

Peer Work at MIFWA

MIFWA's Lived Experience (Peer) Framework



Creating a strong and sustainable peer workforce that is driven by the lived experience of people with mental health challenges.

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Introduction

MIFWA is a mental health organisation that is committed to supporting people living with mental health challenges and their families in WA. MIFWA offers a range of services and supports, including peer-led support groups, education and training, and individual support services.

MIFWA specialise in providing community mental health services for people across Western Australia.

We are experts in understanding recovery and delivering individual services; in partnering with carers, families, and clinical teams; and in supporting the person's journey – including transitions between clinical and community services.

MIFWA focusses on the person not the diagnosis.

MIFWA holds positive expectations and look for new ways to support people to achieve their goals and live a good life by working alongside people in a way that is meaningful to them. Our focus on the individual gives us unique opportunities to be agile in innovating and growing services that respond to community need.

Wherever possible, we support people in their community and focus on people remaining in their community as a means to personal recovery. Support can take place across a range of locations such as in their home, at a café, or at a local park.

We do not provide clinical services such as diagnosis, prescription of medication or psychological therapies.

Why Have a Peer Work Framework?

This Lived Experience (Peer) framework is designed to:

- articulate MIFWA's commitment to lived experience leadership through peer work,
- provide a foundation and support for peer workers,
- ensure that MIFWA's peer worker practice is underpinned by a shared understanding of values, and our model of peer work,
- support our peer workforce to use their lived experience to effectively support the recovery of those living with mental health challenges.

At MIFWA, we aim to provide person-led recovery focussed support.

We actively employ people with a lived experience who have learned through their own journey that recovery is possible.

We are experts in understanding recovery and delivering individual services.

What is the Peer Work Framework?

MIFWA's Lived Experience (Peer) Framework is designed to guide the work of our MIFWA Peer workforce by articulating the values, principles, and approach MIFWA takes to peer work.

This approach has been built through the practice, wisdom and learnings from our peer workforce and the people whose lives they have positively impacted since our inception.

The framework aims to:

- enhance the quality and effectiveness of MIFWA peer services by outlining our expectations about the 'MIFWA way' of working,
- outline how we will continue to implement peer work,
- articulate MIFWA's practice as aligned to the WA Lived Experience (Peer) Workforces Framework, The WA Lived Experience (Peer) Workforces Framework. (2021)
- act as a source of information for stakeholders, including those supported by MIFWA peer workers, their families, and our funders.

Furthermore, the framework offers peer workers the support and resources to effectively support the recovery of those living with mental health challenges who are working to recover their lives.

The framework reflects MIFWA's commitment to creating a strong and sustainable peer workforce that is driven by the lived experience expertise of people with mental health challenges.

60% of MIFWA's workforce identify as having a lived experience, and between 10%–20% are employed in designated Lived Experience (Peer) roles. This framework is aimed toward those in designated Peer roles.



Definitions

Peer Worker

A Peer Worker is a role where a person with lived experience applies their life learnings to support others. Peers inspire hope and confidence in several ways.

MIFWA's peers perform positive practices by:

- Providing support to MIFWA's participants and family carers across multiple settings and roles.
- Reflecting on peer practices and personal development.
- Educating and sharing knowledge with peers, workers, and students.
- Drawing on and sharing education and experience to improve practice and outcomes.

Peer Work

Peer workers are people who identify as having lived experience and who are employed in designated roles to use this lived experience, to build empathy and rapport while engaging in mutual support.

Peer work eligibility is not defined by a set of symptoms, more so by experiences that have shaped and influenced a person.

Peer work requires that lived experience is an essential criterion of job descriptions, although job titles, responsibilities and related tasks will vary. Bell et al. (2014) identify a number of features of initiatives delivered by people with lived experience that deliver benefits and outcomes, including:

- Providing hope through positive self-disclosure;
- Role modelling skills and self-care for negotiating a daily life;
- Peer workers are often more effective in establishing rapport more quickly and building trusting relationships with service users when compared to other staff.

Lived Experience

MIFWA's definition of 'lived experience' aligns with the WA Lived Experience (Peer) workforces framework's definition as adapted from Byrne, L. & Wykes, T. (2020).

"The key to qualification for Lived Experience (Peer) roles is that the impact of the experiences –

- whether of mental health challenges,
- problematic substance use or
- suicidal thoughts, feelings and/or actions,
- and whether based on personal or family/significant other experiences

– caused life as they knew it to be so disrupted that the person had to reimagine their place in the world and their future plans." The WA Lived Experience (Peer) Workforces Framework, adapted from Byrne (2020).

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- Bell, Panther & Pollock. (2014). Establishing an effective peer workforce: A literature review.
 - Louise Byrne & Til Wykes. (2020) A role for lived experience mental health leadership in the age of Covid-19, Journal of Mental Health, 29:3, 243-246, DOI: 10.1080/09638237.2020.1766002
 - WA Mental Health Commission (2022) Western Australian Lived Experience (Peer) Workforces Framework – https://livedexperienceworkforces.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/mhc-lived_experience-pw-framework-oct2022-digital.pdf

MIFWA Peer Values and Principles

Peer Work Values

Hope and Empathy
Authenticity
Mutuality
Participation
Empowerment
Compassion

Peer Work Principles

Connection
Authenticity
Diversity
Humanity
Mutuality
Human rights

Values Explained

MIFWA peer work values, which include hope, empathy, participation, inclusion and acceptance, mutuality, and empowerment, are critical in providing effective and meaningful support to individuals with mental health challenges.

Hope

Involves promoting a belief in the possibility of recovery. This value is important because it encourages individuals to envision a future that is different from their current circumstances.

Peer workers can support hope by:

- sharing their own recovery stories,
- validating individuals' experiences,
- offering encouragement and support,
- holding onto the belief that circumstances can change.





Empathy

Involves connecting to the emotion another person is experiencing. It does not require that we have experienced the same situation they are going through. This value is important because it helps to build trust and connection between peer workers and individuals.

Peer workers can demonstrate empathy by:

- actively listening,
- acknowledging individuals' experiences,
- validating their feelings.

Authenticity

Involves being genuine, honest, and transparent in interactions with others. Peer workers strive to create an environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves authentically, without fear of judgment. Authenticity allows for deeper connections, trust, and the fostering of a safe space for sharing experiences.

Peer workers can promote authenticity by:

- actively listening,
- validating emotions,
- providing non-judgmental support,
- sharing relevant aspects of their personal journey.

Mutuality

Involves building relationships based on reciprocity, shared knowledge, skills, and resources. This value is important because it promotes a sense of equality and shared responsibility in relationships.

Peer workers can promote mutuality by:

- sharing their own experiences and knowledge,
- seeking out and valuing individuals' perspectives,
- collaborating on problem-solving.

Participation

Involves promoting engagement in meaningful activities and relationships. This value is important because it helps to build social connections, enhance well-being, and promote recovery.

Peer workers can promote participation by:

- encouraging individuals to engage in activities they enjoy,
- connect with others, and
- pursue their goals.

Empowerment

Involves supporting individuals to take control of their lives, make informed decisions, and pursue their aspirations. This value is important because it helps to promote autonomy and self-determination.

Peer workers can create the conditions for participants to become self-empowered by:

- helping individuals to identify their strengths and goals,
- providing information and resources,
- supporting them in making their own decisions.





Compassion

An emotional response to empathy and creates a desire to help. Compassion involves acknowledging the beauty and pain of shared humanity, so that people may respond to themselves and others with kindness and take can action in the face of suffering.

Peer workers can promote empowerment by:

- engaging in active listening and validation,
- creating a safe space for individuals to express their emotions and share their experiences,
- responding with loving-kindness, showing genuine care and concern for the well-being of others,
- peer workers can actively work on building a relationship of equals, fostering a sense of mutual respect and dignity,
- peer workers can encourage individuals to develop self-compassion, recognising their own pain and struggles. By modelling self-compassion and encouraging its practice, peer workers empower individuals to be present with their own pain, which enables them to be more present and compassionate towards the pain of others.

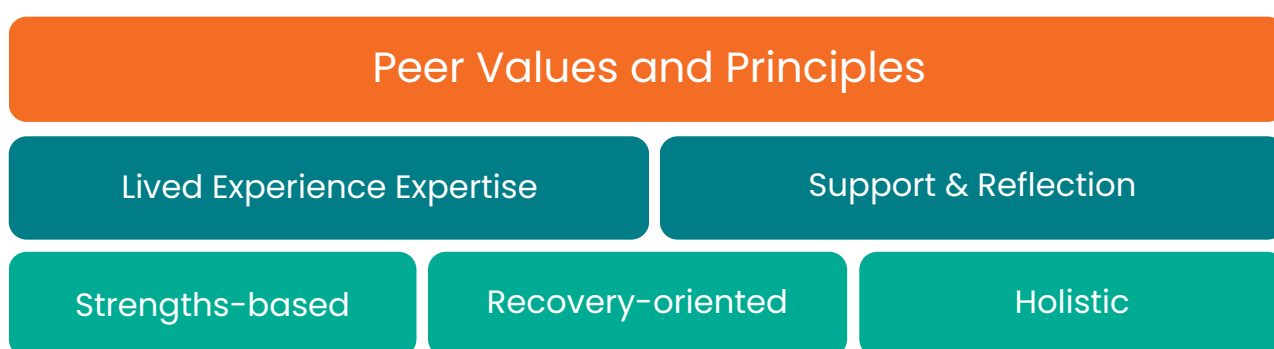
Our values are critical in providing effective and meaningful support to individuals with mental health challenges

MIFWA Model of Practice

MIFWA's model of practice is a holistic, person-centered approach to mental health and well-being. It is underpinned by our values and peer principles.

Each peer brings their own lived experience expertise and is supported and mentored on how to apply these to their role as a peer. Peer workers are advocates, change agents and disruptive innovators. Their work often challenges the traditional way of 'helping' a person living with mental health challenges, and instead finds a new way of working 'together' in a mutual peer-to-peer relationship.

By incorporating these approaches and principles, MIFWA aims to provide a supportive and empowering environment for individuals seeking mental health peer support.



Two key approaches underpin our work with people:

Strengths-based practice

MIFWA's model includes strengths-based practice, which focuses on building upon the strengths and resources of individuals. This approach emphasises the importance of recognising individual strengths and drawing upon those strengths to build recovery skills. At MIFWA, we do not focus on a person's deficits, instead we focus on what people can do, what they want to do and work toward to a new way of being.

Recovery-oriented practice

MIFWA's model includes recovery-oriented practice. We recognise that mental health recovery is a personal journey unique to each individual experiencing mental health challenges. MIFWA peer workers use recovery-oriented practice through promoting collaborative relationships, understanding each person's strengths, wishes, and opportunities. They respond to individuals' preferences, concerns, needs, goals, and values. They aim to minimise the impact of mental health care on the things, people, activities, and roles that individuals identify as important to their well-being and recovery. Decision-making is led by individuals, considering their values, needs, circumstances, and resources.

MIFWA is committed to continuous learning, reflection, and improvement in our practice.

Supporting Peer Work at MIFWA

MIFWA support our peer workforce to succeed in their roles and sustain a positive difference in people's lives.

Thriving at work and sustaining wellbeing

MIFWA is passionate about creating a mentally healthy workplace in which all staff thrive.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge sometime our work takes a personal toll.

Some of the ways we support a mentally healthy workplace for Peer Staff is by:

- Actively promoting self-care and demonstrating empathy and support,
- Offering regular supervision, mentoring and peer supervision,
- Offering reasonable adjustments (eg, flexible working arrangements, changing some aspects of the job or work tasks, purchasing or modifying equipment,
- Providing job clarity (e.g. accurate job descriptions, accurate work plans, peer supervision),
- Access to our Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Connected to evolving wisdom on lived experience leadership

We connect our peers to internal and external peer networks that share knowledge and expertise around peer roles and lived experience leadership. We support learning, education, and development.

MIFWA is passionate about creating a mentally healthy workplace in which all staff thrive.

Our Progress

MIFWA is a peer organisation at its core, having been established by family carers and people with lived experience in the 1980's. We have been delivering Peer Programs for over a decade and are passionate about the growth and development of the Peer workforce and are committed to being at the forefront of building Lived Experience leadership throughout our organisation.

We are proud to have a talented team that embodies our values and reflects our history and organisational culture. The MIFWA team includes over 60% of people with a lived experience of mental health challenges and recovery, including our peer workforce.

MIFWA currently employ over 30 Peer Workers across six peer programs.



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