

National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) Conference 2024:

## **Building an Organizational Culture that Supports People with Lived Experience as Staff Members**

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# LIVED EXPERIENCE

## How can Lived Experience be defined?

- An individual's perspective, personal identities, and history, beyond professional or educational experience.
- Knowledge and understanding gained when an individual has lived through something.
- Having a first-hand individual human experience with homelessness, mental health, substance use, justice involvement, domestic violence, and/or extreme poverty.



# LIVED EXPERIENCE – SAFE SPACE



- **DIVERSIVE**
- **INCLUSIVE**
- **ACCEPTING**
- **WELCOMING**

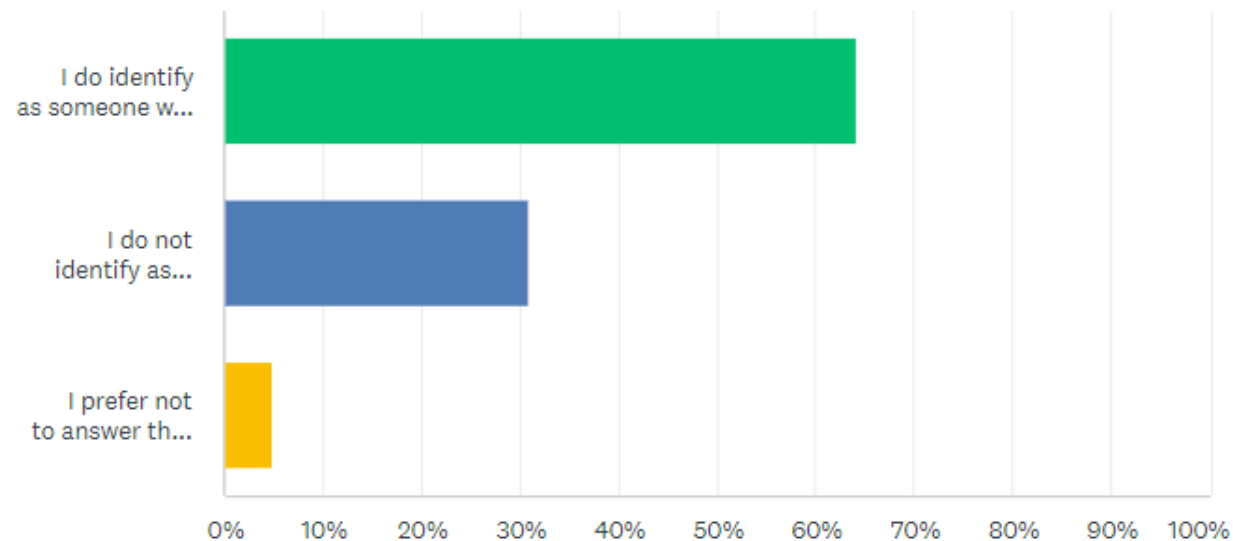


# SELF-DISCLOSURE



# LIVED EXPERIENCE – STAFF SURVEY

Would you describe yourself as someone with Lived Experience?

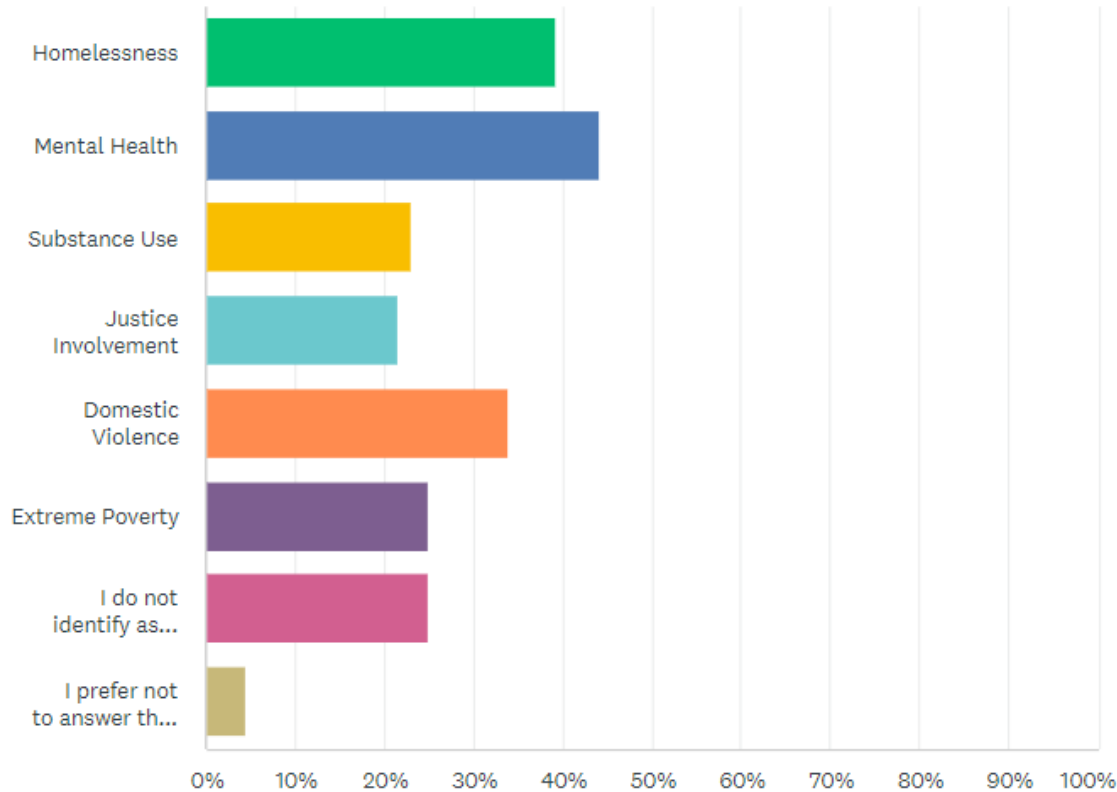


Responses	
I do identify as someone with Lived Experience	64%
I do not identify as someone with Lived Experience	31%
I prefer not to answer this question	5%



# LIVED EXPERIENCE – STAFF SURVEY

Would you describe yourself as someone with Lived Experience in any of the following areas?



Responses	
Homelessness	39%
Mental Health	44%
Substance Use	23%
Justice Involvement	22%
Domestic Violence	34%
Extreme Poverty	25%
I do not identify as someone with lived experience	25%
I prefer not to answer this question	4%



# THEMES THAT EMERGED – STAFF SURVEY

- The work can be triggering, combined with how it can take a toll on one's mental health and increase the need for self-care
- Advocacy around increased pay and compensation, even an appeal for affordable housing solutions
- Management support
- More structured supervision
- Individual, strength-based training plan based on my role

# BE BRAVE – ASK DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

- In the context of your organization, ask “Who are we?”
- Do we look like those we serve?
- When it comes to decision-making, ask who is at the table, and why, as well as who is not at the table, and why not.
- Do we value those with lived experience – how, how often, and in what ways?



# RECOMMENDATIONS

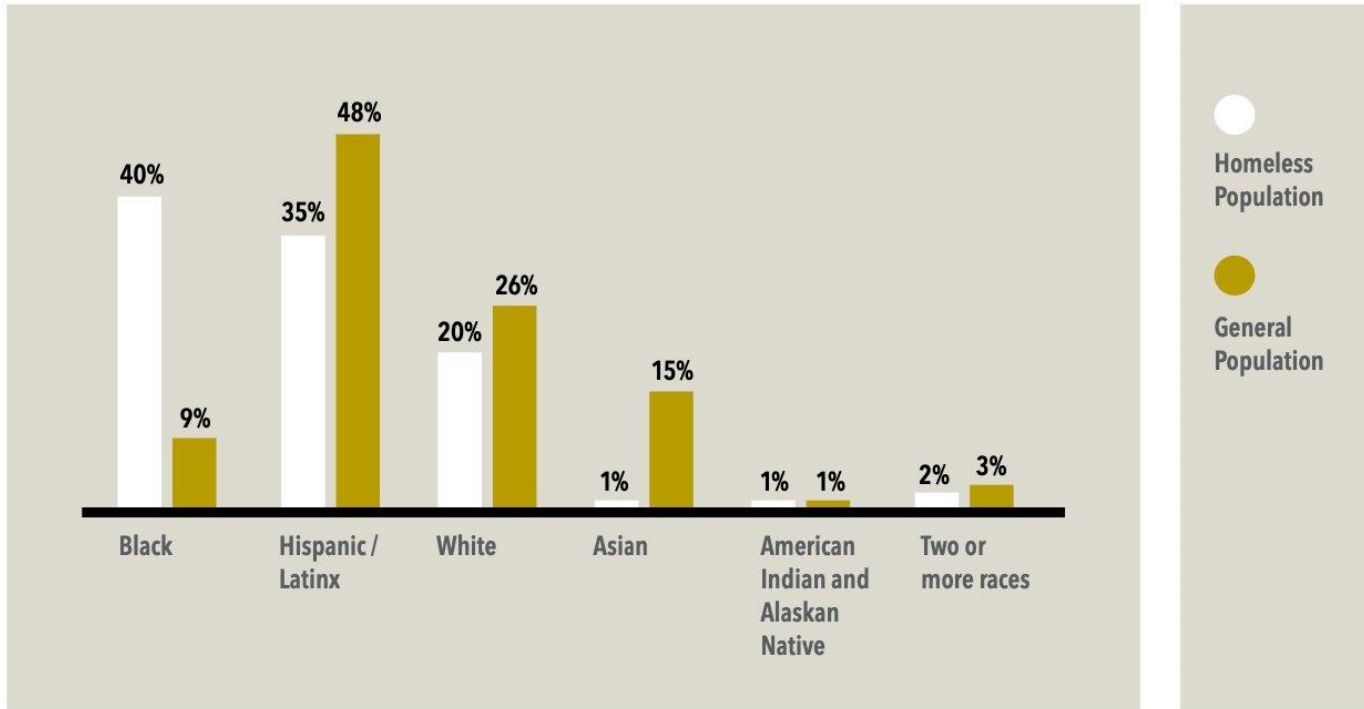
- Conduct staff surveys, to understand who you are as an organization. Gain insight into what your staff need, in order to thrive in the work.
- Lift staff voices up into decision-making, by including that as a goal in your strategic plan and be accountable to that goal.
- Be trauma-informed – ensure that staff at every level are trained in Trauma-Informed Care and approach the work accordingly.
- Provide staff with more structured supervision as they join your workforce. This can be a safe space for team members to debrief, be validated and feel supported.
- Create individual, strength-based training plans based on team members' role. Expand their toolkit.
- Provide resources like an Employee Assistance Program that staff can tap into when the work and/or personal situations become heavy.

# BLACK PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



# BLACK PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

**GRAPH 1:** Homeless Population vs. General Population, by Race & Ethnicity, Los Angeles Continuum of Care, 2017



Sources: Homeless population data represent estimates from the 2017 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count for the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (LA CoC). General population data taken from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey: 5-Year Estimates for Los Angeles County.

The findings of the January 2017 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count confirmed a troubling and ongoing trend.

According to the 2017 Count, although Black individuals accounted for 9% of the total population in Los Angeles County, they represented 40% of the homeless population.



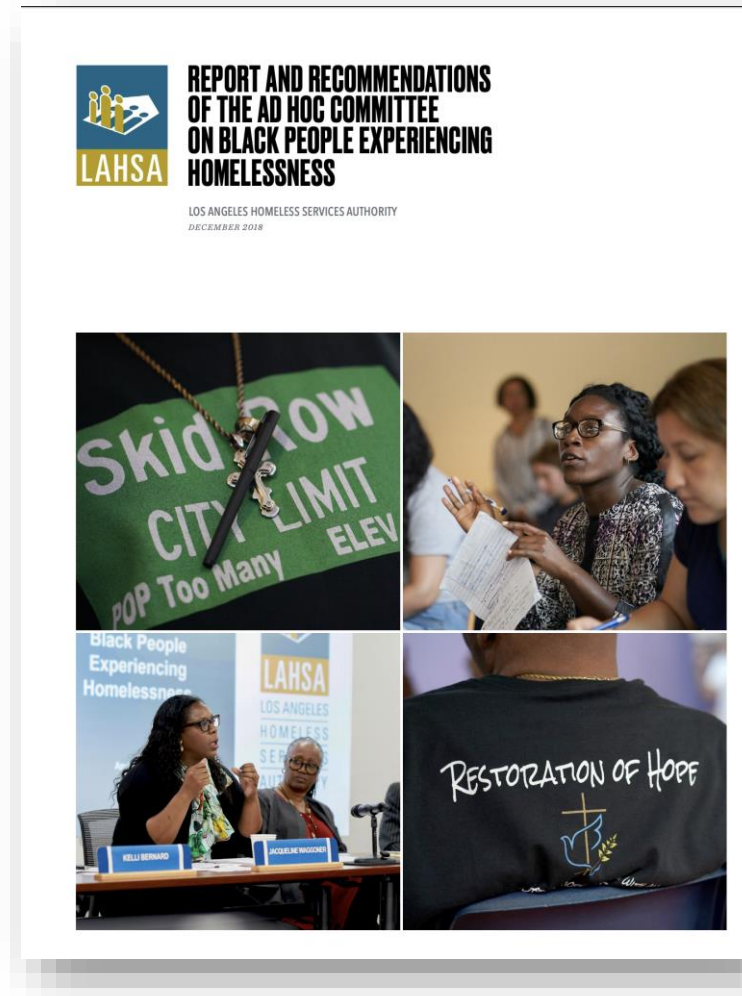
# BPEH RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation #13

With input from community organizations with successful program models, advocate for and fund the establishment of a cross-agency community partnership that provides a holistic approach to addressing employment barriers—including employment training and placement, mental health services, leadership training to advocate for workers' rights, and mentorship opportunities.

## Recommendation #14

Ensure that living-wage workforce development programs and employment training programs are aligned with major growth sectors in the Los Angeles region, adequately funded, accessible to people experiencing homelessness (e.g., proximate locations, transportation and childcare assistance, low-barrier eligibility requirements, compensated through stipends, etc.), and offer services tailored to Black people experiencing homelessness—particularly Black youth. Program development should include a broad range of opportunities, including entrepreneurial and small business opportunities



# THE LIVED EXPERTS ACADEMY

Based on the recommendations formed by the Ad-Hoc Steering Committee, St. Joseph Center piloted the Lived-Expert Academy.

Every participant in this cohort identifies with having lived-experience in one or more of the following:

- Homelessness
- Substance Use
- Mental Health
- Domestic Violence
- Justice Involvement

This pilot is grant funded by the Hilton Foundation, the Weingart Foundation, and California Community Foundation who truly believe in the vital importance of lived experts leading this work.

**BLACK PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS PROJECT**  
Lived Expert Academy

Black people account for less than 10% of L.A.'s population, yet they make up one-third of its unhoused people.

**OUR GOALS**

- CREATE A FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT**  
Develop a framework and mechanism for the co-creation of homelessness policy and programs with people with lived experience.
- EXPAND DEVELOPMENT**  
Increase the representation, input, and decision making of people with lived experience in solving homelessness.
- CO-CREATE ENGAGE**  
Provide people with lived experience the tools and training to successfully co-create homelessness programs and policies.

**ABOUT US!**  
The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) Commission called for the creation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness (BPEH) to examine contributing factors in the over representation, increase racial equity within the homeless service delivery system, and to develop recommendations to better address the problem and meet the needs of BPEH.

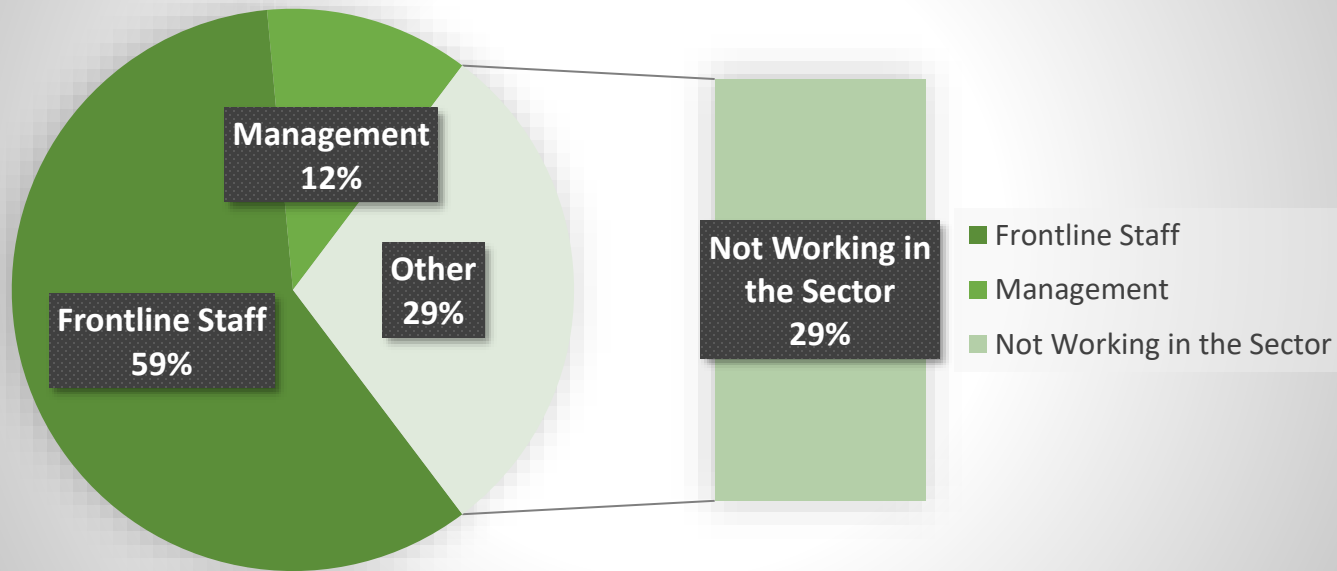
Including Lived Experts (LE), people with firsthand knowledge of what works and what needs improvement in our care system will provide important context and relevant information. Co-creating with Lived Experts will design solutions with people rather than for them. It legitimizes different ways of knowing and expertise and strengthens the diversity and equity of the work.

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# THE LIVED EXPERTS ACADEMY

## Lived Experts Academy



Frontline Staff Positions include:

- Case Managers
- Housing Navigators
- Peer Specialists
- Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Counselors
- Community Health Workers (CHW)

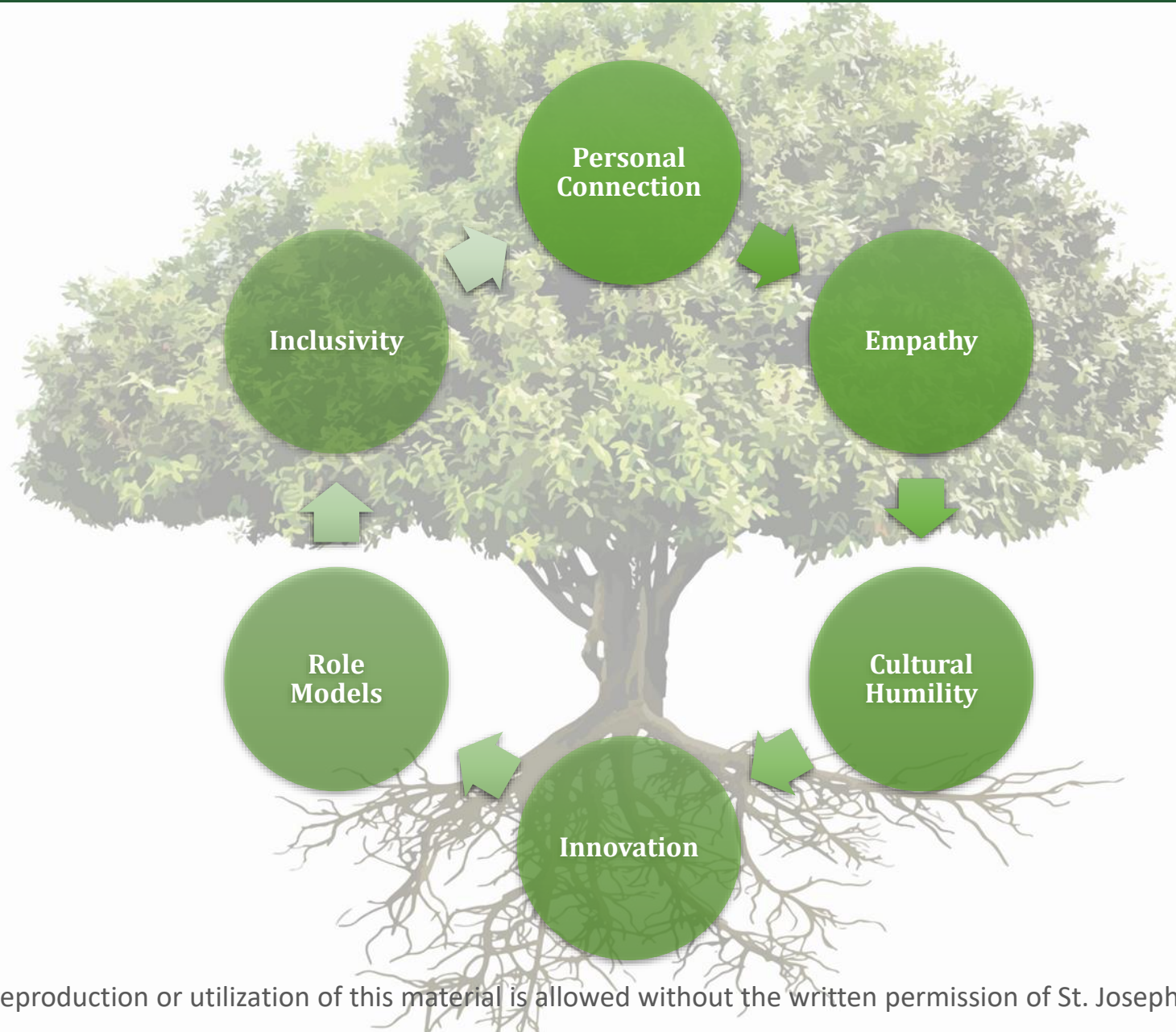
Management Positions include:

- Program Managers
- Senior Managers





# THE LIVED EXPERTS ACADEMY



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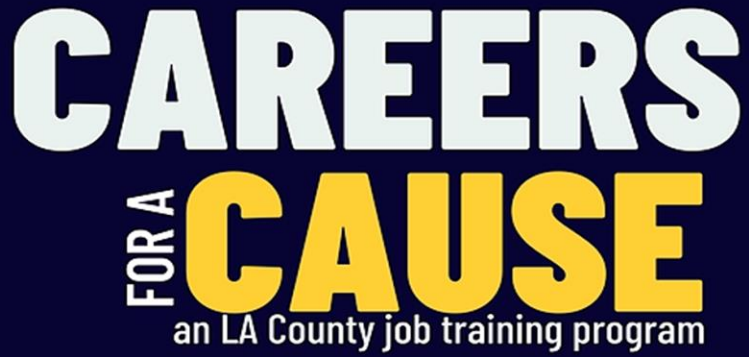
*“The work load the last 3-4 months has been daunting. With more and more vacant positions and high-turnover of staff, a lot has fallen onto my plate. Not prioritizing self-care in this work, especially the challenging times, is a one-way ticket to burnout”*

*“Something I’ve noticed throughout my time at \_\_\_\_\_ is that there’s not a lot of support for frontline staff (i.e. case managers) when we’re triggered by the work. When something traumatizing happens, it’s like we just have to accept it, bottle it up, and try our best not to take it home with us.”*





# Workforce Development Programs in Los Angeles County



Careers for a Cause (C4C) is an eight-week training initiative that links residents of LA County who have firsthand experience with homelessness, involvement in the justice system, or other forms of marginalization, with practical, paid training and job opportunities in the social services field.



# RECOMMENDATIONS



Create an Inclusive  
Hiring Process



Inclusive  
Onboarding



Build a Strong  
Culture of Belonging



Inclusive Leadership



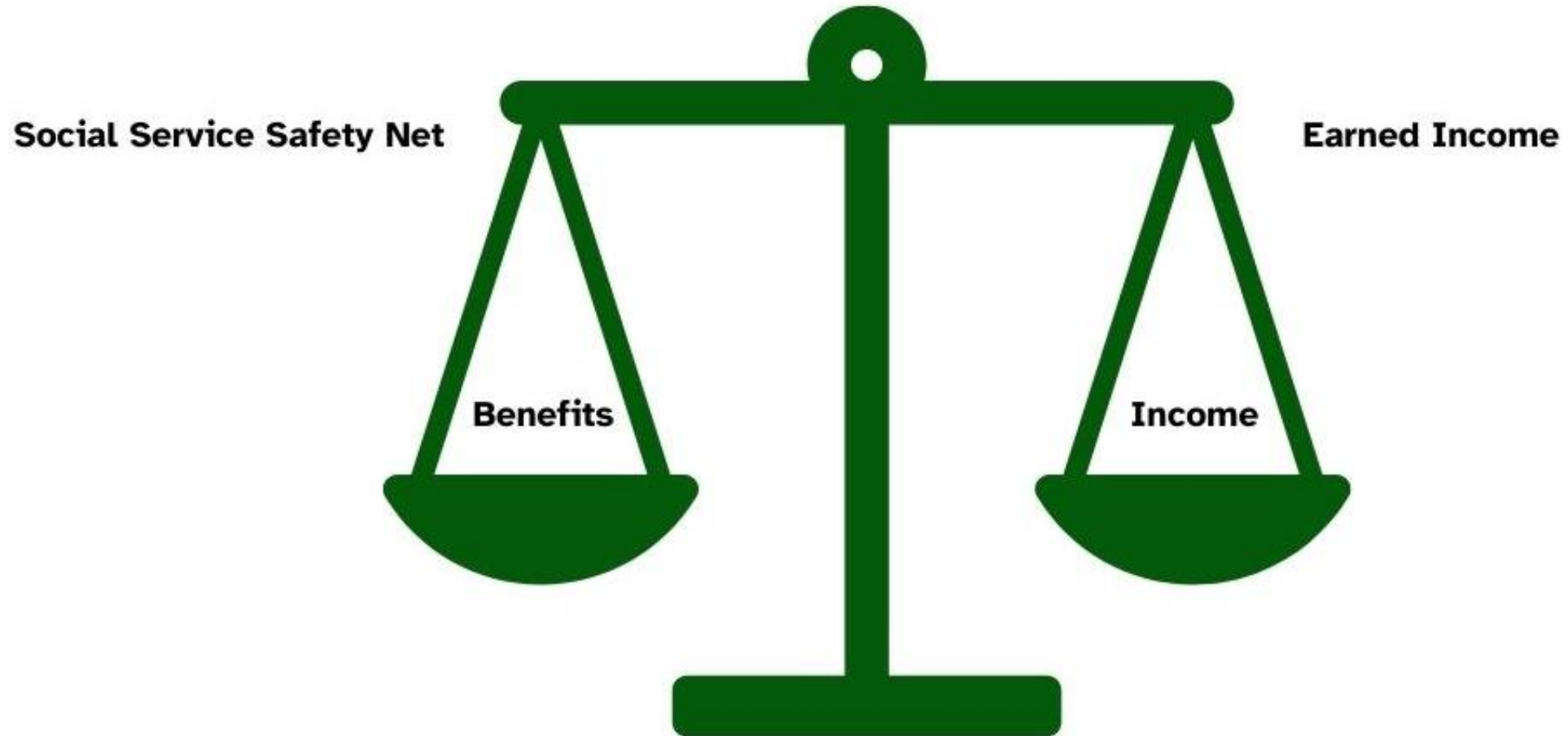
Valuing One's Lived  
Experience



# BENEFITS CLIFF



# BENEFITS CLIFF



# BENEFITS CLIFF

Loss of benefits or long periods of plateau often disincentivize work. The looming financial insecurity is scary and terrifying. Trying to navigate a disjointed set of federal, state, and local programs is nearly impossible.



**GENERAL  
WELFARE**



**FOOD  
ASSISTANCE**



**HEALTHCARE**



**CHILDCARE**



**HOUSING  
SUBSIDIES**



# BENEFITS CLIFF

Client shares personal story of the poverty trap

Social Service Safety	Income
Social Security Disability (SSI)	\$958.38
CalWorks	\$232.00
CalFresh	\$192.00
Total	\$1,190.38

Earned Income	
Hourly Rate	\$20.19
Average Monthly Net	\$1,716.80

Increased net household earned income= \$524.42



# BENEFITS CLIFF

For those enrolled in St. Joseph Center Vocational Training programs moving from benefits to employment can be challenging. By providing them with case management and other supportive services, they have been able to make the transition and begin to thrive in the work.



# RESOURCES



# RESOURCES

## Benefits Cliff

EXAMINING THE COMPLEX SOCIAL SAFETY NET FOR LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES:

*How Benefits and Resources Respond to Increases in Wages*

[https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Social-Safety-Net\\_Full-Report\\_FINAL\\_10.22.21.pdf](https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Social-Safety-Net_Full-Report_FINAL_10.22.21.pdf)

## Black People Experiencing Homelessness

**LAHSA AD-HOC Committee Report:** The Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness

<https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=2823-report-and-recommendations-of-the-ad-hoc-committee-on-black-people-experiencing-homelessness.pdf>

**COVID-19 Homeless System Response:** Guidance for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining People with Lived Experience and Expertise of Homelessness

<https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/6599/covid19-homeless-system-response-guidance-for-recruiting-hiring-and-retaining-people-with-lived-experience-and-expertise-of-homelessness/>

**COVID-19 Homeless System Response:** Engaging Individuals with Lived Expertise

<https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/COVID-19-Homeless-System-Response-Engaging-Individuals-with-Lived-Expertise.pdf>

**COVID-19 Homeless System Response:** Paying People with Lived Experience and Expertise

<https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/COVID-19-Homeless-System-Response-Paying-People-with-Lived-Experience-and-Expertise.pdf>



# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



# Thank You



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