

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast  
Episode 82: Creating the Space for People With  
Lived Experience to Thrive

KEY:

FS: Female Speaker  
TO: Tom Oates  
KB: Katie Biron  
EP: Eshawn Peterson  
SP: Shawn Powell

00:00:00 [Music Introduction]

00:00:02 FS: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

00:00:31 TO: If you were not able to attend or view any of the sessions from the most recent Child Welfare virtual Expo, well, we're giving you the chance to listen into some of the conversations that highlighted the events. Hi everyone. Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I have Tom Oates. The Child Welfare Virtual Expo is presented by the Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for States. And for the past number of years, they've put this entirely virtual event together to address emerging trends in child welfare practice. Bringing experts together and share perspectives and resources to help advance how we improve practice. The 2022 virtual expo focused its energy and sessions supporting the child welfare field with methods and strategies for engaging people with lived experience. Now, a way to describe lived experience is the representation and understanding of an individual's human experiences, choices and options, and how those factors influence one's

perception of knowledge. And that's based on one's own life. So as agencies update policies and procedures, expand how they approach being family-centered, bringing aboard those who have first-hand experience within the child welfare system can add to the needed perspectives that you need to have to understand the impacts that those policies, procedures, and interactions have on the children and families being served.

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But it's not as simple as just having someone share their story or review a policy once it's finalized. How you engage, how you involve, what authority you provide, the assumptions you make about those with lived experience can make or break the efficacy that you seek. So, in this episode of the podcast, we're going to listen into a session that was called Setting the Stage: Creating the Space for People with Live Experience to Thrive. Now the conversation is between Katie Biron from the Capacity Building Center for States, her colleague Eshawn Peterson, and Shawn Powell with Parents for Parents out of King County, Washington. These three have personal or professional experience integrating and working with people with lived experience and bringing them into the workforce. I want you to listen to why integrating lived experience into the workforce is so beneficial to child welfare agencies, as well as considerations for integrating people with lived experience into the workplace. The three also talk about securing leadership and field buy-in, the interview process, compensation, technical knowledge, and the impacts to an organization's culture. Okay, Katie Biron kicks off Setting the Stage: Creating the Space for People with Lived Experience to Thrive, here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

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KB: We're going to really start with a discussion on how do you engage people with lived experience in projects or teams. And then we're going to transition and delve into considerations for bringing people with lived experience into the workforce, be it as a contractor or an employee. Joining me today will be Eshawn Peterson with the Center for States and Shawn

Powell, who is a parent with lived experience, who does ongoing work with families currently experiencing the child welfare system. I myself, Katie Biron, also bring lived experience as a resource caregiver and an adoptive parent. We're going to start today's session by reading off a scenario. After noticing a decrease in the data showing the number of parents engaging early in a child welfare dependency case, several staff members were tasked with a project aimed at developing a series of new strategies to help boost early parent engagement. After the group has come up with all the engagement strategies they believe the department should adopt, a meeting is held with multiple departmental staff to share a presentation about the new strategies.

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During the presentation, a staff member asks if any stakeholder engagement has occurred, particularly with parents who have previously navigated the child welfare system. The project development committee replies that no, that had not occurred as the project was on a very tight deadline. The department head asked the committee to get some stakeholder feedback on the new strategies before they launch. The head of the committee remembers meeting a veteran parent months ago at a meeting and sends off the following email: Hi. We met at a meeting several months ago. I remember you're a parent who has navigated the system. Would you please join us at our next committee meeting to review some new strategies we developed? We meet every other Tuesday, 10-12:30 pm. Here's a Zoom invite. We look forward to seeing you next Tuesday. So, now I will be joined by Shawn and Eshawn. And so, let's look into that email a little further. First of all, what were some of the strengths in that email and that engagement strategy? Shawn, I'm going to start with you and then pass it to Eshawn.

00:05:37

SP: Thank you. Katie, in my experience in the work that I do, we have a team of parents who all have lived experience and they get asked all the time to come to similar meetings and join projects. One of

the things that I want to start off by saying is that yay, for this organization, for recognizing the importance of the voice of parents with lived experience or any person with lived experience. I think that a lot of times people, they still haven't started to prioritize that in their projects. And I think across the board, it's becoming more and more relevant and becoming a priority. So, I think that adding the value of the people with lived experience is a step in the right direction. I also think that, you know, the other, the other important factors are that he recognized or she recognized that she had previously met that person. And so, building a rapport from the very beginning is important, too. I don't know, Eshawn, do you have other strengths that you can focus on?

00:06:53 EP: Yes. I mean, you kind of hit on the fact that there was an attempt to engage and how important that is. They gave them important information, the time and the date, and they gave them the method in which they were going to conduct their meeting. However, there are some things that we definitely gotta hit on. Katie?

00:07:11 KB: Oh, that's great. Eshawn, let's transition to that. What are the areas of improvement? What parts of this email made you all sit in your seats a little uncomfortable and say, I have a suggestion on how that could be done differently? Eshawn, why don't you start and then we'll follow up with Shawn.

00:07:28 EP: Well, I think it's clear that this person does not have a strong relationship with the person they're asking to come and join this meeting. So, the first thing is there's an assumption that they'll want to, and you can't just make that assumption. You really do have to build the relationships in order to have that meaningful engagement and invite them to spaces. You have to know whether they want to be invited to these types of spaces to share their story. You want to make sure that they're partnered with the organization and that organization is prepared to work with them. That's so important.

People who have experienced highly traumatic situations really don't want folks just kinda coming in and saying, hey, what did you go through? They want to know that there is a safe space for them to share that information. And you want to make sure that the organization has prepared them to do so.

00:08:19 You want to make sure that in that preparation that your entire team is ready and prepared, that they understand what questions to ask and what questions may be inappropriate to ask. You also want to make sure that that person with lived experience is prepared and they know how to strategically share their story so that they are not giving parts of themselves through their story in ways that will harm them in the future. Shawn, what are some of your other thoughts?

00:08:44 SP: One thing that that brought up for me is that - kind of to piggyback off of what you were saying, Eshawn - is that this invitation made the assumption that this person wanted to be involved. And also kind of had the sense that that person inviting them knew their whole story or understood their story. And they just met previously at a meeting months ago. And maybe that opportunity only awarded them time to hear a small piece of that person with lived experience's story. And they're basing this entire invitation off of knowing that one thing. And one thing that I think is great when talking about preparation is before inviting this person to come to an entire meeting to bare their soul to a whole group of people, why don't we invite them to come and join a one-on-one, get to know them a little bit better. Explain the project in-person or even a phone call, right? So that they can understand the entirety of the story and then pick and choose which pieces are going to be relevant to the project and appropriate to share.

00:09:56 I also think that just acknowledging again, how important it is for this organization to bring on a person with lived experience and to value their time and to let them know that they understand that the trauma that could have been caused from their lived

experience, but that it is of value and it is of importance. And so they have to get buy-in from the person that they want to be a part of that. Just because they're willing to share their story doesn't mean they want to help anybody because they could have resentments towards the whole situation. You have to make sure that they have the buy-in for what the project is about and what the goals are. You want to make sure that they have those shared, those shared values and beliefs to move forward.

00:10:41 KB: If you all could talk about the feedback loop, I have heard you both say, like, you don't just invite someone who has lived experience to check a box. Like, you need to really let them know what you're gonna do with their information. Eshawn, can you elaborate on that?

00:11:00 EP: Absolutely. Anytime that you're invited to participate in something, you'll want to know what happens with it. And so, you don't want your interactions to be transactional and that you come in, you share your information, and then that's it. So you want to make sure that you've established some sort of feedback loop so the people can understand how you're using their story and that information. What's to come of it? What are the next steps? They want to be kept in the loop for that. Some other technical things that I think are really important to address is making sure that when you're scheduling, that you're being flexible, right? Some of the people that we work with are parents, they have jobs, they are in school, they have things and priorities that they have to focus on. And so, it's important that we're not just saying, hey, come to this meeting today at this time, but we're saying, what is your schedule of availability? And that might mean that we have to meet later on in the day, perhaps on a weekend, so that we can accommodate the needs of the people with lived experience.

00:11:59 Additionally, one of the technical things that was in an email was Zoom, right? There's an assumption that because of the world we've lived in in the last few

years that everybody has access to Zoom or has access to technology to be able to facilitate that. Cell phones, computers. But some of the folks that we are working with don't have access to that technology. And so, we want to make sure that they do. And if they don't, that we're providing it to them so that they can meaningfully engage in the process. Another consideration to make is childcare. Often we're parents. I'm a parent and so I know if I'm asked to do anything after hours, certainly on the weekend, I'm going to need someone to watch my children. So, that is something that we also have to be mindful of.

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The last technical piece that I want to kind of hit on, in addition to kinda like that feedback loop is compensation. It's so important that we are compensating those who we're asking to spend and take time away from their lives and their families with us and that they're paid for it. Here's the facts. At the end of the day, these are our jobs, so we're getting paid to be there. Our knowledge is important, our value is important, and we get compensation for that knowledge and for that value. But it's important that we extend that to people with lived experience that we're asking to participate in the work that we're doing. Any other thoughts, Shawn?

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SP: I really liked what you said to backup just a bit about the scheduling purposes. I think that we can become very rigid in our expectations when we are seeing the same people every day in our workforce or our teams. And then when we bring someone on that may not have that same structure in their life, we do have to be a little bit more flexible and open. And I think we need to show people with lived experience that their value is just as much as anybody else on the team. And so, we would not, we would ask the rest of our team when we're setting a meeting, what's your availability? Send out a doodle poll. You send out, you know, do you have this day or this day and at what time and you try to figure out what works for everyone. We would want to afford that same consideration to a person with lived experience because they may not have a full-time job, but they

have a full life of responsibilities that they have to navigate. So, I really appreciate the comment about the scheduling.

00:14:16 And then also child care, of course. Right. And how many times have we all been to Zoom meetings where we get Zoom bombed by our kids. And to maybe just be aware that if it is via Zoom, that maybe they haven't taken their children to childcare. And you may see an appearance by a little one which brightens anyone's day, but just shows that real life goes on no matter what's going on in the world. So, I agree with that, Eshawn. Katie?

00:14:44 KB: Yeah. So, Shawn, if we're thinking about someone with lived experience being tapped to come to a meeting and perhaps share their lived experience, perhaps comment on something that's been developed, it's not really clear from this email what the role is - can you talk a little bit about how in the initial approach that the individual lived experience can understand why me, why are you tapping into me and what special considerations are you going to make so that I understand why I'm there where I feel competent in your meeting. Where I'm not going to feel like you're just going to sit me down and pepper me with questions about all things related to being a parent in child welfare. But that you're really going to target a part of my knowledge, but not just my story. Because I know you've talked in the past about the individual with lived experience, if they, if they're not sure what they're walking into or are not, they don't understand the ask, they may feel like I'm not equipped to do this. I don't know why you're asking me, so I wondered if you could speak on that a little.

00:15:54 SP: Absolutely. And I think that it starts with informing the person with lived experience about what you're asking them to do. Giving more background information about the project or about the team that's holding a meeting that they're gonna be walking into. I think that people, such in my case, I was so used to sharing my story to professionals, to



attorneys, to the courts, to people who were judging me and who were criticizing me and looking down on me, that that's kind of how my story developed. And so, if I was asked to share my story, it would come out in a way that I would leave out certain pieces because I wouldn't want to be vulnerable to this type of person or this audience. Whereas if I know what I'm walking into, what the purpose is, who's going to be there and like Eshawn said earlier, how my information and my story is gonna be shared or used and for what purpose, especially what the end result is or the goal of this project. We're using the lived experience that was shared by this person to do this or make these decisions or guide these choices, right? And then that would allow me the time and space to kind of prepare for how I'm going to share my story, what parts are gonna be relevant to the project and whether or not I can decide that I can even do it because I can support the project or the mission of the project.

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It starts with information. And as I work with parents now who are currently in the system, it's important for me to make sure that they have access to all the information so they can start their journey. Even through the court system, being able to make decisions for themselves, empowering them to be aware of the choices they have and really take control of it. That continues even on after cases are dismissed, they're out of the child welfare system and they're moving on to bigger projects. It's gaining that information, getting all the knowledge that you can to make those informed decisions and not feel like you're being forced by any outside entity to do that? I hope that answered your question, Katie.

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KB: Oh, absolutely. And what it really boils down to, what I hear from both of you, is afford the individuals with lived experience the same respect that you afford all the colleagues in the meeting. In regards to scheduling, in regards to preparing, in regards to a feedback loop, what are they going to be doing - it's not clear from this email, are you

joining the team from here on out? I mean, they did say we meet Tuesdays from blah, blah, blah, or is this a one time come in, let us pick your brain, thank you very much, that's it. And so, really, really affording everyone the same respect. I remember when I was being asked to do, you know, consult on a couple of different projects and often the schedule was set and this was pre-Zoom and so, I had to go there. And it occurred to me one day, every time I was attending this meeting, it was costing me \$100 out-of-pocket - by the time I paid for childcare and time off and travel to get there and parking - it was costing me 100 bucks to come to this meeting. While everyone else in the meeting presumably was getting paid a salary to be there and it just was like woah, woah, why, why am I having to pay to be here? So, I think just really, really considering all aspects of this when you reach out and looking at everyone as an individual.

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So, I'm going to read a different email, incorporating some of your suggestions and I kinda want to hear from each of you at the end. Did this hit the nail on the head completely or are there a couple of areas that there could still be some improvement? My name is Susie X and I am the Regional Manager for the child welfare early engagement unit. My unit has been working on a project to increase and improve early engagement with parents impacted by the child welfare system. This project had a tight deadline and unfortunately, we add a misstep and failed to engage an individual with lived experience early in the planning process. We will use this as a learning opportunity and will reach out to individuals with lived experience much earlier in the process on future projects. Despite the delay in reaching out, we certainly recognize the value of having individuals who have been personally impacted by the system involved when we develop a new process.

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I remember meeting you several months ago at another event and the way you spoke about your experiences as an impacted parent really stayed with me. We would like to invite you to one of our planning meetings so

that we can share our plan for early engagement and get your feedback on some of the documents we have created to share with parents during the first interaction with the department. Our meetings are typically held on Tuesday mornings from 10:30 to 12, however, we recognize this date and time might not work for your schedule. We would be more than happy to flex to your schedule and can meet outside of this time, including evenings. Just let us know what works for you and we'll do our very best to accommodate. We meet on Zoom, an online meeting platform. If you're not familiar with this platform or technology is a barrier, please let me know so I can support you. We offer compensation in the form of a \$200 stipend for the two to three hours of work we anticipate you contributing to this project. Thank you for considering this opportunity. Okay, so if this lands in your inbox compared to the other one, how, how are you as an individual lived experience feeling?

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SP: Yay, I'm excited to be a part of this. I feel honored that someone has placed a value on my story and it stuck with them. So, something is generating some thoughts and some ideas and I can actually help make a difference. It was so gentle, the invite, and it was compassionate and it was, hey, I understand that your experience is a huge thing for you to share. And we're asking you to be very vulnerable. And let's see if this is a good fit for us. But, we really want you to be a part of this project because we value your experience so much. And just that acknowledgment in this second email - completely different feeling about the request. I am wanting to ask questions. I want to give this person a phone call. I want to have a conversation. I want to share my thoughts on things and I want to collaborate in this, in this project. And I don't think that looking at this email and listening to you read it and having it and writing, it didn't take more than 5 minutes longer than it took to write the first one.

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And just that few minutes makes a huge difference. A huge difference. And you know what if I got this invite and it wasn't really something that I could do

or commit to, I might give this person a call and suggest someone else I know, because I think it's still such a great opportunity and I might know someone that is a better fit or has an experience that works better with this project. But I'm willing to explore it and I'm willing to take the time, just like this person did, to invite me and give the acknowledgment of my past and my story. What do you think, Eshawn?

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EP: There are two major things that stood out for me. Let's first look at the technical pieces, right? The things that we've talked about early being flexible in scheduling of the meeting and offering to meet at times that are more convenient for the person with lived experience. Certainly compensating them, stating what that compensating, compensation looks like, excuse me. And then also what's expected of them in terms of time commitment - two to three hours worth of work, it's very clear. I have a better understanding. Also really kind of explained the scope of the project and what they were focusing on. But the most important piece beyond the rapport building that Shawn just spoke about was the acknowledgement and accountability. The acknowledgment that this is late in the process to really be engaging folks with lived experience. And so that's a culture shift that that organization has made. And not just saying, hey, come to the table, we're going to check a box sort of deal, but acknowledging and taking accountability for the fact that they really started kind of late in the game in terms of bringing someone with lived experience. So, that was the things that really stood out to me the most. Katie?

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KB: I love that, Eshawn, it's, and they're also not using it as an excuse like we're at the tail end, we haven't engaged anybody, well, let's just finish this one, we'll do better next time. It's, it's being willing to take that moment, course-correct a little bit, do what you can and do better in the future. And so, now we are going to move into bringing individuals with lived experience on into the

workplace, either as a consultant role or as an employee. And so, on the outset, this seems very simple. Put up a job ad, interview for the job, choose the best candidate and move on. But there are some considerations that workplaces should take when, when they are making this opportunity available for individuals with lived experience.

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So, I went through and I found some very typical job qualifications that are in almost every ad. A specific degree, or a specific designation, specific certificate, a certain number, or a certain number of years worked experience - worked, not lived, worked. The proficiency with software programs. They list off, you need to be fluent in Word and Excel and this, and this, and this and this and this amiss and maybe an ability to type a certain number of words per minute. And then really even delving down to the assumption that anyone who would apply for your job has a high-school diploma and making that a qualification. And so, I would really love to hear from you all, what do we need to know? What do we need to know when we're engaging individuals with lived experience? This may be, I'd love you to touch on, like, job requirements, roles, skill sets, compensation, all of this. And so Eshawn, I'm gonna let you take it at the beginning here and then transition it over to Shawn. So, what do you wish folks knew before they even, even wrote that first job description?

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EP: Well, one of the things that I think about are, what are the job requirements? Are we intentionally, unintentionally or intentionally because you never know, excluding people with lived experience with the requirements that's listed in the job ad. Some of the things to think about is is a high-school diploma necessary in order to do the role and take care of the responsibilities that are present for that specific job? Are the skills that are listed necessary or are they skills that can be developed over time within the organization? Is training available to support that development, right, to acquire those skills necessary later? The other thing

that I really think about is this background check process and the screening process. I know for you, Shawn, that is a big area. Do you want to talk more about that?

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SP: Thank you, Eshawn. Yeah. And really, that's one of the first things that as a person with lived experience freaks out about when they see that a background check is going to be required. Because we all have a background of some sort and we worry about that because it's already been an obstacle for us to get housing, to get even a bank account, to do a lot of things, get employment, volunteer at our children's school, all of those things. So, then when we're trying to be a part of something bigger and grow ourselves professionally or even just personally, we worry that the background check is going to be a dead stop for people. And so, being able to be flexible with your requirements or your expectations of that and really explain why, I think is going to be able to let that person with lived experience honor their lived experience, their history, their past, and use that as really the jumping off point for their employment. And really be able to use those as positives rather than negatives.

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We're in the business of believing that people can change. We don't judge someone by what their background report says from 2, 3, 4, 10, 15 years ago. We are judging their character and their ability based on what they've done since that time to put new practices in place and new behaviors and choices in place to prevent those things from happening again, right? So, we have to overlook what shows up on paper and really get to know the person. And that brings to mind something that happened to be real recently in the hiring practice is that we had a candidate where, in our organization HR determines how we hire. They pick our interview questions, they pick our reference questions when we reach out to someone's references. And they also determine how many references they need to have. This individual has not had a job, a tax paying real job in many, many years, and could only provide two recent professional references. But HR

said they needed three and the third one was not a professional reference. It was a housing case manager from a treatment center she went to, but it was the only person she could think of. And HR said no, that's not good enough even though we're hiring for a role of a person with lived experience to help people just like this person.

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And so, we had to advocate to our HR department to say, hey, we don't need that third one because the first two are good enough. And we know this person and we know what their character is and they know what they're like. And we're willing to make accommodations for this regardless if they have the three references or not. So, those hiring practices do need to be looked at. With the background check, with, with references, with the skills test, right? We're, we're training people and they may come in with very limited skills because their life experience is not sitting behind a desk typing 100 words per minute. Their life experience is not creating spreadsheets and doing statistics. So, that's something that they can learn on the job and skills that are relevant to the role they're, they're providing. And so, we have to provide time to do that training. Assess really where they're at, where their strengths are, and really build them up and make them excited and be proud and encourage them to continue using those strengths. But create room for them to grow in the areas where they need practice and be able to provide support in those, in those areas.

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And then create a space where the team can also provide support. And so, the person with lived experience can feel comfortable going to the team or having a designated person to ask for help. Because in our experience, when you ask for help, it means you're not doing something right. It means that, you know, something's going wrong and we are going to be criticized or judged for that. Really, I would much rather hire a person who's willing to ask the questions and ask for help to get it right than to assume because they're afraid to ask. And that's on me as a manager, as a supervisor to create a safe

environment for people with lived experience, to feel comfortable in asking for that. We are always on edge a little bit. And one of the things that we need to consider is in scheduling, whether it's for a one time project like we discussed before, or if it is for an ongoing project like contract work or a full-time employee, is that people with lived experience really have good boundaries in place. They have to to maintain their recovery, their sobriety, their mental health, the structure in their life, and they really need to pay attention to their self-care.

00:32:15 And one of the considerations we need to think about is making that available to them. Sometimes they need extra time off to account for therapy. Maybe they're still attending treatment, maybe they're going to meetings, maybe they just need some downtime more than other employees would to take care of themselves. And that might happen before they've accrued any kind of PTO or vacation time. So, we may even need to look at that system to make sure that we're able to provide a space for them to take care of themselves. Do you have anything else on that, Eshawn?

00:32:36 EP: Yeah. The only other thing that I can really think of when it talks about bringing folks in is the types of roles that we're bringing people with lived experience into. There's this sometimes assumption that the roles that we want to bring them into are almost always focused on some sort of mentorship - which is important and has value, it has its place. There is nothing like working with people who have experienced similar things to what you have experienced. That sort of connection is different and honestly you can't duplicate it when it comes to regular case management. However, people with lived experience have other experiences and have other skills and talents. And so, we don't want to just say we want to hire someone with lived experience for mentorship roles. We want to hire them for other roles that they're completely capable of taking on.

00:33:32 The other thing that I always like to talk about when



we're considering hiring people with lived experience is really honestly, how was that lived experience going to inform the work, right? Because we have to make decisions on how much we want to share, how much we want to put out, what value that's going to add to the job itself. And so, it's important that when you're hiring and you're in that interview process that you're really upfront about what the expectation is in terms of incorporating your lived experience into the job itself. So, those are the two other things that I think are really important. And then of course, compensation, fair compensation. A lot of mentorship type roles don't pay a lot. So, when we think about fair pay, equal pay, compensation, we have to take in consideration again, what is the lifestyle, gas, location, childcare, the needs that they have. And is this is pay range really appropriate, one for the work that's being done and two, for life.

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KB: It sounds like what you're saying, Eshawn, is that \$20 gift card for a full day of work may not cut it. And so, what I've really heard both of you say is that anyone looking to bring an individual with lived experience on, should really tease apart that entire job description and really look at each piece. Is a college diploma necessary? Is a high-school diploma necessary? Is passed, successfully passing a background check. What does that mean? I want everyone to think about what does that mean? Does that mean filled out the form successfully and got it turned in and whatever comes back, comes back. We need to think about these things. Because if you just put successfully pass a background check, like Shawn said, that's excluding a ton of people who are going to say, my background check is not going to be crystal clean, it's just not. So, really looking at how are we structuring, structuring this hiring process to bring these individuals with lived experience on. So, now I'd love to transition to these individuals coming on board. So, we've got them hired, we gave them a computer, put them through standard orientation. They're good to go, right?

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SP: Not exactly, right. We would, we would love it to be that simple. One thing that comes to mind as being most important is preparing the rest of the team for this person to be on board. I mentioned this a little bit before, but not everyone is on board with working with people with lived experience in any role. Some people are still in the mindset that they need a certificate or a degree in a frame on their office wall to be have, to be worth anything or have any value. And so, sometimes we're judged because they know that our background check had to be an exception to the rule or there was accommodations already made for us. And so, we need to have that open dialogue with our teams to say, hey, we're bringing this person on and get the buy-in from everyone. At least be able to get the agreement that this person is going to be on our staff, or on our team, and this is how we're going to treat them - as an equal, as if they are the same value as anybody else.

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Because many times as a person who is a full-time employee in an organization, I myself, though I am a Program Coordinator, I can walk into certain rooms or certain break rooms, or certain areas of this place, and people are putting their cell phones in their pocket, pulling their purse close to them, they're hiding and locking their laptops because of that judgment because like, oh, here comes a peer, they must be a thief, okay, so we have to, you know. And, even, they may not realize that they're sending that message, I see it. Because for years, that's what I've been up against. And so even in the workplace, if someone could say, okay, we're going to have a peer. This is what it's like. This is not how we're going to judge them, and this is how we're going to interact with them and this is how we're going to all support one another. I think that preparation piece is key. Not only to make the staff as a whole comfortable, but also that person with lived experience feel like they can walk into any environment in that workplace and feel comfortable and valued.

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EP: The thing that brings up for me is that that's a microaggression, right? And so, there's training that's necessary for your team to be able to recognize when they're committing a microaggression such as putting your purse away. And I would say we're all judgmental in some way. We're wired that way. And so, notice what you notice about your behavior when people have lived experiences are around because that's an important part of changing and then acting and behaving differently, right? And so recognize that it's there, but you're going to work on it. And that's what's important. And allow that space for your team to explore what that means for them and their behaviors and how they're interacting with those with lived experience.

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The other piece that I want to talk about in terms of shifting agency culture is the support for those with lived experience. I like to develop something called, like, a lived experience support plan, if you will. That really puts the person with lived experience in the center and the driver of how they want to be supported when they are activated at work or triggered at work. Or they experience a microaggression and they feel some kind of way about it or they're stressed out. What sort of supports do you need, how can I help you? Not saying, hey, well, if you get activated, I'm going to suspend you for the rest of the day. But really centering what it is the person with lived experience wants and needs. Sometimes we have good intentions and we're like, hey, can I give you a hug or do you need extra support or those sorts of things? And maybe I don't want that. And you wouldn't know that unless you had that conversation and built it into your supervision. Then also, speaking of supervision, put in those check-in points. As things are going, as the job is developing, as the role is developing, do those sort of check-ins from that lens. So, those would be the things that I kinda think about that are important in terms of shifting agency culture and then making sure that those that lived experience feel supported. That supervision is key.

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Katie, can I jump in and say one more thing just to add onto that? It brought up to mind turnover. So, as you create a welcoming environment and culture shift for people with lived experience to come on board, be prepared for that turnover because as we nurture these people in the workplace, we provide them training and the support to grow, they're going to move up and move onto bigger and better things. And it may just be a stepping stone. And so, you may get really good at bringing on and training people with lived experience and have that high turnover. Not because they decide not to work for your agency because it's terrible and you don't create a good environment because now we have the tools that we can do that. We have that awareness. But because these people are going to grow and they're going to want to do more and they're going to see that more people are valuing their experience and they're going to want to move on. So, we see high turnover rates. But for a good reason.

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KB: I also, you all bring up so many good points and it also makes me think about being conscious if you're a supervisor, if you're in HR, of really checking in with that individual with lived experience to make sure that they feel confident in the skills that will be expected of them in the workplace. I think sometimes we can unintentionally assume people know what Teams is, how to put a meeting on a calendar, how to do Zoom, how to put together a PowerPoint. Like nowadays, they're having kids in third grade do that, so shouldn't everybody know how to do that? And are we creating an environment and finding the tools out there to help our individuals with lived experience who don't have those skills obtain those skills so that they can feel equal in the workplace? Or are we creating an environment where they don't feel like they can say, I actually don't know what an Excel spreadsheet is. I can't make one. I don't know what one is. I'm willing to learn, but where do I go to get this information. And really putting that onus back on the supervisor, back on HR to find those tools, to find those resources to really help this individual enter the

workforce.

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And I think about it, like it can be a whole variety of things and you need to look at everybody as an individual. But it may be talking about professional dress for the workspace. It may be talking about professional language and things you say and don't say in a professional workplace. And so, just being, being aware of that and not being like, hey, you've joined us. You've been here a week, you've got it right? But then the last thing I'll say before I turn it over to you, Eshawn to close is also, having that conversation within the organization that this individual with lived experience should not, people should not feel like they are free to mine this individual for information about their experience. This individual should be able to sit down for lunch and talk about the fact that it's sunny and hot and they need to go buy a new swimming pool for their kid because there's popped and not someone saying you were incarcerated once, what was that like? Like, we just need to be aware that this is not an open book to be accessed at any time. That this is this individual's story. And should they choose to share it with you or share it with the organization, that should be completely on them. But I think sometimes we think, oh, great, we have a foster youth. They know all things foster youth related. I can ask them every question. And I can only imagine that would not feel very comfortable to be the token resource in your organization. And so, Eshawn, I am going to turn it over to you to close with some wise words of things to remember.

00:43:51

EP: Thank you, Katie. We want to remind you that we've included a tip sheet for today's talking points. They are just tips, right? There's so much more that we all have to learn about authentically engaging, interacting with and onboarding people with lived experience. So, we encourage you to take a look at that tip sheet and then also encourage you to continue to do your own research, take that accountability and make some changes within your own organizations. But last, we want you to remember that

this is human-centered work. We have to believe in the importance of forgiveness and second chances when engaging with people with lived experience. For all the reasons that we shared about and specifically, Shawn, thank you for sharing your story. If we don't believe people can truly change, if we don't believe that they are worth it, then honestly, you don't really believe in the work that we're doing. So, I want to challenge you to think about how you are showing up for people with lived experience.

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TO: Now, we'll point you to some of the tip sheets that Eshawn mentioned at the very end of the conversation, just head on over to [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov), go to our podcasts and we'll have those links for you on this episode's web page. Also, you should check out all the sessions from the virtual expo. So, we'll have a link to all of the recorded sessions for you. Now if you haven't checked out our other episode of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast focused on the virtual expo session on how to authentically and respectfully engage individuals with lived experience and storytelling, you should go check that one out, too. Of course, you can find the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast on Apple podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, SoundCloud. My thanks to the team from the Child Welfare Virtual Expo and especially Katie Biron, Eshawn Peterson, and Shawn Powell. And of course, my thanks to you for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I'm Tom Oates. Have a great day.

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FS: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov) and is a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children's Bureau.

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