

## **PACKING A POWERFUL PUNCH: SURVEY REVEALS THAT PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERTISE IMPROVE EVERY CORNER OF THE FIELD**

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The inclusion of people with lived expertise of homelessness (PWLE) in the work of ending homelessness is not symbolic—it has a measurable impact on shaping more responsive, effective, and equitable response systems. In a recent survey from the LEARN Project, PWLE respondents shared some of the ways that their work contributes to ending homelessness.

### **Client-Centered Services**

In an open-ended response to the LEARN project survey, one case manager noted that their personal experience with homelessness enhanced their ability to empathize with their clients' challenges and successes. This understanding helped their organization, including staff without lived experience of homelessness, embrace a more client-centered approach to the services they provide.

But it is not just workers with lived experience who acknowledge PWLE's impact. System leaders also detailed PWLE's contributions to more client-centered services.

### **Local Policy**

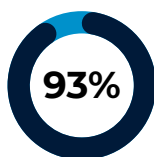
Two respondents noted that PWLE in their communities co-created a Client Bill of Rights, which was then adopted as an official policy across dozens of counties. This document defined what types of services and treatment clients are entitled to within each region's response system, ensuring that people have equitable access to services.

### **Program Design**

Continuum of Care (CoC) leaders also noted that PWLE influence how programs are designed and how their organizations identify service gaps, and also ensure that service programs meet the lived realities and needs of unhoused community members. The programmatic shifts that they introduce have game-changing impacts.

## WHAT **IMPACTS** ARE LIVED EXPERTS HAVING ON ENDING HOMELESSNESS?

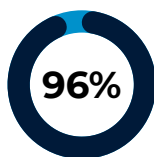
According to System and Organization Leaders who Responded to the LEARN Project Survey



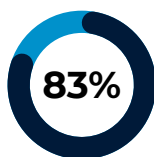
*Ideas and feedback from people with lived expertise help our CoC or organization provide housing and/or services to more people*



*Ideas and feedback from people with lived expertise help our CoC or organization prevent more people from entering homelessness*



*Ideas and feedback from people with lived experience help our CoC or organization identify more people experiencing homelessness*



*People with lived expertise make our CoC or organization a more competitive applicant for funding opportunities*

## **Data-Informed Decision Making**

The LEARN team also asked respondents to “Please describe any other ways people with lived expertise of homelessness have made changes to your organization or homeless response system.” Among other things, leaders noted that people who have experienced homelessness have changed the types of data that organizations use to evaluate their work to end homelessness and consequently, how resources are allocated to different projects and programs.

For example, leaders shared that youth with lived experience led grantmaking and grantee selection under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP). By listening to individual experiences, rather than just quantitative data, youth with lived experience developed a better understanding of unhoused youths’ needs. They used this data to shift how resources were allocated, and which programs were funded. While these approaches are not universal, they exhibit that those who are most impacted by homelessness can and must have a central role in ending it.

## **Culture Change**

The influence of lived expertise extends beyond direct services and program design and into the culture of organizations and CoCs. Leaders shared that PWLE helped prioritize and lead action to improve racial equity, helped challenge blind spots in traditional leadership, and brought about deeper self-reflection about how their organizations can be more inclusive.

**These contributions are not just symbolic. Building more inclusive organizations helps reshape service delivery, make services more accessible to people in need, increase worker retention, and create more effective systems.** These findings illustrate a fundamental truth: PWLE are not just changing culture — these changes are also improving how the response system operates.

## **Bottom Line**

The information that leaders shared validates what many advocates have long known: systems become more just and more productive when people with lived experience are not only heard but given the power to make decisions. As the authors in this series point out, organizations can take steps to improve their response to homelessness by supporting PWLE well. Funders and policy makers can ensure that organizations and systems receive enough resources to provide this support and uplift PWLE.