

DOWNTOWN EAST PROJECT

LIVED EXPERIENCE @ WORK: WHERE MOTIVATIONS BECOME SPECIALTIES

We talked to Peers* and heard about four main motivations for pursuing employment related to lived experience. With these 'types' of workers in mind, factors enabling and preventing employment can be discussed and addressed.

These illustrations reflect response patterns across types, and it should be noted that competencies, stressors, supports and other themes described in one type may also apply to those who associate with another type.

*In this project, 'Peers' reflect the variety of roles across organizations that bring a deep understanding of and expertise about the lived experience of those supported by an agency, formally or informally. We recognize that organizations and Peers use and prefer a variety of different terms to describe roles that centre a person's lived experience.

Created by Health Commons for the City of Toronto

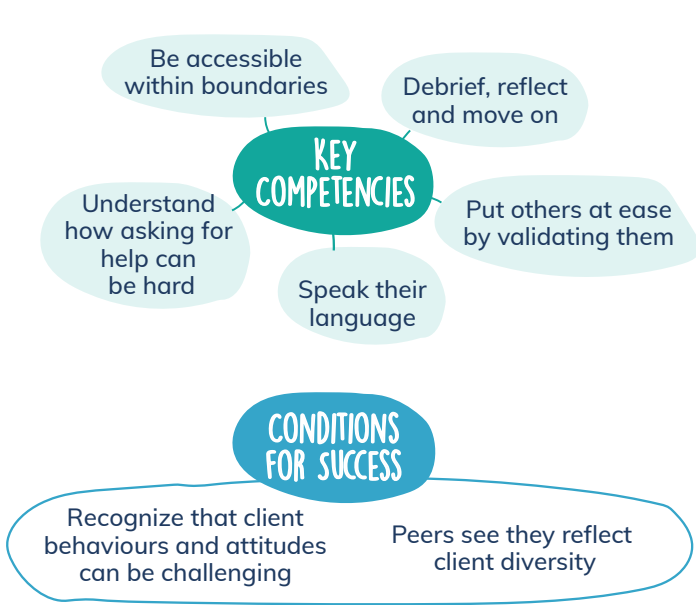


THE CLIENT CARE SPECIALIST

It's all about people

This worker is highly focused on the individual client and their needs, and develops a deep and caring relationship by applying their lived experience to support the client's journey.

“ [Clients] are really appreciative of hearing what I've gone through and hearing I'm well now, gives them hope. Hearing I'm on the other side, that's where I want to be. ”



Purpose of Role

- ▶ Emphasis on one-on-one case or navigation work

Stressors

- ▶ Underpaid for actual work done
- ▶ Undervalued knowledge within the team
- ▶ Don't know what happens to clients

Supports

- ▶ Regular check-ins
- ▶ Supported self-care (time and money)
- ▶ Competency building with real scenarios

Views on Career Advancement

- ▶ Will move on one day

Orientation of Focus

- ▶ What does the client need?

It can be complicated when...

- ▶ Perfection is expected – no pedestals, please
- ▶ Timing is wrong – personal crisis is too recent

LIVING THE EXPERIENCE

“I didn't know...where I could talk to someone who's not going to judge me”

TELLING THE EXPERIENCE

The organization “told me a lot about what kind of opportunities I had” that valued lived experience

APPLYING THE EXPERIENCE

“Peer work makes me feel so rounded off, it's not funny. I feel like a superstar. Really validates me.”

ADDING TO THE EXPERIENCE

“I see myself in future working as social worker”

THE COMMUNITY ACTIVATION SPECIALIST

It's about a calling

This worker is highly invested in giving back and advocating for the rights of their communities. It matters that they share collective experiences and/or identities.

“ I wanted to give back to community that helped me get my life back on track ”



Purpose of Role

- ▶ Emphasis on group cohesion and community building



Stressors

- ▶ Over-supervision and condescending colleagues
- ▶ Personal poverty, food insecurity and housing struggles
- ▶ Sometimes people take advantage of you



Supports

- ▶ Good salary and benefits - and stability
- ▶ “Would be nice to have meals when working”
- ▶ Ongoing access to trainings



Views on Career Advancement

- ▶ Will stay when the job is right



Orientation of Focus

- ▶ What does the community need?



It can be complicated when...

- ▶ Past creates stigmas that never seem to change
- ▶ It's too much: “I was the staff after staff went home”

LIVING THE EXPERIENCE

“I experienced a period of illness, someone told me to apply”

TELLING THE EXPERIENCE

“I was ready to go back to work”

APPLYING THE EXPERIENCE

“Mostly conflict resolution and crisis management...didn't know it was part of job”

ADDING TO THE EXPERIENCE

“Breaking stereotypes that drug users can't be productive. It's bull\$#!+.”

THE PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST

It's about acceptance and healing

This worker seeks an environment where it is safe to be oneself. They see work as 'part of my recovery', and value the opportunity for self-reflection and discovery while providing support to others.

" I have to understand myself in order to understand someone else "



Purpose of Role

- ▶ Emphasis on personal growth in a supportive environment

Stressors

- ▶ Too much 'independence'
- ▶ Wages threaten needed benefits
- ▶ Undervalued time and effort

Supports

- ▶ Small and big breaks when needed
- ▶ Immediate access to team members
- ▶ Time to get comfortable before doing a task

Views on Career Advancement

- ▶ Will maintain routine for as long as possible

Orientation of Focus

- ▶ Where can I be myself?

It can be complicated when...

- ▶ Receiving and providing services at the same place
- ▶ Situations escalate: "I'm not trained to handle this"

LIVING THE EXPERIENCE

"I was hanging around here a lot [at the organization] - I was bored"

TELLING THE EXPERIENCE

"Sometimes you move forward but would like to give something back to community once you're healed"

APPLYING THE EXPERIENCE

"Clients see you as a staff, but I feel like one of them at the same time. It's kind of weird"

ADDING TO THE EXPERIENCE

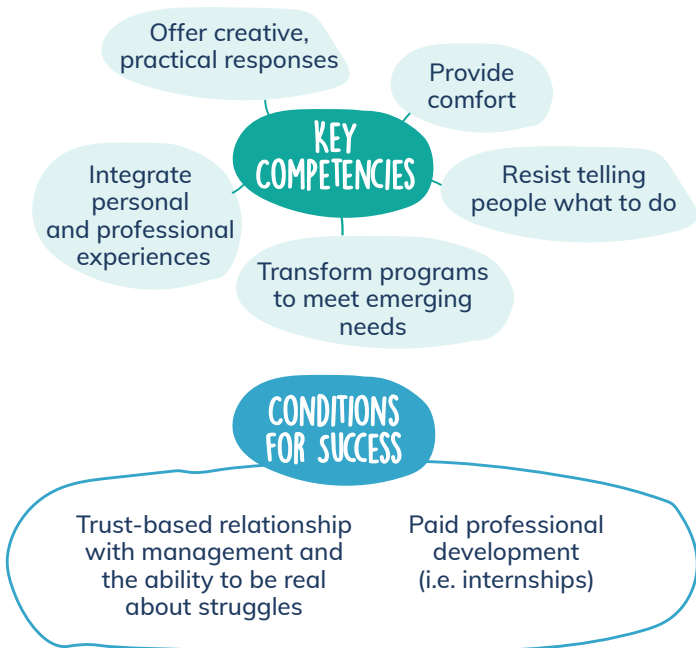
"Couldn't have predicted how long I would stay at the organization - or the different roles that have come that have all been meaningful"

THE HEALTH PROMOTION SPECIALIST

It's about getting to work

This worker is building a career that values their lived experience and is personally meaningful. Jobs are opportunities to (re)enter the workplace and/or change career paths.

“ Through volunteering and lived experiences, got Canadian experience so I could work ”



Purpose of Role

- ▶ Emphasis on building marketable skills in a supportive environment

Stressors

- ▶ Challenges finding positions
- ▶ Undervalued work history
- ▶ Discrimination in the workplace

Supports

- ▶ Explicit welcoming of lived experience
- ▶ Performance measures and review
- ▶ Investment in career development

Views on Career Advancement

- ▶ Will pursue promotions that fit

Orientation of Focus

- ▶ Where can I be seen as staff?

It can be complicated when...

- ▶ Job titles are permanently stigmatizing
- ▶ Trying a new job doesn't result in a good fit

LIVING THE EXPERIENCE

"Trainings helped me pace myself and to get ready for a second career [as a Peer]"

TELLING THE EXPERIENCE

"I feel more comfortable in those environments than I do working in a store or something"

APPLYING THE EXPERIENCE

"I've grown stronger about enforcing our rights as [Peers]. It's not about banning people...but right now this is inappropriate and I can't continue this call"

ADDING TO THE EXPERIENCE

"I see my Peer work now as a serious stepping stone that could potentially move me...to a permanent full-time role doing something similar to what I'm doing...It's pretty awesome."