# 2/22/23 TA Office Hours:

# Lived Experience Feedback Loops Community of Practice

# Overtime Q&A Session

* Some of the most important meetings are when LEAB members are present. How do we best create safe spaces for LE individuals to participate in group meetings and feel more comfortable sharing vulnerable experiences with groups? How do we create spaces in which individuals with LE can feel heard?
  + TK: There are general things, but also PWLE are just like every other individual, with unique history and triggers for different things. Part of it is paying attention to body language and creating safe environment. Having an environment where people feel heard and engaged in active listening; mirroring things back to the resident and not creating judgment through words or body language.
  + JA: Patronizing/pitying… avoid it. Everyone’s different, so create what you think is a safe space, but based on their experiences, it’s ultimately up to them to decide what they’re comfortable sharing/how vulnerable to be. It is really an individualistic experience.
  + TK: There’s a risk of letting instinct take over to say “I know what you mean/how you’re feeling” and we have to be careful with those things, because we *really don’t* know what that person’s feeling or thinking. It can come off dismissive, even though that wasn’t the speaker’s intent. Also, we run into situations where case mgrs are put in a position/trained to be the ‘fixer’ to find solution(s) for problems. Empowerment is huge — giving the person a sense of purpose and self-determination to make differences in their own life can make a major shift in how they feel about the interaction.
* How did you first get involved with your community’s efforts/LEAB/Care Coordination?
  + - JA: Right at the start of COVID — I was just living life, and a friend told me about the Young Women’s Freedom Center — join the Freedom Circle — get an incentive. It was great to see so many PWLE from all over CA. Folks were so comfy sharing their experiences. It helped me share my own experiences. I got an internship, which turned into a research fellowship for system-impacted young families. From there, I saw a flyer for the YAB, and slowly got more and more involved in different efforts. When you share your story and are surrounded by others with similar xp’s — you feed off each other. It’s addicting — you just don’t want to stop doing it.
    - TK: A little different — I’ve always been involved. Starting in my early 20s I’ve served on nonprofit boards and such — chamber of commerce — city boards. I didn’t get involved in any of this stuff until I had a major life shift. 2017 due to mental health issues I found my way into incarceration and way outside my normal self. I’d never had a speeding ticket before 36, and next thing I know I’m in LA County Jail. Went to prison for 4 years, and was relocated to San Jose with continuing mental health issues. I was in a TSU, then into the hospital, and became homeless. I’d spent a career in IT — never thought I’d be in this situation; realized it can happen to anyone with just a couple of wrong turns. I found out about LEAB and got involved; and like Jocelyn said, it’s addictive knowing you can make a change. Working now to form my own nonprofit to help folks with re-entry/homelessness. Such a great example with even just 2 of us, so many disparate experiences leading to the same place or hardship. It can truly happen to anyone for a huge number of reasons.
  + What steps did you take to obtain tangible positions of power within agencies?
    - e.g. voting seats on committees/councils
      * JA: I try to let people take on these opportunities, but I’m really excited for this. I always want to jump at every opportunity. In my head, when is this opportunity going to happen again? It’s scary to pass up opportunities — I just want to keep going forward. I was so excited to be at the CoC \_\_\_\_ table, making connections with new people and making change at the County level. Membership at LEAB and YAB is very powerful, but being able to make a change at the County level, give my input, and know that it will 100% be taken into acct. It boils down to wanting to commit myself to things. This mission is my biggest commitment.
      * TK: There’s a lot of people that want to be involved, but a level of hesitation, not knowing whether they’re equipped to do certain things — this is what I love about LEAB — I appreciate our mission because we’re a leadership dev’t board. People who may not have been in these positions previously; it gives confidence/skills and it’s exciting to see members of the board who come out of these horrific situations, and now sit on these seats… Sketch is on a city housing board… we get asked to participate in city and county groups and cmtes all the time. I tell members all the time, it’s just about getting involved and committing yourself. I became a member of LEAB, and less than two months later, I ended up as Secretary because I was just present and willing to step up, and served in that position for a year. January this year, was elected as board chair. It was an amazing feeling and willingness to step up. Lots of opportunities out there, and helping folks know how valuable their experience and opinions are.
      * JA: Me and my mom were moving constantly. I’ve been to 17 or 18 different schools. I never thought I’d be a part of something, or what I wanted to be when I grow up. But then I started getting involved in stuff — personally, I didn’t know what the CoC was, or that I’d sit on the board. I got flown out to DC. Outside of Mexico, I’d never left CA. All these opportunities, I just had to take them. When you get housed, you have that anxiety of “I need to keep working, or get another job” — the anxiety of not knowing what happens if I don’t take every next opportunity
      * TK: Jocelyn’s hit it right on the head. Some are more hesitant to jump into opportunities. Some are extremely proactive and want to jump into each and every opportunity. But even then there’s an opportunity for professional dev’t to make sure people don’t overload themselves. We have 38 board members, but there’s prob 10-12 that are extremely active in LEAB activities; others may be active in other arenas. Sometimes we have to be careful and make sure people really want to take this on, because they can burn out.
* In my background data administration role, how do I not dehumanize people in how I present data? How do I make sure that my work is sensitive and not biased? Especially considering how we collect and present data.
* What are some ideas for improving client participation/engagement, addressing ambivalence, and incentivizing participation?
  + - TK: Goes back to every person’s ‘going to be different’ – I always want to ppl to think about clients and participants and community members the same way they think about themselves. **It’s the same things that motivate us, that motivate you**: a sense of empowerment, money, promotion/advancement/certification, same things that make anyone feel good is the same as any other person. **You want to feel heard, appreciated, and valued**. Keep that in mind, and you’re on the right track. What do I get out of it? What’s my reward for going above and beyond? Be respectful, and consider carefully what’s in it for them.
    - JA: I researched, wrote, focus groups, Freedom Circle, Bill Wilson workshops, but it’s really hard to say *what’s in it for them.* I try to do things people will enjoy or be rewarding to folks. People at BWC might think I’m just in it for the pay (which I’m not). It’s not that they don’t come because there’s not enough in it for them. Some folks already have their job, don’t need resume assistance. They’ll come for holiday events perhaps, or if there are gifts. I can find it really hard to get people to show up. I often leave it up to the folks making the flyers, post on my social media. It’s a difficult question and I’d also like to know the answer.
    - TK: All of us play a part in this. The more this is done across all orgs, the more we’ll get out of this. When you have a lot of orgs that *expect* participation and commitment without any type of incentive or compensation, then you create an environment. It makes it hard to get participation, because it’s not like communication to the homeless is an *easy thing.* How to get word out that “Hey, we’re doing it differently” — the more the ENTIRE COMMUNITY revises how it
  + For someone who is new to the industry, how do you ask things/what do you ask to encourage people to share more? What is a sensitive way to ask about needs so people are more open to revealing/ discussing things?
  + How do you get more youth involved? What would be useful to get more young members?
  + Ideal meeting frequency and location?
    - JA: I like in-person vs Zoom both for different reasons. In-person is better for making connections. You can connect with people on Zoom, but it’s not quite as good. With Zoom, I can bounce from one meeting to the other seamlessly. Personally, I like things in-person the most. After COVID that was the go-to excuse: if it’s not virtual I can’t do it. COVID just made people not want to be in person anymore. When I was in school, I was fine being in person and after COVID I just want to be in front of the computer all the time. For duration? **1-2 hours — any longer is too long**.
    - TK: Frequency is one I can’t answer off top — depends on the type of meeting. We have general board meetings on bi-weekly basis. Others on weekly. Some on monthly. Depends on the goal. Assuming it’s from a case mgmt standpoint, meeting with clients, and even that depends. If it was a perfect world, we’d be meeting with clients all the time, because things would be moving so quickly to get them housed and off the streets, *the way that things should be.* With the long situational reality though, getting face to face is hard, so probably not more than once every couple weeks. Be in continual contact though… just because you don’t have an appointment, doesn’t mean you can’t pick up the phone and ask how they’re doing/anything I can do to make things a bit easier for you right now. Let them know you think about them and that you care about their situation.
* How can we administer surveys in a way that will get us the volume of feedback we’re looking for that will still yield quality information?
* Would you ever be available to come to our agency to provide us more information?
* How do we continuously engage individuals through that sometimes long housing search process, and maintain hope and trust in the feedback process?
  + TK: I have a simple answer — change the process. We HAVE TO FIX THE LONG HOUSING SERACH PROCESS. I know several people and get messages from them 2-3x a month saying they’ve changed numbers and email addresses. As long as this process continues to be long and tedious and feels hopeless, its going to be really hard to keep people interested and on track. Not the answer people want to hear, but the truth is we have to fundamentally change the system and that’s what will make this better. We do ourselves a disservice asking how to deal with the long process, rather than just not accepting the long process. Let’s not normalize the long process — that’s not okay.
* Word choices… How to approach when someone is in that situation (homelessness) already? I don’t want to offend anybody or say the wrong thing. But I also feel bad if I ignore things that happened to them.
* What resources, programs, or support would’ve been helpful for you to avoid you becoming or experiencing homelessness?
* How do you best respond to someone and engage someone you are trying to continue to support who is being abusive toward volunteers/service providers?