



Helping the Helpers in Peer-Led Violence Interruption Work

The Work

Hiring and deploying individuals with histories criminal involvement or violence (i.e., peers) to tackle the seemingly intractable epidemic of community violence is impactful and life-changing. Peer-led approaches are transformative and can help prevent future victimization, crime, and tragedy in families of both potential victims and perpetrators of violence.

*Violence interrupters are exposed to significant trauma almost daily in the routine performance of their work. They are called to the scene of **fatalities**, they witness **gun violence and physical altercations**, they **intervene** in fights, and they try to **provide resources to families** suffering from poverty, hunger, and interpersonal violence in the home.*

The Challenge

Too often peer-led violence intervention programs are so focused on the urgent need to disrupt violence that the needs of the peer workers are overlooked, and these peers are not receiving the help they need to do this incredibly challenging work. Consistent with best practices for supporting first responders and other helping professionals, any person exposed daily to extreme stress, tragedy, and trauma should be provided with training to manage their own traumatic responses to the extreme circumstances they are exposed to in the day-to-day duties of their job. There are numerous evidenced-based practices that exist for trauma support in the workplace for other professionals, *yet few if any have been adapted and delivered to peer-based violence interruption workers.*

The WEI Approach

Our team tailors trauma responsive training and supports to peers delivering violence interruption programs. We adapt trainings using an interdisciplinary team of those with lived experience in violence, criminal justice and violence interruption, researchers, and social workers.



The training includes:

- Naming & **recognizing trauma**
- Identifying potential traumatic **stressors & trauma responses**
- Stress and coping **strategies**
- Recognizing the **need for help in others**
- Knowing **when to seek help** for oneself

The training can be delivered in person or virtually and includes a train-the-trainer option so that the community-based organizations employing peers can offer continually and ongoing support as their workforce changes. WEI is seeking to expand this freely available training across the country and continuing to refine our approach based on feedback and evaluation results.