



RESEARCH PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON LIVED EXPERIENCE

UniSA PhD student Verity Reeves wants to advance the understanding and integration of lived experience workers within mental health services.

As the successful recipient of a PhD scholarship sponsored by UnitingSA, Verity is in the second year of her research project, *'Understanding the context, influence and sustainability of the lived experience workforce contribution to mental health service delivery'*.

Over the past few months, Verity has conducted interviews with mental health workers across Australia, and will publish four research papers between now and March 2023.

She is in the final stages of interviewing peer workers, who have a lived experience of mental health challenges, and their non-peer worker colleagues.

"This research is about increasing acceptance of the lived experience role in mental health services and the integration and sustainability of the role."

VERITY

"I hope that the research will be used in a positive way to influence organisations to be more inclusive in the services they provide, as well as reduce stigma and discrimination that has been attached to mental health diagnosis for so long."

When developing the project, Verity says a priority was to ensure the research could be used in a practical way.

Over the coming months, she will draw on the data to develop an educational resource for non-peer workers aimed at improving their understanding and attitudes around lived experience workers.

Verity hopes it will increase acceptance of the role among non-peer workers and support positive integration within teams and across services.

"We will co-design an educational resource, pilot it and then evaluate it," she says.

"If it can be used in mental health services that employ lived experience workers to support positive integration and sustainability of the role, then that would be a really positive outcome.

"I hope I can help create better working environments and, in turn, create positive change for people who utilise these services – that's what really interests me."

Verity has a background working in community services, including as a drug and alcohol counsellor and within foster care.

She says she is relishing the opportunity to combine her work experience and research skills to help create meaningful change.

"For me it is about not being able to just work in the system but have influence over the system," she says.

"Essentially, if I can do something in my research that will have a positive impact on someone's life, that's enough for me."

Verity's work is part of UniSA's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Research and Education Group.

Verity is still seeking mental health workers to interview as part of her research. If you are a non-peer worker, who works alongside peer workers, and would like to get involved, please email Verity at Verity.Reeves@mymail.unisa.edu.au