

# LIVED EXPERIENCE & LEADERSHIP

Homeless Link open-to-all webinar  
Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024

Marcus Johnson, Sabrina Ellis, & Christiane Jenkins



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- SUIT are a commissioned lived experience recovery organisation (LERO), made up of staff and volunteers who are in recovery, or are affected by addictions and associated social harms.
- Established in 2007, SUIT has become a service for some of the most vulnerable people in Wolverhampton.
- We are hosted by the local CVS infrastructure (WVCA).
- We work to reduce barriers between clients accessing healthcare, housing, welfare, employment, and in criminal justice settings, and to improve recovery outcomes.

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## Today's Team



*"Lived experience service-user involvement working alongside clinical treatment is undoubtedly the most important ingredient for the optimum outcome in the battle against addiction"*

Marcus Johnson, Project Manager



*"I support people to understand their strengths beyond a label. My goal is to help individuals recognise their worth and live their best lives"*

Sabrina Ellis, Volunteer



*"I introduce creative pathways, designed to support recovery through better networks and opportunities. It is grounded in community and promotes the embodied knowledge of lived experience"*

Christiane Jenkins, Volunteer

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## WHAT DO WE DO?



- Provide one-to-one support.
- Provide advocacy.
- Undertake assertive outreach in key services/locations.
- Activities to improve recovery outcomes, including art, poetry & spoken word groups, peer support & mutual aid groups.
- Raise awareness, tackle stigma, & educate.
- Help to ensure that people get the most out of services.
- Offer volunteering opportunities, structured to provide recruitment, induction, training, & support.
- Strategic activities, including board meetings.
- Deliver consultations & conference presentations.

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### The realities that people experience are complex, multiple, social, and subjective.

- LERO's such as SUIT make visible the transformative potential of recovery to those who need it the most (White, 2010).
- LERO's challenge the power imbalance by promoting the embodied knowledge of experience.
- LERO's provide trustworthy collaboration partners, who can connect to personal struggles and provide diverse non-clinical social and emotional supports (Park, 2018).
- Subjective expertise delivered by peer-led support place value upon the understanding of service users and their individual needs.
- Staff and volunteers with lived experience provide essential perspectives towards the care and treatment of service users; increased recovery rates and strong connections develop where empathy is present (Booth, 2019; Jones, 2015; Park, 2018).

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"Coming to SUIT finding other people who wanted to change their life and be happy too, gave me inspiration. It gave me the motivation to realise that I'm a good person and I'm worth saving".

"When I came into volunteering, with others with **lived experience**, we would share stories, and we would laugh, empathise, the atmosphere was so right!".

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"Mutual aid, person-centred volunteer programmes, really help to keep people drink and drug free. There's something to work towards".

"Belief in them and people listening to them. That's what we need".



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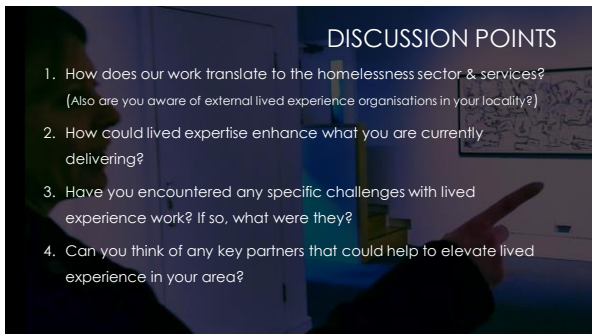
Accurate and consistent reflection from people "who have **been there** are better positioned...as they share the experience of addiction and stigma. Recovering staff are able to empathize with the pain that users experience...and understand more intimately the difficulties in re-establishing trust with family and community members" (Park, 2018, p97).



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### DISCUSSION POINTS

1. How does our work translate to the homelessness sector & services?  
(Also are you aware of external lived experience organisations in your locality?)
2. How could lived expertise enhance what you are currently delivering?
3. Have you encountered any specific challenges with lived experience work? If so, what were they?
4. Can you think of any key partners that could help to elevate lived experience in your area?



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