

FRAMEWORK CHAPTER 1



VOICES of Lived Experience Dufferin is a community-based advocacy group composed of people with lived experience, and a facilitator /coordinator.

A community-based group of people with lived experience (PWLE) is a diverse and inclusive collective made up of individuals who have personally navigated a wide range of life circumstances. Members may include those who have experienced mental health challenges, substance use, homelessness, incarceration, domestic violence, poverty, trauma, chronic illness, disability, or systemic discrimination. Others may come from backgrounds of refugee or immigrant status, involvement in the child welfare system, or have lived through marginalization due to race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. This rich diversity of experience fosters a supportive environment rooted in empathy, peer connection, and shared resilience.

The VOICES Framework is a dynamic tool designed to guide organizations and communities in working more effectively with people with lived experience (PWLE). Each of the twelve chapters within the framework represents a distinct lens or tool that can be applied to shape programs, policies, and services that engage and support individuals and families.



*This document is one of 12 chapters from **The VOICES Framework**. The full framework and additional materials, as well as references and works consulted on this topic, can be found on the VOICES website.*



1 MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE AT APPROACH

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTION PROMPTS

The VOICES process involves question prompts that guide the group discussion. These are the question prompts for this chapter's group discussion.



I want organizations that are there to help me to meet me where I am at because...



I want to see flexibility in organizations that work with people who live in poverty because...



Flexibility and wrap-around support would have given me...



Wrap-around support matters because...



We want organizations to be willing to change and adapt because...



Wrap-around support and organizational flexibility go hand in hand because...



INTRODUCTION

In the realm of social services, meeting people where they are at is essential for building trust and effectively supporting individuals who live in poverty. In all our meetings we kept returning to this concept as our anchor. **All 12 areas of our framework are interconnected**, although this area is the one that repeated the most – we simply want to be met at whatever experience we are at as individuals when we are in need. This approach for us emphasizes flexibility, understanding, and personalized care. According to research, client-centred practices lead to improved outcomes, increased engagement, and a stronger sense of empowerment among individuals receiving services (Hernandez, 2017). This did not surprise us at all – it only confirmed that our need to be met this way is essential and valid.

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"When I first sought help, the rigid systems made me feel more like a problem than a person. It wasn't until I met a worker who adapted to my needs and truly listened that I felt hopeful. They looked at me as a whole person and helped to get me several different services that could meet all my needs. How was she going to know what my needs were if she didn't meet me where I was at? Flexibility in services is crucial because it shows genuine care and respect for our unique situations."

– *VOICES Member*

PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE INSIGHTS

At VOICES, we understand that addressing poverty involves recognizing and adapting to the diverse needs of individuals. Many of us have experienced the benefits of flexible and wrap-around support, which addresses not just immediate needs but also the underlying issues that contribute to poverty. Studies have shown that holistic and adaptable approaches are more effective in creating lasting positive changes (Choi, 2015).



"I remember feeling overwhelmed by all the requirements and hoops to jump through when I needed help. The lack of flexibility made it difficult to get the support I needed. Wrap-around support would have addressed my multiple challenges and helped me feel less isolated and more capable of moving forward and feeling better about myself. Once I was down for so many reasons it was impossible to get back up again, I'm better than before and I am counting our blessings, but my family and I are still fighting the good fight against poverty. Some days are harder than others."

– VOICES Member



The Importance of Being Client-Centred and "Meeting People Where They Are At"

Meeting people where they are at involves tailoring interventions to address specific needs and circumstances, which builds trust and improves service delivery. This approach fosters empowerment, enhances overall outcomes, and leads to increased satisfaction and engagement (Darnell et al., 2017). In addition to better satisfaction for people like us who receive services we also think that this approach over time will be cheaper because people will get more of what they need to be able to elevate out of poverty and once out of poverty people are able to contribute and give back more to their communities.

KEY POINTS OF THE FRAMEWORK

BUILDING TRUST

Trust is crucial in the client-organization relationship, as it enables individuals to feel comfortable accessing services and sharing their challenges (Matthews, 2018). By actively listening to and respecting the perspectives of people with lived experience (PWLE), organizations can foster an environment of trust. This trust is the foundation upon which effective support is built.

IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY

Tailoring services to meet specific needs leads to more effective interventions and support systems (Choi, 2015). When services are designed to address the unique challenges and strengths of everyone, the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes increases. This personalized approach ensures that the support provided is relevant and impactful.

FOSTERING EMPOWERMENT

Recognizing and valuing lived experiences enhances a sense of agency and self-determination (Cain, 2015). Empowerment is a critical factor in enabling PWLE to break the cycle of poverty and improve their well-being. When individuals are involved in the decision-making process and have a say in the support they receive, it enhances their sense of control and confidence.

ENHANCING OVERALL OUTCOMES

Client-centred practices improve client satisfaction, engagement, and retention (Hasson & Kogan, 2014). When organizations are responsive to the unique circumstances of PWLE, the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes, such as increased economic stability and improved health and education outcomes, is significantly higher (Hernandez, 2017).



EXAMPLES OF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT STYLE TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE PEOPLE



COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Engage vulnerable individuals and communities in decision-making processes to ensure their voices are heard and their perspectives are considered (Cunningham et al., 2016). This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and empowers individuals to actively participate in shaping the services provided to them.



CONTINUOUS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Regularly assess the needs and priorities of the vulnerable demographic through surveys, interviews, and community consultations (Horizon Health Network, 2018). This ongoing assessment helps identify emerging challenges, gaps in services, and changing needs, allowing the organization to adapt its strategies accordingly.



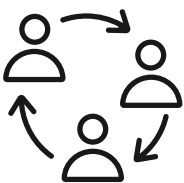
FLEXIBLE SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

Implement flexible service delivery models that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of individuals and communities (Cunningham et al., 2016). This could involve offering different levels of support, providing culturally sensitive approaches, or adjusting service hours or locations to enhance accessibility.



CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for staff members to enhance their skills and knowledge in working with vulnerable populations (Cunningham et al., 2016). This ensures that staff are equipped with the necessary tools and competencies to address the unique needs and challenges of people who live in poverty.



PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS:

Foster partnerships and collaborations with other organizations, community groups, and stakeholders to leverage resources, expertise, and support (Horizon Health Network, 2018). Collaborative efforts allow for a more comprehensive and coordinated response to the needs of vulnerable populations.

IMPORTANCE OF WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTS

Wrap-around supports are essential when working with people who live in poverty because poverty is a complex and multifaceted issue that affects various aspects of a person's life. It is not just about lacking financial resources; it often involves a combination of social, economic, educational, and health challenges that create barriers to engagement in the world and hinders well-being.

Wrap-around supports refer to comprehensive and coordinated services that address the various needs and challenges faced by individuals and families in poverty. Here's why they matter:

HOLISTIC APPROACH



Poverty affects multiple dimensions of a person's life, including housing, employment, education, healthcare, mental health, and social support. Wrap-around supports take a holistic approach, acknowledging that these issues are interconnected and cannot be effectively addressed in isolation. Our Taking a Wholistic Framework Approach chapter in our framework addresses this more deeply.

INDIVIDUALIZED ASSISTANCE



People living in poverty often have unique circumstances and challenges. Wrap-around supports focus on personalized assistance, tailoring interventions to the specific needs of each individual or family. This approach increases the likelihood of success and positive outcomes.

BREAKING THE CYCLE



Poverty is often passed down through generations due to systemic and structural barriers. Wrap-around supports aim to break this cycle by providing resources, skills, and opportunities that empower individuals and families to improve their situations and create a better future for themselves and their children.

COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION



Our experience has taught us that poverty-related challenges are rarely solved by a single service or organization. Wrap-around supports involve collaboration and coordination among various service providers, government agencies, community organizations, and stakeholders. This integrated approach ensures that support systems work together efficiently and effectively.



LONG-TERM IMPACT

Quick-fix solutions might provide temporary relief, but they may not address the root causes of poverty. Wrap-around supports focus on sustainable, long-term impact by equipping individuals with the tools and resources they need to improve their situations over time.



ADDRESSING UNDERLYING ISSUES

Poverty often stems from a combination of factors such as lack of education, limited job opportunities, inadequate healthcare, substance abuse, mental health issues, and more. All of us have experienced a combination of these things. Wrap-around supports tackle these underlying issues to create a comprehensive and lasting impact. Some of us have an education but there is still an issue of poverty. What we have learned is that poverty can happen to people even when they are educated and healthy.



ENHANCING RESILIENCE

We all have expressed that living in poverty is emotionally and psychologically challenging which is also backed by research. Wrap-around supports not only address the immediate needs but also enhance individuals' resilience, coping skills, and emotional well-being to better navigate future challenges.



PROMOTING DIGNITY AND EMPOWERMENT

Wrap-around supports promote a client-centred approach that respects the dignity of individuals living in poverty. By empowering them to make choices and decisions that affect their lives, they can actively participate in their own journey out of poverty.





THE ROLE OF FLEXIBILITY & ADAPTABILITY

It is essential for an organization that works with vulnerable people to remain flexible and willing to change in its management approach due to the complex and dynamic nature of the needs and circumstances of vulnerable populations. Flexibility allows organizations to adapt their strategies, policies, and services to effectively respond to the evolving challenges and diverse needs of vulnerable individuals (Horizon Health Network, 2018). Vulnerable populations often face multiple and interconnected barriers such as poverty, discrimination, and trauma, which require tailored and responsive interventions (Meadows-Oliver, 2009). By embracing flexibility, organizations can be more responsive to individual and community needs, adjust their programs based on feedback and evaluation, and engage in continuous improvement to meet evolving challenges and meet people where they are at (National Resource Centre for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2016). This adaptability enables organizations to provide person-centred care and enhance the overall effectiveness and relevance of their services.

"When I was trying to get back on my feet, what I needed was comprehensive support that addressed all aspects of my life – not just a quick fix. Wrap-around support would have made a significant difference in helping me achieve stability and long-term success."

– *VOICES Member*





"The system's complicated and unfriendly barriers often made it difficult for me to get the help I needed. I felt like I was constantly jumping through hoops. When I finally found a service that was flexible and adaptable to my situation, it felt like a breath of fresh air. Flexibility is key to effective support."

– *VOICES Member*

Meeting people where they are at and providing wrap-around support are essential in social services. By treating individuals with respect and empathy, and by being flexible and adaptable, organizations can create a more supportive and effective service environment. Our goal at VOICES is to continue advocating for these approaches and promoting a culture of compassion and understanding in our community.



ORGANIZATIONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

These questions can help ensure that you are taking a Meeting People Where They are at Approach at your own organization.

- 1 How can we adapt our services and practices to meet individuals where they are, acknowledging their unique circumstances and challenges?
- 2 In what ways do our current programs or policies prioritize or hinder flexibility and personalized care for PWLE?
- 3 How can we ensure that our staff and volunteers are trained to provide wrap-around support that addresses the interconnected challenges faced by those we serve?
- 4 What steps can we take to build trust with PWLE and foster an environment where they feel heard, respected, and supported?
- 5 How do we incorporate client-centred approaches that focus on tailoring services to the specific needs of each individual or family?
- 6 What strategies can we implement to actively involve PWLE in the design, implementation, and evaluation of our services?
- 7 How do we assess and address gaps in our service delivery to ensure we are responding effectively to the evolving needs of vulnerable populations?
- 8 In what ways can we foster collaboration and coordination with other organizations to provide holistic and comprehensive support systems for PWLE?
- 9 What resources, policies, or practices can we develop to ensure organizational flexibility and adaptability in meeting diverse client needs?
- 10 How do we measure the long-term impact of our wrap-around support and client-centred approaches on the individuals and communities we serve?

WALK IN OUR SHOES: PERSONAL STORIES FROM PWLE



“Last year I was working but I hurt my back at work. The physio was covered but I needed more money to address my health issues and I did not have it. I was forced to go back to work earlier than I was physically ready for. My body then gave out and I completely crashed. I couldn’t afford what I needed to get well – including food. My body got worse, and I found myself in a spiraling cycle.

I was then suddenly given notice to move out of my already precarious housing situation. Then I was frantically looking for housing and money. I was even more stressed, and I couldn’t afford the alternative health care that would have helped me more holistically. If I had been fully met where I was at, I would have had stable permanent housing, I would have been able to recover from stress and the injury and have real time off. I also would have had access to far more services to give me all the care that my body needed. If I had been met where I was at, I would have healed and then gone back to work when I was ready. I would have also been able to sustain my job.”

– *VOICES Member*

WALK WITH US...

This is one chapter from a framework of 12.
Find more resources at DCEC.CA.

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