

Embedding a peer workforce

Infrastructure is key



Lived experience roles are an integral part of the mental health workforce. However, the right working conditions need to be in place for them to succeed.

Strong peer leadership

Peer leadership supported by strong organisational leadership, committed to championing lived experience, at all levels enables the effective integration of peer roles.

Recovery ready

Services must be prepared for peer roles by fostering a culture that understands and respects lived experience, providing training to teams, and ensuring clear policies that support the integration of Peer Workers.

Role progression

Peer roles should be dynamic, with opportunities for progression and the flexibility to adapt based on the needs of both the workforce and the communities they serve.

Long-term investment

Sustainable funding is crucial. Investment in peer roles should go beyond salaries to include training, supervision, and career progression opportunities.

Autonomy

Peer Workers need space to shape their roles based on peer support values, rather than being absorbed into traditional clinical models. Autonomy allows for genuine peer relationships to flourish.



Peer Workers need professional supervision and support structures to thrive, especially because they're often working on their own in teams that may not fully understand peer support.

Fran Lepori, Trust Head of Lived Experience Workforce at Central North West London NHS Foundation Trust.

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Enablers

Cultural change

Embedding support requires shifting organisational attitudes to fully embrace recovery approaches and recognise the value of lived experience and peer leadership.

Peer-led co-production

Genuine co-production where peers are fully involved in designing policy, service delivery and developing roles, to maintain authenticity and fidelity.

Clearly defined roles

Ensure peers and colleagues understand what the role is (and isn't) to avoid dilution of peer support values.

Permanent roles

Short-term contracts undermine the stability of the peer workforce. Aim for long-term positions with pay that reflects the value of lived experience.

Training & education

A comprehensive induction and ongoing learning helps peers and their colleagues understand the unique contributions of peer support.

Formalised support

Strong peer networks and supervision structures are essential to sustain peer roles.

Reflective practice and development

Ongoing training, reflective spaces, and mentorship help Peer Workers grow in their roles.

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Collaborative working

Facilitating teamwork on an equal basis between Peer Workers and other staff ensures a cohesive approach to service delivery.

Organisation buy-in

Be open to learning from Peer Workers and adapting any structures to support peers in their roles. Their lived experience is an asset.

Evaluation & feedback

Regular assessment of peer roles helps to demonstrate the impact of peer, builds confidence and guides improvements to strengthen the peer workforce.

Keen to find out more?

Showing what's possible, in this short film, Fran Lepori, Head of Lived Experience Workforce at Central North West London (CNWL) NHS Foundation Trust, shares key insights from their approach to embedding a now +150 person strong lived experience workforce.



[Click to play.](#)



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Example workforce structure



Trust Head of Lived Experience Workforce (Band 8c)

Lived Experience Leads - *CEN & Trustwide (Band 8a)

Lead Advanced Lived Experience Practitioners

Advanced **KUF Development Lead

CEN Advanced Lived Experience Practitioners

Deputy Peer Support Lead

Advanced Lived Experience Practitioners

(Band 7)

Advanced Lived Experience Educators

(Band 6)

Senior Peer Support Workers

Senior Peer Trainers

Peer Employment Specialists

(Band 5)

Peer Support Workers (specialised)

Peer Trainers

Peer Tutors

(Band 4)

Peer Support Workers

(Band 3)

*CEN - Complex Emotional Needs

**KUF - Knowledge and Understanding Framework

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