



Experience to Expertise Spectrum

The anti-slavery and anti-trafficking movement is starting to value survivor voices and survivor input. Sometimes, this is called "lived experience expertise." But what is lived experience? And what does it mean to be an expert? Here are some key terms and issues to understand.

What is Lived Experience?

In the context of Survivor Alliance, lived experience refers to any person who has gone through human trafficking or slavery as defined by the United Nations. People can have lived experience of cancer, domestic violence, war, and so many other things as well.

"Lived experience experts" is a way to recognize that everyone knows their own life story best. No one else can be more knowledgeable about your life than you! You are an expert on your story. Also, your story and the lessons you've learned from them can often shed light on what it might be like for other people.

People with lived experience are able to advise on a wide range of topics related to that experience. For example, you might review outreach and awareness materials, training materials, comment on the impact of a policy, provide feedback on direct social service programs, and a great deal more.

Life Experience

Life experience is something that everyone has and is used to describe transferable skills that you have gained simply by living. You may have heard people call this “the school of life”. These skills can include things like:

- Relationship development and management.
- Negotiation and conflict resolution.
- Critical thinking and creative problem solving.

Life experience can also be culturally or demographically specific – this type of experience is particularly valuable if you come from a marginalized or underrepresented population.

Professional Experience

Most of you will already know that professional experience refers to any experience you have from a particular work area - including jobs which require no form of higher education, such as restaurant and retail jobs. Survivors who work in the anti-slavery field as consultants or in full-time positions have professional experience in anti-slavery work. Professional experience familiarizes you with things like:

- Supervisor-supervisee relationships.
- Working collaboratively as part of a team.
- Customer service skills.
- Financial responsibility, budgeting, paying taxes.

Professional Expertise

Professional expertise is something you acquire after many years of professional experience in a specific field. It is often said that a person needs 10 years of professional experience to achieve true professional expertise. Those with professional expertise are usually able to:

- Understand an issue from a historical and emerging trend perspective.
- Provide unique insight and innovative solutions.
- Think ‘big picture’ and understand the nuances of individual realities.

Education

Formal education includes primary and secondary school; college and university degrees, graduate level degrees such as Masters and PhDs. Education can also come from professional training workshops or certifications. These courses could have been completed online or in person.

For more information, contact
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