

# Elevating Lived Experience Voice in the Homeless Response System

Portland / Multnomah Community of Practice

# Session Overview

1. Review the origins of the Community of Practice (CoP)
2. Share the CoP's work on increasing Lived Experience voice in the Portland / Multnomah Homeless Response System
3. Explore opportunities & challenges with including people with Lived Experience

# Presenter Introductions

Belinda!

Benjamin!

Erika!

Patrick!

Bill!

# Question

Think about a time when someone's lived experience shaped your perspective or changed your work...

*What happened?*

# Definitions

Community of Practice (CoP): is a group of people who regularly interact to collectively learn, solve problems, develop best practices around a shared concern, goal, mission, or passion.

Lived Experience: first-hand involvement or direct experiences and choices of a given person, and the knowledge that they gain from it, as opposed to the knowledge a given person gains from second-hand or mediated source.

*– This presentation uses PWLE as an abbreviation for People with Lived Experience and Expertise of Homelessness*

# Community of Practice

# National project to help empower people with lived experience

- Initiated by Fund for Housing Opportunity
- CoPs in Detroit, Chicago and Portland
  - Baltimore briefly participated
- CoPs focus on project based learning
- Goal: encourage and support Continuums of Care to shift power to people with lived experience in Systems Design work

# Question

Why is lived experience voice important for influencing policy and developing services?



Our thoughts on  
the importance of  
lived experience  
voice:

- It's expertise
- It builds trust
- It makes services more equitable
- It shifts power
- It humanizes the work

# Our CoP

- Coordinated by Multnomah County Homeless Services Department
- 9 members
  - Three County staff
  - Five people with lived experience of homelessness recruited from County advisory committees
  - Three people who work for homeless service providers
- Several members hold multiple identities and lived and learned expertise
  - Black, Indigenous, Latine and other people of color
  - Personal experience of houselessness and receiving services
  - Experience working among homeless services
  - Experiences with recovery or harm reduction
  - Serving on system advisory committees

# Our Project: Connection, Trust & Advocacy

*Project Goal: Co-create a space/gathering that fosters relationships among people with the lived experience of homelessness to equip with tools and build power of those closest to the problem and the solutions to advocate as a body and as individuals.*

- Developed based on collaborative decision making processes
- Reflects interest of CoP members and assessed needs of our Homeless Response System
- Advocacy and trust building rose as most important elements for this project

# Opportunities and Challenges

## Opportunities:

- Political will for more engagement by some County electeds
- Expectation from HUD, other structures that PWLE are at the table
- Private/Public events
- Local Government
- State (Lobby Days)
- Volunteer to speak

## Challenges:

- Limited trust of government, service providers by PWLE
- Tokenism
- Access to power
- Understanding the change
- Go the distance
- Always speak with confidence

Engaging Lived Experience in our  
Community

# Questions

*How do you invite people with lived experience into decision making or service design?*

# Questions

*How do you respond when participant feedback challenges program rules or routines?*

Increasing Lived Experience  
Voice in our Community



# Questions

*In which spaces are there gaps in expertise from people with lived experience?*

Some examples of where there are likely gaps in expertise from people with lived experience

- City of Portland / County / Metro
- Local Enhanced Service District Meetings
- Criminal Justice System
- Neighborhood Associations

# Questions

*How can gaps in lived experience/expertise be filled?*

Some examples of how gaps in lived experience/expertise voice can be filled

- City shelter services/temporary shelters identifying leadership among people with lived experience and sharing opportunities with them
- Advocates/non-profits working with people with lived experience to create intersectional bridges on policy decisions and their impacts
- Creating Consumer Advisory Boards that create more equity within non-profit frameworks by creating transparency and feedback loops

Next Steps

# Work plan through May 2026

- Regular planning and learning meetings
- Exploring current organizational structures and engagement tools
- Possible survey of “lived experience voice” in our Homeless Response System
- Goal: schedule our initial event or gathering in late 2025/early 2026
- Develop communications platform to share out work and response to this project
- Explore opportunities for continuation beyond May 2026

# Thank You!

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