



Introduction to Lived Experience Participation, Leadership, and Collaboration at Justlife

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Introduction

Justlife is committed to centring lived experience in all aspects of our organisation as we work together to make stays in temporary accommodation (TA) short, safe and healthy.

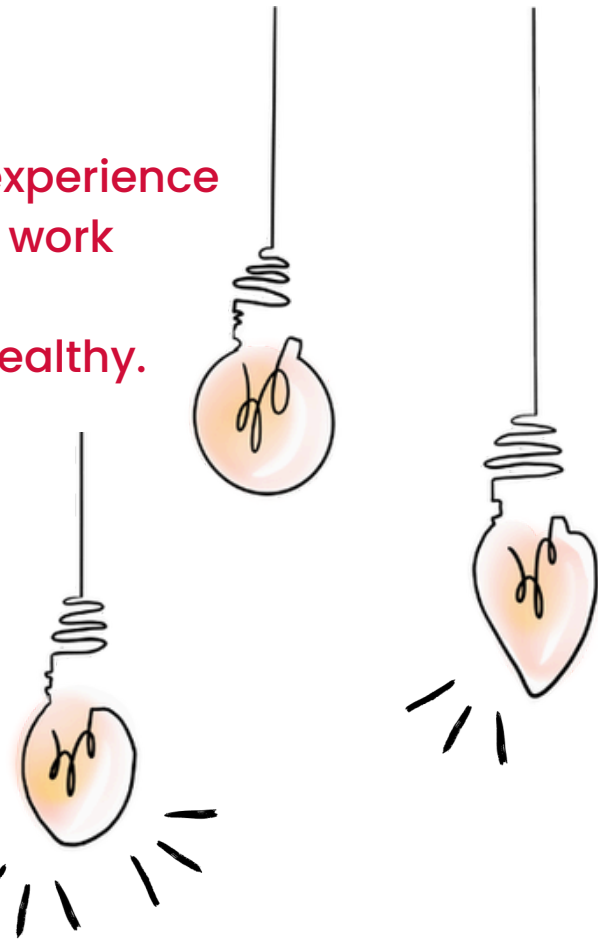
Everything we do is informed by the realities of TA and the experiences of people living in it. This includes support provided for staff, policies, guidance, structure and training needed to carry out our work in an inclusive way – all of which enables us to be accessible to and led by those with lived experience of homelessness.

This introduction is an overview of why we work in this way. It was produced in consultation with staff about what kind of support and guidance they need to help them understand and do this work, as well as drawing on the learning from Lived Experience projects such as Peer Research and Common Ambition. A number of colleagues with lived experience from across the organisation and externally also input and feedback on this document.

Please read this alongside our [Ethical Principles for lived experience involvement](#), to get a full summary of why and how we work. If your work will involve research, please also read this alongside the [Research Ethics policy](#).

Please note: This booklet is an intro rather than a detailed guide for how to set up and run a participatory a project. However, [pages 11-12](#) have a project preparation step-by-step checklist, with links to many great resources which go into much more detail about methods of running projects and supporting participants!

Feel free to reach out and schedule a chat with [our](#) Lived Experience and Participation Lead if you want to discuss anything in more detail, or have any suggestions for further guidance!



Definitions & our 'Why?'

What we mean by “Lived Experience”

At Justlife, when we say “Lived Experience” or “Lived Experience of Homelessness”, we mean anyone who has a first hand experience of homelessness or the homelessness system. This includes but is not limited to:

- Clients of our services
- Attendees of our projects
- People we meet in influencing work
- Research participants
- Steering group members
- Our staff and volunteers
- Campaigners we collaborate with
- Families, friends, advocates and supporters of those experiencing homelessness

Each project might adapt the kind of lived experience definition they work with – it really depends on the aims and purpose of the project.

Why Lived Experience Matters

We believe that those with firsthand experience of the challenges we aim to address are best placed to shape solutions. Their insights provide invaluable perspectives that:

- Enhance the relevance and effectiveness of our services
- Address systemic barriers and injustices
- Build genuine partnerships that empower individuals and communities

Lived experience perspectives and participation are drivers of change—shaping our mission, policies, and strategy.

Justlife's Ethical Principles for Lived Experience Work

Our ethical principles are a guide for embedding lived experience across all areas of work. They ensure that our projects centre equity, inclusion, and meaningful participation, creating a safe and respectful environment for all involved. These principles are designed to help you maintain an inclusive, respectful, and fair approach in any lived experience led work or participatory projects you undertake. They aim to help you create safe spaces, share power, and make sure participation is meaningful and not tokenistic.

- 01** **Equity and Inclusion**
- 02** **Person Centred Approach**
- 03** **Psychological Safety**
- 04** **Accessibility**
- 05** **Active Allyship**
- 06** **Transparency and Accountability**
- 07** **Meaningful Engagement**
- 08** **Ethical Data Use**

Our ways of working with people with lived experience of homelessness

Alongwith following the ethical principles, we can ensure lived experience is centred, heard and making an impact in our work through three practical ways of working: collaboration, participation, and leadership

Collaboration

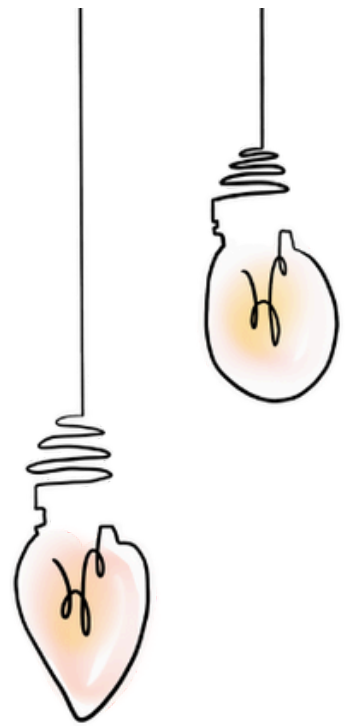
Collaboration is about ensuring we work in partnership with people with a broad range of lived experience to develop solutions and impactful services. We design inclusive spaces where expertise is shared, and decision-making is shaped collectively, whether through co-designed programs, conducting peer research, or accessible consultation aimed at influencing strategy.

We recognise that organisations like ours can be inaccessible for some communities. That's why we are committed to building partnerships with other organisations and grassroots groups, proactively seeking new ways to connect with underrepresented groups, and championing voices that are often missing from conversations about homelessness.



Participation

Participation means ensuring that those with lived experience are not just consulted but actively involved in our work. We run projects led by participants, creating spaces where their insights inform decision making and drive meaningful change. Whether through advisory roles, co-produced research, or direct involvement in service design, we embed participation at every stage. This influences both day-to-day project development and broader organisational direction, ensuring lived experience is a driving force in shaping progress.



Leadership

Leadership means enabling people with lived experience to take on decision-making responsibilities and shape Justlife's strategic direction. The Lived Experience and Participation Lead champions our commitment to embedding lived experience at all levels, ensuring lived experience participation and representation remain consistent and relevant across the organisation.

We use methodologies such as co-design and human-centred design to ensure leadership is driven by those directly impacted by the issues we address. Initiatives like Common Ambition and Peer Research run on co-production principles, enabling participants to have power in shaping the trajectory of projects.

These approaches and our ethical principles have been co-created, learning from our existing and recent lived experience led participatory work. You can read more about our live projects on our [website](#)



How Decisions on Lived Experience Approaches, Principles, and Ways of Working Are Made Internally

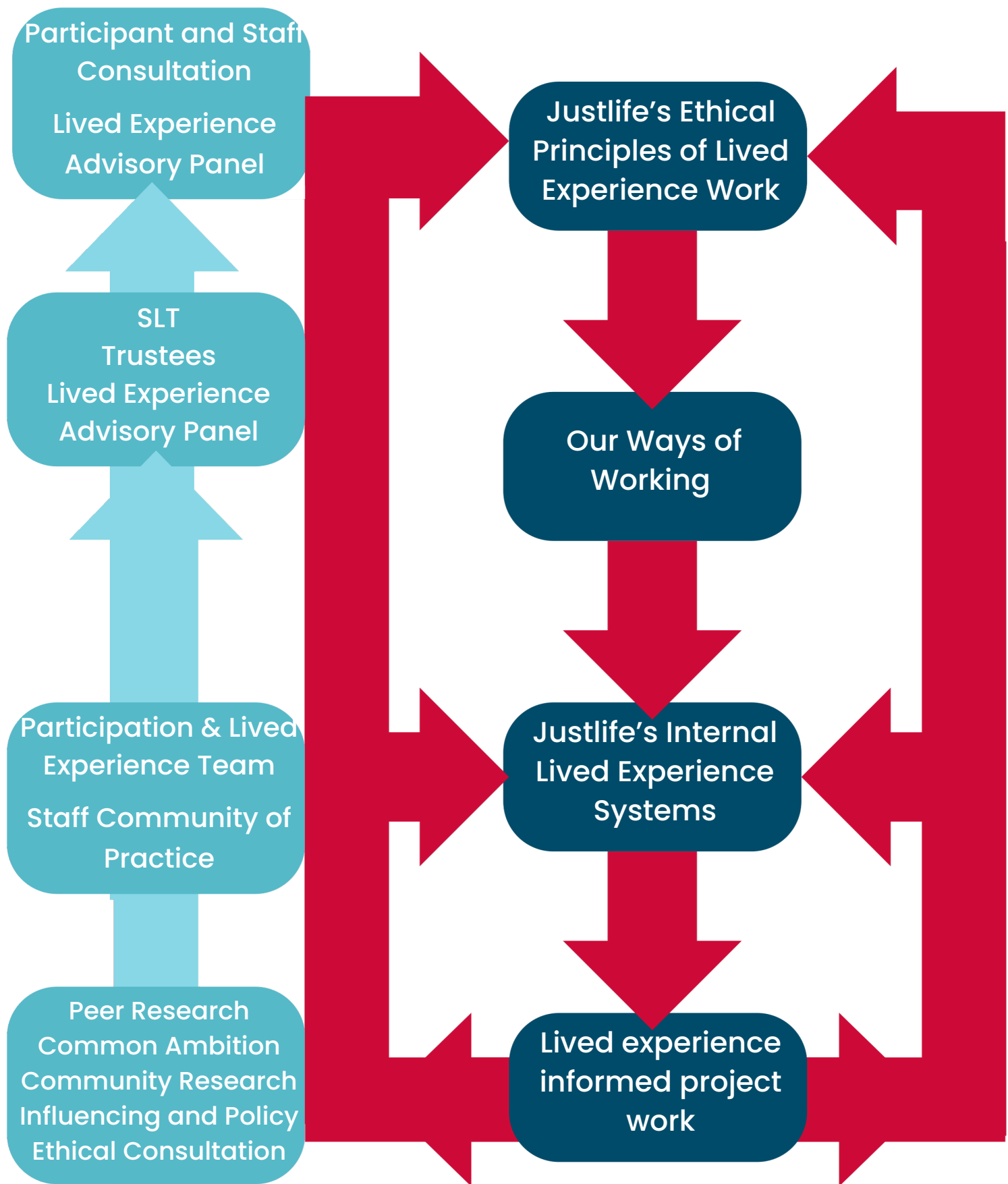
At Justlife, decisions around our lived experience approaches are shaped through a collaborative and reflective process, led by the **Participation and Lived Experience team** – the **Lived Experience and Participation Lead** and the **Participation and Learning Coordinator**. Together, they are responsible for coordinating how lived experience is embedded and supported across Justlife, and how learning from projects is captured, retained, and folded into our approach so that valuable insights are not lost when a project ends. All decisions are grounded in our ethical principles and informed by ongoing learning, feedback, and real-world practice.

Key organisation wide decisions and policies such as how we involve people, what principles guide us, and how we embed lived experience are developed through:

- Co-design and consultation with staff, volunteers, clients and project participants.
- Evaluation and learning from lived experience led and participatory projects
- Input from the lived experience advisory panels (LEAPs) and the staff Lived Experience Community of Practice
- Input from the senior leadership team (SLT) and trustees, to ensure proposed changes and ongoing design are financially and strategically viable, and to ensure lived experience insights influence organisational direction
- Cross-sector collaboration and learning from other organisations, activist networks, grassroots groups, academia, and individuals to understand and apply best practice in participatory work
- Alignment with our organisational values, strategy and commitments to DEI

All Staff are encouraged to bring questions, insights, and challenges from their projects into shared decision-making space, so we continue to learn, adapt, and improve together.

Justlife's approach to lived experience work decision making



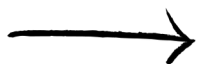
Practical terms you will hear used in our lived experience work

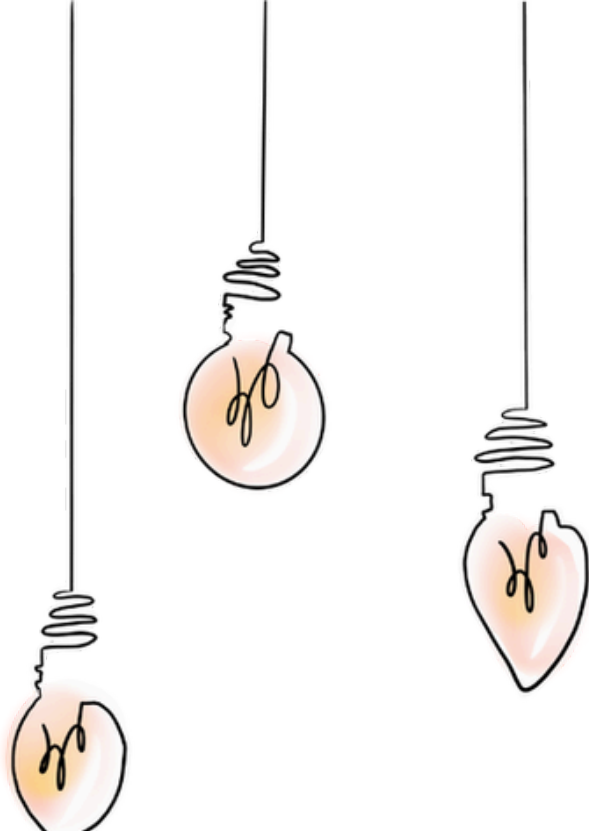
First of all, the three Co-s.... Co-Production, Co-Design and Co-Creation

The terms co-production, co-design, and co-creation are often used interchangeably, and in practice, the boundaries between them can be quite blurry. Many projects develop their own definitions for these approaches as part of their co-production process, shaping them to fit their specific needs and contexts. However, broadly speaking, each term refers to a different stage and type of involvement within a project carried out in partnership between professionals and those with lived experience of the issue being focused on, where power and decision making are held collectively.

- **Co-Production** is generally regarded as the most comprehensive approach, involving collaboration throughout the entire process, from planning and design to delivery and evaluation, as well as project direction.
- **Co-Design** is more focused on shaping an end product or output, such as a service, policy, or tool. It typically occurs within a structured framework, where professionals set design parameters while participants provide crucial insights to make sure the final product meets user needs.
- **Co-Creation** happens at the front end of a project, focusing on generating ideas and shaping concepts collaboratively. It's about exploring possibilities, defining challenges, and setting directions for future development, often before specific design constraints or structures are in place.

NHS England model for different types of involvement from Working in partnership with people and communities: Statutory guidance, Annex A.





Other terms you may hear

Design Thinking/Service Design: A facilitated, problem solving framework that prioritises creativity, testing ideas and lived experience insight to create person-centered solutions. This might be used to redesign one of our services, or help us figure out a problem or challenge we can't "unstick" with current ways of doing things!

Collaboration: Working together across diverse perspectives to achieve shared goals, valuing each contributor's expertise and input. At Justlife, we often use this word to describe our way of working.

Facilitation: The process of 1 person or a small team guiding group discussions or activities to create a safe, inclusive, and productive environment for everyone to contribute.

Intersectionality: Recognising how overlapping identities (eg, race, gender, class, sexuality...) create unique experiences of privilege or disadvantage, and addressing these in all work.

Endings: In psychologically informed working practices, it's recognised that endings or significant changes often trigger unconscious reactions, mental distress and emotional responses. This human reaction should be expected and planned for in the context of projects.

Good endings / ending well: When we talk about "good endings" or "ending well," we mean addressing these possible reactions in a person-centered, psychologically, and trauma-informed way. A good ending involves being realistic about the changes, not denying or minimising them, and providing a support package to help guide someone through the process.



Steering Group: A group of individuals brought together to guide and oversee a project or initiative, providing strategic direction and ensuring alignment with goals. In lived experience work, steering groups will include people with first-hand experience of the issue being addressed alongside those with learned and professional experience.

Advisory Panel: In the context of Lived Experience, an advisory panel is a group of individuals with direct, personal experience of the issue being addressed, brought together to provide insights, guidance, and recommendations on a project, service, or initiative.

Peers: Individuals with shared experiences or circumstances, often used to describe those with lived experience of a specific issue who support or work alongside others currently having/who have had similar experiences.

"Design from the margins": A concept in design thinking that centres the experiences, needs, and perspectives of marginalised or underrepresented groups in the design process, who are often left out or overlooked in traditional design practices.



Resources and next steps if your role involves lived experience participation

If your role includes working in a participatory way, directly with individuals with lived experience, GREAT! Here's what to do next... If you use any of the following resources, please let the projects who created them know so we can track our ongoing impact!

01

Familiarise yourself with these key lived experience guidance documents and policies

- Ethical principles for lived experience work
- Lived experience payment policy and guidance documents
- Research Ethics policy (if your work will involve research in any form)
- Communications consent processes (if your work will involve comms, publicity work or gathering testimonials from participants)

02

Know your why Understand the purpose of your project or work, and why lived experience involvement is important specifically for your project; and where/how it needs to feature to help you decide the best approach. [The How to Set Up a Peer Research Group manual](#) has a great step by step process to guide you through thinking about this - ~~whether it's peer research you're planning or not!~~

03

Know your role Understand what your role is in your project's lived experience involvement work. For example, are you going to be running groups, offering support, designing or carrying out research? Will you be a facilitator or a support worker, or both?

04

Design your project!

Reach out to colleagues working on participatory projects to get their advice on how to set up a project and what approach might suit your project. The best way to find out who to chat to is often to ask around, but here's a head start....

Co-production steering and project direction – Nicki, Jules, Alex, Gail, Si, Asta

Service Design & design sprints – Alex, Nicki, Jules, Si

Peer Research – Gail, Signe, Alex, Asta

Project Advisory Work – Alex

Action Groups (TAAGs, Criminal Justice) – Saoirse, Ruth, Sarah

Ethical Consultation (focus groups, feedback sessions) – Morgan, Gail, Signe, Alex, Si

Person Centred Research – Signe

Have a look at our [website](#) to find out more about our current lived experience led and participatory projects, and draw on our resources:

Don't forget to let us know if these resources help you in your work :)

[The Peer Research resources and manual](#)
[Common Ambition Health & Homelessness work resources](#)

Carry out a risk assessment for your project that includes psychological and participant wellbeing/risks to establish what level of support may be needed for this project to be carried out safely.

05

Start well

Once you have your project planned and know what participation will be involved, create a project outline, intro pack and role description for participants. Templates can be found in ~~our~~ [our](#) LE project resources folder.

06

Plan for the ending of the project at the very start

It's important to think ahead about how you will support those involved to exit well—both emotionally and practically, whether it's months long engagement or just a few weeks.

Consider what next steps or opportunities might be available to them, whether within Justlife (such as other projects or roles) or externally. You should also build in processes for participant reflection and feedback, such as through an exit interview, questionnaire or final reflective session. This not only enables us to listen to participants and better support them, but also ensures we continue learning and improving our practice.

Ending templates can be found in our LE project resources folder, and [resources about how to support someone in a psychologically informed way through endings here.](#)

07

Plan reflection time into your project

Just as we prioritise psychological safety and autonomy for participants, it's equally important that staff supporting lived experience work have the time and space to reflect themselves.

Reflection simply means taking time to think critically and honestly about your experiences, actions, and decisions, in order to learn and improve. It helps you process emotional impact, notice what's working or not, and stay grounded in your values and purpose. These are all essential for delivering thoughtful, ethical, and person-centred work.

Consider from the start how you will build time for reflection into your project—both for yourself as a practitioner, and for anyone you support (staff, volunteers or participants). Consider whether you are someone who naturally reflects, or do you benefit from prompts or structured time? Speak to your line manager about regular check-ins, join a reflective practice group, or explore external supervision if needed.

You might also want to try solo reflective techniques like journaling, voice notes, or scheduling quiet thinking time after key sessions.



Support for Staff Members with Lived Experience

Justlife encourages applications from people who have lived experience of homelessness and recognise and value the unique experiences they bring to their roles. We are committed to providing meaningful support to ensure a safe, inclusive, and fulfilling working environment. Below are the key aspects of support available to staff members with lived experience.

Access to Support

All staff members who work in a frontline or supporting role have access to external supervision through our approved providers. People with lived experience of homelessness may request alternative personal therapy (including part payment towards existing therapy they may be undertaking) tailored to their needs which will be financially compensated at the same value as our external supervisor

Confidentiality and Disclosure You are not required to disclose your lived experience. However, if you wish to discuss this, your line manager will be available for a confidential conversation. They can support you in navigating whether and how to share this information more broadly, or in maintaining confidentiality beyond your direct line management relationship. You are also welcome to approach [Alex, Justlife's Lived Experience and Participation Lead](#) at any time.



Supportive Line Management

While line managers don't provide pastoral care they receive training and support to help with accessibility needs, equipping them to effectively support you.

Tailored Accommodation

If certain tasks, training, or activities could be triggering, managers are committed to working with you to adjust or exempt you from participation when necessary.

If you have a physical or mental health condition or disability, Justlife is able to support you in applying for the Access to Work fund. The support you get will depend on your needs. Through Access to Work, you can apply for:

- A grant to help pay for practical support with your work
- Support with managing your mental health at work
- Money to pay for communication support at job interviews

To find out more about this, speak to your line manager and check out the scheme's website [here](#).

For HR support, contact [our](#) Business Support and Development Coordinator



Justlife
1479-1489 Ashton Old Road
Manchester
M11 1HH
0161 285 5888
info@justlife.org.uk
www.justlife.org.uk

Justlife Foundation Ltd 7517887 Registered Charity 1140822

