



Supporting Mental Health & Wellbeing

## **What You Should Consider Before Becoming A Peer Worker**

*Please note: This document should be read in conjunction with the Peer Worker position descriptions.*

Before applying for a Peer Worker position you need to be very considerate of the fact that being a Peer Worker means that you will be innately drawing on your lived experience in the every day duties of your work. You will be expected to walk beside people who are trying to recover and build a respectful, professional, appropriate relationship with them that is based around conversations which will draw on your experiences and emotions. This may be very challenging at times but if you are the right person for the position you will find it very rewarding.

Your openness about having a lived experience of mental health issues is not limited to only one on one conversation with people accessing the service but is expected to be evident when speaking with staff, managers, committees, and external stakeholders.

The conversations you have with people about having a lived experience may be crucial to individuals embarking on their journey of recovery. Your lived experience conversations may also be crucial to another member of staff having understanding of a persons situation or the way they may be working which might affect the people either positively or negatively. Your conversations with staff and managers will also need to model good reasons for why designated Peer positions are so important.

You need to be prepared that when you are socializing people will ask you what you do for a living and when you tell them "I am a Peer Worker" this may open up conversations with those people about their mental health or that of someone they know. This can be very overwhelming at times and you will need to be able to manage these situations so that your own stress levels and mental health are not compromised. You need to be comfortable with sharing that you have a lived experience with others outside of Flourish Australia.

You also need to consider that if you decide to change jobs or careers your resume will indicate that you have a lived experience of mental health issues. You need to consider how you might feel about this in the future. Rest assured that if you worked well with Flourish Australia and you decide you would like to apply for another position we would only be strengths focused and not discuss your lived experience with a future employer unless you wanted us to do so.

You also need to be aware that although the very fact that you have a lived experience of mental health issues is essential to you being appointed to this position, you will be required to work professionally, with a strong work ethic and making the needs of the people you support a priority. If your mental health does become fragile we undertake to support you as best we can, in the ways you need and to honour our ethos of helping people to stay supported and employed. However we do expect you to do the best you can at all times in maintaining your mental health, physical health and to work in a manner that upholds and promotes the respected and positive reputation of the peer workforce as being professional and dependable. If you do this you will feel valued and respected by Flourish Australia.

We would also request that you write/fill in a Personal Situation Plan that you would share with your manager in order for you and your manager to have an understanding and agreement of what your rights and responsibilities are and the rights and responsibilities of your manager should your mental health begin to cause you difficulties. We will support you to stay in work as far as possible. We have a great deal of understanding and support for our staff with a lived experience of mental health issues.

You also need to consider that this is a position that will require you to take formal training in peer support, even if you have other relevant tertiary qualifications.

It is also important that Peer Workers in the course of performing the role do not:

- Discuss clinical issues such as medication with the people they support and refer this conversation to an appropriate clinician or support service after receiving permission from the person.
- Make decisions about a person's physical health. If concerned you **will** report these concerns to a manager, doctor or other clinician, paramedic or first aid officer.
- Use their lived experience to make others feel that their experience is less important than the Peer Worker.
- Will not engage in negative reciprocity such as enmeshment with another peer in a way which promotes victimhood, over dependence, negative behaviour.

Peer Workers do by definition use their lived experience openly, appropriately and effectively to build professional relationships with the people they support that share similar lived experiences. Peer Workers will also use their lived experience to inform and contribute to staff learning, service understanding, and delivering person-led, strengths, ability and possibility focused, recovery based language, documentation and actions. They will use their lived experience to work as advocates on an individual and systemic level as required. The positive reciprocity that builds between peer workers will be respected and supported.

If you have decided to apply we wish you success and if you would like to ask questions before writing your application please speak to the person listed as your contact person.

I would like to reassure you that if you choose to develop your career as a Peer Worker, Flourish Australia would use every resource at our disposal to ensure you succeed and that you become an important and invaluable team member.

**Fay Jackson**  
**General Manager, Inclusion**