



Community Report:

Exploring Opportunities for a
Penticton Lived/Living
Experience Circle

2023

Audience:

This report is written to provide members of the Penticton community and partners working to address affordable housing and homelessness with an overview of the project, findings, and recommendations from the focus groups. This will also go to the funder. Ideally this is a shorter read for community consumption.

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We gratefully acknowledge that this research was conducted on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Okanagan (Syilx) People.

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Working with communities in BC's
Interior, Lower Mainland, Central
& Northern Vancouver Island

Authors:

Kerry Rempel, PhD (Candidate), MBA, BPE
Co-Researcher, Professor
Okanagan School of Business, Okanagan College

Stephanie Griffiths, Ph.D., R. Psych
Co-Researcher, Professor
Okanagan College

Jamie Lloyd-Smith
Steering Committee Member
Social Development, City of Penticton

Shawn Kelly
Co-Researcher, Lived Experience

Bobby Hines
Co-Researcher, Lived Experience
Ask Wellness

Annika Kirk
Co-Researcher, Lived Experience
Student, Okanagan College

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Forward

“Without a proper understanding of how and why people end up homeless, most people have no idea how broad... the risk of becoming homeless [is]. There is a huge fear of the homeless from the public at large. So many of us PWLLE have mental health issues coupled with addiction issues...It makes it hard for meaningful interaction for everyone. We need to destigmatize and humanize us (PWLLE) or it will keep failing. I feel that it is absolutely crucial that the input of peers and peer groups count. We are the ones that have first-hand knowledge. I have lived it. Not for us, but with us.”

- Reflections of Shawn Kelly, lived experience co-researcher

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What we set out to do (Overview of the Project)

Homelessness is a topic of concern in the community of Penticton. Instability of shelter spaces, lack of affordable housing, and community concerns related to safety and visibility of homelessness have contributed to a growing desire to tackle this issue in systematic ways. Finding ways to address root causes or the “upstream” factors that are putting individuals at risk for homelessness as well as managing episodic homelessness will be key to creating change in the community. Penticton’s social services sector is working collaboratively through the 100 More Homes collective¹.

Despite the formal and informal connections between those working in the field, there has been an absence of meaningful engagement with individuals with lived of experience of homelessness in project planning. One way to include this missing voice is to bring people with lived/living experience (PWLLE) together in a formalized way that is accessible to the community. This project looked to understand if there was support for such a group in the community, understand how the group could help to address homelessness, and identify key elements that would sustain the work of the group long term.

We approached this project from a community engaged perspective² to ensure it reflected the realities of Penticton. To do this we reviewed existing sources of knowledge and sought out local knowledge experts. A final and important piece of the work was to make sure the findings came back to community for use in future planning. To this end, we produced:

- A Community Report (meant for community and service providers in Penticton) – a summary of the process, the findings, and recommendations of the work
- A Technical Report (meant for community implementors and research teams) – a more detailed look at the methods used to conduct this research project
- An LEC (Lived Experience Circle) Toolkit (meant for community implementors and research teams) – a guide to creating LECs that support a community
- A Reference List (meant for community implementors and research teams) – a comprehensive list of literature, toolkits and guides that informed our work

Background on Lived/Living Experience Circles and the Local Context

LECs can be described as a collection of people who share a particular experience or condition who meet with some regularity. These groups can be more or less formal, may be long serving or convened for a short time. They may come together to support one or many initiatives. They

¹ 100 More Homes is a program of the United way that brings together partners who are working to address affordable housing and homelessness (<https://uwbc.ca/program/100-more-homes-penticton/>)

² For more insight into community engaged research, see these resources from the Centre for Community Based Research <https://www.communityresearchcanada.ca/approach>

have been used in many contexts including healthcare, software design and social program development/evaluation.

LECs have been used in a variety of ways to help address homelessness. Several research projects focused on homelessness have included the voice of PWLLE, most notably the multi-site case study *At Home/Chez Soi* (Homeless Hub, n.d.; Nelson, et al., 2016) where each of the 5 test sites had lived experience groups embedded to support gathering and analyzing the study results. There are also many examples where PWLLE have been included in the development of programs and policy in order to provide guidance on design and evaluation from the perspective of those with lived or living experience of homelessness (Hatch, 2014; Lloyd-Smith, 2022; TAEH PWLLE Reference Group, 2018³). The development of policy frameworks like Canada's National Housing Strategy demonstrates commitment to ongoing consultations with PWLLE (Lloyd-Smith, 2022).

Lived Experience Groups in Penticton

Within the community of Penticton, different agencies or groups have formed their own individual lived/living experience groups to guide operations. These groups focused on addictions, poverty, or homelessness, but none were readily accessible to the community at large. Examples of existing groups include P+OPS (The Penticton and Area Overdose Society), SOLE (South Okanagan + Lived Experience) group and AskWellness's Penticton Ambassador Program.

LECs in Kelowna

In Kelowna, PWLLE were involved in the development of the Journey Home Strategy which guides the City's 5-year plan to address homelessness. LECoh (Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness) (<https://www.journeyhome.ca/about-us/partners/lecoh/>) was formed as part of this strategy and is the first lived experience group in Canada embedded within a strategy and designed to support a community rather than an individual organization or project. They are an independent entity housed within the Central Okanagan Journey Home Society (COJHS). This group meets regularly, has a documented structure, Terms of Reference, and a recruitment strategy. LECoh is accessible to the Kelowna community to provide guidance and perspective. They are involved in advocacy, direct policy, provide input on city decisions, maintain a regular practice of site visits to outdoor sheltering spaces, and work collaboratively with bylaw and RCMP to address concerns around community safety.

Project Team

The co-researchers involved in this research are a mixture of PWLLE and student/community-based researchers. Team recruitment was informed by the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and included individuals with expertise in homelessness and lived/living experience, backgrounds in community based and/or qualitative research, and knowledge of the local Penticton community. All members of the team actively contributed to the design, data

³ Additional sources can also be found in the companion Technical Report.

collection, analysis, and final project outcomes and as much as possible aligned to the principles outlined locally in the *Allyship in Research* approach (Myrah, Rempel, & Laing, 2021). To learn more about each individual research team member, see [Appendix I: Research Team Bios](#).

The team was supported by a steering committee consisting of representatives from the City of Penticton (Jamie Lloyd-Smith), The United Way (Naomi Woodland) and Ask Wellness (Lisa Robinson). In addition, Okanagan College (Penticton campus) and Regional Dean Alison Gibson provided space and support through the process.

Goals and Methodology

In this section we provide an overview of the goals of the project and how it was conducted (methodology). More detailed information about the research process is contained within the companion Technical Report.

Goals of the Project

Formal

The primary goal of the research was to explore whether there was a perceived need for a lived/living experience group that would serve the community of Penticton. Supporting goals included understanding:

- how a lived/living experience group could help address homelessness in Penticton
- how to define success for a lived/living experience group
- what might be required for such a group to be sustainable in Penticton longer term

Informal

The steering committee wanted to provide opportunities for local organizations working in the homelessness field to come together to have conversations and connect. Post-pandemic and economic influences resulted in fewer strategic community conversations at a time of growing need for urgent support. Due to high turnover in the sector, it was also an opportunity to have service providers and others make in-person connections that were disrupted by the pandemic.

Methodology

The approach to this research was guided by the steering committee, past research, and by our lived-experience co-researchers. The team conducted a literature review, focus groups, and interviews with key knowledge holders doing similar work. Analysis was done as a team and the information was presented to the community in a series of reports and conference presentations.⁴

⁴ We have provided a detailed explanation of the process used in the companion Technical Report.

Literature Review Overview

We consulted past published research and key documents and reports that spoke to how lived experience groups were used to inform policy, program development or research. We also looked to identify any resources related to best practices in including lived experience voices⁵.

While not exhaustive, some key learnings from our literature review were:

- PWLLE have commonly been included in research projects (e.g. At Home/Chez Soi), policy development (Hatch, 2014) (Myrah & Rempel, 2022) and in program development (Nelson, et al., 2016). They have also been involved in service provision.
- There are many definitions of “lived or living experience”. This suggests that communities would be well served to establish a common definition which is understood by all community agencies and decision makers.
- In any work where PWLLE are included, time and space for relationship building is critical (Myrah, Rempel, & Laing, 2021; Nelson, et al., 2016). It is advised that project planning includes additional time for relationship building unless the project team has an existing working relationship.
- If a group is looking to include PWLLE for their expertise, it should be done with a genuine need and process for inclusion. (Eversole, 2010; Myrah, Rempel, & Laing, 2021). The literature warns strongly against creating participation and inclusion opportunities that are tokenistic or are seen to be *checking a box* (Lloyd-Smith, 2022).
- There are many barriers to including PWLLE voices. Looking to minimize the differences in power (hierarchy), creating supporting structures, offering training opportunities/ mentorship, providing financial and technical support are ways to minimize the barriers (Nichols & Gaetz, 2014; Stapelton & Soh, 2019; TAEH PWLE Reference Group, 2018).

A more detailed discussion of the literature is contained in [Appendix II](#).

Research Process

We employed a community-engaged approach to this work. Guided by previous research, it was determined that focus groups and interviews would be used to gather data. The research project and methodology were reviewed and approved by the Okanagan College Research Ethics Board.

To gather community specific information, 2 focus groups were conducted. The first gathered the perspective of community organizations, funders, government stakeholders and community at large. The second was held to gather feedback from PWLLE of homelessness in Penticton. Interviews were conducted with experts in Lived Experience groups. These included PWLLE as well as service providers and researchers

⁵ In particular, resources such as “Lived Experience as Expertise: Considerations in the Development of Advisory Groups of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness and/or Poverty” are excellent tools to guide inclusion (<https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/lived-experience-expertise-considerations-development-advisory-groups-people-lived>).

Analysis of the data was done collectively by the research team and validated by participants and the steering committee. For more detailed information on the methods and approach taken, see the companion Technical Report for this project.

Findings

We identified several key recommendations for Penticton and other communities looking to support an LEC. Based on our findings, the LEC model may be of great use to smaller cities and more rural communities that have a culture of sharing resources and working collaboratively.

Ultimately, there is community support in Penticton for an LEC. The community has identified specific ways it could help address homelessness locally and what would be required to make it sustainable. In this section we discuss the value of having an LEC, expectations and insight into how success might be measured. We also provide insight into how an LEC might be sustained within a community like Penticton.

Lastly, we introduce an engagement framework that can guide Penticton and other communities on how to work with an LEC. This is a brief introduction with more details provided in the accompanying LEC Toolkit.

Value of a Lived Experience Circle for Penticton

Based on the feedback from the local community, there is a willingness to support and a recognized need for the community to hear from PWLLE. An LEC would bring a fundamental and missing perspective to **decision-making** and **provision of support** for individuals experiencing homelessness. It could provide a platform to embed PWLLE into current and future planning.

When asked why an LEC would be important, participants pointed to the need for **advocacy** and actions to **address stigma** with respect to individuals experiencing homelessness. A LEC was seen to be able to play a key role in **educating** the public and as a **potential resource** for the community.

Help to Address Homelessness

There were 5 critical areas identified as ways that the LEC could support work addressing homelessness in Penticton.



Advocacy: Having a coordinated group of individuals to provide lived experience perspectives allows for this voice to reach the ears of agencies, municipal leaders, and other government entities. Having a clear pathway to gather the multiple perspectives of PWLLE, would allow for clearer calls to action, informed by the reality of experience.

In addition to work undertaken by an LEC, it was also suggested that community leaders, Councillors and others would be better prepared to advocate on behalf of those living in poverty or homeless. An LEC would support others to advocate from an informed perspective and could speak directly to what is needed most in the community. This informed advocacy would be instrumental in lobbying for the supports and resources most needed in Penticton.

Addressing Stigma: Utilizing the knowledge and experiences of PWLLE was considered an important path to addressing homelessness. In particular, including PWLLE in anti-stigma activities was seen as a way to connect directly with communities. PWLLE felt this was important because it offered an opportunity to help create more compassion in the communities in which they live. In addition, they described the positive effects they believed this advocacy work would have on themselves. They felt it would allow them to bring the “humanity” back to communities, to “reinforce the importance of treating people like humans (not animals)”.

Changing Systems: A coordinated voice that was accessible to agencies and systems leaders could provide a valuable ‘street’ perspective necessary to identify holes or gaps in service provision and highlight instances where systems overlap or provide conflicting/supporting service. This could increase the effectiveness of approaches to addressing homelessness by identifying the most pressing needs, silos in service provision, and challenges to accessing service, etc. This could occur because, unlike organizations which provide some services within

Participant Quotes:

“Create safer environments – especially during planning/building (e.g. city)” (LE)

“By understanding pathways into homelessness – help to build a better safety net (upstream impact)” (Service Provider)

“There is very little representation of this “voice” in the community” (Service Provider)

a continuum of care, PWLLE will have experience across systems and over the entirety of a continuum.

Informing Decision Making: Participants identified the voice of PWLLE should be included intentionally in decision making at the local and provincial levels. Participants believed that this would increase the effectiveness and timeliness of decisions and could lead to the identification of additional upstream (prevention) and downstream (maintenance/aftercare) opportunities that could positively impact decisions being made. Including an LEC at decision making tables would allow for a broader spectrum of perspectives in debate and would bring the voice of PWLLE on par with other residents such as businesses and property owners. PWLLE suggested that if their voices were included it would allow them to communicate back to their peers.

Improving Support: The Lived Experience participants in this study also discussed that they felt having an LEC would support service provision for those living precariously or on the street. They highlighted the potential for an LEC to increase the effectiveness of supports by giving a voice to those who are receiving service. By acting as an advisor/advocate, the circle could provide a safe space to offer critical feedback and protect individuals from the fear of losing supports for speaking out. This voice could support evaluation, program development and could identify holes in service provision.

LEC Function in the Community

In addition to general ways that an LEC could address homelessness in Penticton, participants also tried to describe specific roles, actions or activities it could undertake. It's helpful to understand practical, real-world examples when imagining what an LEC can undertake.

Connecting to Lived Experience: An LEC could act as a liaison between PWLLE and those in positions of power, specifically service providers, municipal officials, and provincial ministries. Through connecting regularly with those who are precariously housed or unhoused, an LEC would be able to act as a line of communication.

Peer Support: LECs could also be involved in aspects of service provision. By connecting individuals living on the streets to existing outreach programs, LEC members could support service providers by helping to establish trust in the system. By visiting those living rough or in shelters, LEC members could also act as a support to individuals as they waited for access to supportive or affordable housing.

In Penticton, there is a history of PWLLE providing outreach support. Building on this, LEC members could work in Peer Support/Peer Navigator roles. If provided with appropriate training, they could be valuable resources as part of a community response team. Other communities

LEC Roles in Community

- Connecting to Lived/Living Experience
- Peer Support
- Activism/Voice/Advocacy
- Community Decision Making
- Programming/Policy/Evaluation

such as nearby Kelowna are currently employing PWLLE as peer navigators to support individuals trying to navigate service systems.

Activism/Voice/Advocacy: Seen in other communities such as Vancouver and Kelowna, PWLLE have played critical roles in advocacy and activism work⁶. LEC members could have a role in organizing action and activity within the community of Penticton. This work can be constructive and educational such as creating a homelessness simulator, creating an understanding of how the system of supports operates locally, or creating an understanding of the challenges those living in poverty face trying to obtain and maintain housing. Other suggestions included being a hub for the collection/distribution of safe supply products.

Community Decision Making: It would be ideal for an LEC to have a seat at key decision making tables particularly with respect to outreach and coordinated services that span multiple organizations. It was also noted that an LEC could provide valuable insight and suggestions for bylaw, community safety and other organizations involved in enforcement (RCMP, security). They could be consulted on decisions related to the types of housing needed, treatment facilities and other services developed to support those precariously housed or living on the streets.

It was also suggested that an LEC could play an instrumental role in providing City Council and those creating municipal policy with an understanding of the potential impacts of proposed activities. In the past, Councillors had to rely on presentations from city staff, feedback from the community and friends/family with experiences of homelessness in order to understand the situation on the streets. Forming a relationship with a group such as an LEC would enable Council to ask critical questions and gain valuable insight, directly from those who have been or currently are experiencing homelessness.

Programming/Policy/Evaluation: Participants indicated that an LEC could be utilized as a consultant/expert by organizations, agencies, or government entities to support program evaluations. By involving lived or living experience members in such a role, they could identify best practices from the perspective of PWLLE. While some participants identified groups in the community who do currently access PWLLE to advise or make improvements, this is not currently a common practice for most organizations. It was felt that having an organized group such as an LEC to assist with recruitment or feedback, organizations would have better data to work with.

In addition, the LEC could be utilized to support or co-develop/co-lead programs in the community. Any activities or programs designed by PWLLE or where PWLLE are the sole target for service, would be ideal. Finally, LEC members could be involved in an advisory role to provide direct insight into the unintended consequences of approaches, programming or enforcement of bylaws and other community initiatives.

⁶ see examples such as VANDU in Vancouver <https://vandureplace.wordpress.com/>

Expectations for a Lived Experience Circle for Penticton

Once participants had confirmed their support for a Penticton based LEC, we asked them to help us understand how/when an LEC would be accessed, what the measures of success would be for the group, and what key elements would be needed to ensure they are sustainable into the future. The following section provides a summary of what we learned.

How/When Should an LEC be Accessed?

How: All participants identified that accessing the LEC would need to be simple. Members of Kelowna's LECoH stressed that having a coordinator and key point of contact that was centralized facilitated access to the group, and was a critical element of their success. Other ways to keep connection or contact with the LEC would be to have an internet presence. Participants suggested that a common physical location for LEC meetings was useful, but an 'office location' was not necessary.

Participants also highlighted the need to promote the existence and purpose of the LEC. Promotion should be virtual but also physical to ensure that individuals living on the streets or in shelter were also aware of the group. In addition, having a physical presence at coordination tables, community events and regular community meetings would allow for people in Penticton to learn about the group and approach them during public outings to gain more information.

When: It is important to note that participants were clear that lived/living experience input did not have to solely come from the designated community group but could also come from PWLLE who were involved in their programs directly. Input from an LEC was deemed most appropriate in circumstances where a 'community' of perspectives was useful (an LEC would have a diversity of lived/living experiences in their group makeup) or when the impact was going to be felt throughout the community of Penticton. Some examples where LEC involvement would be appropriate might be:

- Municipal government or organizational policy development/changes directly impacting PWLLE
- Introduction or reduction of system wide services, approaches or programming (i.e. complex care, supportive housing, etc.)
- Shelter or sheltering policies including cold/hot weather, location and type
- Coordination tables
- Land use decisions (parks, park uses, designated outdoor sheltering spaces, water fountains, etc.)
- Enforcement approaches (bylaw, RCMP, security organizations)
- Community wide anti-stigma or advocacy campaigns
- Community wide educational opportunities related to realities of poverty, drug use, homelessness, etc.

How would Success be Measured?

Measuring the success of this circle was seen to be critical to ensure its long-term sustainability. Funders and community(ies) are more likely to engage and support entities that they perceive to be successful. Through discussions with participants, literature and other lived/living experience groups, several different categories of success could be considered. One key idea stood out as critical, ***whatever the definition(s) of success, members of the circle should be leading those discussions and should ultimately determine the measures.***

Success was described in ways that could be measured routinely as outputs of group activities or reflect outcomes or impacts that could take years to realize. The creation and maintenance of a group of this nature was considered a success. Others identified that a positive group image and statistics on how much the group was used would also be a measure of success.

The table below outlines a summary of qualitative and quantitative measurements. The full range of ideas are contained in Appendix III. Some are simple and easy to undertake, others would require sufficient supports, likely from researchers, students, or community organizations such as a backbone or others to track and evaluate.

Table 1: Success Metrics

Category	Description
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An assessment of how well known the group is in the community
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerical tracking of various activities
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measures that demonstrate how the LEC is making a difference in critical areas
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement of milestones related to group creation and maintenance
Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection of anecdotes showcasing history, work, notes from the streets
Addressing Stigma/ Advocacy/ Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixture of qualitative and quantitative measures
Policy/ Decision Making/ Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track success at impacting decision making
LE Skill Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-Assessments

What Would Make an LEC Sustainable?

Participants provided excellent insight into the key features that an LEC would need to be sustainable over time. Combined with additional information from the literature and feedback from the LECoH group in Kelowna we have summarized the core idea into specific categories. In this section we will identify the core elements that either **lead to** or **derail** sustainability.

Sustainability Elements

- Initial and evolving structure
- Funding
- Governance
- Coordination/ Administration
- Training and supports

Lead To: Participants highlighted the need for the development of trust in all aspects of the circle. This related to inter-group dynamics, trust between coordinating entities or individuals and the circle as well as any oversight organizations, and finally, trust between the circle and the community. A second highlight was securing and managing diversity within the group to ensure that the circle represented a variety of perspectives. This commitment to diversity was seen as a strength, but also potentially a challenge to maintaining stability through the life of the circle. Finally, flexibility and a commitment to designing an LEC that fits the needs of the community was also strongly recommended.

Derail: While most of the feedback between community/service provider respondents and PWLLE was consistent, there were several differences worth mentioning as they relate to long term stability and sustainability. When service providers/community members discussed a vision for the LEC, they often referred to the need for a Board or Advisory group to support the members of the circle. In addition, they focused on structures and processes designed to ensure safety within the group. This group also focused on providing training and supports for LEC members.

In contrast, when PWLLE discussed safety, they did not mention oversight bodies. Instead, they referred to ensuring trauma informed approaches were utilized and that the safety of relationships were prioritized through things like confidentiality codes between members. This was echoed by feedback from LECoH. LECoH also emphasized that while safety and structure was

important for the group, it should not be used as a tool for exclusion or rigidity. Their experience

Research Note: These differences highlight the risk of creating a circle that exists to benefit how existing organizations would see an LEC versus creating a circle defined by and for PWLLE. Clarity in expectations and roles for this circle will be critical to long term success. Measuring the group by institutional ideas of how the circle should operate and conduct its work may show the group as “unsuccessful” if it is focused on objectives identified by

stressed that it was more important to include a diversity of members. That diversity would likely provide the necessary range of skills and safety to support the group.

Initial and evolving structure

Having a structure that is flexible, adaptable and able to evolve was seen as very important. It can be difficult to predict what the future needs or direction of such a group might be, particularly as the current landscape of government policy, drug toxicity, community safety, etc. continue to change. This was also reflected in the desire to have group diversity.

With diversity comes a responsibility to make the group, its meetings, training, and opportunities as accessible as possible. This means considering locations that are somewhat centralized and easy to get to via transit. The meeting spaces should reflect a willingness to meet participants where they are and consider the needs of smokers, those requiring childcare and access to overdose supplies if necessary. Choosing locations that are accessible to those with mobility challenges should also be considered.

Having food and other amenities at the meeting was also considered important. Food, whether purchased or pot luck, does several things. It builds community, it eliminates a barrier to participation when people are not trying to contribute on an empty stomach, and it is a powerful motivator for attendance no matter what kind of group you have. Choosing member-friendly foods will also be important. Consider foods that are softer in nature, low in sugar, high in nutrition and flavour to support those with compromised gum/dental health or other health concerns.

The structure of the group should have a level of formality to it, in particular a definition of goals, mission/vision, roles and responsibilities of the group, conditions for participation (i.e. respectful community, confidentiality, etc.), decision making processes, conflict resolution approaches, and leadership structure (if any). The structure should also address how people will communicate with each other and how the group will be contacted. It was seen as especially helpful to have regular meetings at consistent times and in consistent places. Ideally, decisions about the structure should be led by PWLLE.

Finally, there was discussion about how the group might exist as a legal entity⁷. It could exist as an informal, grassroots organization that requires little formality to operate and conduct its work. However, most participants indicated that more formality would be a supportive and effective structure. While there are several different configurations, the first focused on having the group exist within a more traditional nonprofit society structure with a formal board or advisory/steering group to provide input and remove barriers. The second focused on a more autonomous structure, with little oversight. Likely the ideal structure for a group lies somewhere in the middle and may change



⁷ Discussions of structure are covered more fully in the accompanying LEC Toolkit

as the group evolves. Initially for set up of the group, dealing with administration and funding issues, etc. it may be advantageous to have an oversight group, or to simply “locate” within another organization⁸⁸. Many existing lived experience groups do work within an existing organizational structure to take advantage of existing staffing and structures for support.

Roles

Participants identified that creation of supporting documents that outline roles, responsibilities, behaviours, etc. was important. LECOH recommends a Terms of Reference, formalizing who can be a member and for how long can they be in the group. They also recommend documents that outline how and when to recruit participants, the minimum number of people needed to sustain the group, how group members are decided, and the roles of alumni members. Some groups may even want to specify how many individuals from each category, lived or living experience, should be part of the membership, and whether there should also be categories for specific groups for participation. This is to ensure diversity and could include Indigenous, senior, youth, LGBTQ2I+, and other relevant minorities that may be important to this community.

Safety

Ensuring that participants in the group felt safe was a concern that surfaced during our discussions. The more diversity in a group, the more complex the environment becomes, the more need to define what safety looks like and how it can be supported. In particular:

- Creating an environment where everyone feels safe to contribute was important. Everyone included both members of the group, but also members attending the group to present, get advice, or simply observe.
- Codes of conduct for all participants that outline not only how the group wants to interact, but also gives guidance and perspective to guests was important. In particular, a judgement free circle was highlighted as critical with a strong focus on compassion and understanding
- Long term safety would be supported by ensuring that counselling or similar services were provided to support any negative consequences from participation.

Funding

Participants felt that for a lived/living experience group to be successful longer term, they would recommend a diversity of funding sources be found. They also felt strongly that, when possible, members should be paid for providing their expertise to the community. PWLLE recommended that the group look to make payment accessible meaning that the administrative burden should be low, payment should be in the form of honorariums and ideally there should be no tax forms. Not providing financial compensation could result in barriers to participation. This brought forward several key concerns identified in the literature and from our research:

- The group will need to create a structure for when and how payments are received by participants in order to maintain as much parity and transparency as possible.
- Payments can affect existing forms of support from government sources. In some cases, it may affect eligibility for funding through existing programs. This should be investigated and documented in order to provide participants with as much information as possible.

⁸⁸ Groups such as 100 More Homes Penticton may be well suited for this role

- At the time this document was produced, a threshold of \$500 maximum for honorariums has been set by CRA. If an organization is giving out more than \$500 to a person in a given tax year, the organization must produce a tax document for that individual.
- It may be advisable to consider monthly stipends or some other predictable form of compensation to help participants to manage tax implications.

Coordination/administration

In addition to discussing structure and governance, the role of a coordinator who would facilitate the administrative pieces of this work was important. It was felt that this would assist with establishing clear communication lines and generally keeping the group organized so they would be able to focus on simply providing their expertise, time and talents. It was suggested that the ideal coordinator would also have some lived experience of homelessness.

The coordinator could fulfill a key role in the promotion and awareness of the group and its activities. It was a strong suggestion from PWLLE that the coordinator could pull together materials like a street newsletter that would showcase writing, art, etc. from individuals who had lived/living experience of homelessness.

Training and Supports

When discussing sustainability, supports and training were mentioned often by participants. They felt that folks who were part of an LEC could need not only physical, emotional, and organizational supports, but would also need training to support the work they would do. A detailed list of supports brainstormed during this project is located in [Appendix IV: Types of Training Supports](#)

Costs

Costs to convene LECs will vary depending on the type of structure (more formalized, more expensive), the number of members, the number of meetings, and the kinds of work and levels of engagement that the LEC is involved in. Ultimately, it is difficult to give a general figure due to so many variables being at play.

This research does support communities trying to estimate costs by providing some categories of expenses, examples of items in each category and some general costs that most LECs will incur regardless of activity. Categories and Examples of Costs are described in Table 2.

Important Note: When considering honoraria and other forms of payment for LEC members, it is important to understand the tax implications. At a certain point, the honoraria become taxable (Canada Revenue Agency) so an LEC is advised to track disbursements and ensure all members are aware of the requirements for reporting honoraria as income.

LEC members on income assistance may also be negatively affected by income received through honoraria. It is important to have open discussions with members to ensure they are aware.

Table 2: Categories and Examples of Costs for an LEC

Category	Description	Examples ⁹
General Costs	These are costs all LECs will likely need to operate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honoraria (at living wage if possible) (LEC) • Bus tickets/Gas money (LEC) • Food for meetings (LEC) • Facility fees for meetings
Coordination/ Admin	These costs are related to coordinating LEC work and individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinator (paid work) (C) • Organizational fees (expenses related to starting up group and maintaining legal status) • Email (C) • Computer (C) • Network Storage (hosted online such as MS Teams or Google) (C) • Internet (C) • Access to office/supplies (periodically to support activities)
Communication/ Promotion	These costs support bringing awareness of the LEC to the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website/online presence • Social media • Cell phone (C) • Business Cards • Name badges (ID LEC members)
Technology	These costs address the technology needs of an LEC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEC members may need access to technology to support the work of the group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cell phones (including data plan) ○ Computer/tablet ○ Internet connections • Software (Google Suite or MS Office)
Training	Training costs will vary significantly by group and by individual member.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer Skills for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Online meetings ○ Accessing online documents • Website development • Social media • Trauma informed practice (C) • Conflict de-escalation • Public speaking

⁹ Items marked (C) are expenses specific to the Coordinator role)

Recommendations

Based on the community conversations, recommendations from service providers, municipal leaders, PWLLE and others, there is both a need and a willingness to introduce a lived/living experience circle to serve the general community of Penticton. We recommend utilizing existing lived/living experience groups and their supporting organizations to identify next steps.

There are a variety of next steps that could support the founding of this group. We offer the following points for consideration as first steps:

- Convene interested parties to review the findings in this community report and identify potential leaders willing to take action
- Identify stakeholders who could support or derail the creation of an LEC
- Utilize existing lived/living experience groups and their supporting organizations to identify potential LEC members
- Identify a structure to support the LEC in its initial phases.
 - Penticton currently hosts the 100 More Homes collective. 100 More Homes has both a formal relationship with the City of Penticton, and the confidence and social capital with local organizations, to help sustain this work.
- Create a 'best guess' budget, and identify and secure initial project funding for the LEC
- Identify a potential Coordinator/Facilitator
- Meet with Central Okanagan Journey Home Society and LECoH to learn more about the early days of their LEC

Once a coordinating team has been identified and work has begun, more steps will emerge. The LEC will evolve at a pace that meets the needs of the community.

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Appendix I - Research Team Bios

Shawn Kelly

Journeyman Chef. Want to use my experiences in homelessness that I experienced in my life, to shed more light on this situation from my perspective. A person who has lived it. Experienced homelessness in my teenage years and other points in my life. For example, when I lost my wife in 2015 from multiple sclerosis. As well as suffering a major injury falling from the roof of a 2-story building. In which I had a major relapse into my addictions. I lost everything.

Bobby Hines

I was introduced to the research team through my employer, Ask Wellness Society. I wanted to contribute to meaningful solutions to homelessness. I have lived experience with homelessness and addiction. I now work with vulnerable individuals who are recovering from homelessness.

Annika Kirk

Annika Kirk is going into her fourth year as a Business Administration student at Okanagan College specializing in accounting. She works as a Research Assistant at Okanagan College on different projects, including comparative tax policy for local industry, lived experience circles on homelessness, and social enterprise work within the alcohol industry. She feels passionately the LEC work from her own lived experience and understanding the importance of the lived experience perspective within policy and program development.

Stephanie Griffiths, Ph.D., R. Psych.

I am a College Professor in the Psychology Department of Okanagan College, based in Penticton, and an Adjunct in the School and Applied Psychology Program in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. As a clinician, I think applied research is important both at the individual and societal level. As an instructor and a researcher, I can think of few social issues more important than homelessness, mental health, and addiction. We need to do everything we can to help our communities address these issues. Fortunately, the Vancouver Foundation, Okanagan College, and our community partners provided an opportunity to explore how lived experience could help the community address these problems.

Kerry Rempel, PhD (Candidate), MBA, BPE

I am a College Professor at the Okanagan School of Business, Okanagan College based in Kelowna. I am a founding member of the Kelowna Homelessness Research Collaborative and a Board member for the Institute for Community Engaged Research at UBC-Okanagan. As a practitioner/academic, I focus my research and teaching on social change, trying to understand how organizations and systems work together to address pressing social issues. Through applied research and course projects, I bring social issues into the classroom and provide opportunities for students to explore how to make change and use their knowledge of business and organizations to create good within their communities.

Appendix II – Expanded Literature Review

The following table outlines some of the key resources and findings from our review of academic and public sources.

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Key Articles</i>
<i>Defining Lived/Living Experience</i>	<p>Key considerations around a definition of lived/living experience included being specific around what the “experience” was. Some groups are linked only to experiences of homelessness, but others included or excluded experiences of poverty, addiction, mental illness and others.</p> <p>One working definition that our research team liked was created by a lived experience group <i>“A PWLE is a person who has been, or currently is homeless. We want to honour and include people who have experienced different types and lengths of homelessness, <u>if being homeless was a significant part of their life.</u>”</i> (TAEH PWLE Reference Group, 2018, p. 4)</p>	<p>(Dudley, Distasio, Sareen, & Isaak, 2010) (Nelson, et al., 2016) (TAEH PWLE Reference Group, 2018)</p>
<i>Defining Knowledge or Expertise</i>	<p>It may benefit communities to also formally recognize or “name” the knowledge that PWLLE have. This may also include different ways of knowing if traditional Indigenous contributions are to be included.</p>	<p>(Eversole, 2010)</p>
<i>Importance of Relationship Building</i>	<p>For projects that seek to involve input and participation from PWLLE, effort and time needs to be dedicated to creating a strong relationship between all participants in the project. Relationship building allows for a common language to be established, roles to be defined and agreed to, trust to build, and for individuals to understand the contributions possible from all participants.</p> <p>The strength of the relationships between participants lends credibility to projects with all stakeholders (including PWLLE) and can help to ensure the results of the projects are accepted.</p>	<p>(Myrah, Rempel, & Laing, Allyship in Research Toolkit, 2021) (Nelson, et al., 2016)</p>
<i>Pitfalls to Avoid/Barriers to Including LE</i>	<p>Be aware of the power differences in projects involving PWLLE and creating situations where “us and them” are present. It is important to ensure that the consultation and participation is genuine and not simply a token gesture. Involving PWLLE experience in planning rather than just consultation will help to mitigate tokenism and minimize power differences.</p>	<p>(Eversole, 2010) (Myrah, Rempel, & Laing, Allyship in Research Toolkit, 2021)</p>

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Key Articles</i>
<i>Examples of LE Groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that there can be distrust between participants and find ways to mitigate and build trust • Consider who ‘leads’ activities. If the leadership is always in the hands of those without LE, is the process inclusive? • Ensure that everyone’s ‘knowledge’ is valued/included • Find and support individuals who can act as a translator between different groups of participants or knowledge holders • Consider what access resources (monetary, technical, psychological, etc.) may be preventing individuals from fully participating in the process, including simply feeling that they ‘belong’ as part of the team • Participants with LE can find themselves at the margins during participation due to a lack of familiarity with what is expected for group participation, lack of understanding of how committees operate and lack of experience working in a consultative/collaborative role • Conflict/issue can result when not all participants are prepared for the work expected of the group. This means also providing training for those without LE. Success will be limited if non-LE members do not mitigate their approaches, language and practices to support the inclusion of PWLLE. • Challenges occur when there is little time to create the formal structures within groups. Many projects assume that there will be little time needed to iron out roles, expectations, and build relationships, but this is usually not the case • Structures/processes that work well for large organizations or individuals who work in them, may not work well for PWLLE. They may not have the ability to access technology, attend meetings in particular locations or at particular times. In addition, processes larger organizations use to pay individuals (i.e. bank accounts, addresses, waiting times for payment, etc.) may not work well for PWLLE • Organizations may not adequately budget for the costs (anticipated and unanticipated) that can occur with LE groups <p><u>Research:</u> PWLLE have been active members of research projects throughout Canada.</p> <p><u>Program Development:</u> PWLLE have been involved in building a variety of programs and responses to challenging problems.</p>	(Nelson, et al., 2016) (Stapelton & Soh, 2019)

Concept	Findings	Key Articles
<p><i>Promising Practices for LE Groups</i></p>	<p><u>Provision of Service:</u> Speakers Bureau where LE members are available to speak on particular subjects related to homelessness. Other LE groups have been involved in the mentorship of other PWLLE.</p> <p>Several practices for involving PWLLE were evident in the literature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived Experience Circles (populated specifically with PWLLE) benefit from hiring or appointing a specific individual to coordinate the group and/or act as an ambassador. These individuals take on the responsibility for much of the administrative work required to keep these circles functioning • Creating an environment of shared learning where PWLLE are supported to gain the skills and expertise related to sharing their knowledge (i.e. facilitation, public speaking, computer skills, etc.) This could be supported by creating a mentorship group • Ensure that circles have a clear purpose. Consider formalizing (as much as is possible) roles, expectations and responsibilities. Include PWLLE in the financial management of the group where possible • Support the group to have varied backgrounds that are a broad representation of the homeless in the community • Train other organizations to on how best to work with a LE Circle • Consider how to compensate PWLLE members for their time. Ideally this is through monetary compensation. Many PWLLE face barriers to participate fully without this support (i.e. child care, technology costs such as internet bandwidth, transportation costs) and their cost of volunteering is relatively higher. The literature advises an hourly rate comparable to the regional 'living wage' 	<p>(Nelson, et al., 2016) (TAEH PWLE Reference Group, 2018) (Patterson, Schmidt, & Zabkiewicz, 2010)</p>
<p><i>Value of LE Circles</i></p>	<p>Adding the voices of PWLLE to program/policy development has many benefits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PWLLE provide insight into what will actually work in their localized communities and add context to the work that is missing without their voices. In addition, their perspective can highlight what interventions or approaches will <i>not</i> be successful. • PWLLE are a necessary stakeholder in addressing complex issues such as homelessness. Their voices have been missing in solution creation • LE Circles involved in program creation and evaluation add credibility and legitimacy to the development process 	<p>(Eversole, 2010) (Clifford, Wilson, & Harris, 2019) (Frankish, Hwang, & Quantz, 2009) (Nelson, et al., 2016) (Patterson, Schmidt, & Zabkiewicz, 2010) (Nichols & Gaetz, 2014) (Stapelton & Soh, 2019)</p>

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Key Articles</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established LE Circles can shortcut the time required to build relationships and develop necessary skills because they have a working history with the sector they are supporting• LE Circles can act as excellent translators to both their LE communities, but also to provide translation to service providers, government entities and others. This is possible when they are provided with the appropriate resources and training to undertake this role	

Appendix III: Measures of Success

Category	Description	How to Measures (qualitative/quantitative)
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An assessment of how well known the group is in the community (including general population, service providers, municipal government) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yearly survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who knows of the group, who does not? What are they known for doing? Street/shelter/supportive housing survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> determine awareness among PWLLE
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event invitations Numbers of requests to participate/give feedback, etc. # of regular meetings/tables invited to Database of contacts that keeps track of who are key contacts the group meets with (look at yearly increases/decreases or at new connections) # of visits to shelters/supportive housing/outdoor sheltering spaces Call out numbers (if group is used to support outreach or first response) # of consultations # of events group attends and presents at # conference and advocacy activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking system that records the activities of the group (individuals and group together) Database of contacts Meeting minutes to record/track who engages with the group as well as topics of discussion Track presentations the group makes (conferences, other groups)
Success/ Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of educational materials (combat stigma, encourage better understanding of homelessness situation) Decrease in municipal policies that have to be reviewed due to unintended consequences Decrease in barriers to accessing supports By-Name-List – advocacy for aggregate information Increase in numbers of people accessing services, leaving the streets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List and repository of materials created by the group for presentations and education Street/shelter/supportive housing survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify barriers, conflicts and track changes/ability to access services Track changes in stigma felt by those on the street Community Survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track stigma, attitudes and awareness of homelessness issues Support efforts to track how

Category	Description	How to Measures (qualitative/quantitative)
Set up for Success/ Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase levels of satisfaction/ease in navigating service • Attendance and engagement of members • Can maintain/recruit sufficient numbers for the circle • Documented mission/vision, policies and practices • Member matrix to ensure diversity of membership (want a wide range of voices (inclusion) in this group with varying levels of connection to current homelessness) • Support system in place for members • Sufficient funding for activities • Website, document repository, emails, access to technology/phones, etc. – access to all administrative pieces to support group operations • Autonomous status (group exists on it's own) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearly PLECoH survey of circle members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Satisfaction, safety, training, support, opportunities, barriers • Yearly survey of service providers to gather feedback and suggestions, evaluate impact/activities • Track success at getting grants/sponsorships for operational support
Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of the group activities (video, audio, written, other) to tell the story of how organizations started and operates • Document stories of members for education, inspiration, mentorship to others • Knowledge mobilization – the “stories” are accessible to others • Stories of successful interactions, engagements of the group and of the impacts of their work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List and repository of materials created by the group for presentations and education • Case studies, papers, toolkits, etc. written by/with the group
Addressing Stigma/ Advocacy/ Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking changing attitudes in the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anti-homelessness views ○ Change in attitudes ○ Enhanced sense of community between those on the street and those housed/owning businesses • Document work with service providers (e.g. Interior Health, shelters, etc.) to address stigma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Track stigma, attitudes and awareness of homelessness issues • Media scan of new – track stories and media coverage to identify changes • Street/shelter/supportive housing survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Track changes in stigma felt by those on the street

Category	Description	How to Measures (qualitative/quantitative)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track engagements with municipal governments and provincial ministries • # of educational or advocacy activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track # of education sessions and any work that comes from those sessions • Document/track meetings with municipal and provincial governments • Tracking system that records the activities of the group (individuals and group together)
Policy/ Decision Making/ Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track success at impacting decision making • Identify changes to decision making processes to include LE voice or consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track number of times PLECoH is invited to provide input, feedback, critique • Track number of policies, program evaluation, program or service development that visibly utilized PLECoH input • Document changes to policy or decision making processes
LE Skill Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased confidence in PLECoH members • # of training sessions held to support PLECoH members • # volunteer time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearly PLECoH survey of circle members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Satisfaction, safety, training, support, opportunities, barriers • Tracking system that records the activities of the group (individuals and group together) • Document number and type of training PLECoH members attend

Appendix IV: Types of Training Supports

Physical Supports:

- Bus tickets or other supports (carpools) to get to and from meetings or activities
- Group members may need data plans for phones or other technology (tablets, computers) to be able to reliably receive and send email, participate on video calls, etc.
- Access to a recurring meeting space
- Food at meetings

Emotional Supports:

- May need access to counselling supports to address issues from participating in group meetings/activities.
- Opportunities to build trust among the group
- Opportunities for frequent check-ins with group members
- Self-care training

Organizational Supports:

- Supports to manage the day-to-day work of connecting individuals together, answering and responding to requests for support from community, organizing meetings and support with fundraising and honorariums

Training Supports¹⁰:

- Conflict resolution training, de-escalation training – this would support members when presenting in community and potentially when doing work on the streets
- Public speaking training – to assist members to feel comfortable asking/answering questions and speaking at public events
- Technology training to assist with email, documents, etc.
- Peer support training

¹⁰ Through interviews with LECoH, they stressed that training to support activities could be important, but were careful to mention that it should not be used as a barrier to participation in an LEC. They advised that opportunities to build these skills would be welcomed, but that no one should be required to engage in the training. They also highlighted that if LECs recruit a diverse group of PWLLE, it is likely that many of these skills already exist within the cohort.