



**SOLUTIONS TO HIRING BARRIERS FOR  
INDIVIDUALS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE TO  
WORK IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND  
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FIELDS**

**Workshop Summary**

**AUGUST 2022**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health (CCJBH) contracted with the California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), to determine how best to engage statewide public outreach efforts surrounding individuals with lived experience (LE) in the behavioral health and criminal justice systems. The CSUS LE project design is a multi-phased approach and an iterative process upon which CCJBH continues to build. Phase I of the LE project focused on statewide public outreach to gather stakeholder input that was used to establish CCJBH's Regional Lived Experience Projects. Phase II of the project consisted of two parts. The first part involved conducting an online survey and key informant interviews (KIIs) to assess if and how promising practices in hiring LE staff are being implemented in the behavioral health (BH) and criminal justice (CJ) systems, resulting in the report [\*Successful Approaches To Employing Individuals With Lived Experience In the Criminal Justice And Behavioral Health Fields\*](#). As reflected in this report, the following eight barriers were identified regarding hiring individuals with LE:

1. Background checks and security clearance (as an issue of technical policy, as well as culture)
2. Equal Employment Opportunity laws and disclosure issues
3. Funding and billing
4. Adequate and fair compensation
5. Stigma and lack of recognition of the role & value of peer support
6. Lack of a Peer Support Specialist Certification
7. Degree requirements for advancement within an organization
8. Insufficient support and mentorship.

To identify potential solutions to address these barriers, the second part of the project involved the CSUS facilitation team and CCJBH staff co-hosting a "Solutions to Hiring Barriers for Individuals with Lived Experience to Work in the Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health Fields Workshop" on September 13, 2021. This report documents the input and comments from workshop participants, which was captured and documented by CSUS, and analyzed by CCJBH, to formulate recommendations in this report. In sum, future CCJBH efforts can include:

- Providing policy and program vision/guidance to increase knowledge and awareness of the barriers and potential solutions associated with hiring individuals with LE across the multiple sectors that serve individuals with behavioral health needs who are involved, or at risk of involvement, with the criminal justice system.
- Identifying and promoting examples of model employment programs and strategies for hiring and retaining individuals with LE, and developing/compiling and disseminating relevant resources (e.g., data, toolkits, fact sheets).

In addition, behavioral health and criminal justice system partners and stakeholders can use the information compiled in the [\*Successful Approaches To Employing Individuals With Lived Experience In the Criminal Justice And Behavioral Health Fields\*](#) report, as well as this report, to inform and influence future planning efforts and discussions.

## BACKGROUND

Since 2019, the Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health (CCJBH), in collaboration with the California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), has been engaging with stakeholders in a multi-phased and iterative process to identify issues and potential efforts that are needed to support individuals with lived experience (LE) in the criminal justice and behavioral health systems, as well as their networks. As part of Phase I of the LE project, statewide public outreach activities identified issues and potential efforts needed to support individuals with LE, their families, and networks. The information gathered in Phase I was used by CCJBH to establish the Regional Lived Experience Projects. Phase II of the project consisted of two parts. The first part involved conducting an online survey and key informant interviews (KIIs) to assess if and how promising practices in hiring LE staff are being implemented in the behavioral health (BH) and criminal justice (CJ) systems. Results from the online survey and KIIs, published in the report resulting in the report [Successful Approaches To Employing Individuals With Lived Experience In the Criminal Justice And Behavioral Health Fields](#), included several current practices pertaining to hiring (e.g., including people with LE on hiring panels, individuals with LE having additional core competencies and meeting other job-related requirements), retention (e.g., competitive salaries, ongoing training), and career pathways (e.g., onramp to employment, access to leadership programs, and succession planning). The KIIs also resulted in identification of the following eight barriers to employing individuals with LE:

1. Background checks and security clearance (as an issue of technical policy, as well as culture)
2. Equal Employment Opportunity laws and disclosure issues
3. Funding and billing
4. Adequate and fair compensation
5. Stigma and lack of recognition of the role & value of peer support
6. Lack of a Peer Support Specialist Certification
7. Degree requirements for advancement within an organization
8. Insufficient support and mentorship.

The second part of the project involved facilitating a “*Solutions to Hiring Barriers for Individuals with Lived Experience to Work in the Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health Fields Workshop*” (hereafter referred to as “workshop”). During the three hour webinar workshop, participants participated in an ice breaker exercise, learned about CCJBH and CSUS projects, listened to a panel discussion from individuals with LE, and participated in one of eight breakout group sessions to provide solutions to the eight barriers to hiring individuals with LE. Stakeholder input was captured and documented by CSUS, and analyzed by CCJBH to formulate recommendations for this report.

## WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

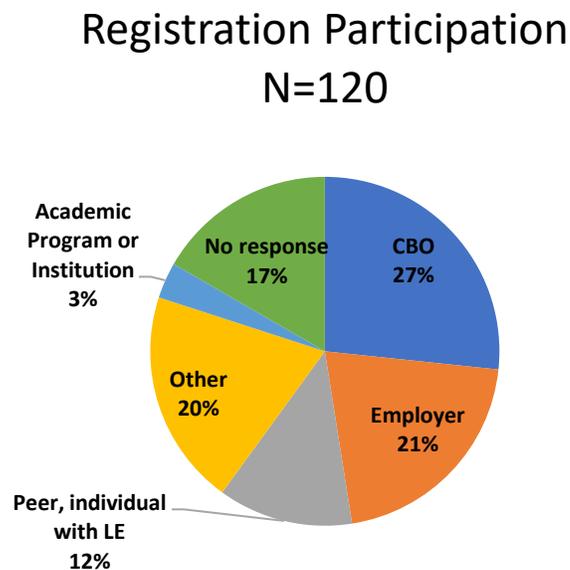
To recruit workshop participants, CCJBH collaborated with the CSUS facilitation team to develop a workshop invitation that was disseminated using CCJBH’s distribution list, which represents diverse behavioral health and criminal justice stakeholder perspectives across

California (e.g., system partners, advocates, other individuals interested in CCJBH’s efforts). In addition, the invitation was sent to programs in higher education that support formerly incarcerated students in the UC, CSU, and California community college systems (e.g., the Underground Scholars Network, Project Rebound, and Rising Scholars Network). Individuals who participated the CSUS LE projects to date also received an invitation. Two days prior to the workshop, registered participants received breakout session instructions and a document that summarized the project background and key findings from the [Successful Approaches To Employing Individuals With Lived Experience In the Criminal Justice And Behavioral Health Fields report](#).

### Workshop Participation

Through the outreach efforts, 120 participants registered for the workshop. As shown in Figure 1, participants predominately identified as either being representatives of CBOs (27 percent) or employers (21 percent), although there were also participants who identified as peers/individuals with LE (12 percent) and academic programs/institutions (3 percent). Twenty percent marked “Other” to describe their representation.

Figure 1: Registration Participation for Solutions to Hiring Individuals with LE to work in the BH and CJ Fields Workshop



### Workshop Format

The workshop, which was co-hosted by the CSUS facilitation team and CCJBH staff, took place via Zoom on September 13, 2021, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The specific goals of the workshop were to:

- ✓ Identify strategies to overcome challenges to hiring individuals with LE within the criminal justice and behavioral health fields.
- ✓ Identify strategies to further promote employment of individuals with LE across multiple sectors.

The CSUS facilitation team opened the workshop with introductions and an online poll that served as an ice breaker. The first half of the workshop consisted of presentations on the project background and barriers and spheres of change (discussed below), which were then followed by an opening panel and discussion with individuals with LE in the behavioral health and criminal justice systems. During the second part of the workshop, participants were placed into one of eight breakout sessions wherein they had an opportunity to provide input on potential solutions to addressing a barrier to hiring individuals with LE in the BH and CJ sectors.

### Conceptual Framework for Workshop Discussions

CCJBH and the CSUS facilitation team presented background information on the project, including the eight identified hiring barriers, and provided a framework in which to think about strategies and solutions to overcome the barriers (see Figure 2). Specifically, participants were asked to consider how barriers and solutions are present within and across different levels – individual, organization, and community – and how a particular solution in one sphere might connect with or be applied to another sphere.

For example, to address the barrier of stigma, the following solutions might be implemented at multiple levels:

- Organization/Community: Deliberately and strategically outreach, educate, and engage for early recruitment beginning in high school.
- Community/Individual: Training and outreach to address stigma.
- Organization: Include people with LE who reflect the diversity of the individuals served on recruitment and hiring panels.

After being presented with this framework, workshop participants were then invited to indicate via another online poll at which level(s) they see the bulk of their work occurring, with participants being allowed to select more than one level. Most participants saw their work occurring at the organizational level, followed by the community and then individual levels.

### Interactive Activity

To make the workshop more interactive and to prime the breakout group conversations, participants were invited to respond to an online poll to answer the question, “Using one word, what are you most curious about for today’s workshop?” Figure 3, depicts participant responses using a word cloud format. The three most common responses were that they were curious about learning were opportunities, solutions, and resources.

Figure 2: Spheres of Change Framework



Figure 3. Word Cloud Reflecting Participant's Curiosity on the Anticipated Workshop Discussion

Using one word, what are you most curious about for today's workshop?



### Panel Discussion: Lived Experience Perspectives

The conceptual framework presentation and interactive activity were followed by a panel discussion with individuals with LE in the behavioral health and criminal justice systems to highlight their perspectives and share success stories about overcoming barriers through leveraging relationships at the community, organization, and individual levels.<sup>1</sup> The three featured panelists included:

- Karl Meabrod, Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Detention Services
- Ryan Shook, M.S.W., Student Life/Peer Mentor Coordinator, Gavilan College,
- Cecelia Carrillo, Office of Women's Policy, Office of Gender Based Violence Prevention, Santa Clara County

During panel discussion, participants were invited to share how they connected with panelist stories, and how these stories inform perspectives and opportunities to advance solutions. Highlights from panel stories and discussion included:

- The importance of individual relationships and giving people a chance to succeed despite their past.
- For people with LE, having someone in their corner who believes in them until they can believe in themselves is a huge boost.
- The importance of building on initial success – there are critical moments that shift the

<sup>1</sup> To select the panel members, the CSUS facilitation team identified and outreached to individuals with LE who have experience implementing hiring practices that integrate LE into the workforce and represent one or multiple levels of focus. Prior to the workshop, the panelists met with the CSUS facilitation team to review a prompt with guiding questions to address during their presentations.

- range of opportunities for people and set them on a path towards success.
- Policy changes are key to remove systemic and institutional barriers.
  - Given prejudice and ignorance, people are still hesitant to speak out about their lived experience.
  - It is important to empower people with LE to not only be employees, but to be employers themselves (e.g., starting their own organizations, businesses).
  - The very thing that often disqualifies a person for a particular job is exactly what would make them successful. For example, people who are justice-involved are often barred from working in the criminal justice sector, but their LE provides a strong foundation from which to work as an effective peer mentor or counselor to those currently incarcerated.
  - Peer-to-peer support is foundational.
  - Opportunities are needed for incarcerated people to build their skills while serving time so they may develop peer support networks that are both “inside” and “outside,” and prepare for what they want to do upon leaving jail or prison.
  - Financial and economic empowerment is critical for people with LE. Many people who end up in the criminal justice and/or behavioral health systems come from communities that are not economically empowered. We need more pathways for people with LE to go into economically empowering sectors, such as the finance industry.
  - Leadership within companies is needed to drive the kind of change needed to hire and retain employees with LE.

### **Breakout Groups Design**

The workshop breakout groups were organized around the eight hiring barriers that had been identified in the online survey and KIs conducted in fall 2020. During the breakout activity, participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight breakout group topics. Participants in each group were asked to identify a lead who would be responsible for facilitating the conversation, recording ideas in a shared online notetaking document (made available through a link provided in the Zoom chat), and reporting out on their breakout group’s discussion. A representative from either CCJBH or the CSUS facilitation team was assigned to each group to support notetaking as needed, and assist with any questions.

The goals of the breakout sessions were for participants to learn from each other, identify ways to implement solutions to these barriers to promote LE perspectives in the BH and CJ systems work environments, and provide feedback on how CCJBH and other state resources can support implementation of solutions. Discussion questions were as follows:

- What are solutions to overcoming barriers to hiring and retaining individuals with lived experience?
- What can be done to implement solutions?
- How can CCJBH and other state resources support implementation? What resources are needed at the local level to support implementation?

Feedback provided during the breakout sessions was captured and compiled by the CSUS facilitation team, which CCJBH used to develop findings and recommendations presented in this report.

## WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT SOLUTIONS TO IDENTIFIED LE EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS

Participants affirmed the ongoing relevance and challenge of the previously identified barriers, and provided suggestions on how to implement a wide variety of solutions at individual, organizational, and community levels. Many were already actively engaged in efforts to address hiring barriers and implement solutions in their particular role within their organization through partnerships with other organizations and/or through activism and advocacy. While participants were grouped by barrier topics for the breakout activity, discussion of solutions and implementation needs often transcended any one topic. This is not surprising, as individuals with LE confront multiple barriers simultaneously and in ways that often intersect or are interdependent. Taken together as a whole, the participant feedback illustrates the web of solutions and implementation approaches that are needed to connect/reconnect people with LE to career pathways in the BH and CJ sectors, including both educational and job opportunities.

### Overarching Themes

Overall, as heard in previous stakeholder KIIs and in the online survey, workshop participants continued to emphasize the following high-level themes:

- Workplaces and organizational cultures should promote and enable holistic, interpersonal, and adaptive support systems for employees with LE, including self-care.
- There should be state-level policy and/or standards established for peer support/LE positions, and employer best practices should be promoted (e.g., in hiring, recruitment, retention, training, and compensation, as well as contracts and projects).
- Technical assistance should be provided to employers, such as trainings/toolkits on hiring, retention, and the creation of career pathways for individuals with LE.
- Targeted awareness and educational outreach/campaigns about the value of LE and recovery success stories should be developed and disseminated to prospective employees and employers, as well as the general public.

### Barrier-Specific Solutions

In addition to these general overarching themes, participants offered specific solutions to address the eight identified LE hiring barriers, as follows:

Barrier 1. Background checks and security clearance (as an issue of technical policy, as well as culture).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Note that shortly after this workshop, the Department of Fair Employment and Housing released [guidance](#) on the Fair Chance Act, including a [toolkit](#) and instructions on how to use their [complaint process](#).

- Ensure HR training includes education on laws that govern background check processes, including compliance with the Fair Chance Act.
- Promote understanding of and accountability to AB 1008 legislation (i.e., “Ban the Box”); use social media to help hold companies accountable.
- Remove aspects of job descriptions that are barriers to hire individuals with LE (e.g., educational requirements and lengths of experience).
- Create a toolkit and training opportunities for employers on the background process and what to do after the background check is completed. For example, create/allow for a reapplication and/or appeal process that includes providing resources on how a prospective candidate might be able to get their record expunged or a process for candidates to demonstrate how their record is not a reflection on their ability to perform the duties of the position for which they are applying. Similarly, create a toolkit and training opportunities for prospective employees to learn about the hiring process and options that can be taken in case a background check is not passed.
- Ensure effective systems of accountability (i.e., ensure that existing state/federal policies that are designed to support people with LE are being followed, monitored, and that employers who are not complying are held accountable). For example, address lack of education on and/or non-compliance with Fair Chance Act.

**Barrier 2. Equal Employment Opportunity laws and disclosure issues.**

- Provide training to individuals incarcerated in juvenile and adult correctional facilities regarding application disclosure (i.e., what is required to be disclosed), and guidance on how best to respond when asked during an interview if they have anything else to share about their life experience(s).

**Barrier 3. Funding and billing**

- Workshop participants did not provide specific recommendations on how to address the identified funding and billing issues.

**Barrier 4. Adequate and fair compensation.**

- Advocate for a statewide “living wage” or pay range for peer specialists.
- Help organizations be creative with compensation – examine organizations may compensate staff with LE in a manner that does not jeopardize other benefits.

**Barrier 5. Stigma and lack of recognition of the role and value of peer support.**

- Educate and foster collaboration among potential employers, such as the behavioral health, criminal justice, and social services systems, and CBOs, on the existence and benefits of utilizing Peer Support Specialists in programs to

support job placement, and to welcome individuals with LE into their workforce.

- Leverage organizational Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committees to promote collaboration, reduce stigma, and counteract segregation.
- Provide opportunities for individuals with criminal justice system LE to demonstrate that they have competencies and skill sets that make them qualified to perform the duties of the position.
- Advocate for State and local level (city, county) contracting incentives to entities that employ individuals with LE.
- Encourage employers to hire a certain percentage of justice-involved employees and promote these opportunities so that individuals with LE won't hesitate to apply. This would create more employment opportunities, prevent tokenizing of employees with LE, and help reduce the stigma associated with hiring individuals with LE.

**Barrier 6. Lack of a Peer Support Specialist Certification.**

- Community colleges could consider offering a Peer Support Specialist certification for use in multiple sectors.
- Once available, allow individuals convicted all types of offenses to be eligible for Peer Support Specialist certificate programs, with access to training and opportunities to apply for positions to provide peer support services.
- Once available, promote education on Peer Support Specialist certificate programs to potential employers.
- For those who are incarcerated for lengthy periods (e.g., CDCR), a Peer Support Specialist certification could be completed prior to release based on community-based standards for peer support certifications for individuals who are justice involved.

**Barrier 7. Degree requirements for advancement within an organization.**

- Offer modified schedules to allow individuals with LE to further their education to be competitive for promotional opportunities within an organization.
- Advocate for paid educational opportunities for those with LE (i.e., paying for individuals with LE to get educated and pay for their education), including who are those incarcerated and post-release, and mobilize resources to ensure a holistic approach; consider basic needs assistance to ensure educational advancement costs are covered (e.g., tuition, housing costs, childcare, etc.).
- Provide certificates and Continuing Education Units upon completion of trainings for professional growth opportunities.

- Allow Peer Support Specialists to utilize pro bono hours towards keeping certificates valid, and create a system for tracking this time. This includes creating a network for peers to interact with one another.
- Examine potential changes to policies/laws that restrict people with LE from being licensed in key behavioral health fields (e.g., Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy).

#### Barrier 8. Insufficient support and mentorship.

- Increase partnerships between employers and reentry organizations (e.g., Underground Scholars Initiative, Rising Scholars, Project Rebound, and the Anti-Recidivism Coalition) that focus on higher education to support people with LE by better understanding their specific needs.
- Training and development approaches should consider the following:
  - Trainers should have experience working with formerly incarcerated individuals and have training specific to trauma-informed care.
  - Onboarding should be intensive (all day) and include meals.
  - Technology and soft skills trainings should be provided that is specific to the position.
  - Assessments should be used to discover and foster individual skill sets.
- Provide an experienced LE mentor for the newer LE staff to help support their personal, educational, and professional journey.
- Provide a support group for the LE mentors, with a clinician or lead LE, for ongoing support to meet their needs.
- Create support groups for Peer Support Specialists to create opportunities to engage and learn from others who are employed as Peer Support Specialists.
- Promote time for self-care. When working with clients and/or patients, employees with LE can potentially experience situations that may trigger their own trauma. As a result, it is important that employers promote the usage of time for self-care.

#### Other suggestions

- Make available databases/lists of companies that hire people with LE so that individuals with LE know which companies are hiring and job opportunities are more well-known and accessible (e.g., Honest Jobs).
- Issue statewide policy requiring companies hire a certain number of justice-involved employees.
- Hiring authorities could collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate improved outcomes for hiring individuals with LE into the BH

and CJ sectors. Many organizations are tracking retention and the number of people hired, but there is a desire for more substantive and informative data in this area.

To implement these solutions, participants highlighted the need for local level community buy-in, and collaboration between the state/county levels and CBOs that are already hiring individuals with LE.

## LIMITATIONS

This report is intended to document workshop participant perspectives on solutions for consideration. Accordingly, the information and perspectives shared are those of the participants and should not be viewed as the entire landscape of potential solutions. Also, some potential solutions may not be viable after further research, and may not be appropriate across all settings. In addition, the predominant method of outreach for workshop participants was through the CCJBH listserv. Additional outreach was conducted to academic institutions who are participants in the Rising Scholars Network, Project Rebound, and/or Underground Scholars Network. Since CCJBH does not currently track the demographic composition of their listserv, participants may or may not have represented the full range of perspectives on solutions to overcoming hiring barriers for those with LE. The workshop was also held during regular business hours, so individuals with other obligations, particularly job or family care duties, may not have been able to attend.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The workshop discussions continued to indicate a need to identify and develop solutions to barriers to hiring and retaining individuals with LE into the BH and CJ employment sectors using a holistic approach to solutions so that the challenges and barriers may be simultaneously addressed at the multiple levels in which they often exist – individual, organizational, and community. Workshop participants identified multiple promising potential and emerging solutions, some of which are already established and practiced by certain organizations.

As leaders in the effort to end the criminalization of individuals with mental health and substance use disorders by supporting proven strategies that promote early intervention, access to effective treatments, a planned re-entry and the preservation of public safety, CCJBH has a unique role to play in advancing solutions as part of its overall mission. Future CCJBH efforts can include:

- Providing policy and program vision/guidance to increase knowledge and awareness of the barriers and potential solutions associated with hiring individuals with LE across the multiple sectors that serve individuals with behavioral health needs who are involved, or at risk of involvement, with the criminal justice system.
- Identifying and promoting examples of model employment programs and strategies for hiring and retaining individuals with LE, and developing/compiling and disseminating relevant resources (e.g., data, toolkits, fact sheets).

In addition, behavioral health and criminal justice system partners and stakeholders can use the information compiled in the [\*Successful Approaches To Employing Individuals With Lived Experience In the Criminal Justice And Behavioral Health Fields\*](#) report, as well as this report, to inform and influence future planning efforts and discussions to establish or strengthen employment opportunities for individuals with LE.

## CONCLUSION

The workshop yielded yet more information in the Phase II portion of CSUS/CCJBH's LE project from which to continue building a knowledge base on current and emerging practices in hiring and retaining individuals with LE in the BH and CJ systems, as well as identifying potential solutions to significant barriers that prevent implementation of these practices. Workshop participant feedback and ideas represent one touchpoint with stakeholder on these issues, and CCBJH actions and recommendations based on stakeholder engagement may continue to be refined through additional system partner and stakeholder conversations.