Research Summary: Integrating People with Lived Experiences into the Child Welfare Services Workforce

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I . Background[1]

People with Lived Experience (PWLE):[2] The definition of PWLE can be very broad but generally indicates individuals who are directly affected by social, health, public health, or other issues and by the strategies that aim to address those issues.

"Lived experience" means knowledge based on someone's perspective, personal identities, and history beyond their professional or educational experience. Lived experience is gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by others. A person with lived experience in the child welfare system—parents, children and youth, resource families, formal and informal caregivers, guardians, and adoptive parents—has lived (or is currently living) with the impacts of the system. Those with lived experience have valuable insights that can inform and improve child welfare systems, programs, research, policies, and practices.

Children, youth, and families involved in child welfare services may also be more comfortable engaging and confiding candidly with PWLE because of their shared life experiences.

"Always place the people who are most impacted at the center of conversations which seek to find solutions to problems affecting them."

~Paul Elam[3]

When leveraging the expertise, perspectives, and insights of PWLE in meaningful ways within health and human service systems, there are clear benefits for the agency, clients, and the person with lived experience. PWLE may have engaged with CWS as children, youth, parents, or caregivers, with each role providing unique and critical perspectives. The voice of lived experience within the CWS adds accountability and transparency while also bringing attention to inconsistencies, communication gaps, and service needs not readily apparent to agency staff and leaders. Specifically,

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[1] Jenkins, G. T., Shafer, M. S., & Janich, N. (2020). Critical Issues in Leadership Development for Peer Support Specialists. *Community Mental Health Journal, 56*(6), 1085–1094.; Capacity Building Center for States. (n.d.). *Change and implementation in practice: Teaming*.

[2] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2023). *"What is Lived Experience?"*; Alliance for Children's Rights (2022). *Engaging Lived Experience in Public Policy Discussions*.

[3] Elam, P. (2019, June 11). Implementation science using a culturally responsive and racial equity lens. Jordan Institute for Families Summer Institute on Implementation Science. [Plenary address]. Chapel Hill, N.C.

amplifying the voices of individuals from marginalized communities emphasizes the need to address biases and systemic barriers that contribute to disproportionate representation and differential treatment of specific populations within CWS. For example, lived experience has contributed to a better understanding of racial and ethnic disparities within the CWS. PWLE has also shed light on how trauma can affect individuals and their ability to engage with services, informing the development of trauma-informed care approaches prioritizing safety, trust, empowerment, and collaboration.

Furthermore, there are opportunities for PWLE to share their innovative ideas to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. By leveraging the unique perspectives and insights of PWLE, these individuals can effectively contribute to enhancing service delivery, program design, advocacy efforts, policy development, and beyond.

In addition to agency and client benefits, providing paid work experiences to PWLE within CWS offers these individuals opportunities for recovery, healing, and reclaiming their power. Additional benefits may include enhanced self-esteem, empowerment, hope, coping skills, resilience, community integration, increased income, increased sense of self-efficacy, opportunities for skill development, socioeconomic mobility, and career advancement.

Authentically integrating PWLE into health and human services systems requires a commitment to creating inclusive and equitable processes. It is essential to foster an environment where their voices are heard, valued, and integrated into decision-making, ultimately leading to more effective and responsive CWS. Creating opportunities for their meaningful input and active participation includes incorporating PWLE perspectives into various aspects of program development, implementation, and evaluation.

This report aims to review opportunities for effective engagement, integration, and support of PWLE into the CWS workforce and to understand best practices and potential challenges. The report also provides examples of successfully implemented PWLE-centered programs both statewide and nationally, as well as additional resources for further exploration.

II. Potential Types of Paid Positions for People with Lived Experience[4]

The role of an individual with lived experience can vary greatly depending on their level of engagement, from a storyteller to a contractor to a regular employee. Initially, volunteering may provide PWLE opportunities to engage with CWS or provide critical experiences, but this should be linked to pathways for paid employment. In some instances, unpaid work for PWLE can lead to tokenization and devaluing their experiences.

CWS agencies often employ PWLE to provide insights and support to families and children involved in the child welfare system. These roles/positions can vary in titles, responsibilities, qualifications, and compensation by state and county child welfare agencies. Additionally, the terminology and roles may evolve over time. While not limited to these positions for PWLE, below are some examples:

- **Trainer or Guest Speaker:** PWLE take on roles as speakers, trainers, panelists at conferences, or participants in community forums. These PWLE share their personal stories and insights about CWS to improve the understanding of staff, foster parents, children, youth and other stakeholders.

- **Parent Partner/Peer Mentor/Peer Advocate:**[5] Typically includes parents or caregivers who have previously had their children involved in the CWS and are now trained to provide emotional support, mentorship, and guidance to parents in the CWS system. They may help them to understand their rights, navigate the system, advocate for services, and build protective factors and skills for those striving. They use their personal experiences to help parents navigate the requirements and services to reunify with their children in foster care. Some jurisdictions have parent partners who work directly within the court system to support parents involved in child welfare cases. They help parents understand court proceedings and advocate for their

[4] Center for States-Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative. (2022). *Voices of Lived Experience Library - Center for States - Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative*.; Casey Family Programs (2021). *How can people with lived experience be most effectively involved in systems change? Engaging Lived Experts*.;Hinkle, E., Kendall, J. R., Sandoval-Lunn, M., Stern, F., & Donier, J. (2022). *A starter kit on engaging people with lived experience in child support programs.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement.

[5] Casey Family Programs (2022). *Peer Support: Parent Partner Programs*.

rights. Ideally, parent partners work alongside social workers. They are at child welfare decision-making tables, creating relationships with child welfare administrators, agency workers, service providers, judges, lawyers, court personnel, and community representatives.

- **Youth Advocate:**[6] Generally includes young adults aged 18-25 who have had personal experience within CWS, behavioral health, or juvenile justice systems and who are interested in ensuring that their peers receive high-quality services that are responsive to their needs. They work with children and youth in the foster care system, supporting them to voice their needs and concerns, helping them connect to benefits, programs, and services that can help them with various aspects of their lives, and advocating for their rights and well-being. The opportunity to make a difference to other youth facing emotional and behavioral challenges can also make a positive difference in the youth advocate's own healing and recovery.

- **Transition Age Youth (TAY) Peer Coach:**[7] For older youth aging out of the foster care system, TAY Peer Coaches utilize their lived experience of homelessness, foster care, juvenile justice, and behavioral health to engage and offer guidance, training, coaching, and mentoring to youth regarding day-to-day living skills (e.g., meal preparation, laundry training, housekeeping skills) education resources, employment (e.g., resume-building, job searching), and housing. Their role can be crucial in helping youth successfully transition from the foster care system (including the Extended Foster Care Program) to independent living. TAY coaches are also active members of youth case management teams.

- **Cultural Liaison/Cultural Broker/Cultural Competency Specialist:**[8] PWLE who belong to specific cultural, racial, or ethnic groups may be hired as cultural liaisons, cultural brokers, or cultural competency specialists. They can assist in bridging cultural gaps between the CWS and families from diverse backgrounds. They typically accompany

[6] North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC). (2022). *Be a Youth Advocate*.

[7] Transition-Age Youth Programs | Humboldt County, CA

[8] California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC). (2022). *Cultural Broker Family Advocate Program*.

caseworkers on the initial visit with a family to help with engagement, assessment, safety planning, and identification of support systems.

- **PWLE Supervisor/Mentor:** More experienced PWLE working in CWS agencies may be promoted to serve in a supervisor and mentorship role to other PWLE new to the agency. They also may assist in outreach, recruitment, interviewing, training, or coordinating teams or projects.

- **Lived Experience Researcher/Academic:**[9] PWLE collaborate with agencies in conducting and leading research and program evaluation findings to inform policy and practice. Specifically, they may conduct Participatory Action Research, a framework for research centered on the belief that those impacted by research can best frame research questions, research methods, analysis, and evaluation.

- **Executive Lived Experience Role:**[10] PWLE serve as higher-level managers, directors, or board members. They can provide expert advice and guidance on an organization's policy, planning, evaluation, and strategic direction. They utilize their lived experience perspective to support decision-making and strategic planning. Roles such as this are critical for PWLE as advancement within an organization can be challenging and is an integral part of succession planning.

- **Lived Experience Consultant:**[11] PWLE serve as advisors on groups, committees, and boards for initiatives that develop national strategies, congressional reports, policy recommendations, and capacity-building efforts. Authentically engaging those with lived experience is necessary to create strong and effective policy and practice changes. The people directly affected by the system must be the ones providing recommendations to develop policies that improve outcomes for those

[9] Administration for Children and Families: Video: *The Power of Lived Expertise in Research and Evaluation: Child Welfare Edition*. *Note:* This video focuses on key considerations to sustain research and evaluation partnership with PWLE and minimize harm, as well as offers concrete strategies to collaborate and share power with youth and families in the practice and process of data collection, research (including Participatory Action Research/Youth Participatory Action Research), and evaluation.

[10] Roennfeldt, H., Byrne, L., Wang, Y., Chapman, M., Darwin, L. (2019). *Role Titles and Descriptions for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce*. Queensland Government: Brisbane.

[11] Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaboration (2022): *Authentic Youth and Family Engagement: Deploying PWLE as Advisors*. Alliance for Children's Rights (2022). *Engaging Lived Experience in Public Policy Discussions*.

in foster care. The consumers of potential policies know best what supports their needs.

III. Strategies for Effectively Integrating PWLE into the Workforce[12]

Overview

Below is an overview of promising practices to successfully integrate PWLE into the CWS workforce and create a more inclusive and responsive system. These are expanded further in the following subsections.

- **Reflect on Purpose and Address Organizational Barriers:** Before engaging PWLE, organizational and program leaders are encouraged to reflect on why the partnership is essential, what strengths PWLE offer, what the organization can offer in return, and what benefits they hope to achieve for their staff, programs, their organization, and those they serve. Identifying and addressing any internal barriers or stigmas within an organization or program regarding the inclusion of PWLE is crucial to genuinely fostering an environment that will recognize their expertise and value their contributions.
- **Focus on Community Outreach and Relationship-building Efforts:** Reach out and develop collaborative partnerships with organizations, support groups, and advocacy networks representing PWLE in CWS. Attend their meetings, events, and conferences. Pursue opportunities to connect with, listen to, and engage directly with PWLE. Authentic engagement includes building connections that are genuine and centered around trust. Be intentional by asking PWLE which roles they are most interested in.
- **Create Advisory Committees or Boards:** Establish advisory boards or committees that include PWLE. Invite them to share their insights, recommendations, and perspectives on program development, policy development, and service delivery. Ensure that

[12] Administration for Children & Families (2022). *Setting the Stage: Creating the Space for People With Lived Experience to Thrive* [Video].; Delman & Klodnick (2022). Effectively Employing Young Adult Peer Providers: A Toolkit; Hinkle, E., Kendall, J. R., Sandoval-Lunn, M., Stern, F., & Donier, J. (2022). *A starter kit on engaging people with lived experience in child support programs.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement.
Engaging Young People with Lived Experience in the Child and Family Services Reviews: Key Considerations, Roles, and Recommendations; Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2021). *2021/2022 Prevention Resource Guide: Chapter 5 Embracing Community and the Wisdom of Lived Experience*.

the voices of PWLE are heard, and their contributions are valued in decision-making processes.

- **Recruit and Hire PWLE:** PWLE desire authentic engagement through employment opportunities that offer key roles and compensation. Actively recruit PWLE to join your organization or program as staff members. Advertise job openings in spaces where PWLE are likely to see them, such as community centers, support groups, and advocacy organizations. Include PWLE in your organization's decision-making processes. Provide opportunities for them to actively participate in discussions, contribute ideas, and influence policy and program development.
- **Respect and Amplify the Voices of PWLE:** Ensure that partners with lived experience have opportunities to share their stories, perspectives, and expertise. It is essential to recognize that PWLE are experts in their own right, and their contributions should be respected and valued. Encourage their participation as speakers, trainers, or panelists at trainings, conferences, and community forums. Amplify their voices through social media, publications, and other communication channels.
- **Offer Training and Capacity-Building Opportunities:** To achieve equal partnership, PWLE need relevant professional development opportunities, training, resources, and support. This includes providing a comprehensive training program for PWLE about child welfare policies, procedures, practices, and relevant laws with an approach tailored to address their unique perspective as individuals who have personally experienced the CWS system. It should cover topics such as child development, trauma-informed care, cultural competence, advocacy skills, and effective communication strategies. It is beneficial also to offer opportunities for PWLE to develop and enhance their skills in various areas, such as public speaking, facilitation, leadership development, policy analysis, advocacy strategies, the legislative process, and community organizing. These skills can empower PWLE to contribute to discussions effectively, identify opportunities for advocacy and engagement in policy development and reform efforts, and effectively communicate their perspectives to advocate for positive change within the CWS.

- **Create Career Pathways:** The PWLE role is unique in that the primary qualification is lived experience versus academic credentials or formal education. Because so many people come into the field due to personal life experiences, more awareness is needed regarding the range of jobs and roles available in the profession or what opportunities exist for career movement. Some positions for PWLE also may have time or scope limitations that do not allow for growth, limiting the retention of PWLE in the organization. For example, youth advocates, by definition, cannot remain in their roles forever. Most will age out of this position by around age 25. Organizations must consider where these PWLE will go next and how they can support their growth and development. This includes ensuring that PWLE have opportunities to explore career pathways that extend beyond entry-level positions and into supervisory and leadership roles.
- **Foster Peer Support and Mentoring:** Establish peer support networks or mentorship programs that connect PWLE in CWS. This allows them to share their experiences, seek guidance, and learn from each other. Peer support networks can provide a safe space to discuss challenges, build relationships, offer mutual support, gain valuable insights, and advocate for systemic changes.
- **Provide Ongoing Support and Feedback Mechanisms:** Schedule regular check-ins, feedback loops, and evaluation processes to ensure PWLE feel supported, valued, and heard. Provide opportunities for PWLE to share their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Actively listen to their input and incorporate their feedback into program revisions. This ongoing support will help maintain a strong partnership and allow continuous learning and growth.
- **Cultivate an Empowering and Supportive Work Environment:** Create a supportive and inclusive environment within an organization or program by promoting a culture of respect, empathy, and shared learning. Provider and program leadership must support PWLE, co-workers, and supervisors to work collaboratively through enhanced trainings, team building strategies, personnel policies, and sharing their enthusiasm for the potential and value of the PWLE role. It is essential to regularly acknowledge the contributions PWLE make. In addition, to be

attentive and responsive to the potential emotional toll that PWLE may experience due to their personal involvement with CWS. Resources and support should be provided to PWLE to prioritize their self-care, including access to counseling and other wellness services. It is essential to prioritize their well-being and ensure they have the tools to cope with any mental or emotional challenges that may arise.

- **Connect to Resources and Networking Opportunities:** Connect PWLE with relevant resources, research, and promising practices in the field of CWS. Facilitate networking opportunities, conferences, and workshops that allow PWLE to engage with other professionals, researchers, and stakeholders in the CWS system. These resources and networking opportunities can further enrich their knowledge, broaden their perspectives, and establish valuable connections that may support career growth.

B. Readiness, Co-Designing, and Engagement

"Don't start an advisory board if you haven't prepared the agency and other stakeholders for these voices. The culture piece has to be done first. If we are not ready to hear constructive criticism about what we do and how we do it, then we have missed the point of why we wanted youth engagement in the first place."

~Amanda Cruce[13]

How can organizations assess their readiness to co-design? (Casey Family Programs, 2022)

"Co-designing" is an approach to designing with, not for, people and communities. This approach amplifies the voices and experiences of the people closest to the needs addressed through an engagement or initiative. It also prioritizes relationships, increases trust across all stakeholders, and uses participatory approaches to ensure the work is guided by those most affected. Co-design actively involves all stakeholders — PWLE, community residents, organizations, and institutional partners — in the design process to help ensure the results meet their needs and are usable.

[13] Amanda Cruce is an Adoptive and Resource Parent, Consultant For The Center For States, Florida. Source: Casey Family Programs, (2022). How can agencies and organizations prepare for authentic youth engagement?

- Organizations and leaders must collectively assess their readiness to co-design with PWLE, and address several key considerations before engagement can begin in order to gain clarity and identify and resolve any foreseeable operational barriers.
    - **Compensation for lived expertise**: Organizations should provide equitable financial compensation to individuals and communities with lived experience, valuing their time and expertise. Expecting PWLE to volunteer their time, or otherwise failing to adequately and equitably compensate peers, is exploitative, particularly in the context of marginalization and systemic vulnerability (i.e., reduced or compromised ability to realize or maintain a sustainable livelihood). Moreover, because social stigma accompanies financial barriers, it is recommended that organizations adopt a trauma-informed approach to providing compensation to PWLE.
    - **Letting go of power**: In traditional organizational hierarchies, power equals more significant influence, access, and decision-making authority. Thus, people and organizations with more power dominate the context around them. Before engaging PWLE, organizations should collectively identify and address their readiness to do so.
    - **Deepening relationships**: Despite child welfare's charge to keep children safe and support families, the system has historically used removal from the home as the primary means of child protection. Thus, families do not trust the CWS system, creating barriers to participation in any initiative. There needs to be continuous communication and engagement with PWLE before, during, and after any initiative. To reduce the barriers restricting people with lived experience from engaging, organizations should prioritize and embed lived experience as a critical component of their vision and overall strategy.
    - **Shifting mindsets**: In conjunction with the previous considerations, there also is a need to adopt distinct mindset shifts as organizations reflect and evaluate their readiness to co-design.

Spotlight On Prioritizing Lived Experience and Expertise in Child Welfare (Capacity Building Center for States, 2023)

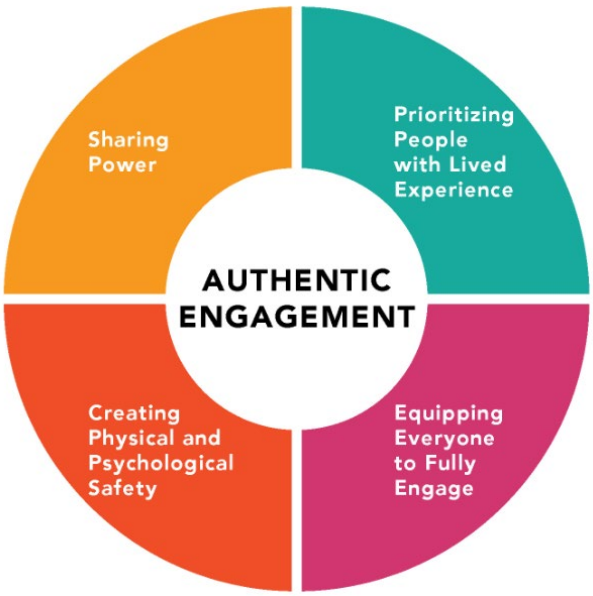
The following questions can be used to determine whether an agency is ready for authentic engagement with lived experts:

- Do we have clear goals and expectations for partnering with lived experts on all projects?
- Are we planning to ask for input from a number of lived experts on every project, or is there a risk of only token engagement?
- Does the agency have a budget to equitably compensate lived experts for their work and expenses in the way that is most appropriate for them?
- Did we reach out to lived experts before beginning a project? If yes, have we explained the scope of work and expectations to them at the outset?
- Are there onboarding and communication plans in place to ensure that lived experts will be provided with all the relevant information before project kickoff and be debriefed about their experiences afterward? Is there an assigned staff member to answer their questions and provide guidance on their work?
- Has our staff received training from lived experts about best practices in partnering and engagement? Have the agency's training curricula been codesigned by lived experts to ensure best practice?
- Are agency team leads prepared to share real decision-making power with the lived experts on their teams? Are team leads prepared to hold discussions about decision-making responsibility at project outset?
- What activities and roles will we ask lived experts to play on teams at our agency (e.g., lead, co-lead, develop content, train, and review)?
- Is our agency committed to meaningfully incorporating input from lived experts, and have we established a process for sharing how their input was used (or why it was not used)?
- Have we asked the lived experts on our teams what types of individual or group supports they need for psychological safety?

What Are the Four Pillars of Authentic Engagement of Communities and Individuals with Lived Experience Through Co-design? (Casey Family Programs, 2022)

This resource explores the four key pillars of ChiByDesign's approach to successful co-design with PWLE.

- Transforming the child welfare system will require creating new policies, practices, and infrastructures that center on equity, prevention, and the well-being of children and families. These same children and families know best what they need and what policies and procedures have harmed them.
- The future of child welfare must be co-designed, which involves learning to co-design equitably, assessing organizational readiness to co-design, and engaging in ways that providers, partners, and other key stakeholders in the system may not have done before.
- The **Four Pillars for Co-design** include:



1. **Sharing Power:** Organizations must identify, understand, and acknowledge where power imbalances exist before inviting co-designers into organizational spaces. Sharing power with co-designers enables them to improve existing programs, determine what new supports and services may be necessary, identify how to achieve positive outcomes, and advance systems change. To effectively share power, organizations should:
   - Create a space to unlearn practices or beliefs that individuals and organizations consider "right" but are harmful to individuals and communities with lived experiences (for example, unlearning extractive community research practices that result in knowledge

being taken out of the community for someone else's gain, sometimes leaving communities worse off).
- Address education biases in teams, ensuring that all forms of knowledge and paths to it are valued equally. (In other words, knowledge learned in a classroom should be given no higher value than knowledge gained through personal experience.)
- Be transparent about engagement goals, processes, roles, and responsibilities.
- Collectively build norms, values, and expectations and create accountability mechanisms that integrate all co-designers' needs and preferences.
- Create collective decision-making structures that enable co-designers to influence processes and outcomes and situate them as the final decision-makers on interventions.

2. **Prioritizing PWLE:** As the holders of critical knowledge, the leadership and guidance of PWLE must be prioritized. Organizations should value co-designers beyond the stories they share. Valuing stories and experiences more than the people who have lived them leads to tokenization, creating environments where recounted stories do not lead to action, and the people telling them become the narrators of trauma-filled cautionary tales. To prioritize PWLE, organizations should:
   - Integrate co-designers into the organization, enabling them to be agents of change rather than external voices.
   - Broaden the diversity of thought and experience by partnering with multiple co-designers as their experiences and perspectives are not monolithic.
   - Acknowledge, respect, and reciprocate the contributions of co-designers by providing opportunities and experiences that would be meaningful and beneficial, including opportunities to lead, develop projects, speak on behalf of the organization, and nurture personal growth.
   - Recognize barriers to engagement and increase accessibility by providing transportation and other appropriate accommodations to engage in activities.
   - Maintain engagement and communication by sharing and educating on the necessary tools, methods, and processes,

informing them of any missed events, and avoiding penalties for meeting other obligations.
- Prioritize flexibility by scheduling meetings, events, and other activities outside of typical business hours for co-designers to participate in the work fully.

3. **Creating Physical and Psychological Safety:** Children and youth in the child welfare system are more likely than children in the general population to have experienced multiple or prolonged forms of trauma, such as exposure to violence. This trauma is exacerbated by removal from their families and adverse experiences within the child welfare system, creating distrust and skepticism about engaging with the system. Sharing experiences in a punitive environment that lacks trust among people, communities, and organizations can create additional trauma for PWLE. Organizations, therefore, must respond by prioritizing the safety and well-being of the individuals involved. That means creating and having spaces free of judgment that do not cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm. To promote physical and psychological safety, organizations should:
   - Prioritize building trust and relationships before recruitment for projects. Setting up forums to listen to co-designers creates safe spaces for organizations and communities to be vulnerable and bridge the trust gap.
   - Clearly communicate any potential risks of engagement or affiliation with an initiative so co-designers can make informed decisions about their level of participation.
   - Collectively create shared values and norms to set behavioral expectations, promote accountability, improve performance, and enable action.
   - Be transparent and explicit about expectations, processes, and structures to remove any assumptions people may have.
   - Utilize trauma-informed strategies, including training for jurisdictions and community partners and counseling and support services for co-design teams (such as constituent advocates and psychologists).
   - Facilitate environments where co-designers can share perspectives without fear of judgment or retaliation (for example, protect co-designers and hold others accountable for making inappropriate statements during discussions).

- Facilitate physically secure environments by creating safe spaces (for example, meeting in spaces where co-designers are already comfortable or have power).
- Adapt spaces by removing messaging, art/photographs, or other objects that trigger past events for co-designers, which could lead to emotional or psychological distress and power imbalance.

4. **Equipping Everyone to Fully Engage:** Engaging PWLE requires organizations to build the conditions necessary for active participation from the entire team, ensuring everyone has equal footing from which to participate. Failure to create an environment where all co-designers feel fully engaged will likely prevent them from having the agency to make informed decisions and contributions that reflect their authentic abilities and passion for the work. To promote engagement, organizations should:
   - Prioritize building relationships across teams to remove hierarchical, relational, cultural, and professional barriers to engagement.
     - Identify and actively address any technical or contextual knowledge gaps that may impact co-designers' ability to contribute to the work.
   - Ensure everyone has appropriate access to relevant information in a way that doesn't isolate, disparage, or embarrass co-designers.
   - Establish infrastructure and methods for creating clarity around team and organizational processes and norms, from contributing ideas and making decisions to more operational tasks.
   - Enable co-designers to contribute through various modes and styles. Understand how and in what ways co-designers want to participate in the work and then create avenues for their participation.

A Starter Kit on Engaging People With Lived Experience in CWS
(Administration for Children & Families, 2022)

This toolkit supports organizations engaging with PWLE to provide more effective and respectful interactions.

- How to identify and recruit PWLE
  - **Partner with relevant community organizations:** Collaboration and trust with these community partners (e.g., domestic violence shelters, fatherhood programs, youth

engagement providers) can offer ongoing opportunities to identify and recruit diverse people with lived experience to inform your programs.
    - **Hire PWLE to perform outreach and recruitment activities.**
    - **Engage a social media or outreach campaign:** Campaigns can cast a wide recruitment net regardless of an agency's prior partnerships. Coordinate campaign development with community representatives you aim to reach so your campaign outreach messaging is targeted and relevant.
- Tips for before, during, and after engaging with PWLE

  Before
    - Identify the best engagement approach to align with your intended outcomes. For example, suppose you want to gather ongoing feedback on new services or practices. In that case, a longer-term consultation or standing advisory committee may be better than a one-time listening session or focus group.
    - Arrange for compensation or other benefits in advance, such as transportation or childcare support, to ensure equitable engagement. Be transparent about the available compensation upfront when you ask people with lived experience to engage with your program.
    - Be upfront about the goals of the engagement, the roles and responsibilities that people with lived experience should expect, and how the information gathered will be used and attributed.
    - Share draft meeting agendas or materials.

  During
    - Offer support during the engagement to build rapport and ensure people with lived experience feel comfortable and able to share feedback or recommendations authentically.
    - Do not unnecessarily push people with lived experience to recount their personal stories without consent.
    - Reiterate the purposes and goals of the engagement, expectations, intended outcomes, limitations, and how information will be used and by whom.
    - Provide positive and constructive feedback to people with lived experience to enhance their ongoing professional development.

After

- Offer a chance to debrief to assess how your program can improve engagement processes and the effects of the engagement—its barriers and successes.
- Ensure payment is processed.
- Close the feedback loop by sharing the project's next steps and offering chances to review outputs before finalizing.

What Does it Look Like to Equitably Engage People with Lived Experience? (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation-Office of Human Services Policy, 2022)

This tool describes different components of ideal engagements with PWLE and contrasts them with the components of inequitable engagements. This is not an exhaustive list, but can be used to identify strengths and opportunities for making team engagements more equitable. Below are the general engagement strategies, but review the table for a more in-depth approach.[14]

The engagement components contrasted in the table include:

- Trust-building
- Diverse group(s) of people with lived experience
- Equitable compensation and other benefits (e.g., training, development, networking)
- Orientation, background, and preparation for both PWLE and staff
- Accessibility
- Power dynamics and influence on decisions

C. Recruitment, Hiring, and Onboarding

Preparing the workplace to be a safe, welcoming, flexible, and supportive environment for PWLE while preparing the larger agency/stakeholder workforce for this integration is essential for successfully integrating and retaining PWLE in the workforce. This requires organizations to anticipate and address challenges and issues in hiring, onboarding, orientation, supporting, and retaining PWLE.

[14] For more information on how to equitably engage people with lived experience, see *Engaging People with Lived Experience to Improve Federal Research, Policy, and Practice (ASPE)*.

Recruitment:[15] One of the most effective ways a state agency can solicit participation in a workgroup or other engagement activity is to ask for the assistance of organizations that have developed trusting relationships with historically underrepresented communities. Agencies should continue to grow their network of community organizations and proactively look for emergent or previously unknown organizations active within a given community. Many PWLE roles require individuals to engage with a system where they may have experienced trauma and support others who may be experiencing trauma because of that same system. Empathy, commitment, and passion are some of the most important traits to look for in potential candidates.

- Specific to Parent Partners, many programs begin recruitment while parents are still involved with the child welfare system. Caseworkers, court staff, judges, and current Parent Partners often identify potential parents who exemplify these traits, and then program staff engage those individuals to gauge their interest in becoming a Parent Partner after their case is closed.[16]
- Best practices indicate that Youth Advocates/Peer Mentors in CWS are most relatable when they share as many characteristics as possible with the young people they serve, including race and ethnicity, community background, education, income, and other life experiences.[17]

Hiring: Most programs do not require PWLE to have a degree or specific technical skills, provided they have the requisite lived experience. Organizations should seek to remove requirements for diplomas, degrees, certifications, and licenses or allow candidates to work toward credentials while on the job.

Assessing a candidate's motivation to be a PWLE is also beneficial. While a passion for helping youth, parents, and caregivers involved in the CWS systems is vital, candidates not interested in working alongside social workers, attorneys, and other professionals to provide

[15] Washington State Office of Equity. (2023). *Community Compensation Guidelines-Compensation Best Practices*;

[16] Casey Family Programs. (2022). *How do parent partner programs recruit, train, and supervise parents with lived experience?*

[17] Casey Family Programs (2023). *What are some considerations for employing and supporting youth peer mentors in child welfare?*

that support may not be the right fit for the position. Ideal candidates are PWLE who are self-reflective, honest about their past, and maintain a sober and crime-free lifestyle if addiction or criminal behavior was part of their history.[18]

National Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce Development Guidelines
National Mental Health Commission (Australia, 2021)[19]
"It is about values that are transferred to practice – values about another human being, belief in another human being."

This provides the essentials of position descriptions for PWLE that authentically represent lived experience practice. A detailed guide to lived experience roles and position description development is included, along with a framework for PWLE in the workforce, the values and principles of PWLE work, and examples and practical considerations from PWLE and evidence-based literature.

It is not as much the particular lived experience important to PWLE roles but the expertise, valued knowledge, skills, and wisdom gained through this experience.

- Effective PWLE position descriptions specifically list what values, skills, competencies, and models of practice are critical to this role, the organization, and to lived experience work broadly.
    - A position description should articulate how an organization's goals, objectives, and values align with and uphold the value of lived experience.
    - By including specific lived experience workforce values and principles, the chances of successful hiring increase, and a culture inclusive of PWLE is promoted. Examples of key values and principles are listed below.

Values

- Hope
- Equality/Equity

[18] Casey Family Programs (2022). *How do parent partner programs recruit, train, and supervise parents with lived experience?*
[19] Byrne, L., Wang, L., Roennfeldt, H., Chapman, M., Darwin, L., Castles, C., Craze, L., Saunders, M. (2021). *National Lived Experience Development Guidelines: Lived Experience Roles*. National Mental Health Commission.

- Mutuality
- Empathy
- Choice
- Respect
- Authenticity
- Belonging/Inclusion
- Interdependence/interconnectedness
- Justice/Human Rights

Principles

- Lived experience as expertise
- Self-determination
- Recovery-focused
- Person-directed
- Strengths-based, Relational
- Trauma-informed
- Humanistic
- Voluntary

Ensuring lived experience values and principles are reflected in lived experience position descriptions is essential for PWLE to maintain role authenticity. Recognizing the importance of lived experience expertise, values, and principles is also critical for organizations and facilitates ongoing workforce development.

Core Competencies: Core competencies are often described as a minimum standard to be considered effective in a role. The core competencies for each lived experience role must align with the values and principles of lived experience work and represent the basic requirements for the role's purpose and duties to be effectively carried out. Below are examples of core competencies for PWLE in the workforce, along with associated position descriptions and tasks to operationalize the competencies.

Examples of Core Competencies for PWLE in the Workforce

Competencies	Description	Tasks
Ethics	· Demonstrate inclusive and non-judgmental approach · Values of honesty and integrity	· Treating all persons equally, with dignity and respect · Does not discriminate in provision of services
Relational	· Ability to engage with others · Work collaboratively · Ability to communicate effectively · Values of relationship focused work · Intentional use of lived experience	· Individual support · Group work · Sharing experiences · Empathic, active listening
Professional	· Demonstrate accountability and responsibility in work practices · Engage in personal and professional development	· Maintain records · Engage in personal and professional development · Follow policies and procedures · Self-care
Leadership	· Support and build the Lived Experience workforce · Provide supervision and professional development opportunities	· Representative skills · Build capacity of the Lived Experience workforce
Recovery	· Support self-determination, self-advocacy	· Elicit and promote hope, strengths and recovery · Provide information, knowledge, referrals that support self-determination and recovery
Lived experience perspective	· Provide a lived experience perspective · Lived experience values of human rights, social change, justice, emancipation	· Apply a lived experience perspective to evaluation, design, training, education, representation, supervision based on lived experience values
System Change	· Advocate for system change · Co-production · Advocacy	· Support systems advocacy · Engage in co-

		production • Develop mechanisms for consumer participation and representation • Support consumer feedback

Onboarding:[20] Making sure PWLE receive a thorough orientation upon hire helps ensure they have the information and resources they need to make meaningful contributions. This requires adequate time to be set aside for orientation and for the program's budget to include funds for training and staff development. Agencies should consider developing and providing an onboarding packet for PWLE. This packet could contain, in plain language, the primary purpose of the organization, collaborative, or project; applicable laws and policies to the agency such as confidentiality considerations and limitations including the signing of any media release forms, public disclosure, non-discrimination; how to request accessibility supports such as language interpretation or computer hardware; and compensation and reimbursement instructions.

- Additional onboarding/orientation content for PWLE may include:
  - Clearly outlined requests, roles, and goals for the position assigned to the PWLE and, if applicable, a participation agreement or letter of commitment so these expectations are clear
  - Relevant background materials and resources, with ample time for orientation to permit full and effective participation
  - Preferred payment options for compensation (if available)
  - Training on technology platforms the PWLE will use (e.g., Zoom, Google Suite)
  - Training on structural racism, bias, and privilege; how to be trauma-informed; and how to use strengths-based engagement methods

[20] Washington State Office of Equity. (2023). *Community Compensation Guidelines-Compensation Best Practices*; National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (2022): *Engaging Parents and Youths with Lived Experience*.

    - A list of additional stakeholders/organizations involved in the collaborative and what each one does (if applicable)
    - An overview of guiding legislation, state/federal priorities, and interactions with other systems of care
    - Acronyms and commonly used terms
    - How to contribute effectively to meetings (e.g., time limits, sharing ideas productively, conflict resolution strategies, the difference between data and personal experience)
    - Whom to contact with questions
- Orientation is also a time to remind participating PWLE to be sensitive to their own triggers—especially when conversations turn personal. Encourage them to engage in self-care.

Communication:[21] Communication is critical in establishing, growing, and maintaining relationships with PWLE. Ongoing transparent communication helps PWLE build trusting relationships. This includes sharing regular updates on initiatives and agency policies and procedures, as well as clear communications early on about what PWLE can expect in terms of the compensation process (amount, frequency, timing, method, etc.). Not doing so undermines trust and may cause more harm. Checking in with PWLE about their preferred communication methods (e.g., phone, text, email, verbally during meetings) is also beneficial. Regarding technology, individuals may have different skill and comfort levels. If so, organizations can provide IT support during meetings/webinars, additional training support, and audio-only options for those uncomfortable using video during virtual sessions.

Accessibility and Equity:[22] Agencies should proactively inquire about PWLE's needs and offer appropriate, individualized accommodations. Accessibility should be included in an agency's budget for making accommodations to eliminate barriers to participation. Planning around PWLE's needs may mitigate their need for reimbursements later on and will ensure the best conditions for effective participation and mutual respect. If they have not already done so, agencies should

[21] Washington State Office of Equity. (2023). *Community Compensation Guidelines-Compensation Best Practices*;

[22] Washington State Office of Equity. (2023). Community Compensation Guidelines-Accessibility; Office of Human Service Policy (2022). What Does it Look Like to Equitably Engage People with Lived Experience?

establish norms around accessibility as it relates to meetings/events, necessary tools/equipment, and general support. Some PWLE roles may require more support than others. For example, storytellers who share personal histories may need emotional support or access to mental health services due to reliving trauma. To improve accessibility and equity to enable participation for PWLE with varied abilities and access needs, organizations may consider the following best practices.

- Inquire about the accommodation needs of PWLE in advance, asking what resources individuals need to participate (e.g., child care, transportation, counseling services, conference registration, or training fees)
- Identify the equipment PWLE are expected to have to fully participate in the project/training/workgroup (e.g., phone, laptop, printer, webcam, Wi-Fi) and ensure they have access to it.
- Host meetings and events in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant accessible buildings.
- Ensure in-person meetings are scheduled in locations that are easily accessible by public transportation (also offering public transportation passes when possible) and inform members of parking availability and cost in advance if driving by car.
- Ensure agency policies and procedures address potential accessibility barriers to support meaningful involvement.
- Offer meeting materials for review at least 24 hours in advance.
- Make use of assistive technology available for members with hearing and visual impairments or those with learning differences.
- Offer a variety of days/times and ways to participate (e.g., orally in person or virtually, in writing).
- Check in on the pace of work, moving at a rate that allows everyone to keep up/allowing individuals to self-pace during training when appropriate.
- Avoid using jargon and acronyms – this language can be othering and exclusive. Instead, use plain language to communicate clearly and effectively.
- Ensure language access, such as providing translation and interpretation services in people's primary language and accommodations for people with disabilities.
- Tailor content to relevant cultural contexts by recognizing diverse values, beliefs, and communication styles across cultures.

- When possible, include frequent breaks built into formal agendas (e.g., every 45-60 minutes).
- Use terms or images that elevate individuals' and communities' assets and resources.

Refer to Washington State Office of Equity's Community Compensation Guidelines-Accessibility (2023) for additional recommendations.

Ongoing Support and Coaching[23]

- Having supervisors and employers who understand the peer role and have a vision for the value PWLE bring into the workforce is critical to their success and, ultimately, to those they serve.
- All agency staff should be available to support and include PWLE, and PWLE should always know who to contact when support is needed or when issues may arise.
- For more formal PWLE positions, regularly scheduled and ongoing supportive supervision for PWLE should be established.
- An organization typically identifies a staff member to serve as the designated contact person for parents/youth with lived experience. Ideally, this person:
    - has a strong understanding of trauma
    - uses a strength-based, recovery-oriented approach
    - has the capacity to provide oversight
    - embraces transparency
    - communicates easily with involved parents/youths (i.e., clearly explains official documents and other publications as needed)
- Young adult PWLE frequently require support with issues both related and unrelated to the job. They may experience unstable housing, unhealthy relationships, trauma symptoms, and behavioral health concerns like those they serve. Ensuring these young adults with lived experience in the workplace understand the system from a new perspective and become familiar with the terms they will hear in meetings is vital. Young adult PWLE need training and coaching on people skills, professionalism, and life skills.

[23] Casey Family Programs (2023). What are some considerations for employing and supporting youth peer mentors in child welfare?; Washington State Office of Equity. (2023). *Community Compensation Guidelines-Compensation Best Practices*; National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (2022): *Engaging Parents and Youths with Lived Experience*.

D. Credentialing and Training Curriculum

A User's Guide to the Family Empowerment Leadership Academy (FELA) Resources (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019)[24]

Through family empowerment and leadership, new pathways are being paved for families and child welfare professionals to work in partnership to achieve positive outcomes. These resources present a series of tools that can be used to help child welfare agencies build individual, team, and agency capacity to collaborate with families to help parents and family members take a more active role in programs and policies, share insights, and enhance services. Child welfare agencies are turning to diverse programs and practices (e.g., family group decision-making, parent partner programs, and family consultation on policy development) to engage families and increase family voice. These resources include a training curriculum, eLearning modules, and an implementation manual.

- Family Empowerment Training Curriculum: Curriculum, assessments, and evaluations are accessible after setting up a free online account. Adults in parenting roles with CWS experience can share their knowledge to improve outcomes for children and families and support the enhancement of agency operations.[25] Co-facilitating this two-day curriculum for in-person training of child welfare agency staff and family leaders models the partnership described. The presentation materials are designed to be customized to an agency's needs and include training agendas, presentations, handouts, video clips, activity ideas, and surveys to assess whether participants achieved intended training outcomes.
- Family Empowerment eLearning: The eLearning modules can help agency staff, family leaders, and community partners build shared understanding in these key areas:
    - Collaboration with families to create sustainable change in the CWS system
    - Agency and family leader roles in developing collaborative partnerships
    - Peer-to-peer support for families currently involved in the child welfare system

[24] All training materials are accessible or available for download with a free account.

[25] *Note:* Resource considerations include compensation of family leaders as PWLE for their time and expenses spent on attending meetings, facilitating trainings, and providing support to agency staff and/or other families.

- Family Empowerment Implementation Manual: Combines research and guidance on best practices in family empowerment with the evolving field of implementation science. Implementation means the processes and activities involved in "putting into practice" programs and strategies and effectively managing change.

The Parent Empowerment Program's Family Peer Advocate Training and Credentialing (Families Together in New York State, 2022)

The Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) is a training program for Family Peer Advocates (FPAs). PEP training introduces new FPAs to their role and the skills they need to engage and empower parents effectively. This credentialing process intends to formally recognize the expertise of FPAs, ensure all advocates demonstrate common core training, expand reimbursement possibilities, and provide opportunities for professional growth and collaboration.

- PEP Training includes self-paced online modules, a multi-day, live training on Zoom, and a series of coaching phone calls.
- Successful completion of the PEP Training is required for anyone seeking a FPA credential in New York State. Having an FPA credential is increasingly becoming a hiring requirement.

Additional Peer Youth and Family Certifications In NY State offering training curricula and credentialing requirements include:

- Certified Recovery Peer Advocate- Family (CRPA-F): This is a specialization under the existing CRPA certification (funded by the New York State Office of Mental Health), providing existing Certified Recovery Peer Advocates (CRPA) an additional opportunity to offer specialized family peer support. The training program comprises:
  - 50 hours of Peer Recovery foundational training required for CRPA
  - 10-hour, 15-module online program entitled *Foundations of Family-Supported Recovery*
  - 10 hours of family-specialty classroom training
- Youth Peer Advocate Credential (YPA): Youth Power of Families Together in NYS administers the New York State YPA Credential. Establishing a YPA Credential recognizes the importance of peer-to-peer support for young people. YPA Professional Credential requirements include:

- Complete Level Two YPA Training
- Hold a Valid YPA Provisional Credential
- Complete YPA Professional Credential Application
- 600 hours of documented experience providing Youth Peer Support Services
- Supervisor Letter of Recommendation
- Signed YPA Code Ethics
- Level Two YPA Training consists of online modules, in-person training, and coaching phone calls.
- 20 hours of continuing education is required every two years to renew a Professional Credential

Notes: Typically, obtaining a YPA Professional Credential begins after an individual is employed as a YPA. There is also a YPA Provisional Credential available. For more information, refer to the YPA Credential: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).

Effectively Employing Young Adult Peer Providers: A Toolkit (Delman & Klodnick, 2022)

Compared to older PWLE, young adult PWLE are more likely to need assistance learning about workplace norms and expectations. Training topics that would be important to the success of many young adult PWLE include:

- Essential workplace skills
- Personnel policies and benefits
- Workplace rights and responsibilities
- Building resilience through stress management, self-care, and wellness planning.

Additional training topics that build YA peer job skills:

- Motivational Interviewing & Active Listening
- Professionalism
- Healthy Boundaries
- Strategic Sharing
- Suicidality assessment and safety planning
- Communication and leadership styles

California Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification (California Mental Health Services Authority, 2023)

Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists provide recovery-oriented, culturally appropriate services that promote engagement, socialization, self-

sufficiency, self-advocacy, natural supports and are trauma-aware. The certification is administered by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) through established policies, procedures, and documents specific to the certification program.

- California Senate Bill 803 (SB 803), authored by State Senator Jim Beall, is the Mental Health Services: Peer Support Specialist Certification Program Act of 2020. SB 803 recognizes peer support's benefits to individuals and families with behavioral health challenges and the increased diversity and effectiveness peers bring to the workforce. SB 803 was signed into law in July 2022, setting a standard of 17 core competencies/statewide training standards that every Peer Support Specialist must know to be certified as a practitioner in California. This certification program created a new provider and service type eligible for federal Medi-Cal reimbursements through the county behavioral health plan. Under the bill, a participating county is responsible for training and certifying peers and providing program oversight. In summary, the 17 Core Competencies of the Peer Certification Training Curriculum include:

    1. The concepts of hope, recovery, and wellness
    2. The role of advocacy
    3. The role of consumers and family members
    4. Psychiatric rehabilitation skills and service delivery, and addiction recovery principles, including defined practices
    5. Cultural and structural competence training
    6. Trauma-informed care
    7. Group facilitation skills
    8. Self-awareness and self-care
    9. Co-occurring disorders of mental health and substance use
    10. Conflict resolution
    11. Professional boundaries and ethics
    12. Preparation for employment opportunities, including study and test-taking skills, application and résumé preparation,

interviewing, and other potential requirements for employment.

13. Safety and crisis planning
14. Navigation of, and referral to, other services
15. Documentation skills and standards
16. Confidentiality
17. Digital literacy

- In addition to participating in the entire 80-hour live online training session (a certificate of completion is provided upon completion), the additional requirements for certification include:
    - Be at least 18 years of age
    - Possess a high school diploma or equivalent degree
    - Self-identify as having lived experience with the process of recovery from mental illness, substance use disorder, or both, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent or family member of the consumer
    - Be willing to share their experience
    - Have a strong dedication to recovery
    - Agree, in writing, to adhere to the Code of Ethics
    - Pay a $250 initial certification fee
    - Have access and the ability to utilize a computer, laptop, and internet connection
    - Pass the Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Exam approved by DHCS for a Peer Support Specialist
- **Related training resources include:**
    - CalMHSA Training Curriculum – Crisis Care Core Competencies
    - CalMHSA Training Curriculum – General Peer Specialist Core Competencies
    - CalMHSA Training Curriculum – Working with Justice Involved
    - CalMHSA Training Curriculum – Parent, Caregiver, Family Member Peer
    - CalMHSA Training Curriculum – Working with Persons Unhoused
    - NAMI: San Diego & Imperial County: Peer Training and Placement Program: This training is devoted to providing individuals peer-to-peer education and support to those who self-identify as having experience with the process of recovery

from a mental health or substance use disorder, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent, caregiver, or family member of a consumer with a mental health condition. This serves as a pathway to employment/ volunteer positions within the public mental health system after taking and passing the Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification exam.

E. Compensation and Benefits[26]

When PWLE give their time and energy to share their expertise and perspectives, they provide an invaluable lens into the inner workings of our health and human services system and have critical insights into what must change to achieve better program outcomes. Compensation and benefits for PWLE constitutes an essential component of this community engagement and partnership.

- **Organizations should strive to pay PWLE a living wage, which may be higher than federal or local minimum wage standards.** Compensation payments are considered taxable income and are part of benefits eligibility calculations, a fact all PWLE should be made aware of before onboarding.
- **Agencies should establish the entire compensation process and procedures for PWLE positions before they are hired so that they are paid in a timely manner.** This means agency staff from accounting, budget, policy, and other involved departments should understand their role in the compensation process for PWLE.
- **A top barrier to authentic engagement of PWLE is related to inequitable compensation, including unfair wages and inconsistent pay.** Equitable compensation refers to paying PWLE people fair, timely, and consistent wages that are informed by research and market compensation guidelines. To achieve equitable compensation, organizations must pay PWLE for their work in a manner that demonstrates the value of their time, contributions, and expertise.[27] Recommended strategies to promote equitable compensation include:

[26] Washington State Office of Equity. (2023). *Lived Experience Community Compensation Guidelines-Compensation Best Practices*.

[27] Olivier, J., & Russell, L. (2023). *Authentic youth engagement within organizations: What does it look like in practice?* Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

  - Establish pay equity policies (e.g., retainer model where someone is guaranteed certain hours per week or regular stipend payments)
  - Practice wage transparency (e.g., include pay rate in job description)
  - Provide choice on payment options since not all PWLE have checking accounts (e.g., direct deposit, debit card, gift card, Venmo, PayPal)
  - Conduct ongoing reviews of wages and payment structures
- **Pay rate examples**
  - The National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare identifies standard compensation ranges for parents and youth with lived experience from $20 to $25 per hour, which may be dependent on locale (e.g., an urban core city versus a rural area) and includes time spent in meetings as well as trainings.[28]
  - Chapin Hall launched the *Empowering Youth Study* (2023) to better understand what authentic youth engagement means and how it can be practiced at Chapin Hall and other youth-centered organizations. The study found youth consultants with lived experience who participated in the study had salary ranges from $25 per hour to $115 per hour.[29]
  - The University of Washington (UW) Mechanics for Stipends & Reimbursement compensation schedule is set at $45 per hour. They provide the following compensation schedule for PWLE (which may need to be adjusted to pay PWLE a living wage).[30]
    - Up and including one hour = $45
    - More than one hour and equal to two hours = $90
    - More than two hours to equal to three hours = $135
    - More than three hours to equal to four hours = $180
    - Anything over four hours = $200

[28] National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare. (2022). *Engaging Parents and Youths with Lived Experience*.

[29] Olivier, J., & Russell, L. (2023). *Authentic youth engagement within organizations: What does it look like in practice?* Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

[30] Washington State Office of Equity. (2023). *Lived Experience Compensation: Best Practices*.

Note: If a PWLE receives $600 or more from one agency in a calendar year, that income must be reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) using a 1099-MISC form.

- **Additional Recommendations for Compensating PWLE**[31]
  - **Assess the level of engagement** to establish equitable compensation, including assessing the level of effort, duration, and type of work PWLE will perform. Consider compensating longer, more intensive work with a higher level of effort (e.g., developing and delivering a training) differently than a time-bound task requiring lower effort (e.g., participating in a one-time interview or listening session).
  - **Reasonable allowances should also be provided to PWLE when appropriate.** This includes any financial reimbursements for travel, lodging, mileage, and childcare (if appropriate)[32] at reimbursement rates defined by the agency for their employees. These allowances should not be confused with stipend payments, which are compensation offered in exchange for PWLE's time and efforts, as opposed to compensation to cover practical costs incurred during work that require reimbursement.
  - **Mirror compensation offered for other valued experiences.** Organizations may consider checking pay levels and working conditions of more experienced organizations, lived experience peak bodies, Unions, or Fair Work Ombudsman.[33]
  - **Set up systems early to avoid administrative barriers or delays in payment**. To get started, consider taking the steps noted below:

[31] Hinkle, E., Kendall, J. R., Sandoval-Lunn, M., Stern, F., & Donier, J. (2022). *A starter kit on engaging people with lived experience in child support programs.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement.

[32] If childcare is deemed allowable, an example of reimbursement rates for child care in Washington State includes up to $25 per hour for the first child and up to $50 per 24-hour cycle for each additional child. PWLE may either submit the bill or invoice received from the provider for child care services or confirmation of payment. Be as flexible as possible with what constitutes a bill or invoice or confirmation of payment (e.g. traditional receipt, screenshot of money transfer through apps like CashApp and Venmo) to make it as easy as possible for PWLE to receive reimbursement.

[33] National Mental Health Commission (Australia, 2021): National Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce Development Guidelines

- Set up a meeting with your accounting, finance, and human resource divisions to discuss compensation and benefits.
- Conduct a pilot or demonstration effort
- Partner with private foundations or businesses: These entities may have more flexibility and capacity to arrange timely pay for people with lived experience as well as provide other benefits and support.

IV. Potential Barriers and Considerations for PWLE in the Workforce

Critical Consideration: Ensuring the Safety of PWLE[34]
Former clients of child welfare, substance use treatment, or family court systems may feel threatened to partner again with these same systems. It is critical to consider the following:

- **Confidentiality**
  - Give parents/youths the option to be referred to in publications, internal documents, recordings, or presentations by their first name only or a pseudonym of their choosing.
  - Ensure parents/youths understand the limitations of any signed media releases and encourage them to speak with the designated contact person about any concerns.
  - Ensure participants know in advance if a meeting or event will be recorded so they have the option to opt-out.
  - Decide if it is essential to maintain audio or video recordings of meetings; written notes may be sufficient and protect confidentiality.
- **Trauma-informed Approaches**
  - Agency staff shows awareness that trauma is a possible underlying factor in the behavior and attitudes of PWLE, and steps are needed to prioritize and provide safety, trust, empowerment, choice, collaboration, and control.
  - If a participant has trouble managing emotions, or seems to dissociate during a meeting, check in with them privately—either during or after the session.
  - Allow parents/youths to decline participation in specific activities or conversations of their choosing.

Successful Approaches to Employing Individuals with Lived Experience in the Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health Fields Summary of Survey and

[34] National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare. (2022). *Engaging Parents and Youths with Lived Experience*

Interviews (Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health in collaboration with California State University, Sacramento, 2021)

In a 2021 survey by the Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health (CCJBH) in collaboration with California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), stakeholders representing diverse populations across California (e.g., behavioral health and criminal justice system partners, advocates, other individuals interested in CCJBH efforts) discussed the following barriers and considerations when hiring PWLE.

- **Background checks and security clearance** (as an issue of technical policy and culture): Several organizations identified background checks as a significant challenge. In some contexts, these can be appealed, but even then, the additional time and resources the appeal takes become barriers in themselves. An applicant's criminal record should be factored into hiring decisions only when directly related to job duties and responsibilities and then in light of the gravity of the crime and the length of time since the offense. Opportunities to address this challenge include legislative changes and relying on individual discretion to make the final call to hire someone despite the results of the background check. Several interviewees reiterated it would be helpful to have a peer who reviews the background checks to support evaluating candidates based on who they are now.
- **Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws and disclosure issues:** Participants expressed concern that some organizations do not explicitly identify lived experience as hiring criteria and part of the formal application process due to concerns about discrimination under EEO laws. In some cases, organizations do not make lived experience a formal requirement but instead ask how it will influence the work that the candidate will do. Other organizations do not ask directly about lived experience at all during the hiring process.
- **Lack of available funding and inadequate compensation for PWLE:** Some funders of non-profit organizations do not necessarily value peer support, making it difficult to acquire funds to create and support long-term positions. Wages for PWLE are often low and unfair (this is further discussed in Section III), which is a barrier to recruiting qualified PWLE support.
- **Degree requirements for advancement within an organization:** Degree requirements can create a systemic barrier preventing PWLE from advancing in their careers. There is a need for workforce and peer

support training curriculum and opportunities to prepare PWLE to enter the workplace, creating an onramp to employment and gaining the experience necessary to meet qualifications for non-entry level PWLE roles. There is also a need for leadership programs and succession planning that are open to all.

- **Insufficient support and mentorship:** There is a need for ongoing support and training in addition to "traditional" supervision. Similarly, empowering PWLE to take risks, grow, and provide opportunities to be part of an organization's decision-making process is essential.
- **Stigma and lack of recognition of the value of peer support:** Implicit stigma against PWLE is an ongoing challenge. Similarly, there are potential misconceptions regarding the role of peer support, which may lead to inappropriate hiring and support of PWLE. These misconceptions can manifest as a paternalistic relationship between providers and peers or treating peers as tokenized job placements rather than valuing their contributions. An interviewee recounted how misunderstanding and undervaluing the roles of PWLE can prevent them from contributing meaningfully to their teams. For example, a PWLE may not have access to clients' electronic health records in the same way as other team members, in order to understand their client's needs more holistically.

Authentic youth engagement within organizations: What does it look like in practice? (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2023)

Specific to hiring youth with lived expertise to work on research, policy, and advocacy projects within organizations in a manner that is authentic, empowering, and equitable, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago launched the *Empowering Youth Study* to better understand what authentic youth engagement means and how it can be best practiced. This included completing small-group interviews in partnership with Point Source Youth and True Colors United and reviewing relevant literature and programmatic materials. Results identified five critical areas in which organizations can authentically engage youth:

- **Promote equitable compensation** practices in ways that demonstrate the value of young people's time, contributions, and expertise.
- **Provide accommodations and supports** tailored to diversity in youth experiences and needs.

- **Respect youth skills and leadership** by designing meaningful decision-making and professional development opportunities.
- **Be transparent** with organizational developments and challenges and involve youth feedback in the continuous improvement of organizational policies and practices.
- **Build rapport** by establishing a culture rooted in empathy for the lived expertise of youth of diverse backgrounds and identities and by creating opportunities for youth and staff to interact within and beyond the workplace.

  The study also identified potential barriers within each core component and corresponding recommended strategies, which are outlined in the table on the following page.

Authentic Youth Engagement: Potential Barriers, Recommended Strategies, and Examples[35]

Engagement Components	Potential Barriers	Recommended Strategies	Examples
Equitable compensation	- Unfair wages - Inconsistent pay	- Establish pay equity policies - Practice wage transparency (include pay rate in job description) - Provide choice on payment options - Conduct ongoing reviews of wages and payment structures	- Retainer model (for example, guaranteed number of hours per week) - Stipend payments (biweekly, monthly) - Flexible payment options (such as direct deposit, VISA gift cards, Venmo, PayPal)
Accommodations and supports	- Lack of awareness of the needs of young people - Limited available funding - Limited partnerships with direct service providers	- Develop a youth-facing resource guide with national and local supports that youth may access - Administer accommodations and supports questionnaire during onboarding to assess youth needs - Provide direct/indirect access to financial, housing, health, professional, personal, and other supports aligned with youth needs - Establish meaningful partnerships with youth-centered direct service providers to facilitate service referrals - Be flexible with working arrangements (consider meeting times and locations)	- Financial hardship stipends - Self-care kits - Crisis intervention supports - Referral to wraparound services

[35] Olivier, J., & Russell, L. (2023). *Authentic youth engagement within organizations: What does it look like in practice?* Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Respect for youth skills and leadership	- Adultism - Tokenism	- Incorporate youth voices in key organizational decisions and practices. - Invest in youth professional development - Invest in adequate youth representation - Train staff on authentic youth engagement, including adultism and tokenism	- Youth involvement in staff hiring processes - Youth co-development of youth and staff job descriptions - Youth pairing with staff mentor and supervisor based on professional goals - Youth speaking engagements - Youth conference presentations - Authorship credit - Acknowledgements in presentations and written products (such as briefs and reports)
Transparency	- Unclear channels of communication - Withholding or gatekeeping of information	- Set clear roles/responsibilities informed by youth voice - Openly address workplace conflict - Train staff to improve critical skills (such as active listening, conflict resolution) - Acknowledge past mistakes - Encourage feedback for continuous quality improvement - Provide the "why" behind organizational decisions - Give regular updates on organizational practices, successes, and opportunities for growth	- Monthly "Share Outs" on organizational updates and equity practices - Office hours with staff liaisons (for example, senior leadership, youth program director) - Anonymous feedback survey - Onboarding packet with clearly outlined roles/responsibilities, training materials, company policies and grievance procedures, organizational mission and

			vision, etc.
Rapport building	- Lack of empathy for youth experiences - Limited opportunities for staff and youth to engage - Virtual work environment	- Empathize with youth experiences, traumas, and backgrounds - Invest in professional and social networking opportunities aligned with youth interests - Hire a cohort of youth consultants to promote building rapport	- Affinity groups and healing circles - Professional workshops and convenings - Social outings (for example, museums, nature walks, musicals)

V. Examples of Promising State and County Programs

Several states and county programs have recognized the value of incorporating PWLE into the CWS workforce. While the specific initiatives may vary, below are examples of programs that have embraced this approach. These examples demonstrate the growing recognition of the importance of including PWLE in CWS in enhancing the effectiveness, relevance, and responsiveness of CWS policies and services. It is important to note that these examples represent only a few instances of initiatives that have been implemented. Other states, counties, and organizations have similar programs or are actively exploring the integration of PWLE into their CWS.

A. California

California Youth Connection (CYC) is a California-based organization that empowers current and former foster youth to advocate for improvements in the child welfare system. CYC engages youth in leadership roles and employs PWLE to provide training, outreach, and support to other young people involved in the child welfare system. This program has paid and volunteer advocate roles.

- Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project (YTP): Led by CYC staff and former foster youth, serves as a national model for designing and delivering youth-led training of all kinds. YTP has provided technical assistance and advice to numerous groups developing constituent-driven training programs.
- Bay Area Leadership Academy (BAYLA): A 10-week leadership development program for youth currently or formerly in foster care. Young leaders ages 14-24 develop professional networks while learning skills and developing their own agendas for effective targeted legislative and policy advocacy for all youth who experience foster care.
    - BAYLA provides PWLE with political education, skill building, and the opportunity to develop critical understandings and build social capital. Utilizes facilitators, guest speakers, and coaches to deliver info.
    - Guide and Syllabus- This guide is designed to provide organizations with the information they need to replicate, adapt, and implement a leadership academy similar to BAYLA in their area.

San Diego County's Family Support Liaison Program uses a family-centered, culturally responsive approach aimed at helping families set and achieve their own goals with the support of PWLE in CWS.

- Jewish Family Services, in collaboration with the County of San Diego's Child and Family Well-Being System's commitment to reducing the disproportionality of African American/Black and immigrant/refugee families who are CWS involved, the Family Support Liaison Program (FSLP) aims to support parents and caregivers as they navigate the Child welfare system. This includes supporting them to reunify with their children and reducing future CWS involvement of families enrolled in the program.
- By applying the C.A.R.E.S. (Coordination, Advocacy, Resources, Education and Support) Wraparound model, FSLP partners with families to design an individualized support plan that works for them.
- Their prevention and family preservation strategies help parents and caregivers navigate CWS, connect to community resources, and increase their networks of support—all with the goal of keeping children safe and families together.
- Liaisons are recruited from the local community; the majority are PWLE in CWS who also have cultural ties to the Black and African American communities. Below are two FLSP position descriptions for PWLE:
    - The Family Support Specialist is responsible for educating families about child welfare laws and policies as well as child safety and well-being; helping families build time management, communication, and financial management skills; supporting families in navigating CWS; and providing referrals to and care coordination with community supports.
    - The Youth Partner works primarily with youth enrolled in the program and provides mentoring, guidance, and advocacy. Youth Partners help by assisting youth in connecting with supportive services; aiding them in achieving time management, communication, and financial management skills; and providing referrals to and care coordination with community supports. The Youth Partner builds trust and engagement with the youth and their family, helps the youth develop supportive relationships, enhances their ability to

draw on their own strengths and available resources, and assists the family with identifying their support network through formal and informal supports. The Youth Partner enhances their work by sharing their perspectives and real-life experiences as appropriate.

Alameda County's Youth Advocate Program (YAP) launched in February 2007 and is a three-year professional development fellowship for Alameda County current and former foster and probation youth, ages 18-25.

- The program benefits from a close partnership between the privately owned West Coast Children's Clinic, which manages the day-to-day operations, and Alameda County's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).
- YAP supports an average of 12 youth advocate fellows at a time, including two senior youth advocates. Fellows are hired between the ages of 18 and 23. During this three-year professional development fellowship, advocates are full-time West Coast Children's Clinic employees, earning a living wage and benefits.
- The goal of the YAP is to improve services, experiences, and outcomes for youth in foster care by including the voice and perspective of current and former foster and probation youth. This involves direct and indirect advocacy, policy input, and training in collaboration with Alameda County DCFS. YAP trains and supports current and former foster and probation youth through a fellowship program that develops their advocacy, engagement, outreach, and policy skills and provides experiences that further their professional development.
- Youth Advocates:
    - Provide advocacy and support to youth ages 12-21 at Child Family Team Meetings (CFTs).
    - Utilize their own foster care experience to advocate for foster youth in various Alameda County DCFS workgroups and committees.
    - Collaborate with Alameda County DCFS to design and implement projects with a youth-friendly approach.
    - Share stories of their foster care experience to educate prospective foster parents and relative caregivers about the

impact of being in care and how they can better care for foster youth.
    - Assist Independent Living Program (ILP) staff with events that provide current foster youth with opportunities to build their career and life skills.
- West Coast demonstrates a solid commitment to the fellows' professional development. Youth advocates devote approximately 20 hours per week to DCFS work, which includes direct advocacy for youth in care and other project and committee work. Fellows may dedicate up to 10 paid hours per week to pursuing individualized professional development goals, including attending school or completing homework, participating in internships, or exploring other careers. In their third year, fellows receive an additional 5 hours per week for "advancement planning," such as resume-building, obtaining a driver's license, or attending job interviews or one-to-one coaching.
- In 2021-22, 100 percent of those surveyed agreed that the fellowship supported them in reaching their professional and educational goals. Program alums have gone on to receive bachelor's and master's degrees, pursuing careers both within and beyond the field of social work (and one former youth advocate now serves as a member of the program's admin team).

Santa Clara's Dependency Advocacy Center Mentor Parent Program (MPP) aims to provide hope to parents participating in DWC, engage participants in recovery, help eligible families successfully reunify, and break the cycle of child welfare involvement.[36]

- **Model**: Mentor Parents meet with all eligible parents during the first legal dependency hearing when the parent is appointed a Dependency Advocacy Center Attorney. When a parent attends the first dependency legal hearing, a mentor will attempt contact twice per week for the first three weeks from the initial court date to support the parent and encourage them to participate in Dependency Wellness Court (DWC) and other substance use treatment services. All Mentor Parents graduated from the DWC and are employed by the Dependency Advocacy Center, the non-

[36] National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW). (2019). *The Use of Peers and Recovery Specialists in Child Welfare Settings* (refer to pages 23-25).

profit organization contracted to provide legal representation to parents involved in Santa Clara County's child welfare system.

- **Qualifications**: All Mentor Parents have lived experience of a substance use disorder and child welfare involvement. The mentors are parents who have:
    - A minimum of two years of sobriety and continue to be engaged in the recovery community
    - Successfully reunified with their children
    - Graduated from the DWC
    - They had their legal case dismissed for at least six months, so they are no longer involved in the CWS system
- **Mentor Parents have the following roles and responsibilities**:
    - Meet with every eligible parent who is appointed a Dependency Advocacy Center attorney and encourage them to participate in the voluntary DWC Program
    - Provide linkages to services and identify service gaps
    - Facilitate access to treatment by helping parents overcome barriers (e.g., transportation, child care) and finding local resources (e.g., food and clothing banks)
    - Monitor participants' progress and keep them engaged in services
    - Provide case management by helping parents organize their schedules to accommodate all the requirements of the child welfare, treatment, court, and other systems
    - Offer role-playing so parents are more prepared and confident to interact with the judge and their social worker
    - Provide support to the parent during team meetings and court hearings
    - Train stakeholders and serve as a positive model of recovery and reunification

In addition to working with participants, Mentor Parents play a key role in educating DWC team members, child welfare staff, community and agency partners, and other service providers about parenting with a substance use disorder and effective engagement strategies with this population.

- **Supervision and Training**
    - The Licensed Clinical Supervisor meets with each mentor every other week and facilitates weekly group sessions with all the mentors to discuss emerging issues and challenges.

    - The Clinical Supervisor also provides specialized training on various topics, including motivational interviewing, self-care, and vicarious trauma. The trainings range from an hour to a half day and occur quarterly. Mentor Parents also participate in trainings provided by the DFCS, the Superior Court, Substance Use Treatment Services, and various other agency and community-based organizations.
    - The MPP Manager oversees program operations and provides non-clinical supervision to each mentor on a consistent basis.
- **Budget and Pay Range**: The overall budget for MPP, including the Manager and Clinical Supervisor, is $466,000. Mentor Parents are full-time, salaried employees with benefits (e.g., health care, vacation). The hourly pay range is $16-19 per hour.
- **Communication Protocols and Information-Sharing**: Since Mentor Parents are employees of the Dependency Advocacy Center, their communications with the parents are covered under client-attorney privilege. In addition, the mentors' process for sharing information is the same as the attorneys—information can be shared with outside parties if the parent provides explicit permission. The parent signs a release of information when they agree to participate in DWC. However, these forms do not overrule the client-attorney privilege.
- **Program Outcomes**: San Jose State University School of Social Work conducts an ongoing program evaluation of MPP. Findings from a May 2017 Research Brief[37] indicate that:
    - Parents who received support from Mentor Parents improved in each of nine self-sufficiency domains, including housing, employment, transportation, life skills, family/ social relations, community involvement, parenting skills, and substance abuse
    - Parents who graduated from MPP and DWC were nearly six times more likely to reunify with their children compared to eligible parents who did not participate in either program.

[37] Drabble, L., Wilson, J., & Soto, D. (2017.) *Evaluation of collaborative services: Mentor parent project of the dependency advocacy center.* San Jose State University School of Social Work.

B. Promising Programs in Other States-Community Collaboratives/ Advisory Groups/Workgroups

Arizona's Office of Prevention, within the Department of Child Safety (DCS),[38] used Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) funds to create and fund its **Parent Advisory Collaborative (PAC)** in 2018. This group was developed to increase parent leadership, provide feedback to DCS about initiatives and improvement activities, and create an atmosphere of compassion, trust, and respect. The collaborative comprises of parents from the community, former foster youth, kinship providers, adoptive parents, and former DCS clients and their family members.

- PAC members receive a stipend, a meal during the meeting, and child care and travel reimbursement.
- The entire PAC meets quarterly.
- Seven subcommittees (on topics such as housing, incarcerated parents, safe sleep, and strengthening young parents) meet approximately monthly.
- The insights provided by PAC members increase DCS's understanding of how the community responds to various prevention efforts and allow the Office of Prevention to adjust strategies accordingly.
- The group also reviews and provides feedback on Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) reports and applications.

Washington State's Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Parent Advisory Group (PAG) is a sounding board for decisions, ideas, and questions that shape the future of DCYF. Parental involvement in decision-making is the key to policies and programs supporting families' strengths and needs.

- The PAG consists of parents and family caregivers of children from prenatal through 17 years old. The PAG meets by phone and in person.
- PAG members represent the unique experiences and perspectives of their families, including but not limited to:
    - Rural, remote, urban, and military communities
    - Access a variety of early learning services for their children or not currently connected to services

[38] Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2021). *2021/2022 Prevention Resource Guide: Chapter 5 Embracing Community and the Wisdom of Lived Experience*.

    - Have diverse family structures (for example, headed by both or single parents, grandparents, kinship care, foster parents, or blended families)
    - Experience with immigration and being new to a community
    - Impacted by incarceration
    - Cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity
    - Have children with varying developmental and special needs.

The **Indiana Youth Advisory Board (IYAB)** is a program of the nonprofit Foster Success, under contract with the Indiana Department of Child Services. IYAB is a group of teens and young adults from across Indiana who are currently in or have lived experience in foster care and are responsible for advising and providing feedback to DCS on issues affecting those in foster care.

- IYAB meetings are youth-led and facilitated by IYAB Leadership Team Members. A staff member from Foster Success supports IYAB during meetings, projects, and other advocacy work.
- IYAB offers a safe space for teens and young adults with lived experience in foster care to connect, share, and grow with each other. Adult workers or Foster Success staff can only attend IYAB meetings if the board invites them.
- IYAB empowers members to advocate for themselves and effectively communicate their needs and concerns.
- When the IYAB formed, they created six positions, one for each of six foundational pillars of Indiana's older youth initiatives: youth-adult partnerships, youth voice, social networking, building social capital, normalcy and healthy risk-taking, and brokering resources.

    - The leaders in those positions have specific duties related to that principle. For example, the Youth Voice representative is responsible for listening to youth in all regions and advocating for policy changes that reflect their perspectives.
    - All of the positions are paid an equal monthly stipend. Rimy Morris, a former Youth Advisory Board member now on staff as a youth advisor for Foster Success, said that the absence of a hierarchy was critical to board members, as they had experienced a competitive culture both in their time in foster care and in earlier iterations of the advisory board. Morris says that as a result of the current youth-developed structure, the

culture of the group has greatly improved: "We now have shared power, we stand up for each other's values, and we move with integrity."[39]

C. Promising Programs in Other States-Youth/Parent Partner Programs

Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma)[40] is an evidence-informed children services-led intervention model[41] that helps public children services agencies (PCSAs) bring together caseworkers, behavioral health providers, and family peer mentors into teams dedicated to helping families struggling with co-occurring child maltreatment and substance use disorder.

- Ohio START's overall goal is to stabilize families harmed by parental addiction so that both children and their parents can recover and move forward with healthy and safe lives. The model is designed to transform the system-of-care within and between child welfare agencies, substance use disorder (SUD) treatment providers, and other family serving systems.
- Uses a family-centered approach and services that help the child, parents, and the entire family. Ohio START recognizes that SUD/addiction is a family disease, recovery occurs in the context of families, and adult recovery should have a parent-child component.
- Parents struggling with substance use are paired with peer recovery mentors who have been through recovery. The Parent Partner teams with the caseworker and assists the parents through the recovery process to help keep children safely at home.
- As of 2022, Ohio START added a fifth cohort and operates in 54 counties across the state.
- The Ohio START model is an affiliate of the national Sobriety, Treatment and Recovery Teams (START) Model, an evidence-informed child welfare-led intervention for families that has been shown, when implemented with fidelity, to improve outcomes for both parents and children affected by child maltreatment and parental substance use disorders. START received a rating of

[39]Casey Family Programs (2022). How can agencies and organizations prepare for authentic youth engagement?

[40] Casey Family Programs. (2023). *What is the National START (Sobriety, Treatment, and Recovery Teams) Model?*

[41] START has undergone rigorous evaluation described in at least a dozen peer-reviewed publications. Outcomes from this collective body of evidence show that when implemented with fidelity:

"Supported" from the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse in May 2022. START has been replicated and scaled for effective implementation in rural and urban, public and privatized, and state and county-administered child welfare systems. (This map shows all current operational sites, along with the number and location of state and local affiliates.)

The Iowa Parent Partner Approach pairs Parent Partners with parents whose children have been removed from the home. It also pairs Parent Partners with parents who can only reside with their children under special conditions set by the courts.

- Parent Partners are parents who were formerly involved with the CWS system and who have achieved reunification with their children. They are selected based on their interpersonal skills, successes, and proven ability to overcome obstacles. To be eligible, Parent Partners must have maintained reunification with their children for at least one year.
- Parent Partners mentor eligible families by providing social support, guidance on navigating the reunification process, and working with social workers and other professionals to ensure the family gets needed resources. The goal is to support reunification and reduce the recurrence of child maltreatment.
- Parent Partners must complete six required training modules before meeting with families. These trainings cover mandatory reporter responsibilities, boundaries and safety issues, an overview of the Department of Human Services, and confidentiality. Parent Partners must also complete five supplemental trainings within one year of starting with the Parent Partner Approach. Additional trainings cover topics such as domestic violence, mental health, cultural competency, and substance abuse. Parent Partners participate in monthly support groups facilitated by a licensed mental health clinician to identify triggers and learn skills to address issues that arise with partner families.
- The Iowa Parent Partner Approach is rated as a promising practice because at least one study achieved a rating of moderate or high on

study design and execution and demonstrated a favorable effect on a target outcome.[42]

Massachusetts's Parent-Professional Advocacy League (PPAL) is a statewide, grassroots family organization founded in 1991 that is dedicated to improving the mental health and well-being of children, youth, and families through education, advocacy, and partnership. PPAL's goals are to support families, nurture parent leaders, and work for systems change. PPAL is the only Massachusetts organization whose work focuses solely on the interests of families whose children have mental health needs. PPAL provides training, support, and mentorship to help parents navigate the mental health system and influence policy and practice.

- PPAL Support Groups: PPAL support groups allow parents and other family members to join others parenting children with emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. People at support groups share stories, listen, and help each other heal and grow. They also share tips, resources, and information one can only find from someone who has been there. PPAL support groups are facilitated by someone who has raised or is still raising a child with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs.
- Trainings for Families: Includes various trainings for family members. For example, Ripple Effect-Using Family Experience to Influence Policy Change strives to prepare family members to serve on committees and advisory boards. It is for parents/ caregivers who are ready to advance their advocacy skills in child-serving systems or policy.

New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Parent Advocacy Initiative in Initial Child Safety Conferences (ICSC) works with non-profit organizations to recruit, train, and employ Parent Advocates city-wide. Parent Advocates support, inform, and mentor parents with children currently in foster care. They offer services such as support to parents in preparation for and during the ICSC by helping them to be informed about their rights and responsibilities within the CWS system, gain awareness of child welfare concerns, and understand and navigate the child welfare system.

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[42] Chambers, J. M., Lint, S., Thompson, M. G., Carlson, M. W., & Graef, M. I. (2019). Outcomes of the Iowa Parent Partner program evaluation: Stability of reunification and re-entry into foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 104.

- This initiative builds upon the work happening at ACS to address racial disproportionality across the child welfare system. ACS has prioritized initiatives that help strengthen parents' voices and success and is currently implementing its Equity Action Plan.
- Key findings from a 2021 evaluation study indicate that the Parent Advocacy Initiative in ICSC is helping to improve outcomes for children and families. The presence of a Parent Advocate was associated with:
    - Significantly decreased rates of out-of-home placements, and children remained at home at higher rates when a parent advocate was present at the conference.
    - Whenever out-of-home placement was recommended, placements in non-relative foster care significantly decreased, and kinship care placements increased.
    - The rate of repeat indicated maltreatment investigations within six months was unchanged.

  The results demonstrate that parent advocacy could significantly impact placement decisions and thus improve the outcomes of children and families.

ACS aims to scale this approach across the foster care system so that every parent with a goal of reunifying with their child has an assigned Parent Advocate to increase the safe and timely reunification of families with children in foster care. They are also in the process of enhancing the ICSC model, including introducing caucusing/private family time, an extended contact time where families can meet with a Parent Advocate and receive support without ACS representatives present.

Bravehearts M.O.V.E. New York, Inc. (Bravehearts) is a youth-led nonprofit organization with a mission to empower young adults touched by the child welfare system to become active and authentic leaders in their own lives as they transition into adulthood.

- The Children's Village organizationally mentors Bravehearts to ensure sustainability while it works toward financial independence without compromising its program model and values.
- Bravehearts has multiple programs and employs young adults to provide individual mentoring support services and advocacy for youth at court hearings, treatment meetings, discharge meetings, and more.

- This organization continuously works in tandem with Child Welfare professionals in Westchester County and across New York State to help educate professionals, providers, institutions, and young adults on the effects of trauma, the importance of resiliency, the need for youth voice, and creating a standard of trust and transparency within the systems and services we come in contact with. This creates opportunities for youth voices to drive improvements and innovations in the services and programs they and their peers encounter on a daily basis.
- Supervision involves multiple layers of support, with PWLE serving in supervisory and direct service roles. Staff employ intensive, creative problem-solving with patience, compassion, and options when a peer mentor struggles to meet organizational expectations. Termination is viewed as an "absolute last resort."
- "Every individual who is part of Bravehearts is an expert in their experience. Any one of them could go to school and get what I have, get an MSW. But I can't go to school and get a degree in foster care. The experience that they have gone through is embodied through their blood, sweat, and tears. That experience has to be valued." ~Warren Kent (Senior Vice President for Community-Based Services, The Children's Village)
- For more information, please review the BraveLife Intervention Training Manual (2020).

Allegheny County, Pennsylvania Youth Support Partners (YSP) are young adults with lived experience in child welfare, behavioral health, or juvenile justice, funded by the Department of Human Services to promote youth voice and enhance the department's engagement with youth ages 14 to 21. YSPs work alongside other staff to help youth identify and achieve their goals. The YSP program, one of the largest and most successful peer mentor programs serving child welfare-involved youth, reports that 90% of children offered a mentor accept YSP services.

- YSPs play a variety of roles:
  - Work with youth between 14 and 21 years of age who are involved in human services or juvenile probation
  - Enable youth to become self-reliant, independent, self-advocates, and responsible for their own actions

    - Help youth understand legal mandates, court sessions, legal documents
    - Connect youth to resources and natural supports
    - Serve as a voice and advocate for youth involved with the child-serving systems at the county, state, and federal level
    - Serve on a team supporting youth and families helping to identify natural supports.
- All YSPs complete the Strength-based Family Worker Credential training focusing on positive youth and family engagement. They are also trained on the service and support offerings of DHS, its contracted providers, and other agencies and community resources. With a heavy emphasis on skill-building, coaching, training, supervising, and team-building, the YSP Unit focuses on preparing the YSPs to work with youth from various backgrounds and experiences with a strength-based, culturally competent, positive, and youth-driven approach.
- Core competencies for YSPs include:
    - Demonstrates professionalism and commitment to ethical practice
    - Recognizes strength in diversity and difference: demonstrating sensitivity in practice
    - Understands and utilizes the power of clear, non-judgmental communication
    - Demonstrates self-care and lifelong learning
    - Applies strengths-based principles to practice with families
    - Applies strengths-based principles to agency and community system

VI. Additional Resources

- Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People With Lived Experience (Center for States-Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative, 2022)-Identifies methods and emerging strategies to engage people with lived experience in federal research, programming, and policymaking. It draws on lessons learned from federal initiatives across various human services areas to identify ways federal staff can meaningfully and effectively engage people with lived experience.

- How can agencies and organizations prepare for authentic youth engagement? (Casey Family Programs, 2022)- Includes steps agencies

can take to prepare for youth involvement in their systems change efforts.

- Becoming a Family-Focused System: Strategies for Building a Culture to Partner With Families (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019)-Provides strategies, tips, and examples for how to build a climate in which parents and families feel engaged in policy development, practice initiatives, and communication.[43]

- Strategies for National and State Groups to Equitably Identify People with Lived Experience (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation-Office of Human Service Policy, 2022)-This tool provides concrete strategies–making a plan, working with partners, and using a variety of advertisement methods–for identifying people with lived experience to engage in health and human services work.

- Strategies for Authentic Integration of Family and Youth Voice in Child Welfare (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019)-Discusses tips and techniques to effectively engage and sustain the involvement of families and youth at the agency level. It includes key tasks for authentic engagement, examples from the field, and an engagement tool with four primary ways to engage youth and families authentically.[44]

- Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Strategies for Meaningful Youth, Family, and Other Partner Engagement-(Capacity Building Center for States, 2019)-Discusses the importance of meaningful partner engagement in child welfare agency strategic planning, monitoring, and review processes, such as the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), and the Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan (CFSR PIP), as well as in prevention and disaster planning. The brief also explores potential barriers to partner engagement, offers strategies for

[43] Capacity Building Center for States. (2019). *Becoming a family-focused system: Building a culture to partner with families.* Washington, DC: Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

[44] Capacity Building Center for States. (2019). *Strategies for Authentic Integration of Family and Youth Voice in Child Welfare.* Washington, DC: Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

overcoming them, and suggests actionable steps for achieving meaningful partner engagement in these processes.[45]

- Effectively Employing Young Adult Peer Providers: A Toolkit (Delman & Klodnick, 2022)-This toolkit was developed specifically for provider organizations that employ or want to employ young adult (YA) peer providers. This toolkit provides employers with direct guidance on enhancing their capacity to sustain and grow a young adult peer workforce. It includes information on supervising young adult peer providers, establishing a supportive organizational culture, preparing and engaging non-peer staff, hiring and training young adult peers, and addressing significant job difficulties. Appendix C of the Toolkit includes a *Young Adult Peer Support Specialist Sample Job Description Template*.

- Voices of Lived Experience Library (Capacity Building Center for States, 2022) and Voices of Lived Experience in Child Welfare: A Digital Story Library Discussion Guide-Includes digital stories of PWLE and a guide for use with teams and individuals to advocate, inspire, support, recruit, train, and coach towards a better child welfare system.

- Child Welfare Virtual Expo 2022-Power in Partnerships: Prioritizing Lived Expertise in Child Welfare (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019)-Includes videos of recorded sessions from the Sept. 28, 2022 event and a CWVE 2022 Learning Experience Discussion Guide, which offers a description of related topics, individual reflection questions to facilitate personal on-demand learning, conversation starters, and team activities with child welfare staff and collaborative partners that when used together with the CWVE 2022 videos, can help teams and individuals value, prioritize, and implement partnerships with people with lived experience and expertise in child welfare.

- How can people with lived experience be most effectively involved in systems change? Engaging Lived Experts (Casey Family Programs, 2021)-Identifies lessons learned from a literature review, discussions, and consultations with experts to more effectively and appropriately

[45] Capacity Building Center for States. (2022). *Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Strategies for Meaningful Youth, Family, and Other Partner Engagement.* Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

engage PWLE in efforts to improve research, policy, and practice. Although the study regards engagement in federal initiatives, the lessons learned are relevant in helping the child welfare field more effectively involve PWLE.

- Peer Support: Parent Partner Programs (Casey Family Programs, 2022)- Includes various resources related to child welfare parent partner programs, including evidence-base, supporting research studies, best practices, and promising programs.

- Thriving Families, Safer Children-Works across the public, private and philanthropic sectors in 22 juris-dic-tions to rethink state and local child wel-fare systems in order to proactively support child and family well-being and break harmful intergenerational cycles of trauma and poverty. Thriving Families includes diverse community stakeholders—most importantly PWLE—to help them discern and develop the supports, resources, services, and approaches to meet the unique needs of their families and promote the conditions to help them thrive. Thriving Families is supported by Casey Family Programs, Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America), The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and The U.S. Children's Bureau as an opportunity to create the conditions for strong, thriving families where children are free from harm.
    - A 2022 journal article, *Using the Core Com-po-nents of a Pub-lic Health Frame-work to Cre-ate a Child and Fam-i-ly Well-being Sys-tem: Exam-ple from a Nation-al Effort, Thriv-ing Fam-i-lies, Safer Chil-dren* describes Thriv-ing Fam-i-lies' strate-gies in Col-orado, Nebras-ka, Vir-ginia and Cal-i-for-ni-a's Los Ange-les County.

- National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council-This council represents a collective viewpoint of youth and alums who have experienced the child welfare system first-hand. They use young adults with lived experience to educate and advise policymakers and child welfare organizations on foster care policies, practices, and programs that will affect children and families throughout the country. The Council consists of 20 members geographically distributed across the country, reflecting a broad range of diversity encompassing, but not

limited to, ethnicity, location of residency, religion and gender, and child welfare experiences.

- Think of Us-An organization founded, led, and shaped by former foster youth and driven by a commitment to centering lived experience. It evolved from a technology nonprofit in 2016 into a research and design lab, taking a novel approach to driving widespread change. Alongside PWLE, they engage across the ecosystem – from Federal policymakers to front-line workers and everyone in between – to create and co-implement novel, scalable solutions.

- A Clinical Support System for Serious Mental Illness (SMI)-Knowledge Base: Peer Specialists (American Psychiatric Association, 2023)-This knowledge-base tool provides answers to various questions about Peer Specialists (currently includes 64 Q&As) to advance the use of a person-centered approach to care that ensures people who have a SMI find the treatment and support they need.

- Critical Issues in Leadership Development for Peer Support Specialists (Jenkins, Shafer, & Janich, 2020)-A study focused on identifying common experiences of Peer Support Specialists who have advanced to a supervisory or managerial role. Seven themes emerged: managing dual relationships, having difficult conversations, push and pull of leadership, taking responsibility for others, taking responsibility for self-care, addressing stigma in the workplace, and spirituality/a calling to help. These professionals integrate their personal recovery experiences into their direct care and leadership approaches in the workplace.

- How do some jurisdictions fund parent partner programs? (Casey Family Programs, 2022)-Describes the experiences of five different parent partner programs and demonstrates that funding sources fall into three general categories: Medicaid, state funding, and grant funding, with some locations pulling funding from multiple sources. As experiences across the country have shown, jurisdictions looking to develop a parent partner program should start with a small pilot and then build support from the child welfare agency, parent partners themselves, families that have benefited from the service, local service providers, courts, and the broader community to spread and sustain the model.

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