

BRIEFING #1

Involving people with lived experience in the workforce

Workforce development and multiple disadvantage

Evaluation of Fulfilling Lives:
Supporting people experiencing
multiple disadvantage

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Action Network



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This briefing explores ways in which people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage can be supported to move into and progress within the workforce, drawing on evidence and learning from the Fulfilling Lives programme.

Since 2014, the Fulfilling Lives programme has supported nearly 4,000 people with experience of multiple forms of disadvantage, including homelessness, alcohol and substance misuse, reoffending, mental ill-health, domestic violence and physical and learning disabilities.

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Key messages

People with lived experience have a **huge amount to offer the workforce**, both within services supporting people facing multiple disadvantage and elsewhere. Lived experience is valuable in a wide range of roles. In support roles, people with lived experience act as role models and rapidly build trust with beneficiaries from the perspective of someone who has been in a similar situation.

Employment can be a **benefit to recovery**, in creating a sense of purpose and providing a daily structure and routine. Yet people with lived experience **face numerous barriers** that need to be overcome in order to move into, and progress within, the workforce.

These barriers can be **circumstantial, motivational or external**, and interact to compound difficulties. Stigmatisation, particularly around those with a criminal record, can affect how people are perceived. Recruitment processes can be intimidating, as can the thought of moving off welfare benefits.

Volunteering opportunities can provide vital experience that can lead to employment. However, a **progression pathway out of volunteering** is essential to help make what can be a difficult jump into paid work.

The opportunity to **develop particular skills and gain qualifications** can also help enhance employability. Partnerships assist beneficiaries to access relevant courses and employability support. Some also provide in-house training programmes, such as in peer research and peer mentoring, supporting people to use their past experiences positively.

Adjustments by employers to working practices and policies can help people with lived experience transition into and maintain paid work. This includes flexible working hours, enhanced inductions, pay flexibility, reflective practice opportunities and a strong package of support.

Choice is essential – not everyone with lived experience will want to move into frontline support roles. Opportunities to experience non-support roles in services working with people facing multiple disadvantage can open up other options and pathways whilst remaining in a sector that understands the value of lived experience.

It is also important for people to have the opportunity to work **outside of services supporting people facing multiple disadvantage**. People will have past work experience or interests in other sectors. Employers in other sectors are not as familiar with recruiting people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage, so supporting the individual applicant to have the confidence to frame discussions about their past in positive ways is important.

Progression within the workplace can be challenging for some. Lived experience may be considered as less valuable in more senior roles, yet it remains a valuable resource that individuals in leadership positions can draw upon alongside their professional experience. Seeing people with lived experience in senior positions is important for those earlier on in their journey to see what can be possible.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this briefing, the Systems Change Action Network (a group representing the programme leads from each of the Fulfilling Lives partnerships) offer the following recommendations. These recommendations are the collective view of the SCAN members and not of CFE Research, University of Sheffield or The National Lottery Community Fund.

- **There should be a commitment from public and voluntary services to support people experiencing multiple disadvantage into employment, with support for organisations to do this.**

Public services include local authorities, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), probation, healthcare providers, etc, as well as those with strategic oversight, for example, Directors of Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Integrated Care Systems to name a few.

This commitment should recognise the benefits people with lived experience can provide to the workforce and the important role they can play in bridging the gap between services and the people who use them.

This should include the provision of both work experience and permanent roles. Where work experience is offered, this should also focus on the

meaningful development of skills and be remunerated where possible. In some cases, permitted voluntary or part-time work can help overcome the financial concerns in moving from state benefits to employment.

Consider the use of entry-level opportunities that allow for skill development and the transition back into employment.

— **Employers should develop flexible policies and working practices to support staff with lived experience into the workplace.**

This should cover both the recruitment process and ongoing support and guidance once an individual is in post.

An open and honest recruitment culture could include pre-disclosure of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) details.

Ongoing support could include the use of individualised safety and wellbeing plans to support mental and physical health needs and minimise the risk of burnout or relapse.

— **Employers should provide opportunities for people with lived experience to develop the skills and experience to achieve career progression, including into leadership roles.**

This may mean taking less of an emphasis on professional experience and academic qualifications and a greater focus on the merits of lived experience itself.

Mentoring can be a successful way of supporting career progression for those with lived experience of multiple disadvantage.

Introduction

Ensuring the workforce is equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes is an essential part of providing effective services and support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. System-wide workforce development is one of five collective strategic priorities identified by Fulfilling Lives partnerships and intended to create sustainable change.¹

The aim of this first briefing is to help leaders and staff in organisations understand how and why they might involve people with lived experience in the workforce, and the benefits of this. Given the nature of the work of Fulfilling Lives, it focuses particularly (but not solely) on supporting people to enter work in services supporting people facing multiple disadvantage.

This briefing answers three key questions:

- What are the benefits of having people with lived experience in the workforce?
- What are the barriers that prevent or make it difficult for people with lived experience to enter and progress within the workforce?
- Based on the experiences of Fulfilling Lives partnerships, what has been effective in supporting people with lived experience into the workforce?

The briefing also includes a range of resources from Fulfilling Lives partnerships to help support people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage to enter and progress within the workforce (links are at the end).

Attempts to support those who have experienced multiple disadvantage into, or to return to, employment are evident within UK and European policy.² Within the homelessness sector in particular, education, employment and training are presented as means to promote integration.³ However, people with lived experience continue to face a number of barriers as a result of a mixture of their circumstances, a lack of self-esteem and confidence,⁴ and negative attitudes of employers.⁵ Fulfilling Lives partnerships have sought to identify ways to support people with lived experience to overcome these barriers and enter and be successful within the workforce. Partnerships have also identified the need to work with employers, so that they are better

prepared to employ people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage and benefit from the value that this can bring.

The briefing draws on experiences and evidence from Fulfilling Lives partnerships, people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage (sometimes referred to as experts by experience) and employers (see page 28 for more detail on our research method). It will be of interest to organisations that provide direct support to people affected by multiple disadvantage, particularly those aiming to support people to access the labour market, and employers looking to involve people with lived experience in their own workforce.

This briefing is number 1 in a series of 4 exploring the workforce development needed to ensure effective services and support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Briefing 2 looks at the role of the multiple disadvantage navigator* and the skills and support they need to be effective. Briefing 3 covers upskilling those whose work affects people experiencing multiple disadvantage but who are not specialists. Briefing 4 considers the needs of commissioners and policy-makers.

Why employ people with lived experience?

The relationship between employer and employee is reciprocal. People with experience of multiple disadvantage have much to offer, and gain, particularly by working in roles supporting people facing multiple disadvantage.

* A navigator is a service-neutral staff member who works with people affected by multiple disadvantage and supports them to secure and coordinate a range of support and services as needed.



People with lived experience can be powerful role models, showing recovery is possible

Benefits for support sector organisations

Having lived experience in a workforce can help to bridge the gap between services and those who use them. People with lived experience have real insight and first-hand knowledge of what it is like to experience multiple disadvantage. People with lived experience can also provide powerful role models to others experiencing substance misuse, homelessness and poor mental health, demonstrating that recovery is possible.⁶ There is evidence that peer support is associated with improved social and clinical outcomes for beneficiaries with mental-ill health and increased hope, self-esteem and confidence.⁷ Partnerships have seen positive outcomes achieved by peer mentors who are well placed to make connections and build trust with beneficiaries from the perspective of someone who has been in a similar situation.⁸

“ A lot of the feedback that I hear is just how much of an inspiration [individuals with lived experience] can be to the people they’re supporting, which is obviously something hard to replicate if you don’t have the experience.

Partnership staff member

“ You can’t blag a blagger, so I find that being a heroin addict for 23 years, I know a lot of the tricks and a work-around ... I’m not backwards at coming forward, so I’m open and have that honest conversation with [beneficiaries], and they’re really receptive to that.

Lived experience team volunteer

As our [recent report on lived experience and systems change](#)⁹ shows, those with lived experience also bring particular insights that can help inform new ways of working. Having lived experience on a team creates the opportunity for learning and experiences to be shared with colleagues.

“ Recruiting people with lived experience ... provides a different kind of insight to gaps and barriers in the system, and what works well ... By having a variety of lived experience supporting the wider workforce with learning, [staff are able] to better understand why what they’re doing doesn’t work very well sometimes, and what would be helpful to change.

Partnership staff member

We have seen that people with lived experience are particularly committed to working hard to support others and improve the system. This passion and desire to create change can be invaluable in what can be a frustrating and challenging sector to work in.

Those who progress into leadership roles have found that at this level their lived experience can help their organisation in other ways. Being able to understand things from a beneficiary perspective can be useful in shaping how their team, or even the wider service, might adapt to better support people. This insight can also be used to support staff members to think about why a client might feel or respond in a certain way. As someone with lived experience progresses in their role, they will have both their professional and lived experience to draw upon.

Benefits for individuals



Employment can help recovery and create a sense of purpose

Having a job is an important aspect of most people’s lives, creating a sense of purpose and providing a daily structure and routine. Employment is positively associated with recovery from substance misuse¹⁰ and a key part of moving away from reoffending and homelessness.¹¹ Once someone is ready, getting into work can be an important part of creating a new, positive identity and sense of self, an important element in the recovery journey.¹²

Working in the support sector can be an opportunity to turn what was once a negative experience into something positive – a way to view their own insight and particular expertise as a tool to help others.

“ I realise now my ten years as a drug addict were not wasted, I was just doing really intensive research!

Expert by experience

At some point during their journey, it is likely that those with lived experience felt voiceless and ignored. Having the opportunity to work alongside colleagues who value their experiences and opinion is important in reinstating a sense of self-worth.

What are the barriers?

Those with lived experience of multiple disadvantage face both real and perceived barriers to entering and progressing within the workforce. These barriers are only likely to be exacerbated by increases in unemployment¹³ as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Getting into the workforce

When beneficiaries first join the Fulfilling Lives programme, they are a long way from the labour market. Those affected by multiple disadvantage can find it especially difficult to even consider applying for a job. Programme beneficiaries have substantial needs in relation to homelessness, mental and physical ill-health, experience of abuse and other forms of trauma, poverty and addiction. Focusing on meeting urgent needs for accommodation, treatment, benefit entitlements and stability are the first priorities.

Analysis of Fulfilling Lives evaluation data shows that recovery takes time.¹⁴ In a previous report, we cautioned against an expectation that all beneficiaries would be able to achieve outcomes such as maintaining employment. Some beneficiaries have needs for which they will always require high levels of support; others join the programme requiring palliative care.¹⁵



Negative attitudes can be a barrier to employment

Stigma and misconceptions

Those with experience of multiple disadvantage are subject to societal stigmatisation and marginalisation. If employers have negative attitudes towards those with experience of multiple disadvantage, this can act as a significant barrier to employment. Staff and people with lived experience perceive that employers think people will behave unpredictably, relapse or take lots of sick leave. Relapse is a risk, but partnership staff suggest that the likelihood of this is lower than is often perceived.

A history of offending is a feature of multiple disadvantage. A criminal record can be a significant barrier to working in particular sectors¹⁶ and the prospect of having to disclose a criminal record can be off-putting.

People with experience of multiple disadvantage are all different and have unique life experiences. One partnership highlights the broad range of people they work with, from a young man with no qualifications or work experience to a woman with a 30-year professional career. There can be a misconception that people affected by multiple disadvantage all fit the same profile.

Need for ongoing support

People with lived experience and ongoing mental health needs will require an understanding and supportive environment. This is not always available in the workplace, even within services for people facing multiple disadvantage. Just because a service supports people in recovery, this does not necessarily translate into supportive policies and processes for staff with lived experience. Employers need adequate occupational health support in place. This will likely require adjustments to support individuals with lived experience appropriately, such as flexible working hours and leave, increased feedback and debrief sessions.¹⁷ One partnership also flagged differences in the availability of ongoing support: while there is good ongoing support for people recovering from substance misuse (such as alcoholics anonymous), the range of ongoing/maintenance support for people with mental ill-health is much more limited.

The difficulty in finding supportive employers is reflected in the fact that the majority of the work Fulfilling Lives partnerships have done to support people into employment has focused on direct support work in services used by people facing multiple disadvantage.

However, a focus on support roles restricts the range of employment options available for people. While for some, work in the support services sector offers a chance to put their lived experience to good use, others want to move away from their previous life completely and avoid reminders of more difficult times. Some are keen to return to occupations they worked in prior to experiencing multiple disadvantage, but employers outside the support services sector are likely to be unfamiliar with the ongoing support that some people need.

Financial barriers

There are costs involved in seeking and moving into work. Travelling to interviews and the workplace can be costly and put people off. Taking up work may also require people to purchase suitable clothing or equipment.

Apprehension about moving away from welfare benefits, particularly when people have received them for a long time, can be a barrier for some.¹⁸

The people with lived experience we spoke to said moving into low-paid work would mean a reduction in their income. In addition, making the shift from benefits to earning a wage is a significant step and involves taking on additional responsibilities that can be daunting.



I had been in receipt of benefits for a long time. Moving into full-time employment would mean a change in my financial position, which subsequently meant I needed to reassess my current outgoings, including rent and council tax.

Partnership staff member with lived experience¹⁹

Some experts by experience* described how they have found the opportunity to undertake permitted voluntary or part-time work particularly helpful. This allows people to retain the financial security provided by their benefits while also gaining experience of work. Part-time work or volunteering was also said to be better than full-time work for mental health, and because it leaves time for people to attend appointments.

* 'Experts by experience' is a term used within Fulfilling Lives partnerships to describe people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage who use their personal experiences to work for change.



Recruitment processes can be intimidating

Recruitment processes

Applications are not always straightforward, especially for those who may have been out of the workforce for a while. The application process can be laden with jargon and unfamiliar terminology.

Over half (59 per cent) of Fulfilling Lives beneficiaries have no formal qualifications when they join the programme; a further 10 per cent only possess entry-level qualifications (see table 1 on page 32). Those with traumatic childhoods and who have experienced multiple disadvantage for many years may have little or no employment or education history. Demonstrating how you fulfil criteria when you have limited experience or qualifications can be a challenge, as can explaining gaps in work history. A lack of confidence and self-esteem can mean people with experience of multiple disadvantage do not recognise the skills and strengths they possess.

Increasingly, employers require applications to be completed online; digital literacy and access to technology can be another barrier for those experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Interviews can be particularly nerve-racking and panels intimidating for those who have not had recent work experience.



There's not a lot of allowances made for how anxiety-inducing interviews and applications are. There's never a lot of support around that. Even when you have lived experience roles, there's still a culture of 'well now come and do things our way ... come and do our interviews, our recruitment process, come and sit in our meetings'. It's not very flexible.

Partnership staff member with lived experience

Employers whose work is in the area of multiple disadvantage are more likely to have considered interviewees' needs and anxieties, and have processes in place to mitigate them. For example, one partnership holds informal interviews where candidates and interviewees sit around a table and written copies of questions are provided. Employers in unrelated sectors will be less aware of how to make those affected by multiple disadvantage feel comfortable in an interview scenario.

Progressing in the workforce

Even once they have entered the workforce, those with experience of multiple disadvantage can struggle to progress. It is important to recognise that this is not always the case, and individuals with lived experience can be, and are, professionally successful. But Fulfilling Lives partnerships and people with lived experience identify that progression can present additional challenges.

The value of lived experience

As those affected by multiple disadvantage tend to enter the workforce with fewer formal qualifications or a lower level of education than those without lived experience, they often have limited opportunity to progress beyond frontline or entry-level roles despite the value that they could bring to more senior roles.²⁰

Leadership and management roles tend to value professional experience or academic qualifications over lived experience. There was a clear perception among those we spoke to that lived experience is valued more in frontline roles.



It's easier to talk about lived experience applying to frontline roles, but I guess I see quite a difference in how we value lived experience in managerial or strategic roles. ... We no longer say that we want lived experience for that.

Partnership staff member

In addition, there is a perception that employers want to avoid giving employees with lived experience additional responsibility for fear of relapse. Both actual and perceived risk of relapse can limit an individual's chance of progression.

Workplace environment

Workplaces can be stressful, unfamiliar and unwelcoming environments for those affected by multiple disadvantage. People with lived experience admit that they have a tendency to be very direct and honest which, although often useful, may sometimes come across as unprofessional. There can be a mismatch between what the employee and employer expect of each other.

A lack of understanding of multiple disadvantage and accommodation of mental health issues can also create challenges.

“ One of the barriers I found for progression is I’ve come into the workplace with a sleigh full of bloody baggage. ... I’ve got quite a few triggers ... in the workplace people will hit those triggers and they will see this volcanic eruption of emotions and then within sometimes minutes, I can settle back down again but they will go ‘it’s unprofessional, you shouldn’t be doing that’. I’m not in control of that and then I will find myself explaining the triggers and they will disregard that and then hit those triggers again.

Partnership staff member with lived experience

Those with lived experience highlighted how being line managed by someone with lived experience can ensure greater empathy and less judgement. They felt they would be more likely to be honest about any struggles or difficulties they were encountering. This shows how engaging people with lived experience in more senior roles can be beneficial.



Support work is stressful with a risk of burnout

Stress, burnout and long-term health conditions

Work supporting people affected by multiple disadvantage can be a stressful job and burnout is a risk for all frontline workers. While sectors supporting those affected by multiple disadvantage can sometimes better accommodate the needs of people with lived experience, employment in these sectors also has the potential to be traumatic for them.²¹ While the individual is probably aware of how much pressure they can deal with, they may underestimate their limits and risk overburdening themselves.²²

Burnout, as well as any ongoing physical or mental health conditions, is likely to affect the number of sick days an employee has. Focus group participants suggested that use of the Bradford Factor²³ to tackle absenteeism disadvantages those with common mental health conditions, such as PTSD, depression and anxiety. The Bradford Factor does not take these extenuating reasons into account. Some feel that this can impact their ability to progress into roles with more responsibility.

How can the move into employment be supported?

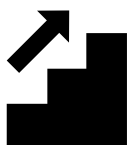
Fulfilling Lives partnerships have worked towards supporting people affected by multiple disadvantage into the workforce, recognising the barriers set out above and developing methods of addressing them.

Provide volunteering opportunities as a pathway to employment

Several partnerships have schemes that provide people with lived experience a pathway towards gaining paid and voluntary work within the partnership. Volunteering opportunities are a great way of giving individuals experience of a work environment without the pressure of a formal role. Often opportunities are in peer mentor-type roles, where volunteers use their lived experience to provide additional support to beneficiaries in similar situations.

Beneficiaries need to be well established in their recovery before undertaking volunteering. Most of those who partnerships support into volunteering and employment are not current beneficiaries of intensive support programmes. A quarter of those receiving intensive support from Fulfilling Lives undertake some form of volunteering at some point during their time with the programme. Those who leave the programme with a positive destination are more likely to have done some volunteering (31 per cent) compared to those who leave for more negative reasons (18 per cent). (See tables 2 and 3 on pages 32 and 33).

People with lived experience from all partnerships found volunteering especially helped them to rebuild confidence, self-esteem and establish stability in their lives. They have developed greater resilience and a sense of purpose. New skills and reflection on strengths developed through volunteering have helped them shape plans to move into employment.



Volunteering can be an important stepping-stone to paid roles

“ When I was peer mentoring, I realised I had a good connection with beneficiaries. I could understand what they were saying and how they were feeling. I felt that the work we did together really mattered and made a difference to their lives. In turn that made me feel great too ... I never realised that my lived experience meant I had so much to give.

Peer engagement worker, former beneficiary and volunteer²⁴

Volunteers in partnerships are treated the same as paid staff members, in that they are afforded the same level of respect and recognition. Voluntary positions are varied and flexible, and beneficiaries can state their preferences for the areas they want to work in. Volunteers choose the skills they want to develop, working with partnership staff to identify internal and external courses as appropriate.

People with lived experience highlighted how being involved in a wide variety of activities was particularly helpful for staving off boredom, which can be a major concern for those recovering from addiction. Although experiences of volunteering are valuable in their own right and not just as a stepping stone to employment, for some, voluntary experiences can lead to paid work. For others, it can be difficult to move from volunteering into paid roles, even where they may be doing equivalent tasks to those in similar paid roles.²⁵ Below is an example of a programme to support people into employment by providing supported volunteering opportunities.

Birmingham Changing Futures Together (BCFT)'s Every Step of the Way

Every Step of the Way (ESOW) is Changing Futures' user involvement and engagement programme. It supports and trains those with lived experience to volunteer as 'experts by experience'. Since 2015, ESOW has trained and supported 131 experts and offered 1,779 opportunities. 18 individuals moved into employment from the programme.

ESOW works with the experts by experience to develop a Personal Development Impact Plan, identifying their personal and professional goals, and how ESOW can help achieve these. While ESOW has a clear structure, each expert by experience is treated individually and support packages they receive are highly person-centred. Read more about the programme [here](#).

Provide training and skills development opportunities

Partnerships assist beneficiaries to access relevant training courses and employability support, often provided by other organisations. For example, Framework, the lead organisation for the Fulfilling Lives programme in Nottingham, runs 'Opportunity and Change',²⁶ an employment support project for people with experience of multiple disadvantage who are still far away from the labour market.

Some partnerships have developed bespoke training courses in areas that could lead people directly into paid roles in the support sector, such as peer mentor training. This type of course draws upon people's lived experience and provides the skills and knowledge to be able to effectively support people facing multiple disadvantage. As not all beneficiaries want or would be suited to a support role, partnerships also offer training in other areas, such as peer research. One such programme providing accredited skills training is described below.

Peer research opportunities with Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead

Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead (FLNG) runs a six-week peer research NVQ Level 2 OCN accredited module to enable people with lived experience to co-deliver and lead their own community research projects. Trained peer researchers can then join the FLNG Peer Research Network, a space for them to discuss potential research opportunities and work towards undertaking research projects with the support of the FLNG Research and Evaluation team.

Peer researchers use their lived experience to build trusting relationships with research participants, usually current service users, which can give them greater reach into communities. Projects that peer researchers have been involved in include begging, access to mental health for people with experience of homelessness, employability barriers for people in recovery and evaluating local services.

Providing a combination of training and community research opportunities has given participants the confidence to take on the responsibility of leading projects and to apply for paid roles. 35 people have received the peer research training: one has since progressed onto degree-level education and eight have moved into employment. This includes research roles within the FLNG partnership and other roles within the sector.

Read more about the peer research work [here](#) and a report by the team [here](#).

Create paid roles specifically for those with lived experience

A key barrier to people moving into the workplace is lack of experience. Some partnerships have created paid roles where lived experience is a requirement and a key part of the knowledge and expertise needed to undertake the work (see example in the box below). This means those with experience of multiple disadvantage are not competing with those without and boosts opportunities to progress from volunteering into employment.

Support choice



Not everyone with lived experience will want to work in the support sector

While people with lived experience have much to offer the sector, we should not assume this will always be an appropriate or preferred career pathway. Many may wish to pursue work outside this sector. Some Fulfilling Lives partnerships have provided bespoke support for people with lived experience who wish to pursue employment in another sector. However, partnerships have had limited success identifying opportunities in other areas. Engaging employers who do not have experience of supporting people facing multiple disadvantage has proved to be especially difficult and lived experience of multiple disadvantage can act as a substantial barrier where it does not offer a clear advantage in a role. Partnerships have demonstrated that people with lived experience can progress into other sectors, given individualised support and guidance. The box below highlights an example of this, where support provided is very much focused on the individual rather than the employer.

West Yorkshire Finding Independence's (WY-FI) Education, Training and Employment (ETE) bespoke support

Some WY-FI beneficiaries referred to the ETE team did not wish to pursue employment opportunities in the support services sector. The ETE team built relationships with organisations in the voluntary and community sector, such as furniture recycling projects, to find paid work opportunities for those who did not wish to take the support role pathway.

Support and guidance provided included:

- Working out individuals' interests and finding opportunities to match
- Listening to concerns and supporting people to make their own decision about which pathway to take
- Supporting CVs and applications, and preparing for interviews
- Making positive disclosures about criminal records rather than focusing on the negatives
- Explaining gaps in employment (for example, how a completed recovery programme shows motivation and commitment)
- Help to achieve or work towards the necessary qualifications or certifications (for example, the CSCS card to work on a construction site)
- Help to access any necessary equipment or clothing
- Understanding the expectations of roles
- Providing a reference
- Linking into local jobcentres and other training or employment organisations.

Identify, support and guide people through progression opportunities

Having lived experience can be beneficial to leadership as well as frontline roles. However, people with lived experience sometimes feel that they are unable to progress beyond volunteering or entry-level work – particularly if there are no role models to show that this is possible.

Support, guidance and encouragement from colleagues and supervisors is crucial to progression. This might be helping to identify opportunities to enhance qualifications, or guidance on job applications. It is unlikely that lived experience will be a requirement for a leadership role in the way it might



Support and guidance can help progression into leadership roles

be for a mentoring role. Guidance can help people with lived experience believe in themselves and recognise that they have the necessary qualities for leadership roles. The boxed example below illustrates how two former peer mentors have successfully progressed into leadership roles.

Having time limits on mentoring roles can prevent people from stagnating in one position. One partnership put a two-year time limit on their peer mentoring and guided volunteers into thinking about what might come next. If the mentor and supervisor are working towards progression at a certain point in time, pathways can be developed to enable this.

Progression from the Birmingham Changing Futures Lead Worker Peer Mentor programme into leadership positions

The Birmingham Lead Worker Peer Mentor (LWPM) programme gave individuals with lived experience the opportunity to undertake peer mentor roles. Az and Andrew both started as peer mentors and are now employed by Shelter as Team Leaders within the Housing First project, supervising frontline support workers.

Az and Andrew feel that their lived experience is beneficial to their leadership roles. It gives them tools and skills others do not have and they can understand better why clients might feel as they do. However, they both acknowledge that now they have several years' professional experience, they draw on their lived experience less.

Both explained that the support they had received throughout their journey was crucial to their success.



I didn't believe in myself, so there was no way I thought I could ever move up the ranks because I thought, I've been a heroin addict for however many years, I don't deserve it. But I do believe from the support I had, people telling me I was worth it, telling me I could do it, showing me and guiding me, that enabled me to progress.

Andrew, Housing First team leader

Az and Andrew show others in mentoring or volunteering roles that progression is possible, and demonstrate to others in their organisation what lived experience can offer to a leadership role. Both feel they have the confidence to apply for positions outside of Shelter using their lived experience as a positive quality to bring to a new role.

More information on the LWPM programme is [here](#) and an evaluation report is [here](#).

Engage with and guide employers

Fulfilling Lives partnerships actively promote and encourage a workplace that caters to the needs of those with lived experience. Some have gone one step further and sought to share their learning and good practice with other employers (see Further reading box on next page). Having lived experience in the workforce can require a shift to a more flexible and accepting culture; partnerships have been able to evidence where this has been achieved and have shared the learning with external stakeholders. By sharing success stories and learning with organisations less familiar with employing people with lived experience, the availability of opportunities could potentially be widened.

However, partnerships acknowledge that it can be difficult to engage employers outside the support sector.



Further reading

The WY-FI co-production team realised that many workplaces are not set up to support the employment of people with lived experience. They came up with the idea of producing [a guide for employers](#) to encourage them to recognise the value that lived experience can bring and understand what adaptations or considerations might be needed. A series of discussions were held with human resources (HR) representatives and operational managers from partner organisations, along with people with lived experience, to discuss the challenges faced and additional support they might need. As a result of the guidance, partners pledged to improve both the number and the quality of the experience for people with lived experience in their organisations. This included making changes such as:

- Involving people with lived experience in recruitment processes
 - Reviewing HR policies and procedures
 - Putting lived experience criteria into job descriptions
 - Creating entry-level vacancies for people with lived experience.
-

Inspiring Change Manchester's (ICM) Getting Real Opportunities of Work (GROW) programme

The GROW programme is designed to support people through the challenging process of moving from volunteering into paid work. The programme facilitates paid placements (ICM covers the cost of wages) within partner organisations. GROW provides pre-application support in the form of mock interviews and reviews of CVs and covering letters.

GROW works with placement providers to ensure their working practices are appropriate. This includes flexibility around sick leave and clear progression routes (placements are fixed-term). Trainees get ongoing wraparound support throughout their placement. They are also allocated time and a budget (£1,500) for their own personal development (such as undertaking training or study) as GROW recognises the importance of this for progression.

Following the success of the GROW scheme in Manchester, Shelter (the lead partner for ICM) have adopted this model and are extending it to other areas of the country. The aim is for all Shelter services to have GROW as part of their offer. The extension has meant more varied roles are offered in addition to frontline support work, such as in campaigns or service user involvement.

Shelter are also building relationships with new partners to help further expand the GROW programme. This will broaden the range of placements and experiences available to trainees and help to encourage a wider audience to consider the benefits of employing people with lived experience.

Concluding remarks

The future is uncertain and there are challenging times ahead. Unemployment may increase as a result of the longer-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy. This may mean people experiencing multiple disadvantage face additional competition for roles. While the support sector may provide a more supportive and understanding route into employment, it will not be for everyone. We must not forget that people who have faced multiple disadvantage are unique individuals, with diverse experiences, interests and aspirations. Unlocking wider opportunities in the world of work will be necessary in order to ensure everyone can fulfil their potential and have a fulfilling life. However, persuading employers with little or no understanding of multiple disadvantage to look afresh at the strengths of people with histories of mental ill-health, homelessness, addiction and offending, as well as their employment practices, is likely to be challenging.

Yet as we have shown in this briefing, people with lived experience have much to offer employers. They also have much to gain. The range of support provided by the Fulfilling Lives programme has helped to build people's confidence and skills. Bespoke opportunities have allowed people with lived experience to demonstrate their abilities and gain valuable experience in the workplace, particularly in the support sector. The Fulfilling Lives programme shows that people with experience of multiple disadvantage can thrive in the workforce given the right opportunity, support and belief in themselves. It is vital that the learning in this report is used to continue to widen the opportunities and support available beyond the support services sector.

About this research

This briefing draws on research undertaken between March and October 2020. The research involved the following activities:

- Review of academic and other online evidence on the topic
- Review of evaluation reports and other evidence produced by Fulfilling Lives partnerships
- A focus group discussion with seven staff, volunteers and people with lived experience from nine Fulfilling Lives partnerships
- Eight online or telephone interviews with staff from Fulfilling Lives partnerships, employers and people with lived experience.

We combined and analysed findings from all activities using a framework approach to identify commonalities and key themes. We shared a draft of the briefing with partnership leads and the Evaluation Steering Group, who provided additional insights and interpretation.

About Fulfilling Lives

The National Lottery Community Fund is investing £112 million over 8 years (2014 to 2022) in local partnerships in 12 areas across England, helping people facing multiple disadvantage access more joined-up services tailored to their needs. The programme aims to change lives, change systems and involve beneficiaries. The programme is not a preventative programme, but instead aims to better support those with entrenched needs who are not otherwise engaging with services. The programme uses co-production to put people with lived experience in the lead and builds on their assets to end the revolving door of disjointed care for adults. The programme also has a strong focus on systems change, so that these new ways of working can become sustainable.

For more information about this report, please contact Joanna.Welford@cfe.org.uk

For more information about the Fulfilling Lives programme, visit www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/multiple-needs

For more information about the evaluation of Fulfilling Lives, including partnership-level evaluations, please visit www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org

Useful resources and further information

The Transition into Full Time Employment: Reflections from an Expert by Experience, Part 1 (Blog) (2019) www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/the-transition-into-full-time-employment-reflections-from-an-expert-by-experience

The Transition into Full Time Employment: Reflections from an Expert by Experience, Part 2 (Blog) (2020) www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/the-transition-into-full-time-employment-part-2

Barriers to Employment for People with Drug and Alcohol Issues and People in Recovery (2018) Newcastle and Gateshead Fulfilling Lives www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpcfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=330&wpfd_file_id=6407&token=7e1f3b0db69975283f3af85abbe1f186&preview=1

Empowerment for People with Multiple and Complex Needs: What it Means and How it Can be Measured (2017) Fulfilling Lives South East www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpcfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=331&wpfd_file_id=5720&token=334add002f28dfa2ed187eaa0f91dcd3&preview=1

Valuing Lived Experience in the Workplace (2019) WY-FI www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpcfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=338&wpfd_file_id=6040&token=334add002f28dfa2ed187eaa0f91dcd3&preview=1

Evaluations

Lead Workers and Peer Mentors: Fieldwork Evaluation (2016) Birmingham Changing Futures Together www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=327&wpfd_file_id=5695&token=334add002f28dfa2ed187eaa0f91dcd3&preview=1

Lead Workers and Peer Mentors: Fieldwork Evaluation (2017) Birmingham Changing Futures Together www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=327&wpfd_file_id=5698&token=334add002f28dfa2ed187eaa0f91dcd3&preview=1

Year Four Evaluation: Supporting Staff Resilience (chapter two) (2019) Blackpool Fulfilling Lives www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=328&wpfd_file_id=6471&token=ee26ba6ad697dbf214ad90a890f07aef&preview=1

Peer Mentoring Programme Evaluation (2019) Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=329&wpfd_file_id=6456&token=334add002f28dfa2ed187eaa0f91dcd3&preview=1

Peer Mentoring Outcomes (2020) Inspiring Change Manchester www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=333&wpfd_file_id=6758&token=334add002f28dfa2ed187eaa0f91dcd3&preview=1

Workforce Development: Interim Evaluation (2019) Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/WFD-Interim-Evaluation-Report-WEB.pdf?mtime=20200318173535&focal=none

Data tables

Table 1: Level of highest qualification on joining Fulfilling Lives programme

Data from beneficiaries of intensive support provided by the Fulfilling Lives programme from May 2014 up to end of December 2019.

Qualification	Frequency	Per cent
No qualifications	854	59
Entry-level	140	10
GCSEs or equivalent	317	22
A-levels or equivalent	67	5
Degree level or higher	59	4
	1,437	

Table 2: Beneficiaries undertaking volunteering at some point

Data from beneficiaries of intensive support provided by Fulfilling Lives for a period of up to three years.

Instances of volunteering	Frequency	Per cent
None	1,150	75
One or more	393	25
	1,543	

Table 3: Reason for leaving by those who undertook volunteering

Data from beneficiaries of intensive support provided by Fulfilling Lives who left the programme, from May 2014 up to end of December 2019. Positive reasons for leaving are no longer requiring support and receiving support elsewhere. Negative reasons for leaving are disengaged, prison and death.

Instances of volunteering	Left for negative reason		Left for positive reason	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
None	500	82	283	69
One or more	108	18	126	31
	608		409	

Endnotes

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