

ORGANIZING AUTHENTIC, PEER-LED STREET OUTREACH FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

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PEER-BASED SERVICES IN RECOVERY / HARM REDUCTION

What is a peer worker? ...

AN INDIVIDUAL WITH LIVED OR LIVING EXPERIENCE WITH HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, OR ANY COMBINATION OF THE THREE WHO WORK WITH OTHERS EXPERIENCING SIMILAR CHALLENGES TO PROVIDE EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

AN INDIVIDUAL WITH A PERSONAL HISTORY OF EXPERIENCES RELATED TO THE POPULATION THEY ARE SERVING.

vs

LIVING EXPERIENCE

AN INDIVIDUAL WHOSE CURRENT EXPERIENCE IS RELATED TO THE POPULATION THEY ARE SERVING.

Example: A peer support worker at a RCO who identifies as being in recovery from substances after several years of active use.

Example: A street outreach worker who is a person who uses drugs and is currently experiencing homelessness.

What are some of the benefits of employing people with living experience?

BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING PWUD: THE ORGANIZATION

- Access to invaluable insight and expertise
- Expansion of service impact and understanding of needs
- Demonstrates commitment to PWUD as valued partners

BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING PWUD: THE INDIVIDUAL

- Improved self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Skill building for future employment endeavors
- Increased sense of belonging, community contribution, and autonomy
- Living wage, benefits, and access to supports

BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING PWUD: THE COMMUNITY



- Decreases stigma around PWUD in the workforce
- Empowers health and human rights advocacy
- Demarginalizes PWUD as community members



The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prevents discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all aspects of public life, including the workplace. This includes individuals who have a history of or are living with substance use disorder.

There is no legal precedent that requires abstinence to obtain and maintain employment, even under the Drug Free Workplace Act.



Past Month Substance Use: Among People Aged 12 or Older, 2023

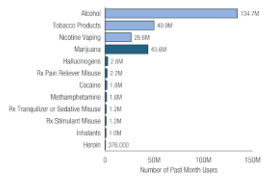
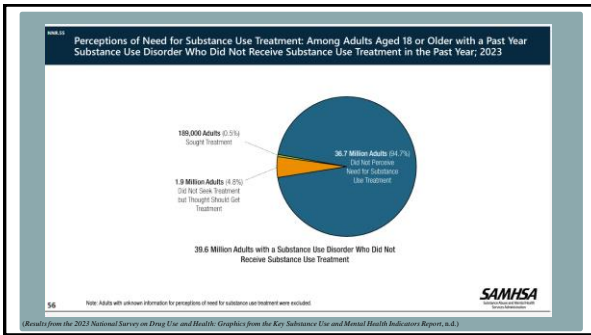
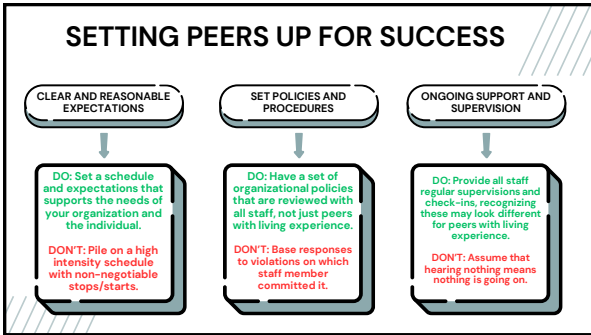


Fig. 1 (continued)
Note: The estimated numbers of current users of different substances are not mutually exclusive because people could have used more than one type of substance in the past month.



(Results from the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Graphics from the Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators Report, 8.6.3)





BREAKOUT GROUPS

Your group will review one of three scenarios that can arise for organizations that both employ and serve people who use drugs. After reviewing the scenario, answer the following questions:

1. What policies were violated?
2. What is the appropriate response from the employer? (warning, suspension or other action, termination, or none of the above)
3. What were the risks involved for the
 - o Participant
 - o Employee
 - o Organization

SCENARIO 1

A participant who was just released from jail asks to buy drugs from an employee. This employee knows that their drugs are uncut and therefore a safer option than what is currently available in the community. The employee meets the participant off site and sells them the drugs at cost value.

SCENARIO 2

One month ago, a participant was going through active withdrawal and asks an employee for money to purchase drugs. As a person with lived experience, the employee understands the pain the participant is in and loans them the money, on the condition the participant pays them back. The participant has not returned to the center since.

SCENARIO 3

An employee goes on methadone treatment, and during the adjustment period in the first few weeks, he is falling asleep at his desk. The program director has concerns about his reliability and considers termination.



SOURCE MATERIALS

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