

SPRC's Lived Experience Program

Background

In 2021, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) established a Lived Experience Advisory Committee (LEAC) to center suicide-centered lived experience perspectives in all projects and efforts. In September 2022, SPRC launched the Lived Experiences Initiatives team (LE Team) to coordinate with the LEAC and ensure SPRC's prevention efforts reflect a nuanced understanding of suicide that centers the unique insights of those whose lives have been affected by it. Our LEAC members are experts external to SPRC who volunteer to provide their insights, perspectives, and feedback on SPRC's projects. The LE Team employs strategies and practices that support relationship building, conflict management, and strategic communication across settings and groups.

The LE Team used three "lenses" to focus the development of SPRC's Lived Experience Initiatives (LEI) in a manageable and sustainable way: (1) an organizational lens, (2) a field lens, and (3) an engagement lens.

The Organizational Lens

The "organizational lens" led SPRC's LE Team to focus on learning SPRC's organizational structure. This allowed us to devise a strategy for incorporating lived experience perspectives that would fit the unique needs and parameters of the organization. With this approach, the LE Team was able to understand SPRC's strengths and challenges and consider change management practices that could facilitate the introduction and uptake of SPRC's LEI efforts across the organization.

The Field Lens

Looking through the "field lens," the LE Team examined information and practices used in the field of lived experience. We began a comprehensive content analysis and review of research, standards, and best practices for lived experience work and programs in various contexts. Our review included resources and information from areas such as:

- Peer work and recovery
- Substance use
- Homelessness
- Disability
- Deaf and hearing impairment
- Suicide prevention
- Sexual assault survivors
- Human trafficking
- HIV
- Public health
- Health communication and promotion
- Academic research

As part of the review process, we identified critical gaps in the field. These gaps included a lack of clear definitions for commonly used terms, terminology discrepancies between organizations and across fields of work, unclear reporting measures, inadequate communication strategies and approaches, and accountability concerns. Since the field of lived experience is relatively new, these gaps were anticipated.

The Engagement Lens

As we identified field-level gaps in practice, we began to consider approaches and principles that would work within SPRC's organizational structure and operational functions. We used the "engagement lens" to develop a lived experience program-tracking process to address the need for assessment, reporting, and accountability. This process is intended to ensure up-to-date and accurate tracking that meaningfully represents the complex nature of this work.

Defining Concepts

Since the inception of SPRC's Lived Experience Initiatives, SPRC leadership has had a desire to continually work to engage lived experience perspectives in deeper and more meaningful ways. During the review and assessment stage, the LE Team understood that LEAC members desired new ways to be involved in SPRC products and services, which provided a new opportunity to meet SPRC's goals for the program. The desire expressed by the committee members aligned with the concept of "co-design," which is often used in the lived experience field. In co-designed projects, those with lived experience co-own efforts alongside technical experts. We should note that, while co-design is often referenced in the field, there is no unanimous agreement on its definition.¹ The LE Team determined that SPRC's co-designed efforts would include lived experience influence and input at every stage, from conceptualization through evaluation and adaptation. Our lived experience collaborators would share power with technical experts and LE Team members in our co-designed efforts. We set a goal of developing practical co-designed projects that could act as models for other groups or organizations interested in integrating this approach into their own lived experience work.

The LE Team is also incorporating the newer concept of "[lived-led](#)" into our work. When a project is lived-led, those with lived experience drive project conceptualization, creation, development, and implementation. We realized that past LEAC discussions had generated ideas that could be developed into one or more lived-led projects. In 2023, the LE Team selected five topics from these discussions and asked LEAC members to refine the ideas and strategize about ways to develop SPRC-supported projects.

Conclusion

In just twelve months, SPRC's LE Team built tracking tools and developed content to support a sustainable LEI program, created specific and measurable outcomes, and further defined lived experience work in our organization. Our team members also act as lived experience subject matter experts and consultants for organizations worldwide. We share tools, strategies, and practices that

¹ World Health Organization. (2023, May 10). *Framework for meaningful engagement of people living with noncommunicable diseases, and mental health and neurological conditions.*

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240073074>

create quantifiable outcomes and make leading contributions to the field of lived experience.

Contact Us

For more information about SPRC's Lived Experience Initiatives, visit

<https://sprc.org/livedexperience/>.

If you have any questions, please reach out to us at sprclivedexperience@ouhsc.edu.