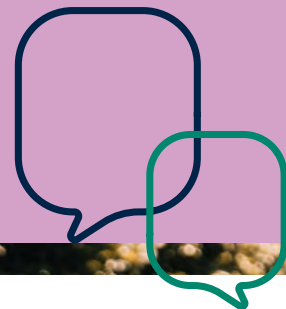


# Lived Experience Framework



**UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE AND GUIDING THE  
ROLE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE IN SYSTEM REFORM**



**2025**



QUEENSLAND  
**Family & Child  
Commission**



Queensland  
Government

## About this framework

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (the Commission) is a statutory body of the Queensland Government. Its purpose is to influence change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children, young people and their families. Under the Family and Child Commission Act 2014, the Commission has been charged with responsibility to review and improve the systems that protect and safeguard our children.

## Accessibility



The Queensland Government is committed to providing accessible services to Queenslanders from all culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. If you have difficulty understanding this report, you can contact Translating and Interpreting Service National on 13 14 50 to arrange for an interpreter to effectively explain it to you. Local call charges apply if calling within Australia. Higher rates apply from mobile phones and payphones.

## Contact for enquiries

Queensland Family and Child Commission Level 8, 63 George Street  
PO Box 15217, Brisbane City East QLD 4002  
[www.qfcc.qld.gov.au](http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au)



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## Acknowledgements

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as two unique peoples, with their own rich and distinct cultures, strengths and knowledge. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across Queensland and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

The Commission recognises the rich and resilient cultures that continue to sustain and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We respect the right to self-determination and the critical importance of continuing connection to kin, Country and culture in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We recognise that self-determination, healing, dignity and respect are all fundamental elements needed to improve outcomes and relationships. As an agency, we are committed to embedding culturally safe and responsive design practices and delivery in our work.

## Recognition of lived experience

The Commission is committed to leading a family and child rights agenda in Queensland and to assist others to integrate a rights approach. This approach recognises that all rights are underpinned by the following four key principles: devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; respect for the views of the child; and, non-discrimination.



The role and value of lived experience is vital to creating more effective, responsive systems in Queensland. Individuals with lived experience offer unique insights that are instrumental in shaping policies and practices that are both relevant and sustainable. Their perspectives ensure that reforms address real-world challenges and meet the needs of those directly affected. However, meaningful, lasting change cannot be achieved alone. It requires a collective commitment from government agencies, community organisations, and the community. By amplifying the voices of those with lived experience and enabling collaboration, we can build inclusive, fair, and just systems that break cycles of disadvantage and better support the children, young people, and families that need it most.

This framework is to support government agencies, service providers and community organisations seeking to embed lived experience in through inclusive, trauma-informed and responsive practices.

*Artwork created by 16-year-old with living experience of out-of-home care*

# OUR COMMITMENT

The Commission is committed to ensuring that the voices and insights of those with lived experience are central to our work. We recognise that the challenges facing those with lived and living experience cannot be fully understood or effectively addressed without their contributions. These commitments underpin our work.

1

## APPRECIATING LIVED EXPERIENCE

We acknowledge and respect the insights of those with lived experience, understanding that their voices and perspectives are essential in shaping decision-making and developing effective solutions.

2

## ENABLING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

We strive to enable an environment where the insights of people with lived experience are actively sought, both formally and informally. We believe that integrating these perspectives into our work results in more effective responses.

3

## VALUING THE DIVERSITY WITHIN AND ACROSS COMMUNITIES

We acknowledge the diversity within communities, including the unique strengths, needs, and perspectives they bring. We aim to engage participants whose lived experiences align with the specific focus areas of each initiative.

4

## MAKING IT SAFE-ENOUGH TO TALK WITH US

We are dedicated to providing tailored, trauma-informed, and effective support mechanisms that enable meaningful engagement and strong partnerships.

5

## VALUING PEOPLE'S TIME

We recognise and appreciate the unique contributions of individuals with lived experience in our work, and ensure they are compensated fairly.

6

## DEDICATION TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

We are committed to welcoming feedback on our approaches and actively seek to improve in response to what we hear and the challenges we encounter.

# OUR APPROACH

## TRAUMA-INFORMED AND RESPONSIVE PRACTICE

### APPROACH

Not everyone with lived or living experience identifies as having experienced trauma, but for many, their insights are shaped by encounters with systemic or interpersonal harm. A trauma-informed and responsive approach recognises these realities without making assumptions and seeks to create safe-enough spaces where people can choose to participate in ways that feel right for them.

This means being mindful of the emotional, psychological, and cultural impacts of past and ongoing experiences, and designing engagement practices that build trust and support choice.

The Commission recognises the limitations of relying solely on trauma as a defining lens, particularly given its complexity and the risk of pathologising or oversimplifying people's experiences. However, we also acknowledge the value of trauma-informed principles when applied thoughtfully and in partnership with those with lived experience.

### BENEFITS

Adopting a trauma-informed, safe-enough approach provides guidance on what individual and systemic trauma is and how they manifest in everyday engagement. With that shared understanding, we can deliberately support psychological, cultural, and physical conditions that feel safe-enough, build trust, and build upon relationships over time.

When inviting people with lived experience to the table, we carefully consider which external stakeholders should be present and why, so power imbalances are minimised. We also plan debriefs and reflective practice activities, iterating our approach when required. This continual learning loop keeps the work responsive to participants' needs and maintains the integrity of the process. Ultimately, it signals to contributors that their wellbeing is as important to us as the insights they share.

## VALUING LIVED EXPERIENCE AS AN ESSENTIAL FORM OF KNOWLEDGE

### APPROACH

Lived experience as a way of knowing, being, and doing encompasses the knowledge, perspectives, and insights individuals gain through their direct, personal interactions with life. It is holistic and subjective, blending personal emotions, worldviews, and understandings. This form of knowledge complements theoretical knowledge by providing a unique perspective grounded in real-life experiences. Recognising and valuing lived experience can lead to more inclusive and effective strategies for tackling social issues.

For First Nations people, lived experience is a vital tool in shaping meaningful and culturally responsive approaches to addressing systemic challenges. It provides unique insights into the impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and the ongoing marginalisation experienced by First Nations communities.

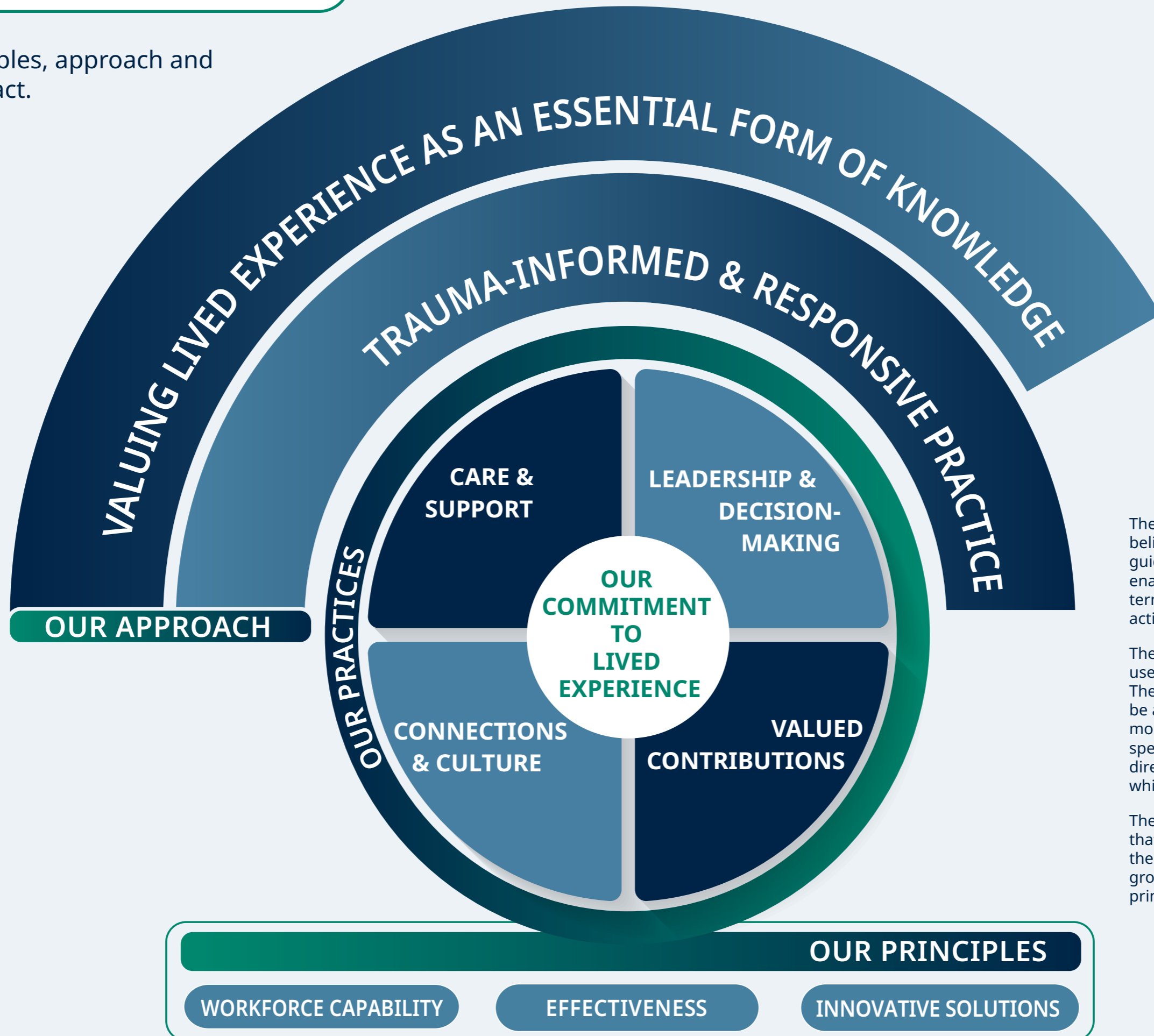
### BENEFITS

Historically, when decision-makers have addressed complex social issues, first-hand knowledge of the issue has often been undervalued, excluding lived experience knowledge in solution development leading to loss of critical insight, resulting in unintended consequences within services and systems. Recognising this challenge, we have worked intentionally to avoid this problem. We partner with people who have lived experience to shape our position, reflect on our role and seek guidance on approaching our work. We actively value lived experience as an essential form of knowledge, creating opportunities for those with lived experience to collaborate alongside other experts.

The promotion of cultural safety, ensuring that individuals feel respected, valued and supported within their cultural identity is a key benefit.

# OUR INCLUSION MODEL

How the principles, approach and practices interact.



The **principles** are the foundational beliefs that underpin the model, guiding its overarching purpose and enabling meaningful short- and long-term impact through purposeful action.

The **approach** is the strategic pathway used to put the principles into practice. They define how the principles will be applied in a general sense but are more flexible and adaptable than specific practices. They guide the direction used to achieve outcomes, while staying true to the principles.

The **practices** are the techniques that are implemented to realise the approach. They are the “on-the-ground” activities that embody the principles.

# OUR PRACTICES

## CARE AND SUPPORT

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Collaborative spaces</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When hosting an in-person workshop or engagement, designate a breakout room for individuals who may need a quiet space. This room could also be staffed with a supportive team member.</li><li>• Meeting people where they are to broaden the reach for lived experience engagement, understanding that some do not, or cannot, access traditional engagement models or means.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Pre-briefing and reflection</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conducting briefing sessions with participants before and after any activity. These sessions involve discussions to identify personalised support needs that can enhance participation, such as assistance with transportation, access to communication tools, and adjusting the activity to accommodate specific requirements.</li><li>• Providing participants with as much information as possible about what to expect from the engagement, including the benefits and potential risks of participation, and clearly outlining their role. This ensures informed decision-making, allowing participants to decide if and how to share their experiences.</li><li>• Offering a walk through of the space in advance.</li><li>• Conducting follow-up calls to check on participants' wellbeing and gather feedback on the experience to contribute to continuous improvement.</li></ul> |
| <b>Mentoring and supervision</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offering personalised support to participants, along with dedicated time and space for debriefing, reflection, and discussion.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Learning and development</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing lived experience inclusion and practice training to staff and the executive team.</li><li>• Engaging in discussions about lived experience role career development and investing in opportunities to enhance their skills.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Peer-to-peer support</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investing in and creating opportunities for peer-to-peer support for designated roles within the Commission and across the sector.</li><li>• Providing a list of support resources before and after engagements to ensure individuals know who to contact if they experience distress.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Acknowledging lived experience</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a dedicated acknowledgment of lived experience roles at consultations, events, and workshops.</li></ul>   |

# OUR PRACTICES

## LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING

- Identified positions**
- The Commission has several identified positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those with lived experiences. We support the use of personal lived experience in a culturally safe way in our internal discussions and project work.

## CONNECTIONS AND CULTURE

- Reflective learning**
- Asking questions and initiating conversation about meaningful participation and the needs of individuals, in ways that evolve and strengthen our practices.
  - Embracing positive risk-taking, staying committed to growing through feedback and reflection.
  - Investing in research and other initiatives to support ongoing learning.
- Relationship-centered practice**
- Prioritising and valuing meaningful connections and collaboration in a culturally safe way, with a strong commitment to understanding and learning from one another.
  - Embracing feedback and initiating conversation where diverse perspectives are invited and respected.

## VALUED CONTRIBUTIONS

- Consultation and engagements**
- Encouraging lived experience-led working groups.
  - Remunerating for the time, participation and contributions of people with lived experience to co-design events and consultations, participate in meetings, and speak at public forums and on panels, a minimum commitment of 2 hours.
  - Responding to and respecting participants' right to withdraw their consent at any time if they feel unable to continue, not affecting remuneration or future opportunities for participation.

# OUR IMPLEMENTATION THEORY

## IMPACT

### PRINCIPLES

#### INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Enable safe-enough, trauma-informed environments that encourage meaningful lived experience contributions

Establish the conditions necessary to leverage diverse perspectives in the ideation and development of solutions

#### EFFECTIVENESS

Be bold in exploring new approaches, recognising that we may achieve better outcomes

Integrate lived experience and create structural opportunities for individuals with lived experience to lead initiatives

#### WORKFORCE CAPABILITY

Value and recognise opportunities for impact leveraging lived experience outcomes

Invest in developing the skills and abilities of staff and advocates (in dedicated lived experience roles or not) to enhance capability

### ACTIONS

- Being mindful of the language we use and acknowledging its impact
- Providing tailored, appropriate support for individuals with lived experience, based on their needs and the activity
- Cultivating relationships of trust and respect with people with lived experience
- Involving people with lived experience in conversations and co-designing safe-enough spaces for authentic participation
- Organising initiatives, events, workshops, and other forums that bring together diverse lived experience perspectives alongside relevant sectors and their leaders
- Collaborating with people with lived experience to co-design relevant initiatives

- Embracing thoughtful risks
- Enabling an environment of trust and continuous learning
- Investing in research and evaluation to reflect on our past efforts
- Facing challenging situations and conversations
- Ensuring dedicated representation of lived experience on the boards and reference groups
- Actively involving people with lived experience in teams that design solutions and forecast work plans

- Offering training and coaching to enhance understanding of power dynamics, allyship and trauma-informed practices
- Ensuring fair compensation for the contributions of people with lived experience
- Valuing the insights of people with lived experience equally when making decisions
- Providing mentoring, coaching and training for individuals in key positions and projects
- Creating supported opportunities for people with lived experience to actively contribute to and lead various activities

### SHORT-TERM

- Gaining deeper, more meaningful insights into issues and potential solutions by actively seeking and engaging diverse perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked
- Greater knowledge generation and understanding throughout the organisation and government bodies

- A more relational and respectful organisational culture that enables productive contributions and the development of effective solutions
- More informed strategic decisions, shaped by the experiences and perspectives of those affected by systems

- Expanded and diverse opportunities for people with lived experience to drive social and systems change

- Enhanced capabilities and self-confidence among individuals with lived experience in contributing to solutions
- Shifting mindsets and challenging assumptions among those without lived experience, enabling a more open, authentic and innovative approach to thinking and working
- Greater recognition of diverse forms of 'expertise,' valuing lived experience alongside formal qualifications and traditional expertise

### LONG-TERM

#### SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

- Solutions that are tailored, context-specific, and address the complexity of people's experiences, and meet the needs of people affected by systems, services, policies and practices
- Successful adoption of solutions across sectors and systems

#### SCALABLE SYSTEM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

- Operating model that prioritises and integrates lived experience, adaptable for future collaborative projects across relevant sectors
- Enhanced capability across leadership to drive change across sectors
- Cross-sector, holistic solutions
- A reduction in the stigma faced by individuals with lived experience

#### INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- A deeper understanding of, and increased demand for, lived experience and expertise within the broader relevant sectors
- Diverse lived experience cohorts for sectors to draw from

# AMPLIFYING CHILDREN'S VIEWS

## THE LAW

The Commission has an obligation to amplify the views of children and young people. Under the legislation, the Family and Child Commission Act 2014, the Commissioners have specific legislated functions, one of which is to engage with, and take account of, the views of children, young people and their families (Section 23 1a). This section of the legislation enables the Commissioners to find opportunities for young Queenslanders to speak publicly about their lived experiences, including of the Queensland child protection and youth justice systems. These opportunities can include social and traditional media, public events, meetings, reports and other public communications channels.

The Commission considers each circumstance individually, with specific consideration to how the potential impact the public disclosure may have on the participating individual and their family. As a starting position, we prioritise publishing information that raises community awareness and system accountability, in alignment with the Commission's legal function and strategic objectives.

Young Queenslanders have freedom of expression, and the legal protection to tell and publish their story.

The Commission is cautious to not unnecessarily publish identifying information, without good cause, but under the direction of the Commissioners, it must also not limit or restrict the publication of the lived reality of the children we are legislated to represent and protect.

Based on the legislation, the Commission can enable the identification of a young Queenslander with the following conditions:

- The Commission supports young people to tell their own stories ethically and in a way that feels safe-enough
- The Commission supports an adult to freely tell their story, without limitation
- The activity does not cause harm to that person or their family
- The activity is in the best interest of the community
- when publishing case studies, artworks, stories and photos of children in care or youth justice, a non-deplume is used, and have the normal consent that we would expect for all children
- When publishing the story of an adult, the Commission has the required written consent.

## CHALLENGING NORMS

In any project aimed to change systems, actively examining and challenging power dynamics is essential. Lived experience inclusion, in particular, involves individuals who may not have traditionally had access to established forms of power. By authentically integrating lived experience into its system's change efforts, the

Commission seeks to address and challenge structural and systemic deficits. While lived experience contributions can challenge established structures and ways of thinking in a positive way, the readiness for this disruption must be intentionally acknowledged.

## SAFE-ENOUGH ENVIRONMENTS

While integrating lived experience into decision-making is valuable, it's important to approach potential risks with care, respect and nuance, with the understanding that not all lived experience participation is inherently risky. Where risks do exist, they should be identified and managed in partnership with those involved.

Risk mitigation should support the autonomy, preferences and expertise of those with lived experience. This includes recognising the dignity of risk, which is the right for people to make informed choices about their involvement.

Rather than seeking to eliminate all risk, a proportionate and person-led approach

involves offering individualised risk planning that is flexible, responsive and co-designed with the contributor. These plans can help identify and respond to emotional, cultural, psychological or privacy-related risks, should the participant feel this is necessary.

Many organisations have risk management frameworks suited to their operations. These should be adapted to support lived experience engagement in a way that is trauma-aware, culturally safe and grounded in trust. By centring each person's preferences and needs, risk management becomes a tool to support safety, choice and empowerment.

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Creating structured feedback opportunities for lived experience participants is essential for shaping practice. This can be done through surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and participatory workshops. Evaluating project outcomes ensures their effectiveness, relevance, and continuous improvement, with feedback from those with lived experience playing a crucial role in refining these practices.

A culture of learning and growth is key to the success of lived experience inclusion. We are committed to ongoing evaluation and feedback loops, investing in research to enhance our work. Insights gained will drive continuous improvements, making our practice more responsive, relevant, and impactful. By incorporating feedback into decision-making, strategies, policies and practices can be adapted to meet emerging needs and achieve better outcomes.



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