

How a Workforce With Lived Expertise Drives Change: Exploring the Evidence

2025 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
ENDING HOMELESSNESS
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Tiffany Adams

Technical Advisor, Florida Housing Coalition

Lauren Fareira

*Lived Expert, Advocate and Consultant
Atlanta, GA*

Daniel Soucy (they/he)

Research Analyst, National Alliance to End Homelessness

Albert Townsend (he/him)

*Director of Lived Experience, National Alliance to
End Homelessness*

Emerging research from the National Alliance to End Homelessness demonstrates that supporting the work of people who have lived experience of homelessness, is an urgent and necessary step to end homelessness. Explore the evidence and hear about programs that help identify what policy makers, systems leaders and people without lived expertise need to do to ensure that people with lived expertise are leading this work.

Welcome!



Grounding Moment

“Dolphin Cloud”, lyrics and music by Lauren Fareira aka SeñoritAwesome

If I weather the storm
Will you promise me sunshine?
Is beginning to form
Beneath my dolphin’s silver lining

*I need to believe in things not even found in dreams
I need to protect my wings, before there’s no song left to sing*

No, it’s not fair
Trees don’t up and grow from nowhere
They don’t just appear out of thin air
Suddenly shady here and there

*I need to believe in things not even found in dreams
I need to protect my wings, before there’s no song left to sing*

I’ve heard it been said,
I’m not homemade, I’m cookie cutter
They’re just afraid of what’s dead
Stuck in a cocoon they’ll never flutter

*I need to believe in things not even found in dreams
I need to protect my wings, before there’s no song left to sing*



Ending Homelessness is Possible.



NAEH's 2024-2025 Lived Expertise Research Team

- Lauren
- Daniel L.
- Tiffany
- Mary
- Eric
- Tatiana
- Kimberley

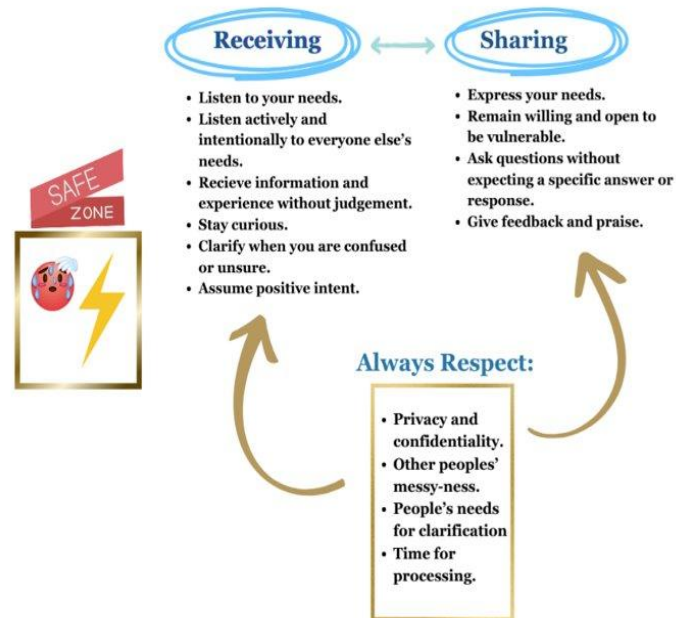


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NAEH's 2024-2025 Lived Expertise Research Team

Lived Expertise Research Team: Community Agreements



- Established shared values
- Invited feedback and direction
- Tried to communicate clearly and directly
- Asked questions - what is most important to explore? How should we explore this?

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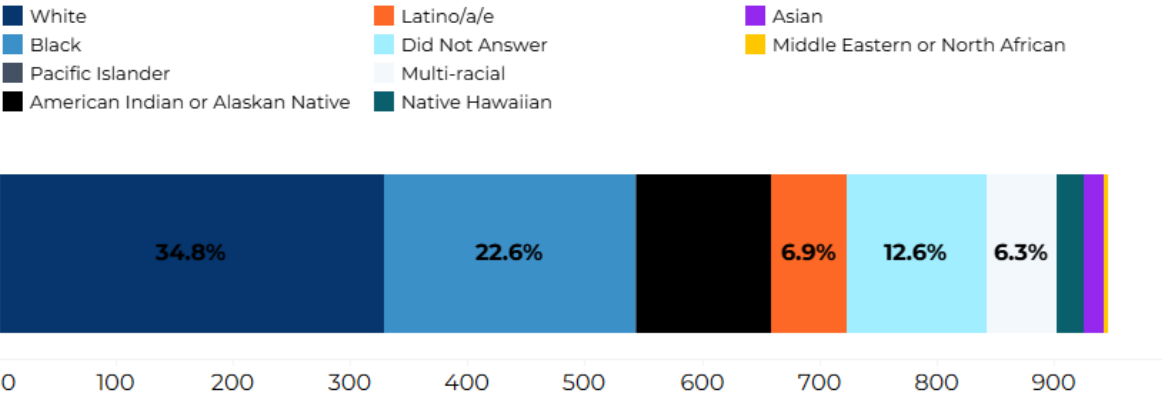
Who Did We **Hear From**?

- **984 people with lived expertise** of homelessness who work in the homelessness response system.
- Over **500 CoC or organization leaders** who may or may not have lived experience of homelessness
- Approximately **50** Multiple Choice and Open-Ended Questions Per Survey

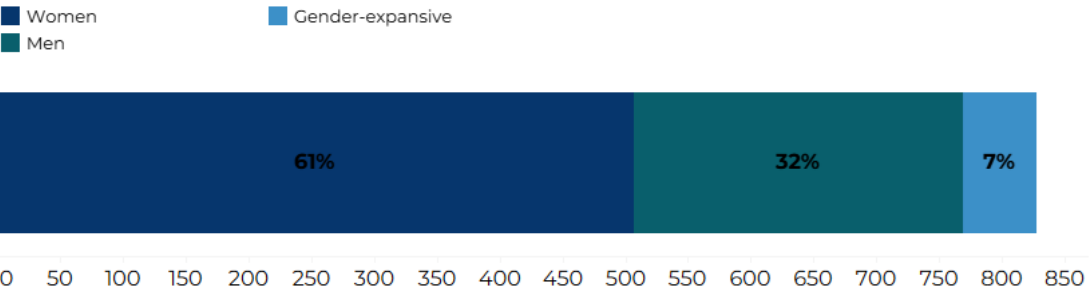


Who Did We Hear From? (PWLE Survey)

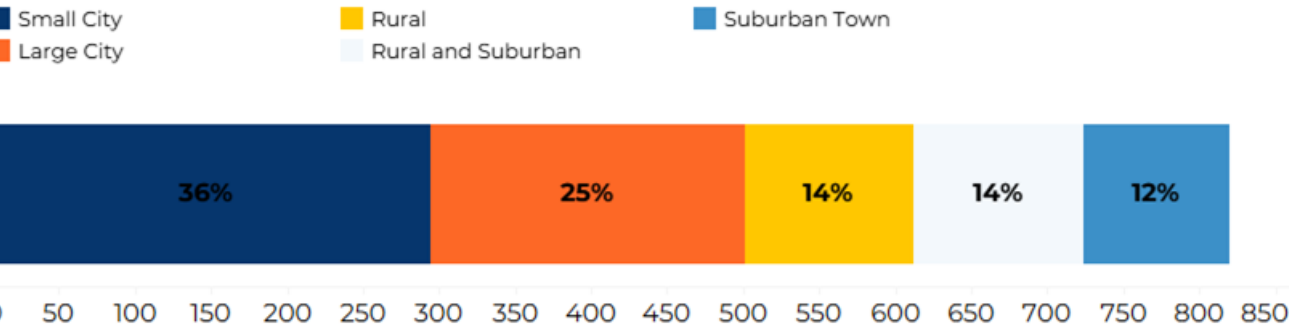
Race



Gender



Geography

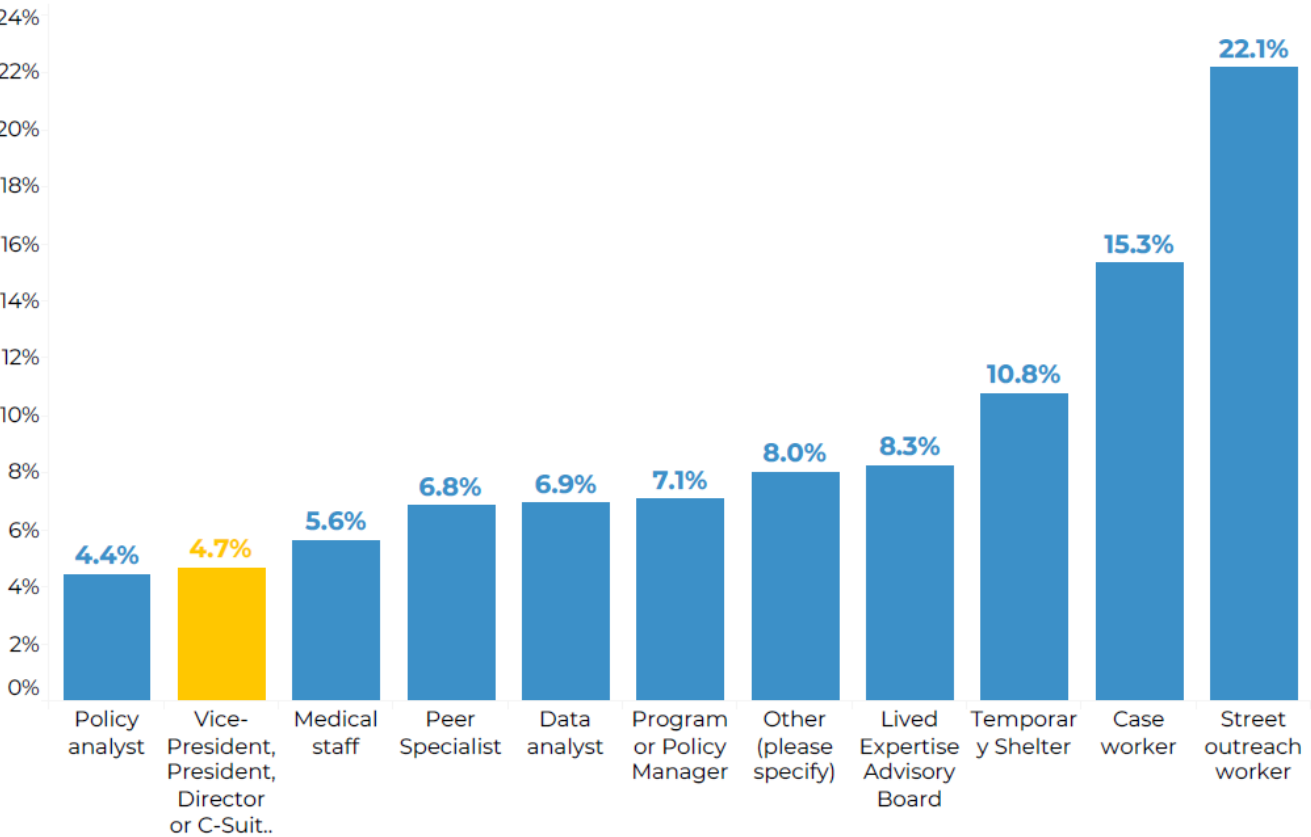


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Who Did We Hear From? (PWLE Survey)

PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS ARE NOT REPRESENTED IN LEADERSHIP



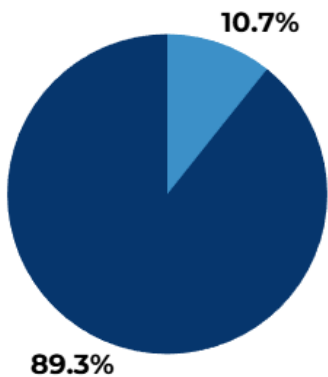
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Who Did We Hear From? (CoC and Organization Leaders)

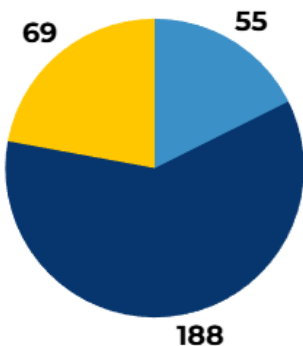
Is Your Organization Part of a CoC?

No
Yes



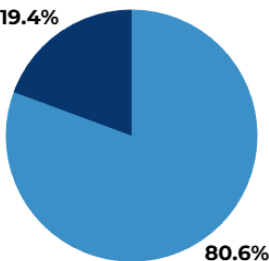
Role in Organization or CoC?

CoC or Organization Board Member
Leadership Team Member (e.g., Executive Director, President, Vice-Preside..
Program Manager



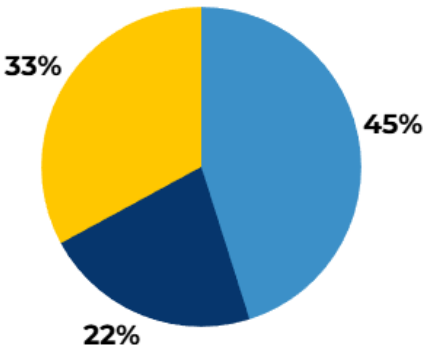
Are You a Person with Lived Expertise?

No
Yes



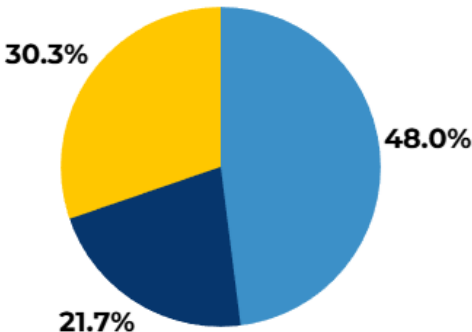
Size

1 to 20
21 to 50
More than 50



Geography

Rural/Suburban
Small City
Big City



*we tried to avoid requiring questions - some people did not respond to some questions

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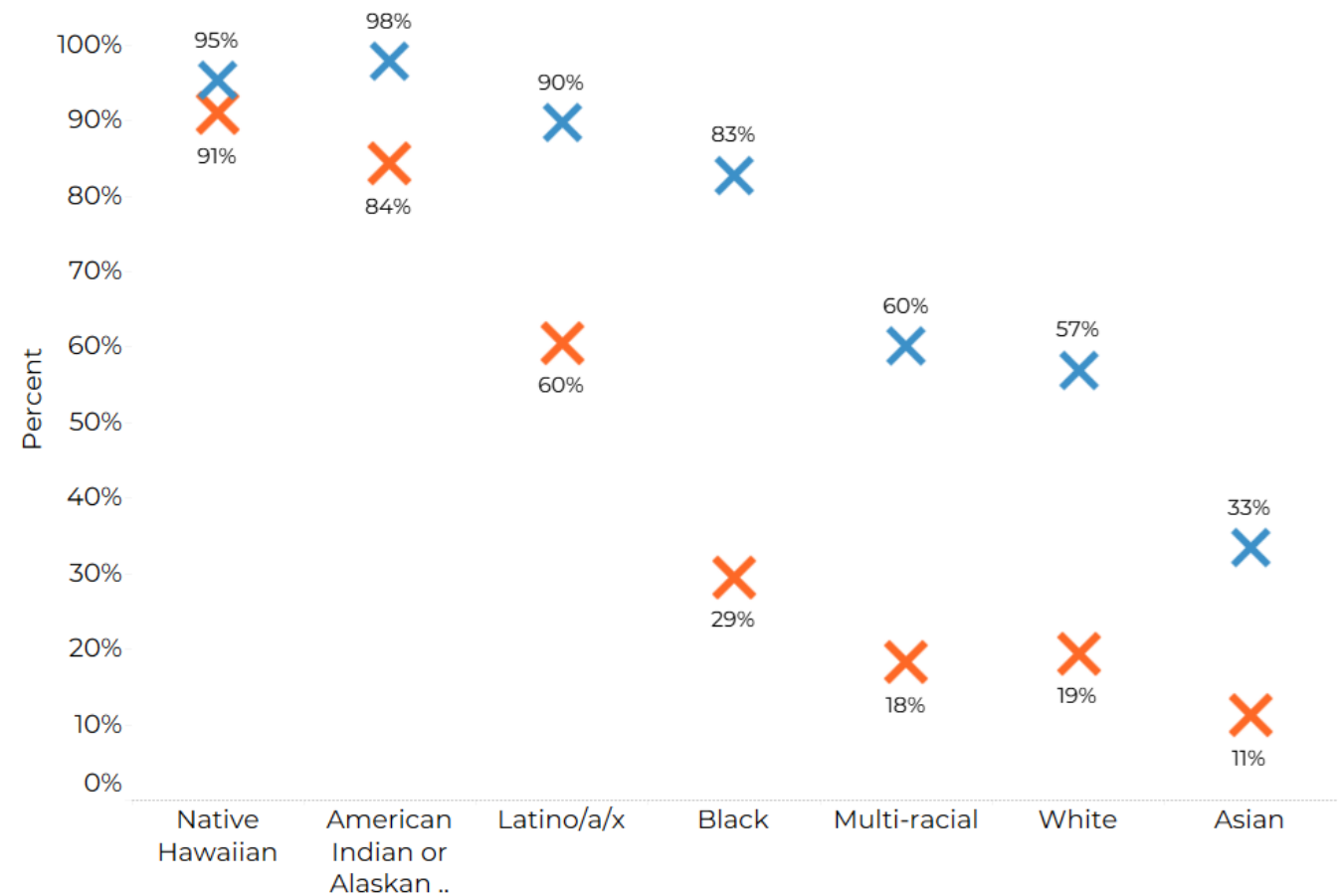
What Are Some of the Challenges That Lived Experts Shared?

- **Financial burdens** (transportation costs, continued housing instability, low pay)
- **Re-traumatization** (reliving past experiences in order to inform their work, lack of support from non-PWLE colleagues)
- Barriers to **higher education** and **training**
- Need to continue **advocating for themselves** amongst their colleagues
- **“Tokenism”**



Financial Hardship May Impact System Performance - Especially for Certain Racial Groups

■ Currently Works Multiple Jobs out of Financial Necessity
■ Will need to leave the homeless sector without a raise



Pay Disparity:

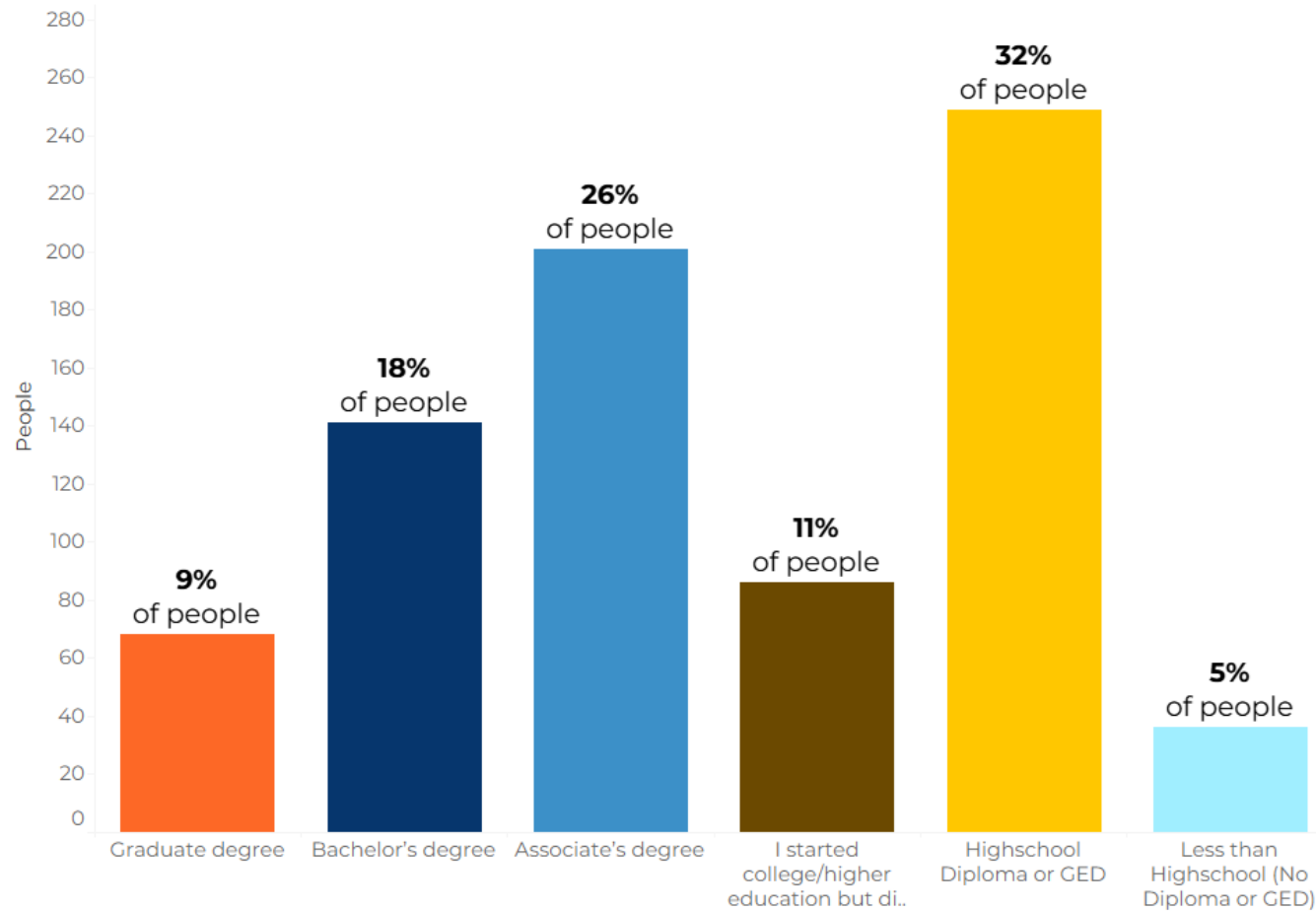
“ In my current role I work as a supervisor in a government agency in a mental health crisis response program supervising peers and CHW that do follow up. My work is equal to the other supervisors, but I make 6,400 less a month them then. When I was promoted, I did not know the wage difference and was just excited to make more money than I ever had. I felt very taken advantage of.

I am the only one that has lived experience in leadership and when I push back against things that don't makes sense for our clients I am often shut down and on the same hand used as a token " look we have a supervisor that was houseless, struggled with mental health etc.”

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Formal Education Poses a Barrier



“There are often educational requirements that are not pertinent to being able to do the job function. Many agencies do not budge on these requirements, nor do they offer training, educational resources, or support to get the proper credentials for those applying with lived experience.”

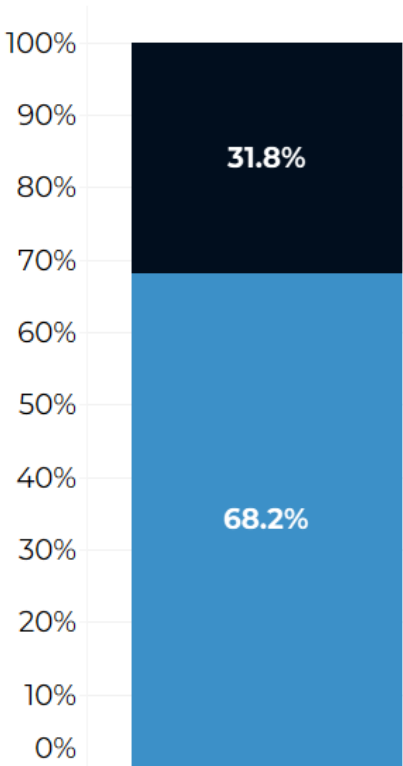
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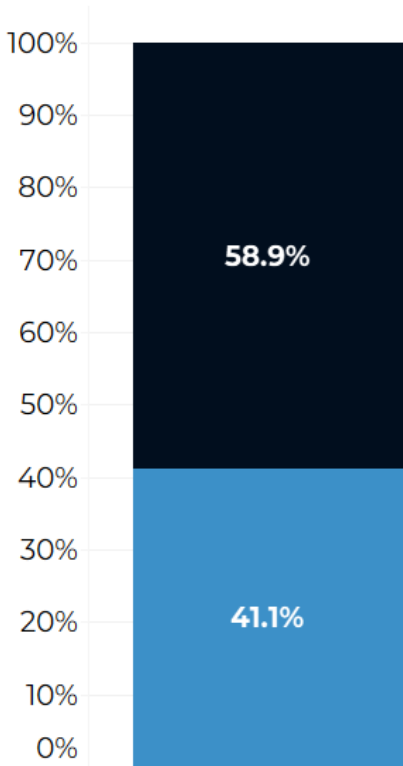
But Training Offers Opportunities...

Certificate, Trade School,
Mentorship, Peer
Training or Other
Training?

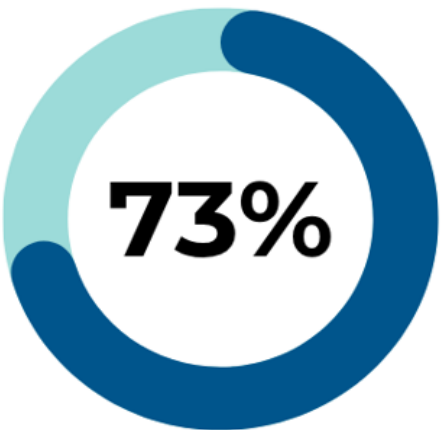
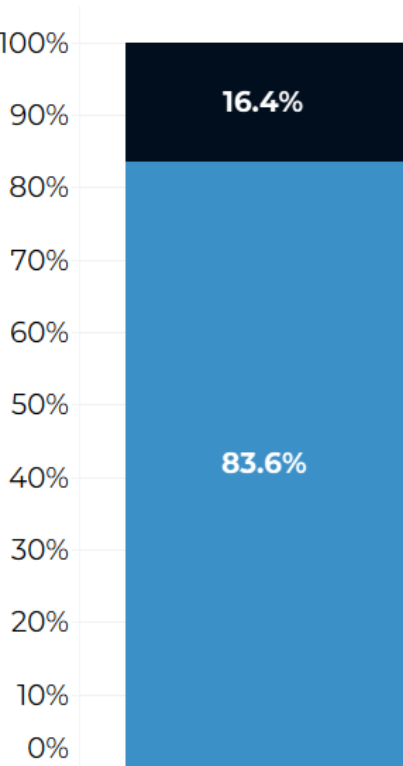
■ No ■ Yes



Trained as a Peer
Worker?



Is Education or Training
Useful for Your Work?

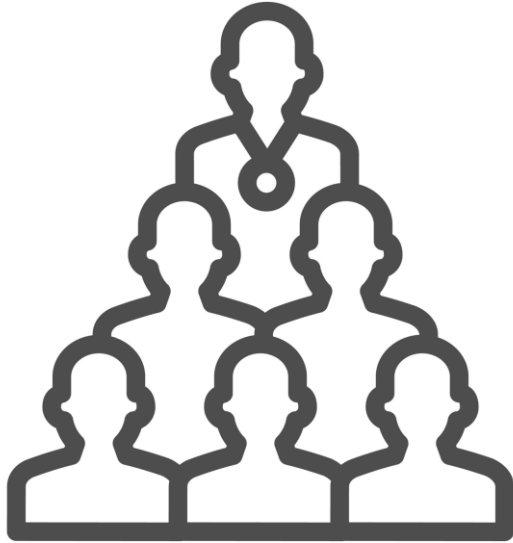


*“My role in the
homeless response
system has helped
people enter housing
or remain housed.”*

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Excluded From Leadership and Decision Making



- Only **22 percent** participate in funding activities (for example, they help write grant applications)
- Just **28 percent** are on senior leadership teams
- **33 percent** are involved in evaluating or collecting data



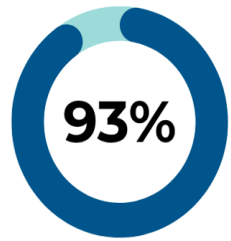
Stigma in the Workplace

“When I talk about my lived experience, even though I am now in long term recovery and a productive member of society, I can still feel as if I am thought of as being "lesser than."

- Fear of disclosure (opting to conceal their lived experience from fear of bias, judgement, or discrimination)
- Undercompensated for expertise (undervalued compared to others in similar roles, a play on one's gratitude or implying one should be grateful to have a “seat at the table”)
- Assumptions of being less competent, capable, or professional
- Facing “double-stigma” if one also has co-occurring mental health conditions and substance use disorders



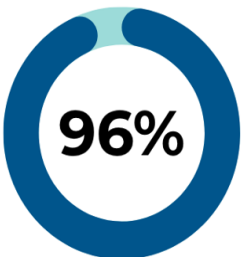
What **Impacts** Are Lived Experts Having on Ending Homelessness?



“Ideas and feedback from people with lived expertise help our CoC or organization provide housing and/or services to more people”



“Ideas and feedback from people with lived expertise help our CoC or organization prevent more people from entering homelessness.”



“Ideas and feedback from people with lived expertise help our CoC or organization identify more people experiencing homelessness.”

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What **Impacts** Are Lived Experts Having on Ending Homelessness?

“PWLE have shaped our services by providing critical insights that have informed policy changes, improved program accessibility, and enhanced client-centered approaches in our homelessness response system.”

“Because I am trained to understand systems and trauma, I am able to work with people who are homeless in a way that is effective and respectful.”

“PWLE have inspired us to open several new programs based on needs that our organization had not previously considered.”

“By bridging gaps in understanding and fostering meaningful connections, PWLE are driving outcomes that align with the needs and experiences of the people we serve. Their contributions have demonstrated that lived expertise is not only invaluable but also essential to creating a system that is compassionate, effective, and truly responsive.”

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How Can We Begin to Reimagine Our Systems and Partnerships?

Break Out Group Questions

- 1) Is there data in these slides that resonates with you and your community's experience?*
- 2) Is there data that surprises you or makes you ask more questions?*



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What role does equity play in meeting the needs of PWLE workers? What changes has your community made, considered or advocated for to reach your goals?



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1) To create more *meaningful* partnerships,

- a) I need
- b) My organization needs and
- c) My system needs...

2) When I go *home*,

- a) I can...
- b) My organization can...
- c) My system can...

