go to the resident's flat to take photos of the issues described and liaise with the relevant government services on her behalf.

However, one of the staff lives in the same public housing tower than the resident and described her as frequently drug-affected and abusive. He feared that reaching her in her flat may aggravate her and that there may be consequences for him if he sees her outside his working hours.

The worker brought this up in supervision and in consultation with his manager, it was decided not to proceed with the visit and to refer it back to the relevant government service.

TYPES OF SUPERVISION

There are two types of supervision: line manager and peer-to-peer supervision.

Line manager supervision

This is often done in weekly or fortnightly sessions and incorporates transparent conversation around challenges, positives, workload, wellbeing, and coping mechanism.

A sample of supervision questions is in Appendix 2.

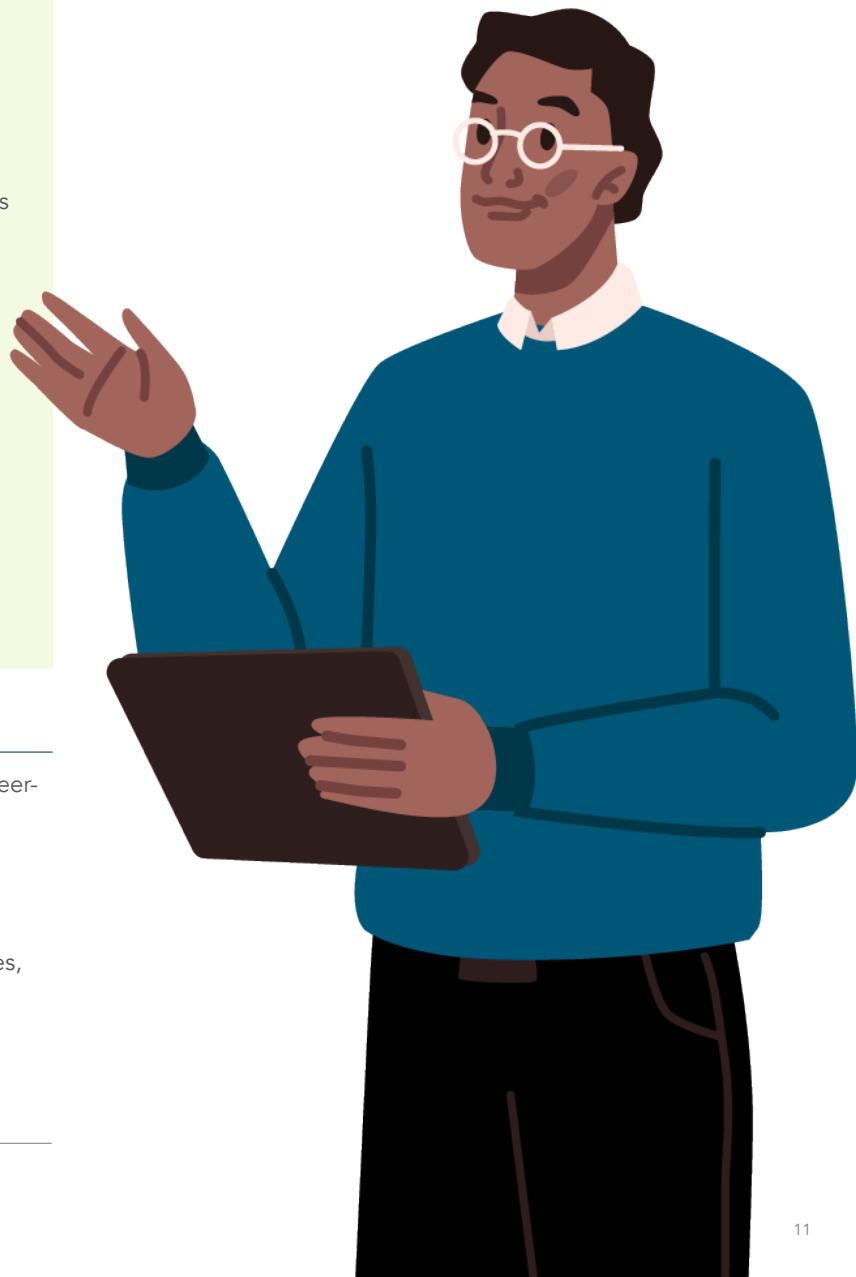
Peer-to-peer supervision

Workers at the same level within a work hierarchy or who have similar roles engage in a mutually beneficial process where they provide each other with support, feedback, and guidance for personal and professional growth and success.

BENEFITS OF SUPERVISION

- Reflection on practice.
- Enhanced accountability.
- Increased feeling of support.
- Development of professional skills and improved efficiency.
- Development of strategies to deal with challenges.

Organisations employing Lived Experience Workers should ensure that effective supervision systems and processes are in place so they can have a safe space to disclose and reflect on challenges surrounding their role. In discussion with the worker, supervisors may be able to determine the kind – and the regularity of – support that will benefit them most. For example, formal and structured supervision, mentoring/peer support or a community of practice.



⁷ Supervision definitions | vic.gov.au (www.vic.gov.au)

Community of Practice (CoP)

A Community of Practice is a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in something they do and want to learn how to do it better. They organise to get together to fulfill both individual and group goals. In professional work, it is often set up to collaborate to enhance their understanding and expertise in certain areas, address common challenges, and achieve both individual and collective objectives. A Community of Practice can be online or face-to-face.

If Lived Experience Workers at an organisation are interested in setting up a Community of Practice, managers can support them to set up a group. It may be recommended that they reach out through their network. This can be done through an EOI form sent to Lived Experience Workers who may be interested. Once the person leading the setup has an adequate number of workers interested, they can organise a meeting to discuss organisation process, draft the Terms of Reference for the CoP, designate a governance structure and chair, methods and frequency of meeting, themes, location if not online. Managers can provide ongoing support if required, including encouraging monitoring and evaluation of the initiative.

Expectations and performance appraisals

An organisation employing Lived Experience Workers should establish clear expectations and performance appraisals processes. These need to be fair and flexible and may include the following:

EMPLOYER'S EXPECTATIONS

Ensure that transparent discussions with the employee are held so that they understand the expectations of the role, what the organisation expects them to bring into the role and what goals are expected to be achieved.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Establish and communicate clear processes about how Lived Experience Workers, in collaboration with their manager, will access professional development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (PDP)

Explain to Lived Experience Workers the process and timeframe to implement a professional development plan and give examples if needed.

SEEKING AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Establish and communicate clear processes about how Lived Experience Workers can seek and provide feedback and are comfortable to approach management.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SKILL BUILDING

Identify and provide opportunities for Lived Experience Workers to achieve career goals. This may include stepping into other positions within the organisation.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

Explain performance measures to Lived Experience Workers as part of initial orientation. This will ensure open communication and supervisors can address those who are not meeting performance measures as they would with any other worker.⁸



8 Adapted from: Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2011. Addressing the strengths and complexities of bicultural youth and family work. p.8

CHALLENGES SPECIFIC TO THE MANAGEMENT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKERS



Though the benefits are many, employing Lived Experience Workers with limited experience in a professional Australian context comes with challenges, for the workers themselves and for their managers. Too often, there are no systems in place to understand and address these challenges.

It's still new that we are hiring more people from the community (...), so it can be challenging to know how we can support them. Each of them comes with unique skills and experiences, some are new to office work environments so it would take more time for them to adjust. (Manager)

Some of the challenges that NRCH and DFFH managers shared during the research to develop this Guide include:

- ✔ hiring workers who met language and cultural requirements but may lack other skills.
- ✔ workers' burnout – mainly due to their involvement with communities they work with; sometimes they engage in voluntary work aside to their paid work and this can result in extra demands on the worker.
- ✔ workers experiencing compassion fatigue when they feel helpless to support clients.
- ✔ those who don't have formal office experience may struggle with adapting to an office setting. This may include not being aware of email etiquette, punctuality and protocols around planned and unplanned leave.
- ✔ workers being re-traumatised because of their own lived experiences (family violence, financial struggles, settlement, the refugee journey, etc.)

Privacy and confidentiality

On occasions, Lived Experience Workers may come across personal information of community members with whom they work. Personal information of community members must be kept confidential as it is private information – even if a worker may think it is relevant to the work. This is a fine line that may easily be crossed as boundaries between work and personal life may blur.

Managers can include a sentence about this in the Lived Experience Workers' PD, in letters of offer, in letters of agreements and/or discuss during supervision. For example, include a statement in the letter of offer that the employee agrees to uphold organisational privacy and confidentiality requirements.

An example of such a statement can be found below.

On occasions you may come across personal information of community members you work with. Please remember that you should:

- ✔ Respect confidentiality and privacy – do not discuss information about your clients with your family or friends.
- ✔ Do not disclose personal information (yours or other workers or other clients) e.g. phone numbers, address, personal email.
- ✔ Do not criticize, complain about or discuss issues relating to other workers, staff, or your employer with your clients or their family. Work related issues and complaints need to be dealt with in the workplace.

SOURCE: Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS). 2021. [Building good boundaries in Support Work](#). Queensland Health

Lived Experiences Workers should also be encouraged – and feel comfortable - to discuss these issues during supervision.

Mary is aware of rumours on the estate about a woman from her community (Lydia), a mother of five, who is said to be drinking excessively. There have been instances when the woman has been seen drunk in public spaces, with her children left to look after each other at home. When Lydia presents to the community centre with a request for help with her utility bills, Mary takes her supervisor aside and mentions that Lydia is known to spend her income on alcohol, which affect her ability to pay her bills. Mary feels that this information is relevant to her workplace, as the team should not spend time trying to support someone who is, in her mind, making wrong choices.

Scope, boundaries and 'role-creep'

Role-creep occurs when requests of tasks outside a worker's usual duties are frequently made. These requests may come from managers, colleagues, community members or external organisations. A definition of role-creep is:

The expansion of a person's role beyond their normal duties, including requests for support from community, employers and/or colleagues seeking assistance.⁹

Managers of Lived Experience Workers need to be aware of

role-creep and the challenges this may create for workers. Below are testimonials of Lived Experienced Workers that reflect this issue:

It's hard to manage high expectations as the community sees us as people who can bring change. They know we will be more understanding, and at times because they know us, they expect us to perform miracles. (Lived Experience Worker)

There was a time when a community member knocked on my door at 9pm asking when they can make an appointment, so when they know where you live it's hard. (Lived Experience Worker)

Samuel works as a housing support worker near a public housing estate. While he does not work with a specific community, it is hoped the fact that he lives on the estate himself will encourage local residents to use the service.

Two years in, management is happy with Samuel's work because this reflects well on their diversity goals, including employing workers from the estate. However, one day Samuel resigns without notice, surprising his colleagues, and disappointing his manager, saying he feels burnt out.

Unbeknownst to his manager, the community expectations of what Samuel could achieve had become increasingly unrealistic – including some requests not related to his program's work. Furthermore, the requests are frequently taking place outside Samuel's work hours, such as when he goes to church or to the shops. It feels to him that his work is never-ending. He has loved helping his community but now he wants to find a role he can leave at work.

Organisations employing Lived Experience Workers should establish systems and processes to reduce the likelihood of role-creep. This may include:¹⁰

- giving workers strategies on how they can respectfully decline requests outside their role. For example, encouraging them to ask other teams to book qualified interpreters rather than use their bilingual skills.
- supporting workers to understand that living and working in one's community may result in obligations and additional requests for support; discuss with them strategies to manage this - for example, differentiate between their voluntary work and their paid work.
- limiting organisational requests for Lived Experience Workers to provide 'a community perspective' outside of their role. Make sure that there are other avenues for the organisation to seek community's perspectives – e.g. a Community Advisory Committee, developing a community consultations framework, etc.
- creating a team environment where Lived Experience Workers can seek support and/or delegate work to their colleagues when needed. These discussions should occur at regular line management supervision sessions.



10 This list was adapted from cohealth. 2021. [Bicultural Worker Working Together](#)

A team of Lived Experience Workers shared some of the ways they respond to community requests.

REQUESTS	RESPONSES
Explaining your role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I'm here to help you."• "I'm being paid to do this job."• "There are other people that can help you too. This is not work that I do alone."
Outlining what support you can offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I can give advice, help with phone calls, try and make services clearer for you."
Boundaries set by your organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I'm only expected to work my set hours."• "I'm not to use my personal phone during work hours."• "This is a formal job. There are ways that I must behave which are different to when I'm being your neighbour or your friend."
The limits of what can be achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I don't have more power than you with respect to housing. I will get the same responses that you will get."• "I can attend a meeting with you and help you understand better what is happening, but I cannot make the outcome better."

Engagement with community and other organisations

Lived Experience Workers engage externally with communities and with other organisations. This engagement may create tensions around priorities and agendas. Workers should be supported to manage these in their engagement practices.

We are the main point of contact for a lot of things, people come to the Community Hub, come to reception to ask for you or call you to talk about an issue they have, so they expect you to help them and direct them in the right place. So, it would be good to know where to direct people and, when we refer them, they get the help as it also comes back to us if they didn't get the support. It will also be good to be more supported in terms of safety as we are isolated. (Lived Experience Worker)

CLARIFYING THE ROLE TO COMMUNITIES

Below are suggestions of approaches to support communities to understand the role of Lived Experience Workers.

- Develop an understanding of what they perceive to be their community's expectation and the obligations of their role within an organisation. Discuss where these may clash and develop strategies around managing this potential conflict.
- Establish community communication strategies to ensure realistic expectations and disseminate information about the role of Lived Experience Workers through community avenues. For example, Community Hub, local community groups, Neighbourhood Houses, etc.
- Reassure workers that developing a clear understanding of the Lived Experience Workers' role by the community can be a long-term process and that community expectations may be high. Implement strategies such as those described above to limit 'role-creep'.
- Discuss with the workers the possible challenges workers may face when they cannot respond to community expectations and, together, develop strategies to manage these challenges.

ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

On occasions, and due to the nature of their work in the community, Lived Experience Workers may be approached by other organisations, and this may create an unexpected "role-creep". Because of their connections with, and knowledge of, communities, they are seen as an 'entry point'. As a result, some organisations may ask them to help recruit for consultations, promote projects, etc. It can be difficult for workers to find ways to refuse these requests.

On the next page, a table outlines the strategies to support Lived Experience Workers when engaging with other organisations.

Sonia is a young woman, who is in her first job for a multicultural service. When clients from her cultural group meet her, the issue that brings them to the service is set aside as they first ask personal questions: "Who are your parents? From where in the Old Country are they from? Where do they live? Where do they work? Are you married? No? I know a nice man for you!" Sonia knows that for this group, locality, relationships (and possible connections) are important to determine whether she comes from a good family, which in turn assures the clients she will do a good job. She also knows that for her to connect with these clients and establish trust, 'community' questions need to be addressed first. It is a tension between this and her employers' policies and practices around boundaries, as well as the short time she has with each client.

As Sonia's role becomes known, current clients and others from her community would approach her when shopping and at community events wanting to discuss a matter better dealt with during work. If they couldn't find her, they would contact her parents. The separation between home life and work life progressively dissolved. In supervision, Sonia approaches her manager requesting strategies to manage this.



Strategies to support Lived Experience Workers when engaging with other organisations

STRATEGY	PURPOSE
<p>Ensure that the Lived Experience Workers position descriptions are clear and revised on an ongoing basis.</p>	<p>This will ensure that there are clear expectations and boundaries to their scope of practice, especially with regards to engaging with other organisations outside their own organisation.</p>
<p>Make workloads and working hours a recurring item of the line management supervision agenda.</p>	<p>This will ensure that managers know of the Lived Experience Worker's workload and what work is been undertaken during working hours.</p>
<p>Stay informed of the Lived Experience Worker's community engagement work, updates, and concerns. For example, ask workers to keep a log of their engagement with organisations (if any) outside their working hours.</p>	<p>This will ensure that all work commitment of the Lived Experience Workers are known by their manager, especially if there are emerging issues that may affect or concern the workers.</p>
<p>Request workers to seek approval for formal engagements with other organisations outside working hours.</p>	<p>This will ensure that managers know of work undertaken by the Lived Experience Workers outside their working hour.</p>
<p>If manager know that the LEWs are engaging with other organisations, offer those organisation advice on how they can engage/employ Lived Experience Workers in specific project.</p>	<p>This will ensure that Lived Experience Workers are employed by other organisations according to best practice.</p>

APPENDICES



Appendix 1: How this guide was developed (Process Report)

Introduction

This report is a companion to the Lived Experience Workers Guide and the Lived Experience Workers Guide for Managers and includes a description of the four stages that culminated in the writing of the two guides. These are: establishment of an Advisory Group; literature review; consultation; and writing the two guides.

The project was led by a North Richmond Community Health (NRCH) Mental Health Worker and AOD Outreach & Community Engagement Program staff. NRCH also engaged a staff member from the Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health (CEH) to support the project.

The findings of the consultation plus the extensive review of literature about non-identified positions in areas of AOD, mental health and bicultural and bilingual workforce, informed the development of the Lived Experience Workers Guide and the Lived Experience Workers Guide for Managers.

Background

In 2023 the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) commissioned NRCH to conduct a consultation process with managers and Lived Experience Workers (referred as LEWs in this report) employed by NRCH and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

A Lived Experience Worker (LEW) is defined as an employee who works and lives in the same community as the organisation that employs them (geography/location); or an employee who is recruited to work within their cultural community (culture and language); or who has self-identified as having a lived experience relevant to the role.

The aim of the consultation was to discuss and gain insight from the managers experiences of recruiting and working with LEWs and from LEWs' own experience in the role.

The project consisted of four stages:

1. establishment of an Advisory Group.
2. undertaking literature reviews.
3. conducting consultations with key informants.
4. development of a Lived Experience Workers Guide for Workers and a Lived Experience Workers Guide for Managers.

Advisory Group

As a part of the commissioning process NRCH established an Advisory Group. The Lived Experience/ Cultural Workforce Advisory Group was established "to provide expert and strategic advice on the development and implementation of a lived experience/cultural workforce framework for North Richmond Community Health (NRCH), and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) - Yarra." The Advisory Group members were:

Laura O'Shea, Manager, Community Empowerment and Development Program, North Richmond Community Health

Brendan Coulton, Executive Manager, Community Services & Consumer Empowerment, North Richmond Community Health

Emanuel Braz, Manager Communications and Community Engagement, North Richmond Community Health

Bernice Murphy, Manager CEH, North Richmond Community Health

Sophie Tzelepis, Acting Manager, People & Culture, North Richmond Community Health

Clare Lorenz, Director, Yarra Housing Estates, Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (DFFH)

Ian Adotey, Manager Yarra Community Capacity Building, North Eastern Melbourne Area (NEMA)

The Advisory Group met six times over the duration of the project and oversaw the writing of the guides.

Literature review

Extensive literature searches were conducted by the NRCH and CEH staff to ascertain if there were guides to employ LEWs. Several guides to employ mental health and AOD peer workers, mental health consultants, and bicultural and bilingual workers were found. These guides provided valuable information, examples and templates regarding position descriptions, recruitment, onboarding, induction, orientation, supervision, training, support, etc. These included:

TITLE	WEBLINK	DESCRIPTION
Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health. 2014. Recruiting bilingual staff (and other Guides)	Recruiting bilingual staff	This information sheet is a guide to recruiting people who can perform their work duties in English and another language.
Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2011. Addressing the strengths and complexities of bicultural youth and family work	Addressing the Strengths and Complexities of Bicultural Youth and Family	The aim of this resource is to provide a definition of bicultural youth and family work.
Cohealth. 2021. Bicultural workers Working Together	Bicultural Workers Working Together	This guide can help bicultural workers to navigate the complexity of living and working in their communities.
Enliven. 2018. Bicultural brilliance. A toolkit for working with and as Bicultural Workers	enliven. 2018. A toolkit for working with and as bicultural workers	This toolkit has been developed to promote the strengths and successes of bicultural workers.
Migrant and Refugee Health Partnership and Social Policy Group. 2022. Building on Strength. Developing Australia's Bilingual and Bicultural Health and Care Workforce	Building on Strength Bilingual and Bicultural Workforce Policy Brief	Describes the role of the bilingual and bicultural workforce, specifically in the aged and disability care sector.
National Mental Health Commission. 2023. National Lived Experience Workforce Development Guidelines.	Lived experience workforce guidelines	The Guidelines aim to supporting employers to assess their readiness and prioritise activities to support Lived Experience Workforce.

Several scientific journals outlining issues affecting this workforce were also found. These focused mainly on role creep, boundary settings, limitation, role delineations, barriers and challenges, intersection between bicultural and bilingual workforce role and interpreting and translation roles, etc. These were useful in providing recommendations and suggestion on how to address these issues. (Centre

for Multicultural Youth. 2011. Addressing the strengths and complexities of bicultural youth and family work; Rogers et al. 2021. Cross Cultural Workers for women and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds: a mixed-methods study of service providers perceptions. BMC Women's Health. 21:222; Changaira L. 2022.Supporting Bicultural workers: A literature Review).

Consultation

The NRCH Mental Health Worker and AOD Outreach & Community Engagement Program staff conducted a series of face-to-face workshops and interviews between July and September 2023 with DFFH and NRCH managers and LEWs. A total of 15 managers and 20 LEWs participated in the workshops, with one NRCH manager participating in an individual interview. Managers were able to reflect on their own practice of employing and working with LEWs and LEWs reflected on their experiences of performing roles such as community engagement officers, administrative support officers, housing and tenancy officers and housing trainees.

Extensive notes were taken during the workshops and summaries of the discussion were compiled.

The thematic analysis of the discussions and recommendations are outlined below. Verbatim transcripts are included to illustrate the findings.

Findings

The findings from consultations with LEWs are presented first followed by the findings from consultation with the managers. LEWs were asked to reflect on the benefits and challenges of the lived experience roles, identify what is working well, the expectations of their managers, what supports would they need to perform their roles efficiently, and recommendations for improvement. Managers were asked to reflect on the benefits and challenges of employing and working with LEWs and any recommendations to address these.

LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKERS (LEWS)

Most LEWs reflected on their experience of employment at DFFH and NRCH and highlighted the benefits that being in their roles have for the community, the organisation, and themselves. However, they also highlighted the challenges facing these roles, especially in terms of community expectations. They also referred to what was working well, what were the expectations they had about their managers and the organisations, and they voiced recommendations for improvement and the type of support they would need to perform these roles efficiently.

Benefits

Below are the emerging themes in terms of the benefits of the role as LEWs.

Personal development and professional development

Using our lived experience of being a public housing tenant, gives more understanding to the challenges that housing tenants face, we feel empowered to suggest system improvement, but also to work with community to explain reasons why things may take longer.

We get to gain lifelong skills, gain opportunities and broaden our network.

I have become more confident in the last 3 years of working in community.

Personal growth and broadening cultural perspectives

(For Lived Experience Workers) it's nice to work in a community they grew up in, as well work with peers who understand your culture, but we also get to learn a lot more about each other's cultures.

Personal connection to a familiar environment and giving back

It feels really good to know that we can help community members as I grew up seeing my mum struggle understand processes and why maintenance takes so long, so the trust and the relationship we form with them is so valuable, so it helps when we explain things.

Positive impact at the personal and the community levels

A lot of community members are proud to have us work in such organisations and feel relieved that they can talk to someone in their language.

Other benefits included fostering social and profession collaboration and growth; adapting to modern work methods and environment; having a mutual understanding and being able to support the community; proximity to home.

By being in this role I also break down stereotypes of what a professional worker looks like and what a public housing tenant looks like. I am both and many people who are not familiar with public housing tenants or people from my community get shocked. I also see the kids in my community face light up and they smile when they see me in this kind of role.

Challenges

Among the main challenges identified by the LEWs are the following.

Managing expectations from community members.

It's hard to manage high expectations as community see us as people who can bring change. They know we will be more understanding and at times because they know us, they expect us to perform miracles.

Unfortunately, community members, family and friends add to that high expectation by providing information such as I got housing quickly or they helped me quickly without knowing that eligibilities and urgencies can be different for everyone depending on the situation.

It's hard to balance between being a community member and staff at NRCH or DFFH. At times people find you in community events or just shopping and they start to talk about an issue they have. While you don't want to be rude and stop them, you listen and ask them to come in when you are at work.

Lack of services available to communities.

However, it's so difficult and disheartening when we know we can't help and it's very hard to tell them that.

When community members are told they are so many public houses in Melbourne... that information is not factual as statistics show number of people waiting vs the number of houses available are not the same.

Workload and management of community expectations.

There was one time where a woman from my community approached our office regarding her application, even though we speak the same language I knew she would not accept anything I say and will try to push for lenience on her application. So sometimes in certain scenarios someone else that isn't familiar to them or from their community explaining is the best option.

Expecting to perform interpreting and translation roles.

I don't mind interpreting however on the spot at times I can't interpret, it would be good to be notified earlier so I can prepare.

For example, I remember one incidence where a renter came in to ask questions, the staff member was explaining to them something, and the person had difficulty understanding it. I stepped in to help by explaining in plain English, so the renter started to understand a bit, my colleague then continued explaining more, the renter again looks at me so I can explain to them. I found it funny that even though we are both speaking in English, however one is more complicated and the other a lot simpler.

I remember a similar situation too where I sat with a client in an appointment during a homelessness assessment. They called an interpreter however there was no interpreter available at that time. The worker was asking the client questions, but they had difficulty understanding their questions, so the client kept looking at me asking me to explain. It was interesting, I don't speak the same language as the client, [but] we are both Africans; however they relied on me to explain in a simple way, and I ended up rephrasing the majority of the questions and providing information for why they are asking these questions when they just need a place to sleep.

Safety concerns (health and behavioural) and infringements on personal privacy.

There was a time where a community member knocked on my door at 9pm asking when they can make an appointment, so when they know where you live it's hard.

When I lived on the estate, I felt like I had to be professional at all times, community members can't see you acting silly otherwise they will never take you seriously.

Other challenges included language barriers; difficulties sustaining a self-care routine and proximity to home; job security and lack of recognition for leadership opportunities.

Working well

LEWs outlined aspects of their employment that are working well for them. For example, having access to appropriate support system, meaningful and engaging activities, and positive community connections.

Expectations

In terms of the expectations that LEWs have from their managers and the organisation, the LEWs nominated:

- ✔ Safe environment and approachable management.
- ✔ Inclusivity, respect for religion and culture.
- ✔ Security (emotional and physical).
- ✔ Appropriate award level.
- ✔ Long-term projects and full-time work.
- ✔ Addressing stress and challenges that their roles face.
- ✔ Effective recruitment and training.
- ✔ Allocated time for administrative tasks.
- ✔ Adequate breaktimes.
- ✔ Work phones.

Support required and recommendations for improvement

LEWs nominated a series of recommendations for improvement and the types of support they would need to thrive in their roles. These include policies, systems and procedures that support the LEWs; clarity about pathways to support communities; clarity about the power limitations of Lived Experience roles; respect for culture and processes in place to communicate to others about religious celebrations; effective and appropriate management and supervision including acknowledgement of skills and provide support when the clients have special needs; and use of plain English in communications with clients.

Policies, systems and procedures

Having policies, systems and procedures was recommended by the LEWs to support their roles. These may include policies that reflect the needs of diverse communities; recruitment of managers who demonstrate respect and understand of the community; mechanisms for peer support; and mechanisms to provide new workers more opportunities to be exposed to new experiences (e.g. shadowing) and targeted training.

To be able to perform their role more effectively, LEWs recommended that pathways and criteria to the types of services that are available to communities need to be clear. Furthermore, they recommended having clarity about the decision-making processes and the power limitations of the roles they have as LEWs.

We are the main point of contact for a lot of things, people come to the community hub, come to reception to ask for you or call you to talk about an issue they have or crisis, so they expect you to help them and direct them in the right place. So, it would be good to know where to direct people and when we refer them do they get the help as it also comes back to us if they didn't get the support. It will also be good

to be more supported in terms of safety as we are isolated in the hub.

Regarding housing services, community finds it hard to deal with waitlist and don't understand why support takes so long. So, when they call and ask about their application it's very hard to explain on a phone call as we have limited time and many callers. I want people to know that we are on your side, we want to help you and approve your application, but we have guidelines we follow, so you must submit the right supporting documents to get your application processed quicker. I think it will be good if organisation make efforts to make community understand process of accessing services and understand wait times. This includes forums and information sessions. It will lift the burden off workers.

Respect for cultural practices and effective communications to others in the organisation about religious celebrations.

We want to have an inclusive workplace and understanding managers (have our religion, cultures recognised and the significant religious celebrations). Sometimes they see you as a point to ask all questions, but I think they should be training for people to ask these kinds of questions. For example, insensitive questions and jokes when I am fasting in Ramadan is just not appropriate. Also, when it's Eid it's hard to know when Eid falls as we follow scholars' announcements so it can be literally the day after Ramadan or the following, so if we have an understanding manager, they could expect us to take time and have proper adjustments.

Effective and appropriate management and supervision including acknowledgement of skills.

They can recognise when their manager underestimates their skills and abilities and not support them to develop more challenging skills. So, it's hard when they have a bias about your skills and it's very difficult to tell them as we come from a culture when you are told to do something out of respect you do it even if you disagree.

It's really nice when your manager supports you and understand you, I learned a lot because of my managers. I can easily open up to them but if they were toxic and it was a toxic team, I would find it hard to be there.

LEWs suggested that organisations and managers could provide extra support when clients have special needs. The workers explained that it is difficult at times to support clients when they are presenting unwell.

Some clients can become agitated and frustrated at times when you can't help them or when it takes you longer to support them. So, it would be good to be supported by your manager to learn what do in these kinds of situations and where to refer clients for more support.

With respect to the use of plain English in communications with clients, LEWs expressed concerns regarding ways

of communication particularly the use of jargon. They recommended to ask questions and provide letters in clear plain English to avoid misunderstanding, book an interpreter in advance of an appointment, ensure that the interpreter speaks the dialect of the client and that the interpreter is competent in explaining a particular topic.

MANAGERS

NRCH and DFFH managers consulted through the development of this Guide mentioned some of the benefits and challenges of working with LEWs and referred to some initiatives and actions that may improve the process to employ and work with LEWs.

Benefits

Some of the benefits identified by the managers included that working with LEWs helped them connect and communicate better with clients because these workers have a deep cultural understanding of the communities they work with. LEWs help others in the organisation by bringing important insights into communities. They also help with informing community engagement strategies and supporting community members with whom they share culture and languages.

They connect with people in a way that others can't. It's an asset.

Having familiarity without having to go into deep details.

Challenges

Managers also acknowledged some of the challenges of working with LEWs. These are related to some administrative aspects of employing community members including their need to adapt to a formal office work environment, issues of retention and conditions of employment; management of relationships with the communities they live and work with; and management of the relationship with their managers.

Some managers mentioned administrative aspects of employing community members and their need to adapt to a formal office work environment. They reflected that this may be a new experience for workers who are selected to the role based solely on their language and cultural background characteristics. Others referred to the fact that some LEWs may take time to adapt to an office work environment, for example not adhering to normal procedures such as responding to emails and checking calendars.

However, it's still new that we are hiring more people from the community to (the) Department so it can be challenging to know how we can support them. Each of them comes with unique skills and experiences, some are new to office work environments so it would take more time for them to adjust.

Some managers mentioned the issue of retention and the impact that offering only fixed term contracts may have on retention of LEWs. Other referred to potential bias from

managers towards the names of applicants who may have been or are clients of the health service. Effective support and minimizing biases during the recruitment process may be effective ways to address these challenges.

In terms of management of relationships with the communities they live and work with, managers alluded to the potential issues that sharing the same culture and living in the same geographical areas of their clients may have on LEWs. These may be difficulties such as keeping confidentiality, re-traumatizing workers because of their lived experience of family violence and being refugees, poor self-care and burnout. Managers reflected on potential demands on themselves to support LEWs to face these issues by helping them to create a separation between work and life and respectfully set boundaries in a way that don't jeopardise the rapport they have created with workers. These issues could be confounded by compassion fatigue.

Writing the Lived Experience Workers Guide and the Lived Experience Workers Guide for Managers

The findings of the consultation plus the literature review informed the writing of the two Guides. The Guides include: benefits and challenges from the perspective of the LEWs and managers; the aspects that are working well and the support workers need to perform the role effectively; and recommendations for improvement voiced by workers and managers.

Appendix 2: Sample of supervision questions

[SOURCE: Department of Health and Human Services, Monash Health Refugee Health and Wellbeing, South East Community Links and Red Cross 2018. ENLIVEN. 'Bicultural brilliance – A toolkit for working with and as Bicultural Workers. p.19]

STRENGTHS-BASED SUPERVISION QUESTION GUIDE

As a supervisor, as well as relying on general supervision skills and experience, we have to learn how to adapt to each individual supervisee that we work with. Our best teacher is the unique supervisee who is with us in the room.

Example questions supervisors can ask to help them learn about their supervision practice:

- What's going well in your practice generally?
- What do you enjoy about the work?
- What's not so easy?
- How do you cope with that?
- What tells you that you can keep on growing and learning in this profession?
- What do you look for in supervision?
- How does supervision contribute to your practice?
- How do you make supervision work for you?
- How do you help your supervisor (me) to supervise you well?
- When you walk away from a supervision session, what makes you feel that we've both done a good job?
- What could we do between us that would make supervision even more useful to you and your clients?

At the beginning of each supervision:

- What's your goal in coming to supervision today?
- What would you like to accomplish in supervision today?
- What would you like to have happen in the next hour, so you'd know it was worth your while coming?
- How will you know afterwards that today's meeting was useful?

Near the end of each supervision:

- On a scale of 0 — 10, where 10 = the best session you could possibly have and 0 = the opposite, where would you rate this session?
- How can we go on moving up the scale in the future?
- What do we each need to do to go on improving our supervision sessions?

