

FRAMEWORK CHAPTER 3



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.*



3 TAKING A WHOLISTIC 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 think it is essential that a holistic approach is taken in organizations that work with PWLE because...



My own experience of living in poverty taught me that a holistic approach is important because...



Being seen as a whole person makes me feel like...



A holistic approach from local organizations and service providers would change my experience by...



We need to treat people in poverty as whole people because...



We think that all communities in Canada need to work harder to provide comprehensive support that sees people in holistic ways so that...



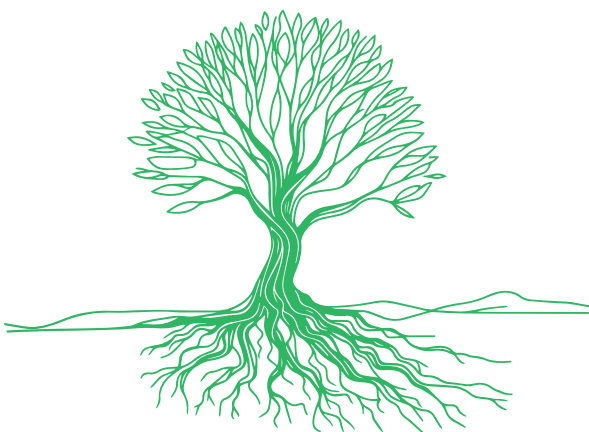
INTRODUCTION

A holistic approach when working with vulnerable populations and people with lived experience emphasizes seeing individuals as whole, multifaceted beings with interconnected physical, emotional, social, and cultural needs. This approach recognizes the complexity of a person's experiences, rather than reducing them to single issues or conditions, and aims to address the multiple, often overlapping challenges they face. Holistic is also often spelled holistic without the W. While these words can be used interchangeably, we have chosen the W to emphasize the word 'whole', which for VOICES is a powerful reminder that we are whole people, not segmented or defined by our poverty. In Canada, poverty is not just a lack of financial resources; it is an issue that affects every aspect of a person's life, including their physical health, mental well-being, social connections, and overall sense of self-worth. According to Statistics Canada, people living in poverty often face multiple, interrelated challenges that require comprehensive and integrated support (Statistics Canada, 2021). This underscores the need for a holistic approach that addresses the whole person and recognizes their inherent value.

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"I think it is essential that a holistic approach is taken in organizations that work with PWLE because it acknowledges all the different aspects of our lives and treats us with dignity. It means seeing us as more than just our needs or our struggles. We are whole people."

– VOICES Member



PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE INSIGHTS

What is a Wholistic Approach?

Our experiences at VOICES show that fostering a wholistic approach involves understanding and addressing the diverse needs of individuals. By integrating services and supports across various domains, a wholistic approach fosters empowerment, resilience, and long-term well-being through person-centered, compassionate care. Many of us have encountered fragmented services that only address specific issues, leaving other critical aspects of our lives unaddressed. Research supports our experiences, demonstrating that integrated and comprehensive care leads to better outcomes for individuals facing multiple challenges (Klinic Community Health, 2013). All of us are facing multiple challenges so treating us as fragmented selves makes no sense to us.



“Being seen as a whole person makes me feel respected and valued. It means that all parts of my life are considered, not just the parts that are in crisis. It means having my strengths recognized and built upon, not just my needs.”

– VOICES Member



KEY POINTS OF THE FRAMEWORK

UNDERSTANDING WHOLISTIC CARE

Our approach addresses the necessity of wholistic care, which involves meeting individuals where they are and recognizing the interconnectedness of various aspects of their lives (Samson, 2015).

INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT

Providing tailored support that considers the physical, mental, emotional, and social needs of individuals, ensuring they receive comprehensive care (Fisher & Ransom, 2015).

COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS

Encouraging community-led initiatives that foster social connections and provide integrated support (Gottlieb & Gottlieb, 2017).

EMPOWERMENT AND ADVOCACY

Involving individuals with lived experience in decision-making processes and advocating for policies that promote comprehensive care (Richie, 2012).

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Developing and implementing practices that are inclusive and considerate of diverse backgrounds and experiences (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).



IMPORTANCE OF A WHOLISTIC APPROACH

"I think having a wholistic approach is important when working with PWLE because it ensures that all parts of our lives are considered. It's about seeing us as whole people, not just problems or one problem (no food or whatever) to be solved."

– VOICES Member

When seeking help, we want our entire selves to be considered because our experiences of poverty affect every aspect of our lives. Recognizing and addressing these diverse needs, we feel, is crucial for effective support.

IMPACT OF WHOLISTIC FRAMEWORKS

As research has demonstrated, wholistic frameworks work practically. For instance, studies on integrated healthcare – where patients' physical, mental and social needs are addressed together reduce inequalities (Valentijn et al., 2013). Likewise, wholistic approaches in social services have proven to be effective, as they also produce better outcomes for people and their families, often by addressing the root causes of their circumstances (Gottlieb & Gottlieb, 2017).



"Currently most things are siloed and confusing. These separated services also create barriers. An example is a friend who has extreme mental health and was living in poverty, close to homelessness. He went to the psychiatric emergency at the hospital on suicide watch multiple times. They said he needed a family doctor to sign the ODSP application, but he didn't have one. It then took many months after that to even get into an office for regular doctor care and then that doctor also required more assessments before they would sign – with appointments weeks and weeks apart and still no signed documents. You hear these stories all the time. But the result is devastating for a person who needs comprehensive care and financial relief now, not partial care a year down the line after things are even worse."

– VOICES Member

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BENEFITS OF A WHOLISTIC APPROACH

We think that a wholistic approach can significantly reduce fragmentation and foster trust, which is essential for effective support. Individuals with lived experience often face fragmented services that address only one part of their needs, which can exacerbate their challenges. By incorporating principles such as integration, collaboration, and inclusivity, we can create a more compassionate and understanding environment.



“What I love about a wholistic approach is that it acknowledges my entire self and empowers me to participate in my own healing. This approach would help me feel seen and heard. This would give me a safe feeling.”

– VOICES Member

WHOLISTIC FRAMEWORK:

Understanding Integrated Care

Integrated care involves coordinating services across different sectors to ensure that individuals receive comprehensive support. This approach recognizes that people’s needs are interconnected and that addressing one aspect of their lives without considering others can lead to incomplete and ineffective care (Valentijn et al., 2013). We have all experienced this. We often feel like we go from service to service only dealing with slices of ourselves at a time. This also leads to transportation issues and extra cost. One of our members was traumatized by the transportation service they received just trying to get to an organization for help when the driver was inappropriate.



CREATING COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEMS

A comprehensive system provides seamless access to various services that individuals need to thrive. This includes healthcare, mental health support, social services, education, and employment assistance. Comprehensive systems are designed to be user-friendly and accessible, ensuring that individuals do not fall through the cracks (Fisher & Ransom, 2015).

"I don't like having to navigate multiple, disconnected services. It would be better if everything I needed is accessible. It would be wonderful if it was easier for me to get the support I need without jumping through hoops. It feels like a full-time job just to be poor. Only people in poverty know how expensive it is to be poor. It is not easy. We are working hard just to survive." – **VOICES Member**

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS

Empowerment is essential for fostering a wholistic approach. This involves recognizing individuals' strengths and capabilities and supporting them in making informed decisions about their own lives. Empowerment also includes fostering leadership and participation within communities (Gottlieb & Gottlieb, 2017).

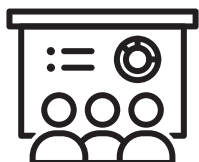
CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING A WHOLISTIC APPROACH

Collaboration between service providers, community organisations and people with 'lived experience' of poverty and marginalization can improve the delivery of services so that they better reflect and respond to individual needs (Fisher & Ransom, 2015). Collaboration reduces the barriers. We acknowledge that this is not an easy path. Some barriers include resistance to change, lack of awareness or understanding of integrated care, and limited resources. Addressing these barriers requires ongoing education, advocacy, and a commitment to wholistic and comprehensive support (Samson, 2015).

"When I needed help and had to rely on the system, it often felt like I was being pulled in different directions by different services that didn't communicate with each other. A wholistic approach can prevent this by creating systems that understand and address all aspects of our lives while working together and putting us in the proper direction." – **VOICES Member**

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

To effectively implement a wholistic approach, service providers should consider the following strategies:



TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Provide comprehensive training on wholistic principles and practices for all staff members. This training should include information on the interconnected nature of individuals' needs and practical strategies for creating integrated and comprehensive environments (Fisher & Ransom, 2015).



POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES

Review and revise policies and practices to ensure they support wholistic care. This includes developing protocols for coordinating services, ensuring confidentiality, and creating a culture of respect and empathy (Samson, 2015).



COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS Foster collaboration between service providers, community organizations, and individuals with lived experience. Partnerships can enhance the delivery of wholistic care and ensure that services are wholistic and responsive to the needs of those impacted by systemic barriers (Gottlieb & Gottlieb, 2017).



PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Develop and support peer-led initiatives that provide mentorship and support for individuals with lived experience. Peer support can be a powerful tool for healing and empowerment (Richie, 2012).





THE ROLE OF INCLUSIVITY IN WHOLISTIC WORK

Inclusivity is a key concept in wholistic work. It recognizes that individuals' experiences of poverty are influenced by multiple, intersecting factors, such as race, gender, class, and disability (Crenshaw, 1991). Understanding inclusivity is essential for addressing the complex and interconnected nature of individuals' needs.

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“My experience of poverty is shaped by many factors, including my race, gender, and status as a single parent. An inclusive approach helps to address all these aspects and provides more comprehensive support.”

– *VOICES Member*



LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF A WHOLISTIC APPROACH

A wholistic approach not only addresses immediate needs but also promotes long-term systemic change. By challenging and dismantling fragmented structures, we can create more integrated and effective systems that benefit everyone. Studies have shown that wholistic care can lead to better social and economic outcomes, improved community cohesion, and greater overall well-being (Valentijn et al., 2013).

BUILDING A WHOLISTIC COMMUNITY

Building a wholistic community involves more than just individual efforts; it requires a collective commitment to comprehensive care. Community organizations, schools, healthcare providers, and local governments must work together to create an inclusive and integrated environment. This involves public education campaigns, community-based training programs, and policies that promote wholistic practices across all sectors (Freire, 1970).

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“We need our entire community to be wholistic, from schools to healthcare providers to local businesses. Everyone plays a role in supporting those of us who have experienced systemic barriers.”

– *VOICES Member*

Taking a wholistic approach is essential when working with people with lived experience of poverty. By recognizing and addressing the interconnected nature of individuals' needs, service providers can create integrated and supportive environments that foster healing and recovery. This approach not only improves individual outcomes but also promotes a more compassionate and effective system of care. Our collective experiences and insights at VOICES highlight the critical need for wholistic work to create a more inclusive and supportive society.



WALK IN OUR SHOES: PERSONAL STORIES FROM PWLE



“Empowerment means recognizing that I have value and strengths, even in difficult times. It's about building my capacity to create change in my own life and in turn I can participate in my community. Every hour, every second of every day is hard in poverty – will I have the money for food? Will my old car break down? This is in my head all the time. I currently have a lot of stress about housing. There is a lot of energy loss around this. If there is good housing, then I wouldn't be preoccupied trying to solve this problem. I also spend a lot of time worrying about my health and work – if I was healthy maybe I could work. If I was housed and healthy, I would have the capacity to give back to my community. I could volunteer. I almost took a place I felt unsafe in which is very wearing on the body and mind.

I don't have the energy to be a part of the community in that stress. I am not living in poverty; I am dying in it. Joy and laughter even get lost from the stress. This is not thriving. I want to let go and sit back and laugh. I can't relax enough to laugh when I am in a flight or fight response just trying to survive. Being wholistic means we are looking at a person as a complete being with all their strengths and complex needs. If I am treated like a whole person then my laughter matters, so does my housing. Being a part of VOICES is helping me to laugh because we take a wholistic approach with each other and in our work.”

– **VOICES Member**

WALK WITH US...

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

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