

# Promoting a Recovery-focused Workplace:

## Job Descriptions

---

Every organization has its own structure for writing job descriptions, but most job descriptions include:

- An overview or brief description of the organization
- A list of job responsibilities
- A list of essential and desired qualifications

Each of these components offers an opportunity for organizations to highlight their commitment to recovery-oriented, trauma-informed, person-centered, integrated care.

---

### Organizational Overview

---

Typically, job descriptions lead off with a brief description of the organization. To highlight your commitment to these principles of care, make sure the language used in your organizational description speaks to an approach centered on recovery, trauma, person-centered care, and integrated health. For example:

- Direct statement: Good Hope Services is a leading provider of housing and other residential supports to people with substance abuse and mental health challenges, offering a broad range of trauma informed, recovery oriented, person-centered services with a constant focus on integrated physical and behavioral health.
- Indirect statement: At Catalyst for Success, services are delivered in a way that maximizes each service participant's opportunities for self-determination and success in achieving the goals of their choice. Catalyst for Success believes in every person's right to determine their own goals and to achieve a full life of recovery in the community.

Any statement included that provides an overview of the position itself is a chance to further emphasize this approach:

- The Care Manager helps service participants actively pursue their own meaningful life in the community as independently as possible including assisting with housing, employment, physical and behavioral health needs.

.....  
Job  
Responsibilities  
.....

In listing job responsibilities, organizations should again incorporate statements that underscore the organization’s guiding philosophy. Of course, it is essential that the wording throughout the job description uses person-centered, recovery-oriented language. For example, words like collaborate, facilitate, and partner reinforce the idea that program participants are driving services, rather than “provider will do X for participants.”

Some examples:

- Collaborate with service participants to identify and develop their own life goals and a timeline that works for them in reaching those goals
- Work together with clients to help them develop coping skills that will help them manage trauma triggers more effectively
- Partner with program participants to track health metrics that promote health and wellness
- Ensure all service plans consider culture and ethnic backgrounds, customs, needs, beliefs, and preferred language

.....  
Job  
Responsibilities  
.....

If you are seeking someone committed to the principles of recovery, person-centered care, trauma-informed approaches, and integrated health, you should state this clearly in the listing of essential and desired qualifications. For example:

- Commitment to person-centered, recovery-focused and trauma-informed treatment strategies, upholding participants’ rights and self-determination in service provision.
- Minimum three years experience working with people using a recovery perspective

Then list specific skills that speak to these issues, such as:

- De-escalation techniques (trauma)
- Partner with individuals to develop skills to help manage strong emotions
- Ability to assess and explore drug and alcohol use with substance users non-judgmentally
- Familiarity with strategies to manage chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension

- Understanding of behavior change techniques, such as motivational interviewing
- Ability to engage people in their own healthcare and wellbeing, using strategies to increase their motivation and desire for improved health<sup>1</sup>

If specific education and licensing standards are not required for your program, you may want to be flexible in your requirements to further demonstrate your commitment to this approach. Most position descriptions focus on academic credentials, but having a specific degree is not necessarily an indication that a job candidate is committed to the principles of recovery, growth, and well-being. Consider expanding the requirements to allow experience to substitute for education, when possible. For example:

- Master's in Social Work preferred but a combination of experience and education will be considered.

And if you are an agency that values the contributions of people with lived experience (both in roles as peers or as other kinds of providers), you might include a statement at the end of your Job Description:

- Our organization strives to provide reasonable accommodations for any known physical or behavioral health challenge or limitation for qualified employees with disabilities to the extent that the requested accommodation will not impose an undue hardship on the operation of our services.

*This Supplemental Resource was written by Edye Schwartz, DSW, LCSW-R, as part of the Workforce Priorities project, ©2020*

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: EMConsulting

## Recommended Interview Questions:

### **Recovery focused and person-centered care**

---

The questions below are intended as a guide for interviewers interested in exploring candidate's skills, knowledge, and attitudes towards recovery and person-centered care.

You may also want to probe for competency in the following "soft skills" that are essential to a recovery-focused orientation:

- Collaboration
- Continuous learning
- Power sharing
- Non-judgmental listening
- Empathy
- Patience
- Unconditional support for others
- Strengths-based approaches

---

### Understanding of recovery and person-centered care principles

- What do you think recovery is, and what is it not?
- How is recovery the same as or different from treatment?
- What do you do in your work with clients that would demonstrate to an observer that your approach is recovery-based?

---

### Attitudes towards recovery and person-centered care

- Describe the likelihood of recovery for people you have worked with.
- From your experience, what kinds of goals are appropriate for clients to work towards? What goals would you consider inappropriate?
- If a person is making a decision that you think is bad, or might lead to failure, how do you respond?
- To what extent should people experiencing psychiatric symptoms, or actively using substances be allowed to make decisions for themselves?

---

### Client participation in service design and delivery

- How do you respond when a client shares a goal that you think is not achievable or reasonable?
- Describe how you have developed treatment plans for people who are not able to specify any personal goals or desired interventions?
- How should programs involve clients in the design of services?
- Talk about how you have worked with clients who do not consistently participate in the services on the treatment plan.

---

## Recovery outcomes

- Tell me about a time you tapped into non-traditional supports to work with a client (*examples of non-traditional supports could include acupuncture, peer staff, service animals, Reiki, Hearing Voices groups*).
- Describe some of the ways you have encouraged clients to be more integrated into their communities.
- Tell me about how you support clients who are interested in getting a job.
- Can you share an example of support you provided to a client around managing an intimate relationship?

---

## Being a recovery-focused practitioner

- Describe how you think staff members can use self-disclosure in their work with clients.
- Tell me about a situation working with a client that made you lose hope. What did you do as a result?
- Describe your experience working with peer staff as a member of the service delivery team.
- Think about a client you found very challenging to work with. Describe that person's challenges. Next, tell me about the person's strengths, and anything you did to tap into these assets.
- Tell me about a time you felt defeated by your work. How did you respond?
- Tell me about something you learned from a client.

---

## Recovery orientation in the workplace

- If you were in charge of the physical environment of your program, what would you do to make a recovery philosophy stand out?
- What does a recovery-focused practitioner do as a supervisor that a non-recovery oriented person might not do?
- Tell me about a risk you have taken and how it turned out.

## Recommended Interview Questions:

### **Trauma Informed Approaches**

---

The questions below are intended as a guide for interviewers interested in exploring candidate's skills, knowledge, and attitudes towards trauma-informed approaches.

You may also want to probe for competency in the following "soft skills" that are essential to a trauma-informed approach:

- Empowering clients
- Trustworthiness
- Dependability and reliability
- Strengths-based
- Empathy and compassion
- Non-judgmental listening
- De-escalation
- Problem-solving

---

#### Providing support; showing compassion

- Tell me about a time you worked with a client who had a history of trauma. How did you respond to their specific needs? How did that experience inform your work with other clients?
- Describe the things you do to create an environment of that is trauma-informed.
- Give some examples of how you connected with clients who seemed distrustful or distant.

---

#### Dealing with crisis and handling escalations

- Tell me about a time when you had to calm down a person who was upset and behaving irrationally.
- Tell me about a time when someone was very agitated and you were not able to help them de-escalate.
- Tell me about a time when you had to respond quickly to a crisis. What was your approach? What was the outcome?
- Sometimes our work is judged or criticized unfairly, or our intent is misunderstood. Can you tell us about a situation that fits this description?
- Talk about the steps you personally take to build trust with your supervisor and co-workers.

---

## Creating safety

- What are some things you consider when you want to make sure a client feels safe? (*look for examples of both physical and emotional safety*)
- What are some strategies you use to maximize opportunities for choice with clients?
- Tell us about working with a client with a trauma history. What coping skills did you work on with this person and what was the outcome?
- Talk about a time you had to anticipate a situation that would be re-traumatizing or trigger to a client.

---

## Working with youth and families

- Think about a young person you have worked with who has a history of trauma. What were some of the situations that were triggering to this person? What did you do to support them in coping and managing their emotions?
- Please share any ideas you have for building resilience in youth who have experienced trauma.
- What is something people who have only worked with adults get wrong about working with young people who have experienced trauma?

---

## For candidates for Supervisor and Leadership positions

- Describe ways you both model and encourage trauma-informed care and practice.
- How do you provide corrective feedback to staff who are not working with clients in a trauma-informed way?
- What strategies have you built into your work to build resilience on your team, and address secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma and burnout?

*Some of these questions are derived from the National Council of Behavioral Health's initiative on Trauma Informed Primary Care's Trauma Informed Care Interview Questions.*

## Recommended Interview Questions:

### **Whole Health/Integration of Physical and Behavioral Health**

---

The questions below are intended as a guide for interviewers interested in exploring candidate's skills, knowledge, and attitudes towards integrated physical and behavioral health care.

You may also want to probe for competency in the following "soft skills" that are essential to a whole health orientation:

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Learning
- Empathy
- Listening
- Observation and awareness

---

#### Scope of practice

- How would you define *whole health*? (look for answers that include *monitoring of chronic illness, overlap of behavioral and physical health, and addressing social determinants of health as part of practice*)? What is the role of behavioral health in addressing "whole health"?
- To what extent do you think a job like this should focus on physical health issues? How should this be done?
- What do you think are the limitations of this position in terms of addressing social determinants of health?
- What are some health issues you think should be part of the job description of a case manager or counselor?

---

#### Knowledge, understanding, and attitudes towards health

- Explain some of the ways you think culture impacts a person's health.
- In your experience, what are some of the ways physical health challenges impact your clients, their recovery, and your work with them?
- Which health topics do you find challenging to discuss with clients? (look for comments about *sex, substance abuse – recognizing these as health issues*) How often do you find yourself bringing up these issues?
- What are some of the reasons you think clients might not consistently take medication as prescribed? Describe a time you worked with a client who did not take medications as prescribed?
- What are some of the strategies you use to help clients improve their wellness skills?

---

## Information sharing and teamwork

- Describe how you share information about your clients with others on your team. How frequently do you share information about the people you're currently supporting?
- Share how you have used technology to help you focus on the well-being of a client. Which tool did you use, and how did you use it?
- Can you give an example of how you have interacted with a client's physical health care providers in the past? How is this typical for you? In what ways was this different?

---

## Supporting individuals

- Can you talk about a time when you supported a client who received a medical diagnosis that was unfamiliar to both you and the client?
- Your client does not have a trusting relationship with her endocrinologist. She has an appointment tomorrow. What can you do to support her?
- Tell us about working with a client who was not "taking good care of his health."
- You make a home visit to a client who has been showing signs of increased isolation because he has a lingering cough. While at the home, you notice a window that doesn't close properly as well as some mold in the bathroom. What do you do?
- Tell me about a time when supporting a client's health made you feel hopeless or out of your league. How did you handle this experience? What other situations with clients make you feel that way?

---

## For candidates for Supervisor and Leadership positions

- What do you think are the responsibilities of a case manager or counselor in working with a client who has physical health issues?
- As a leader, how do you encourage your staff to think about the connection between physical and behavioral health challenges?
- Talk about a situation in which your staff had to work with clients in living situations that were responsible for poor health outcomes. How did you support your staff's work with these clients.
- Describe two ways you have held staff accountable for staying on top of both the physical and behavioral health issues of a client.
- What kind of training do you think is important for staff to maintain a whole health perspective?
- How do you incorporate conversations about whole health/integrated health into staff meetings? Supervision sessions?

