

MCM Group

Lived Experience Engagement and Participation Framework

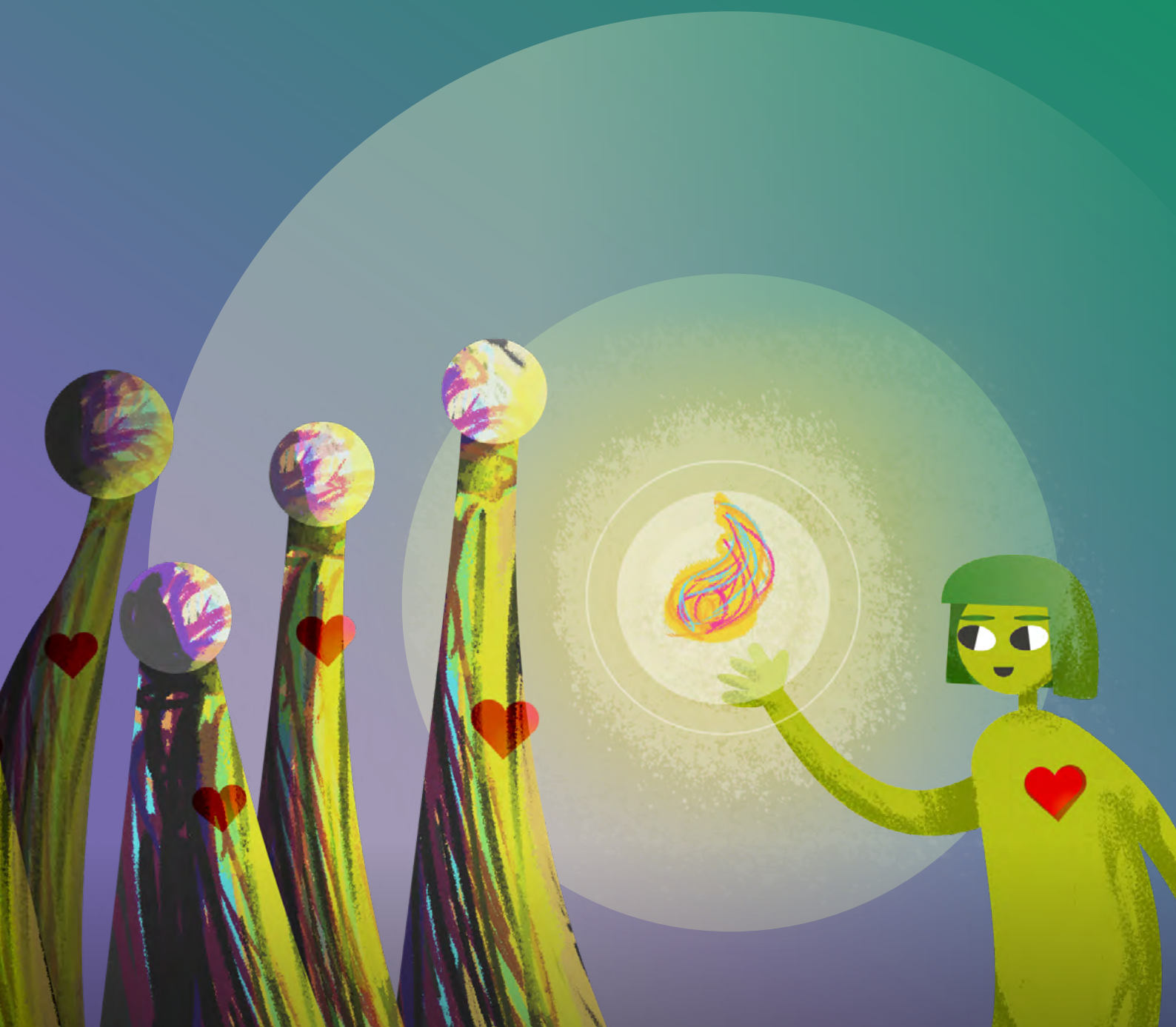
mcm.



**mcm.
housing**



**HESTER
HORN BROOK
ACADEMY**



About MCM Group

Melbourne City Mission (MCM), MCM Housing, and Hester Hornbrook Academy - together MCM Group

Established in 1854, MCM is one of Victoria's oldest, largest, and most diverse non-profit community service organisations. Today, the MCM Group work together to innovate change and create positive pathways for people in Victoria.

Through collaborative efforts, the MCM Group strives to empower and enable people, offering comprehensive support through more than 80 programs, including homelessness, housing, disability, mental health, early childhood and education, child and family services and home-based palliative care.

Through **MCM Group's Healing Oriented Framework**, the sector leading services aim to create healing oriented impact to the experiences of trauma, traumatic stress and adverse life events in the lives of individuals, families and communities.

We are vocal advocates for dismantling barriers, addressing gaps, enhancing social justice, and fostering diversity and inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities for all, towards a more equitable future for everyone.

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Behind the cover artwork

"I am a young queer individual who has been working with MCM for just over six-months through the Detour program.

Through my artwork, I wanted to represent a queer person sharing their lived experience (rainbow flame) to people who are allies but may not have the full picture of what goes on and the politics of being a queer individual (greyed-out figures).

This exchange of information is represented by the rainbow flame inspiring and filling the shadowed figures with their own rainbow strands.

The red hearts on both sides of the figures represents the shared heart and humanity we all share as people, as well as the realisation and acceptance of one another."

- Ollie (They/Them)



Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

We wish to acknowledge and pay our respects to the First Nations People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners, Custodians and Caretakers of the lands, skies and waters.

We pay our respects to their creation stories, songlines, storylines and ancient wisdoms. We recognise the diverse and dynamic nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their unique position as the oldest most historic culture in the world.

We acknowledge the resilience, strength, pride and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their Elders, knowledge holders and healers, past and present; while also recognising the sorrow and pain of the Stolen Generations and continued impacts of colonisation.

Positioning our work within a broader movement

We stand on the shoulders of broader human rights and liberation focused movements, especially those who work and advocate from a place of drawing from their own personal experiences. Without their continued advocacy and activism we would not be where we are today.

Thank you

There were many people involved in bringing this framework to life and we thank them for being open, challenged, and committed to imagining and building this work with us.

Client partners

Danni, Imogen and Tyler, three young people from across MCM Group who partnered with us to help shape this work. Thank you for your insights, recommendations, and deep commitment to realising systems and social change for the better of all.

The people we support

To the many clients, students, and others who generously shared their reflections on lived experience and genuine engagement and participation approaches. Your voices are woven throughout and have shaped the entirety of this framework.

MCM Group boards, leadership and staff

To the MCM Group board members, senior leadership and staff for championing this project and your commitment to having it transform all aspects of what we do and at every level. In particular, Shorna Moore, Marita Hagel, and the project Steering Group members for their support and coordination. Special mention to the MCM Group staff who listen to and engage with the people we support every day and integrate these learnings into our practice approaches.

Consultant partner

To Morgan Cataldo and Sigrid Rynehart from morgan&co, for facilitating and guiding us through this process and bringing this critical piece of work to life.

Definitions

The following list breaks down specific concepts and terms used throughout this framework so that those reading it understand what is being referred to.

Co-design is a process that brings citizens and stakeholders together to design new products, services and policies.¹ Co-design also implies equal partnership in decision-making between MCM Group staff, and the people we support.

Client voice refers to any and all expressions of the views, opinions, needs, experiences and outcomes of individuals, families and carers who have previous or current involvement with a community service.²

Engagement is an intentional process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders, and communities to shape the decisions or actions of members of the community, stakeholders, or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity, or outcome.³

1. State Government of Victoria. *Co-design*.
vic.gov.au/co-design

2. Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (2019). *Client voice framework for community services*.
dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services

3. International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). *IAP2 Definition of Engagement*.
iap2.org.au

Honorariums are usually a small amount of money paid to someone for a service for which no official charge is made. MCM Group offers honorariums as a form of recognition and includes most out-of-pocket expenses, except in cases where exceptional additional costs are incurred.

Implementation plans is a term used often throughout this framework and refers to the planning that teams across MCM Group will undertake to outline processes and steps to ensure the principles of the Lived Experience Engagement and Participation Framework are embedded in their work.

A feedback loop is referred to in this framework as when a person who MCM Group supports shares their views and experiences and the process of when a staff member, team, and they receive a response from MCM Group that outlines how their feedback was considered and/or actioned.

Lived experience refers to personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.⁴

MCM Group is when we refer to the three organisations under the MCM banner, which are MCM, MCM Housing, and Hester Hornbrook Academy.

Participation means people are actively involved in decisions that affect their lives.

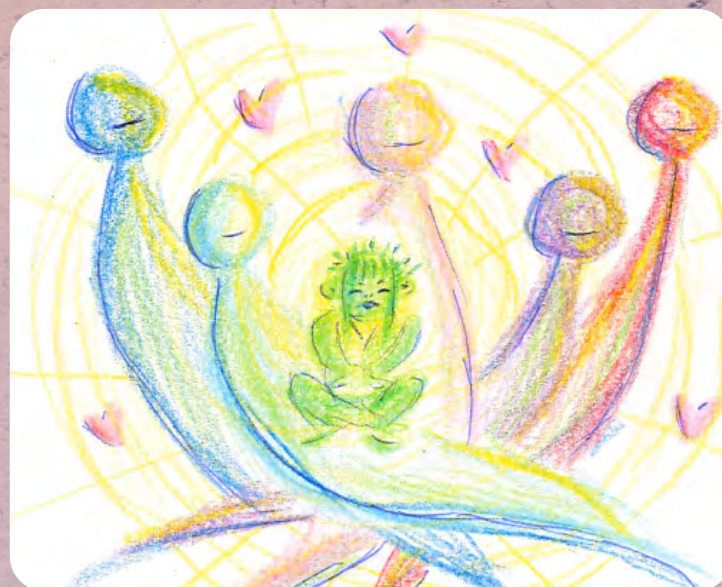
A steering group (or committee) is a group of specialised people who come together to provide support, guidance and oversight of a project or process.

4. Oxford Reference. *Overview lived experience*.
oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100109997



I believe it is important to hear and acknowledge learned experience due to it being the best indicator of advice due to them knowing how it feels.

MCM uses the voices of people to help and support people. By being caring, and valuing individuals; MCM provides a safe space and environment; calling for people to get support and an extra helping hand. By working with individuals with lived experiences, MCM breaks down barriers, stereotypes and provides a safe and caring space for all individuals.



Original responses received from a client voice activity (see Appendix B)

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Introduction



Board and client partner statement

In line with MCM Group's values of **Together, Courageous, Curious, Open, and Accountable**, integrating the lived experience of the people we support is critical for us to be a contemporary for purpose organisation who is credible to the wider community.

We compiled this joint statement to articulate our shared commitment to lived experience inclusion and what it means to us.

As board members, we recognise our role and responsibility to make decisions that guide the direction of the MCM Group for the long-term benefit of our clients, students, and the people who access our services. **Lived experience inclusion is critical for boards because we know we can make better decisions and advocate for change when we understand the experiences of the people accessing our services.**

We believe that what clients, students, and the people we support tell us should shape our values and ways of working in partnership with them. We know that not everyone will have the same experiences of our services. We want to listen to a diverse range of experiences and have these inform what we do in systemised and consistent ways.

We know this work can be complex and requires a multi-layered approach for long-term change. It is not a linear process of feedback and change. Client lived experience is how we make sure that those who access our services are at the core of everything we do and inform the way the organisation operates, at every level.

We commit to meeting regularly with staff, clients, and students to listen, to better understand the contexts people are living in, and the responsibility we have to respond in ways that meet the complexity they are experiencing.

We seek to understand the wider systems we operate within and the impact of these on everyone who comes through our doors and how these systems feed into our culture, practices, and ways of working. We know First Nations Peoples we work with continue to be impacted by the legacy of colonisation, and that it is our responsibility to ensure they experience welcoming, supportive and culturally safe spaces, places and approaches.

We commit to opportunities for mutual and ongoing learning. We want to share what we do at the board level, how we do it and who we are, to open up dialogue and learn from each other. When we ask people for their perspectives, we are open to listening, being challenged and challenging ourselves. We recognise there will be difficult conversations ahead and are committed to them.

We speak with and learn from clients, students and the people we support to recognise and challenge our assumptions and interpretations of their experiences. **This work starts with the courage and commitment to change.**

This framework forms part of a series of work to continuously improve and evolve to fulfil our vision and purpose, which includes our **Possibilities. On. 2023-25 Strategic Plan, Healing Oriented Framework, Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan, and On for Inclusion - Diversity, Equity of Access and Inclusion Strategy.**

Jonathan Mortimer
MCM Board Chair

Di McDonald
MCM Housing Board Chair

David Rennick
Hester Hornbrook Academy Board Chair

Key messages from the project client partners

Three young people were recruited from across MCM Group to help guide the overall process of developing this framework, and the content itself. Here, they share their key reflections and messages about lived experience engagement and participation.

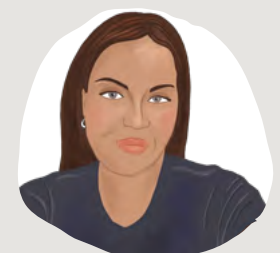


Danni Collaboration and healing

"Creating a safe place for stories and experiences to be heard, honoured and respected. Using the voices of those affected to inspire and create change within the organisation, wider community and governments. I think the most impactful part of this role for me was being able to collaborate with people who had similar yet very different experiences to myself. Forming a shared and healing space to set a standard for the future of the organisation."

Imogen For my mob

"When I say 'for my mob', I mean for our kids and for the generations to come - for our future and the way we hold culture, and how this might impact us when we are accessing services that are not specifically for Aboriginal people. For example, how Sorry Business is so important to us as part of our spiritual practice. This should form part of the way any organisation works with First Nations Peoples."



Tyler Learn with us

"Everyone wants to feel seen, to be heard when they speak, to have their experiences handled with care and respect. That can only happen if we learn from and with people, not at their expense."

Background



What we mean by lived experience engagement and participation

In this framework, we use **lived experience engagement and participation** of the people we support as a term to describe when people accessing MCM Group services engage with organisational decision-making processes and governance.

Examples might include client advisory groups, focused workshops, structured discussions, housing design, and advocacy but it can also be any formal or informal activity that occurs to ensure the people MCM Group supports have a voice in the way MCM Group operates.

This aligns with the way the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) defines “client voice”⁵ as an umbrella term that describes essential input into any activity that asks for and records the views of clients including person-centred practice, co-design, and quality governance.

In the same way that client voice encapsulates *the process* and *the output* of these activities, this framework also considers the client voice at the level of individuals, organisations and systems.

MCM Group strives to ensure that the people we support have autonomy and say in the way they engage with our services as individuals.

In this framework, when we refer to lived experience engagement and participation, it is not about a person’s individual support and decision-making in relation to the services they are accessing.

It is about their input into how we operate, strategic decision-making, and ensuring the collective experiences of the people we support improves over time.

5. Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (2019). *Client voice framework for community services*. dfff.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services

Recognising peer workers

While acknowledging and recognising the value and benefits that lived experience also brings to staff members at MCM Group, this framework focuses exclusively on the *lived experiences of the people MCM Group supports*.

Peer workers at MCM Group continue to be a critical element of the work we do, and development of an **MCM Group Peer Worker Framework** is currently underway to explicitly address and support this.

The purpose of this framework and how it will serve us

People who have accessed MCM Group services, including those from palliative care services who are no longer living, have unique knowledge, perspectives and experiences. It is our aim to embed their voices and insights across all we do.

People with lived experience will take part in designing new programs and services, improve existing ones, and be at the centre of our advocacy and research to drive systemic change. This framework provides a set of guiding principles which anchor MCM Group's governance structures, decision-making processes and broader everyday operations.

In line with **MCM's strategic goal** of *'delivering sector leading services that are healing oriented, informed by client lived experience, and sustainable'*, **MCM Housing's strategic target** that *'all new housing designs incorporate client lived experience'*, and **Hester Hornbrook Academy's strategic intent** to *'enable all students to develop positive pathways informed by lived experience'*, it is MCM Group's collective aim to have lived experience advisory at all levels of the organisation.

This framework is an important step in the direction of our goals, strategic intentions and targets. The objective of this framework is to get a fuller picture of what is currently happening at MCM Group to help define and describe our approach to embedding lived experience engagement and participation.

Our aim is to build a strong and cohesive approach that oversees our engagement and participation initiatives and anchors their foundation and application, together with linking organisational frameworks, policies and procedures to ensure alignment.

The diverse range of services available across MCM Group means there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. This framework intends to create shared principles, definitions, ideas and aspirations for our unique approach to lived experience engagement and participation, but not restrict or mandate how it should work in different circumstances and across distinct contexts.

The process of designing this framework

Approach

Lived experience engagement and participation is increasingly incorporated into the way MCM Group operates, and it was critical that the people we support had a distinct voice and role in the design of this framework.

As far as possible within the time and scope constraints of the project, we extended the principles inherent to lived experience engagement and participation in the development of the framework. The people we support played a critical role in overseeing and shaping the process, as well as the output.

Methods

- Three client partners were recruited for the duration of the project who:
 - » supported the development of the interview questions and information guide for MCM Group staff
 - » attended and co-facilitated selected interviews
 - » co-designed a broader client voice activity (see Appendix B)
 - » designed the agenda for, and participated in an MCM Group workshop for clients, staff and board members
 - » synthesised input from the client voice activity and MCM Group workshop
 - » drew from the client voice activity data to help develop guiding principles
 - » reviewed the final framework.
- In addition to the client partners, we had a further 20 people who currently access MCM Group services complete a client voice activity. Their reflections were captured through writing, drawing and verbal dictation.

Audience

The primary audience for this framework is MCM Group staff, so we conducted a series of interviews with leaders and staff across MCM Group shared services, youth and disability services, MCM Housing, and Hester Hornbrook Academy. The discussions were rich and optimistic, and insights from these interviews offered a strong direction for the framework and its ambitions.

Staff offered valuable insights into:

- The types of existing lived experience engagement and participation currently underway, sharing actions or activities that have worked well in the past for MCM Group, and what could have been done differently. Common questions and challenges were shared, as well as ideas for opportunities and solutions.
- The varied and ambitious visions that have been and are being imagined for lived experience engagement and participation.

- What the role of this framework needs to be for individuals and teams across MCM Group, and ideas for how lived experience engagement and participation could be best scaffolded and supported by the organisations.

A full-day workshop was facilitated with MCM Group staff, client partners and board members. We talked through and validated the themes that had been discussed in the staff interviews. We also dissected what an enabling culture for lived experience engagement and participation would sound, look and feel like.

A steering group was set up and held meetings at key stages throughout the project to provide advice and input into the process and content. Members of the steering group were also invited to review the framework and provide feedback.

We also met with MCM Group board members to seek overarching steer and input, and understand what role the boards and members could play in the implementation of this work.

Process limitations and learnings for implementation

Some challenges were experienced in the design and delivery of this framework that were unable to be solved within specific project scope. We share these challenges openly in the spirit of shared learning and accountability.

The **client voice activity** was designed to be facilitated in the most appropriate and inclusive way for individuals, but we heard from staff that it was still difficult to facilitate this in the timeframes allowed, particularly if language interpretation was required.

The framework has been developed by and had input and review from people with **diverse lived and living experiences**, including experiences of accessing and navigating support systems, and services offered by MCM Group.

It has been our approach to apply an **intersectional lens**, recognising that no one person represents an entire community and that each person brings unique perspectives and contextual knowledge. We engaged with those who are LGBTIQ+, people with disability (including mental ill-health and neurodivergence), people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds and identities, and First Nations Peoples. Our engagement methods were adapted in response to their input.

While we are confident that we have incorporated many different perspectives in this framework, we cannot guarantee or assume consensus with all the principles or approaches outlined. It is encouraged that this framework be utilised as an **anchor and starting point** for lived experience engagement and participation practice evolution.

Learning from our people | Practice wisdom

Listening to and acting on young people's feedback at Check-In Pilot

Youth Mental Health Services at Frontyard Youth Services work in partnership with St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, Healthcare for Homeless. The team provides care coordination and Occupational Therapy support and interventions for young people experiencing significant mental ill-health and homelessness.

The aim of the program is to connect young people who are falling through the gaps of the mental health system to ensure they can engage with therapeutic and clinical services. The pilot program is looking to expand support to include alcohol and drug supports due to the dual diagnosis impact for many young people who find it difficult or impossible to find a service that will work with them.

This pilot is helping to create an evidence base for what works – the program is flexible to enable an opportunity for learning and growth as feedback from mental health peer workers and young people accessing the service is embedded.

This partnership is an illustration of a place-based response to the young people Frontyard Youth Services supports, who tell the service about their experiences of discrimination, an inaccessible health care system, and what needs to be done to respond to their holistic needs.

Key learnings:

- The power of partnerships that create unique service responses based on what young people say they need
- Having dedicated time to develop deep partnerships and networks is where real change can happen and gets unlocked in broader systems.

Guiding principles

These principles were developed in partnership with the project client partners and input from a series of conversations with the MCM Group boards, executive leadership and staff.

The basis of the guiding principles were formed from reflections we heard from the people MCM Group supports through a client voice exercise.⁶



Inclusive

We learn from and with the people MCM Group supports, not at their expense

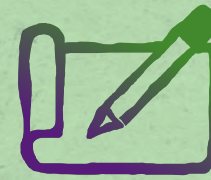
- We recognise that safety is different for each person and that safety is something we build together.
- We consider and implement developmentally appropriate approaches in partnership with those with lived and practice wisdom.
- We challenge how we typically do things and work towards creating a place where genuine engagement and partnership is possible. We seek ways to include those we don't often hear from.
- We are committed to working in ways that are culturally safe for First Nations People and that are respectful and deeply considerate of the ongoing impacts of colonisation.
- We acknowledge that there are power dynamics which influence the way people engage and participate, including the people MCM Group supports and staff. This might include, but not be limited to, people with lived experience of marginalised identities and communities.



Integrity and accountability

We take participation and partnership seriously and approach it with care

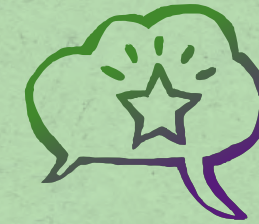
- We always aim to prevent people from getting hurt or harmed through any and all engagement opportunities, and commit to putting processes and measures in place to support everyone involved.
- We commit to honest and transparent processes that foster a culture of collaboration, dialogue, two-way and multi-way communication between our staff and the people we support.
- We realise that informed consent is ever evolving and so continually check in to ensure what we're doing is still working as intended.
- We will be accountable to the advice we receive from people with lived experience.



Action-oriented

We take conscious steps to improve our ways of working

- We take action that leads to improvement.
- We know that change will be required and that it will take time to build trust, and we will be open to change when we hear that it's needed.
- We will measure success by the quality of our services, which includes the impact our services have on the people we support, not just by how many people access our services.
- When the change that is needed might not be possible for us to action, we will be transparent about why and link lived experience insights and frontline practice wisdom to advocate for broader systems change.



Strengthening

We create engagement activities that are mutually beneficial

- We are accountable to the people MCM Group supports and how opportunities to engage with us might affect or impact on them and their lives.
- We look to share power in practice and action and understand it as a positive force we can work to build together.
- We seek to hold space for people holistically, knowing there is opportunity for healing and growth through engagement and participation.
- We understand the power of being seen, heard, acknowledged and validated as a central part of how we operate, build relationships and deliver services. We know that when people have good experiences engaging with us, they feel welcomed and valued.



Incorporated

Lived experience is valued and informs what we do and how we do it

- We commit to creating the time to transform our business as usual, while also adhering to legislative and compliance requirements.
- We investigate how we assess risk and how that affects our decisions about engagement. We also consider how we communicate about risk with our staff so that they are empowered to engage better. We iterate our processes and evolve our practice over time.
- We iterate our processes and evolve our practice over time.
- We are honest about the cost of disruption and change and make the adjustments needed, including identifying resourcing and prioritising staff time for genuine, purposeful and meaningful engagement and participation initiatives.

6. See Appendix B for more detail about the client voice activity we designed

Quick tool for translating principles into practice

A non-exhaustive list of prompting questions which can be used to support MCM Group to uniquely translate the guiding principles across distinct program and service contexts.

- ☐ Have we set up this engagement activity so that people feel included? What information have we provided about the opportunity and process and have we made sure it's free of jargon and easily understood?
- ☐ Does everyone involved have something to learn and contribute?
- ☐ Do we have the people we support and staff working together to understand problems and solutions? What has already been decided and what decisions will we be making together?
- ☐ Are we clear on what is 'out of scope' for improvements or ideas with this activity?
- ☐ Are we prepared to have discussions with senior leaders and/or other decision-makers (such as funders) if what comes up through the process reaches beyond the boundaries of our engagement activity?
- ☐ Have we asked the people we support what they might need to be able to purposefully participate?
- ☐ Are we approaching this activity with care and consideration for what life events might be happening right now for the people we support, and how we might need to accommodate for these?
- ☐ Have we considered any legislative or compliance regulations we need to adhere to and how we can best communicate these with the people we support before we begin?

The 'why' of lived experience engagement

“We need the voice coming back to us to be **more than a survey**, we need face to face, open, honest and safe spaces for people to be able to contribute meaningfully. We can't go into these things with preconceived ideas of how it's going to be. Asking, 'how do you want to be engaged with us?' - as the first step.”

- MCM Housing staff member



Why it's important to MCM Group

We know that the ways we collaborate in the world are changing and we want to be part of that change.

The service systems available to people in Victoria are increasingly complex and are often not designed or operated in ways that reflect the needs or diversity of those who use them. We recognise that MCM Group is part of this service system and know there is always more we can be doing to address the diverse interests and needs of those who access our services.

Across our projects and programs, MCM Group continues to experience the significant benefits of lived experience engagement and participation and we want to expand opportunities to do this more broadly and consistently.

Lived experience input at all levels of MCM Group helps inform strategic decisions for the better, as well as our everyday operations and experiences for staff, clients, students, participants, volunteers and all others who have touchpoints with us.

We strongly believe that as a first step, the principles of good engagement outlined in this framework will help us set the conditions for positive change. We know that solutions to our most complex problems sit within the communities we work with, and that they hold depths of knowledge and expertise that benefits MCM Group as well as informing broader social and systemic change.

As we further embed lived experience engagement and participation across MCM Group, it is essential that we partner with the people we support so that they are also leading improvements to broader public policies and laws that impact them.

We need to imagine and design services and offerings with insights and contextual knowledge from the people MCM Group supports, to truly work towards building more trusting and respectful relationships and contribute to long-lasting and sustainable outcomes.

The approach of '*working with*' is a step towards humanising our practice approaches and helps us better understand the complexities that people are experiencing, straight from the source.

Stories and experiences are powerful anchors, and help us build connection and understanding. Connection helps motivate us to be courageous, and make the change that is needed - within ourselves, our organisations, and beyond.

Learning from our people | Practice wisdom

The power of student voice at Hester Hornbrook Academy

Hester Hornbrook works with students who are not feeling heard, especially about their mental health. We heard that young people often share how they feel that their mental health is not taken seriously by workers outside of the Hester Hornbrook context.

Hester Hornbrook students are looking for opportunities to share their thoughts and voices and it is the responsibility of staff to notice, listen, and create spaces for this to happen.

Hester Hornbrook staff shared that they couldn't effectively do their work day-to-day without listening to the wisdom of their students and working to understand what their drive is. That without hearing student voices, they would be making assumptions about who they are and what they want and need.

Hester Hornbrook works to create genuine opportunities where students can actively shape how the school operates, which includes:

- Supporting students to mentor each other and find opportunities to learn organisational skills through project management tasks (e.g. organising student formals and graduation events)
- Having access to sending the Hester Hornbrook Principal messages directly, who shared that ideas of what they'd like to see improved are often received by senior students
- Opportunities to present to the Hester Hornbrook Board, where there is also a youth advisor who sits as a board member.

There is a commitment to students informing Hester Hornbrook's operations and being able to see themselves reflected in the school's leadership.

"I still struggle to explain my feelings but this school cares about understanding people's issues and doesn't see us as problematic students. We are treated as normal people. I get support because English is my second language and feel that every school should have that support. Now I can spend time on new subjects and language skills."

- Hester Hornbrook student

Why it's important to the people MCM Group supports



"In my second image, the queer individual is shown to be surrounded and embraced by the previous greyed-out individuals, who are no longer in the shadows and are rainbow themselves, which represents the loving, acceptance and support from allies and community.

They are in a way forming a net around the queer person, who now feels safe enough to close their eyes and simply be at peace with everything. The hearts are now displayed on the outside of the figures, representing the outward displays of love and support from everyone."

- Ollie

With their consent, we have used Ollie's imagery to help us break down the five key themes of what we heard from the people MCM Group supports.

Five key themes - what we heard

We asked the people MCM Group supports to reflect on the importance of lived experience engagement and participation from their perspective.

Through a client voice activity, the two question prompts were:

1. Why is it important for MCM Group to hear the voices of clients, students, and people with lived experience?
2. How does it feel when you are heard and your opinion is valued?

There were strong, clear themes that were heard through this activity:

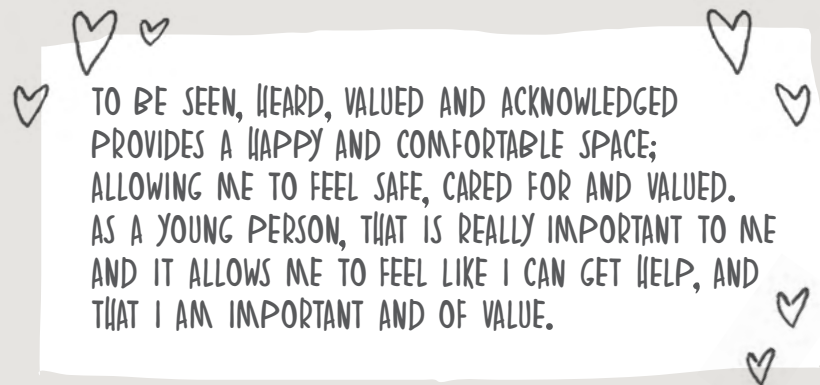




The importance of being acknowledged and valued

People told us that when they are acknowledged, their experiences validated, and they feel valued for their contribution, it opens the doors to building trust. The power of being truly seen cannot be underestimated.

"It feels like what I went through was valid and that I'm being seen and heard."



"It feels better because... someone wants to know."

"If people ignore you, it makes you not want to talk anymore."

"Being heard is always validating, particularly by someone who really gets it, and moreso when they have their own lived experience (the power of peer support)."



That honesty is a foundational condition for collaboration

People told us that the power of honesty is twofold. That by being listened to, truthfulness is then made possible. When that is made possible, honesty follows. This is not only beneficial in the immediate sense, but in the long-term too.

"By working with individuals with lived experience, MCM breaks barriers, stereotypes, and provides a safe and caring space for all individuals."

"Anyone from any background can have equal, honest, opportunities and support."

"By being listened to, I find myself more open to being truthful... I feel safe to be honest and it helps me in my day-to-day life."



Insights and ideas for change, action, and improvement are openly shared

People told us that once they feel acknowledged and valued, and honesty and truth is made possible, then they are more confident to share ideas for change.

"It feels good to know that someone cares, and that something might be changed. It's good to value everyone's opinion because you might hear new stuff or things you've never thought of."

"I think it's important because it can help MCM to understand the lived experience of that group, and assist them in coming up with productive and helpful ways to collaborate and take on first-hand feedback."

"It's important... so they know how to help effectively."

"It's important for MCM and others to hear the voices of those who were limited from expressing their experiences and what goes on behind closed doors that would have never been heard if it weren't for those who really want to make a change."

"Only we know the complexities and nuances of these experiences."



That the people MCM Group supports feel like individuals, not statistics

People told us that when they get to be genuinely involved and influence decisions, they get to experience their own personal power - sometimes for the first time in their lives. This reduces a sense of isolation, supports wellbeing and feeling good, and feeds into healing.

"It makes me feel like I have a say in a discussion or argument/ decision. This is why I believe it's imperative and important to listen to people and understand their opinion and point of view."

"... so they can make school better or just to help out with people that are struggling or just need a little boost."

"It's very important to be heard for my mental and physical health."

"I feel strong and empowered. I am happy but I can also be vulnerable at the same time. I think it's one of the most important things. I feel safe, heard, acknowledged and overall a person and not just a number."

"Load off my shoulders, weight off my chest. I feel more understood and that helps. Just listening helps."

"When I am heard and my opinion is valued, it feels as if a smaller voice in the world is getting recognised and not overpowered by a voice of higher order that sees through the lens of statistics rather than enduring the hardship and reality. It means the world is healing each day when voices are heard."



"I find it also brings a sense of relief to have been heard, it reduces the sense of isolation in the experience. Feeling that your opinion is valued is empowering. Knowing that your experience can contribute to helping others is rewarding."



That building real relationships means people can keep reaching out

People told us that the result of authentic and genuine engagement is connection, and an ability to build relationships. That these good experiences build positive momentum which means people feel able to keep reaching out and be reached out to.

"Being heard and valued... feels a bit weird, it's never happened to me before. It's good to know that people care about you even if they aren't close to you or related to you. It's good to care about others."

"When I am heard and my opinion is valued I feel appreciated and it encourages me to reach out again."

"Feels good to know that someone cares."

"I think it's important to show my appreciation, that people do actually care."

"It's an important ingredient in the relationship between MCM workers and the client."

Learning from our people | Practice wisdom

Honouring Sorry Business at Circuit Breaker

Midway through the second and longest Covid lockdown period, all the young people residing at MCM's Circuit Breaker accommodation were locked down in the building under statewide restriction policies.

For the residents, this meant that going out onto the city street could and would result in police fines. This was a particularly tough time for young people already isolated from friends, family/chosen family and kin. For First Nations Peoples, a restrictive separation from family and Country holds a particular trauma born from invasion and subsequent colonisation practices.

Imogen, a young Kamilaroi woman and Circuit Breaker resident, experienced the loss of a grandmother midway through the lockdown period. She was from regional Victoria and unable to legally return to Country and mob for Sorry Business and therefore unable to grieve, gather, and spiritually journey to farewell her grandmother.

Dylan, a young Gunditjmara and Yorta Yorta man and Circuit Breaker resident, offered to take Imogen down to a local park to perform a smoking ritual as a way for her to connect to her grandmother's passing journey.

From a process and practice perspective, there were two risks to consider involving a decision to approve this ceremony:

1. Breach of Covid-restrictions resulting in police intervention and potential fines
2. Cultural, spiritual, and psychological wellbeing of a young person.

The Circuit Breaker staff decided that risks could be mitigated to ensure health and safety related to Covid, whereas risks to the wellbeing of the young person could not be. Approval was given for the journey to and from the park for the ceremony. Correspondence was provided to Imogen and Dylan to be given to police in the event that they were stopped and required Circuit Breaker support to navigate the situation.

As a result of how this process was navigated, Imogen was able to participate in the passing journey of her grandmother in a way that was critical at the time to her wellbeing and safety. Dylan was able to provide invaluable cultural and spiritual support.

Key learnings:

- Measuring risk and success from the perspectives of both organisational and client perspectives is critical and part of what we mean by being 'lived experience-informed and led'
- When we are responsive to cultural safety, we're also enacting good practice principles of inclusion in lived experience engagement and participation (see our guiding principles on pages 15-16).

Learning from our people | Practice wisdom

Honouring Sorry Business at Circuit Breaker

Imogen's perspective

When I was living at Circuit Breaker, I had to deal with the passing of my grandmother. At the time it was the start of the second Covid lockdown and the world was completely shutting down.

A couple of days before she passed, the workers wrote all the letters I needed to be able to cross the border and visit her one last time. I was only there for 24 hours but the fact that I was allowed to go and say my goodbyes and spend this time at home with family helped tremendously.

After coming back to Circuit Breaker, I got the phone call to say that she had passed. At the time, I wasn't the only First Nations person housed at Circuit Breaker. Dylan, a Gunditjmara and Yorta Yorta young man, had offered to do a smoking ceremony so that I would not miss out on the healing process of Sorry Business. We took this idea to the workers at Circuit Breaker as we knew the risks due to Covid.

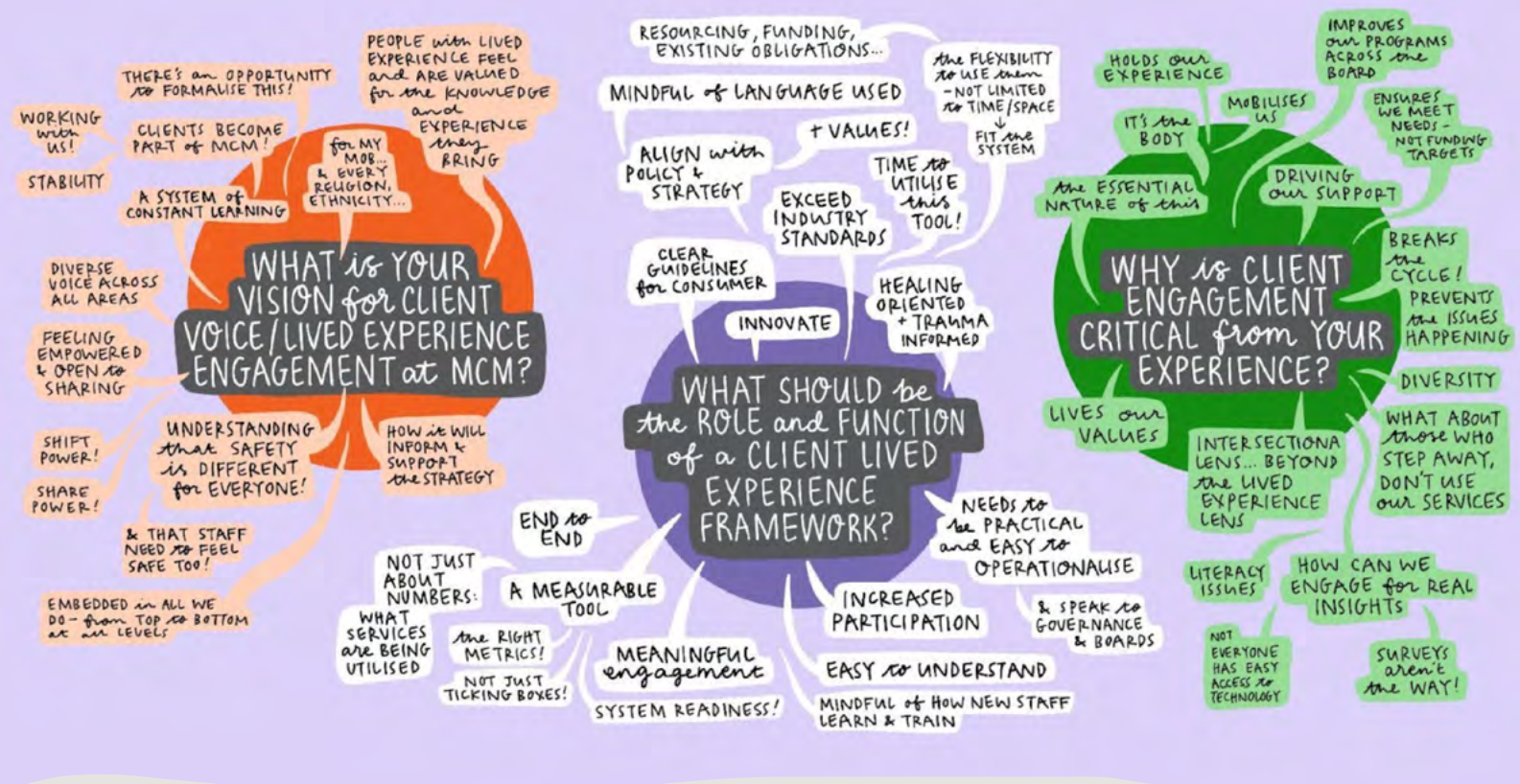
As a proud Kamilaroi woman, it was a hard time as I wasn't allowed to go back to Country to be able to take part in Sorry Business. The workers allowed Dylan and I to go to a local park and perform a smoking ceremony.

This allowed me to have the time to properly heal, as I wasn't with my family and wasn't able to go back to Kamilaroi Country and lay her to rest. The way the workers had looked at and handled the situation could have been very different but they saw how important it was to me as a First Nations person.

I will be forever grateful for this.

The MCM Group vision





Graphic recording by Kate Baxter, The Together Apart

Our shared vision is to ensure we have a widespread and comprehensive understanding that lived experience engagement and participation is critical to who we are as MCM Group.

We want to see this embedded and operationalised as integrated practice across the organisation, at every level.

Our vision includes consistent ways to seek feedback, and we want that feedback to drive change at an organisational and systemic level. For this to happen, we need to be creative and flexible in how we engage. Activities need to be purposeful and inclusive so that we are engaging with a broad range of people who can offer a diversity of perspectives.

“We want to utilise the flexibility of having different ways and mechanisms of weaving through the lens of lived experience into everything we do.”

- MCM Group staff member

Once MCM Group begins to embed this work more formally, it will be reviewed and evaluated with the aim to support the organisations’ capacity for agile systems and structures that respond to challenges and opportunities collaboratively and effectively.

We hope to have many more successful innovation trials that are inclusive for the diversity of people we support to meaningfully engage. Solutions that are developed with the people we support will be woven throughout project and service development, delivery and evaluation. Meaning, we will be moving towards co-creation, not just collaboration.

Our vision also includes more First Nations focused involvement and invested time to develop and maintain deep partnerships and networks.

“Recognising that all the dreams, desires, things we might imagine - what we can do as an organisation in terms of our services or products - those offerings are already there in our frontline staff and clients. We need to unleash the magic and have this approach intertwined within everything we do and how we do it. We need to have an open mind to learning and evolving over time - to being innovative.”

- MCM Group General Manager

The steps to our vision

We know that this vision won’t come to fruition overnight, and that it won’t necessarily be a linear journey to get there. Our vision will need to be grounded in trust and relationships.

“We want to recognise the ‘ground zero’ of engagement - the trust that needs to be built before we do anything together. With the people we support, that means we need to show how we are keeping our word and doing as we say.”

- MCM Group staff member

Changing the way we work will need commitment supported by MCM Group and reflected in organisational structures. Across the Group, staff identified some common approaches to capturing information and evaluating lived experience engagement and participation, including:

- Identifying and sharing good practice
- Training, education, clarity and awareness on what the new expectations are
- Driving and supporting system improvements
- Monitoring changes over time.

Theory of Change

This Theory of Change helps us understand what to measure when embedding lived experience engagement and participation across MCM Group. It outlines what we hope to achieve, and key actions and steps towards our shared vision.



If we...

- Define what we mean by lived experience engagement and participation.
- Recognise and harness the value of client lived experience.
- Create safer spaces for collaboration, and proactively seek and actively listen and action.
- Share good practice examples and learnings with each other.

By...

- Developing implementation plans to embed purposeful lived experience engagement and participation processes across MCM Group.
- Improving our governance structures to ensure our boards and executive leadership are informed by lived experience.
- Holding ourselves accountable to change.
- Resourcing engagement and participation activities and practice approaches.
- Building trusting relationships with the people MCM Group supports to work together on a shared vision.
- Working to ensure our engagement and participation efforts are purposeful and meaningful.

This will result in...

- More innovative and effective services that are directly informed by lived experience.
- Development of stronger policies and evidence for advocacy based on real-life experiences, not assumptions.
- More effective and mutually beneficial engagement and participation with communities and the people we support.
- Organisation's that are better informed by lived experience at all levels.
- Individuals who are more confident to contribute to organisational challenges.

And eventually lead to...

- Improvement of outcomes within communities.
- A more cohesive service system for people to navigate.
- Reduction of social and economic costs of social exclusion, disadvantage and inequality.
- Communities with increased autonomy and power to recognise and correct patterns of inequality and disadvantage.

Adapted from Ingrid Burkett⁷

Following the development of this framework, implementation plans will be developed that offer practical and actionable tasks for teams and functions across the organisations to be rolled out.

7. Ingrid Burkett & Outer East Children and Youth Area Partnership. *Co-design with service users*. vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Codesign-with-service-userscompressed.pdf

Signals of success

Success to MCM Group is more than a list of KPI's and actions.

We know that organisational culture and implicit behaviours are key to lived experience engagement and participation being successful. To understand some of the behaviours that would create that much needed culture, we asked MCM Group staff, board members and client partners at an in-person workshop to describe what an enabling culture would sound, look and feel like if the lived experience of the people we support was valued and genuinely embedded into MCM Group's everyday ways of working.



We would be hearing

We would be hearing acknowledgement that this work is complex, and takes time and resourcing. We would be hearing people from all areas of MCM Group, from frontline staff to board members, talking about how lived experience insights are actively shaping and improving their ways of working.



We would be seeing

We would be seeing training available for staff on actionable steps and the benefits of embedding lived experience engagement and participation, and this would be prioritised in calendars and workplans. We would be seeing program models, communication materials and processes written in simple language without jargon, designed to be shared and understood by a diversity of people and communities. We would be seeing more of the people we support present in meetings and as part of decision-making processes.



We would be feeling

We would be feeling a stronger sense of community, belonging and respect. Sometimes, we might be feeling discomfort but any tension would be intentionally and thoughtfully held. We would be feeling a shift in the way things are normally done and a sense of safety in sharing our thoughts and views with each other, as board members, staff and the people MCM Group supports.



Learning from our people | Practice wisdom

Not A Date to Celebrate at Early Childhood Intervention Service

In 2023, MCM Group announced that staff could choose to work on 26 January if they didn't acknowledge the date as Australia Day, and staff could decide if they wanted to take the day off on a different day of their choosing.

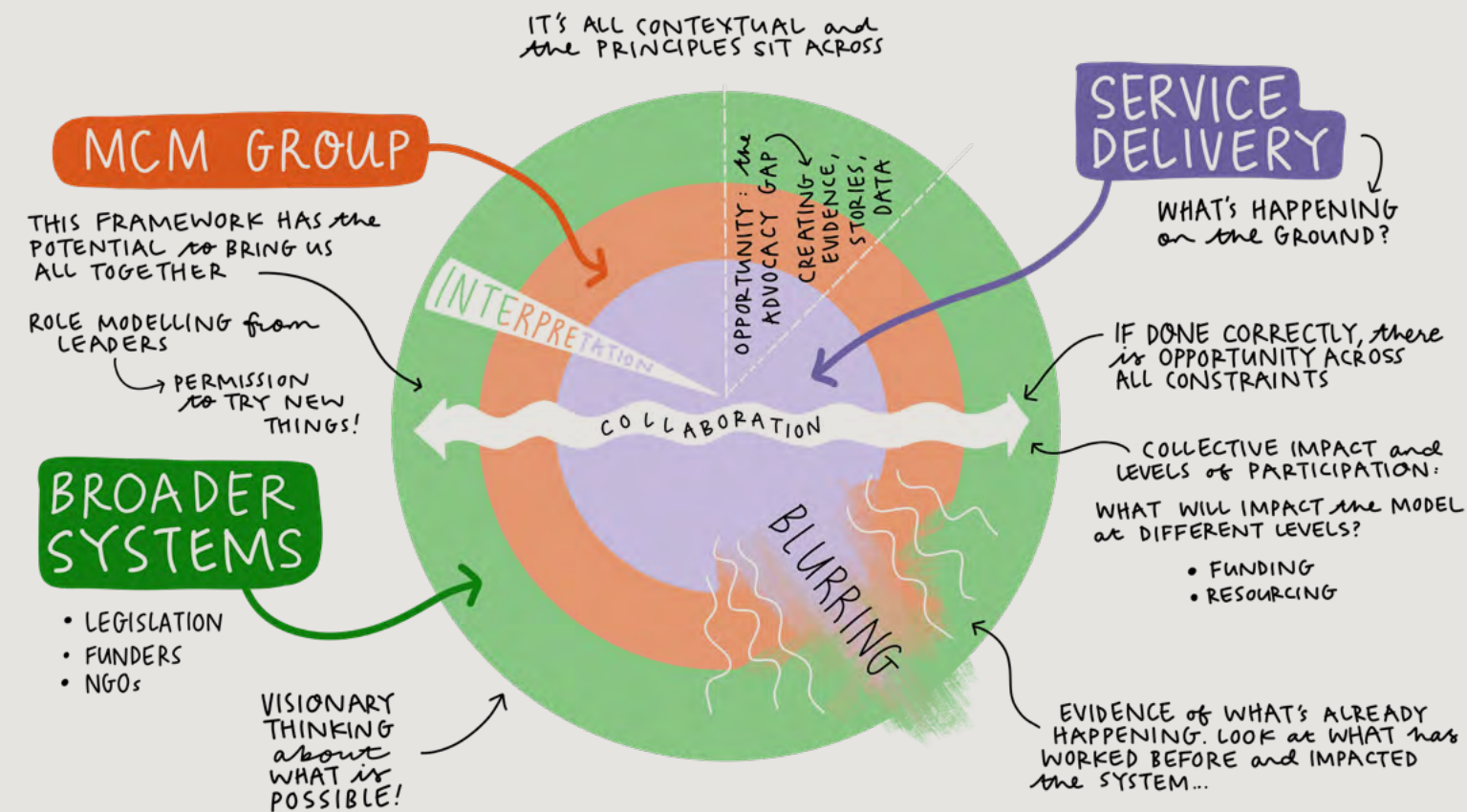
One of the Early Childhood Intervention Service workers had decided to work on 26 January and was doing outreach work. During one of her visits, she was with a family who asked why she was working on a public holiday. When she responded that MCM supported workers' individual choice on how they would like to acknowledge (or not acknowledge) the date, the family then decided to share that they were Indigenous and felt there was trust built with the worker to speak more openly.

They hadn't shared this information through the intake processes, but something shifted through this interaction where the family then saw the worker as someone they could open up to about their identity. This was a critical moment, as it meant that the family could then be connected with culturally specific services.

Learning from our people | Practice wisdom

Key learnings:

- While non-Indigenous people and staff might have some level of knowledge and basic awareness of cultural sensitivity, it's difficult to understand the full or unintended impact of actions unless they are able to consult or partner with First Nations Peoples and others with more expert and contextual knowledge.
- A commitment from MCM Group to allow workers the choice to change one small way the service was offered resulted in significant on the ground impact for the better.



Graphic recording by Kate Baxter, The Together Apart

Acknowledging our place in broader systems

We understand that this work is more than MCM Group getting ready, there's also a readiness that needs to be present more broadly in government, philanthropy and other organisations we partner and work with.

This will mean that MCM Group is also working to help educate, set expectations, and build awareness with partner organisations that aren't as familiar with this work, or know what good practice looks like.

As a group spanning a broad range of services including education, homelessness and housing, disability, early childhood, family and youth services, and palliative care - we are in a unique position of supporting and building sector capability where opportunity arises.

We strongly believe that at MCM Group, it's not simply about the quantity or the number of people we support day-to-day or by the end of each year, it's about the *quality* of approaches and services we offer. This needs to be a clear and shared priority for the entire service sector for us to also be effective.

Embedding lived experience engagement and participation requires an understanding of the funding and resourcing we need to do this well, and the dollar cost of working differently. Similar to the way we know we have to invest in making our workplaces more accessible, we also need to understand the cost of investing in good lived experience practice and inclusion.

Once this is known and understood, we can better advocate for this approach to be sufficiently funded and resourced for success. We are currently operating to the best of our abilities but we know that much more is possible with prioritisation and investment.

A model for collaboration

Each of us has a role to play in ensuring this work is meaningfully and genuinely embedded across all we do, at every level.

Outlined below are some ways that different areas of the organisations can contribute to success and support each other to achieve best possible outcomes and impact.

The people MCM Group supports

Truly at the centre of how MCM Group operates, the people we support share their experiences of accessing our services, housing and school. This includes:

- Offering feedback and experiences of interactions that weren't helpful
- Telling staff about interactions that were helpful, and what they would like to see more of
- Sharing ideas and working with staff to develop opportunities for improvement or maximising positive impact.

MCM Group boards leading by example and setting expectations

This includes:

- Regular and consistent messaging flowing through MCM Group about how critical this approach is (e.g. monthly reports as part of regular board reporting mechanisms).
- Efforts to explain and be transparent in the function and role of the boards, so that the people we support can choose when and how to communicate or be involved.

MCM Group leadership as advocates and enablers

This includes:

- Setting lived experience engagement and participation as a key focus in organisation orientation and induction.
- Involving the people we support in program design or operational models, as well as strategic direction for MCM Group, including policy and advocacy, brand and marketing, and fundraising.

MCM Group staff and practitioners as enactors and experts

This includes:

- Assessing where a team is currently at with embedding lived experience inclusion, including:
 - » feedback mechanisms, such as secondary consultation and review
 - » recruitment processes (e.g. support with developing position descriptions, interview questions, and sitting on interview panels).

MCM Group boards leading by example and setting expectations

- Invitations to organisational leaders, staff, and the people we support to present to and connect with the boards.
- Considering the involvement of people with relevant lived experience at the board level (e.g. board member appointment or advisory group functions), including a thorough and considered process of getting the culture right and identifying what support mechanisms need to be in place.

MCM Group leadership as advocates and enablers

- Including messaging about the value of lived experience across all MCM Group collateral (e.g. position descriptions, websites, and internal and external communications).
- Training and education about the role and value of lived experience in social and systems change.
- Prioritising dedicated time for teams to engage in engagement and participation activities.
- Identifying and mapping opportunities for engagement and participation. *Where and how are decisions currently being made? How can the people we support be included in this?*
- Leading by example through modelling this way of working as part of business as usual (e.g. asking, "Have we asked what the people we support think about this?")

MCM Group staff and practitioners as enactors and experts

- Articulating and reporting on how lived experience engagement and participation is being embedded into everyday ways of working.
- Regular opportunities to meet and reflect on feedback shared from the people we support, purposefully focusing on what will be done with what we hear.
- Continually elevating lived experience engagement and participation initiatives *with* the people we support and sharing learnings and lessons with upper management and wider MCM Group.

Essential conditions for success

Supporting people holistically...

inside and outside of engagement activities. This means moving towards relational approaches and away from engagement and participation as a transactional activity.

Ensuring safe enough spaces and processes...

for the people we support during engagement and participation initiatives, including carefully considered preparation pre, during and post activities.

Identifying, evaluating and continuously improving...

existing MCM Group advisory functions, with the people we support leading this evaluation.

Keeping each other accountable...

for prioritising the lived experience of the people we support so that it becomes more organically incorporated into every interaction.

Recognition and remuneration

The input and involvement of the people MCM Group supports is critical for the Group to inform strategic development and operations.

This Lived Experience Engagement and Participation Framework seeks to enhance MCM Group's work and also means there is a responsibility to acknowledge the contributions, wisdom and efforts that people generously offer, and to ensure people are not worse off for their involvement.

For this purpose, MCM Group has a Client Honorariums (Payments) Procedure which outlines:

- The types of activities for which the people we support will be given an honorarium
- Definitions and examples of when an honorarium will be offered, and when involvement might be voluntary
- Minimum payment requirements
- The process for facilitating honorarium payments.

Honorariums are paid to cover costs that people might incur for engagement and participation activities, but additional payments can be offered when costs incurred are more significant such as child care, or personal carer costs.

Other ways, in addition to honorariums, are often explored to recognise people's contributions and expertise and ensure mutual benefit.

As part of the implementation of this framework, our current Client Honorariums (Payments) Procedure will be updated to further align with sector best practice, and continue to be reviewed in line with new enterprise agreements and standards.

Learning from our people | Practice wisdom

Supporting holistically in Policy, Advocacy & Government Relations

Supporting people to be involved in engagement and participation activities means making sure their costs are covered, but it also means actively acknowledging their unique life circumstances that may also need to be taken into consideration to ensure meaningful and equitable inclusion.

At MCM Group, this has included providing opportunities for learning and professional development pathways to sustainable employment beyond singular engagement and participation activities, and connecting with broader services and supports such as health, housing and legal.

For example, within the MCM Policy, Advocacy & Government Relations team, young people who have been regularly involved in lived experience engagement and participation activities have been supported with their employment endeavours (support with writing resumes, filling out job applications and being provided with references), as well as mentoring and training regarding advocacy and community development initiatives.

When we talk about relational approaches to engagement, this means working with people holistically, and understanding that we are not truly engaging if we are asking the people we support to compartmentalise themselves and conform to fit into specific objectives. Therefore, wellbeing and connection must be core considerations in engagement and participation planning.

Overcoming challenges

It's important to recognise that embedding engagement and participation within an organisation seeks to question and challenge our 'usual ways of working'.

MCM Group has faced its own organisational and systemic barriers in implementing improvements in lived experience engagement and participation and is committed to learning from our experiences.

Staff from across the organisation have shared examples of common questions and challenges that are currently being faced, along with some examples of overcoming these challenges and ideas for what might work well in future.

Questions and challenges

Ideas for improving our practice

“How do we help ensure there is an open will to do lived experience engagement and participation?”

Many people across MCM Group are aware this work is happening, have a strong desire to ensure that it is genuinely embedded, and that everyone in the organisation understands the value and benefits of this approach.

Aligned with this framework's principle of 'integrity and accountability', MCM Group takes engagement and participation seriously and approaches it with care.

Staff from Frontyard Youth Services shared that one thing that was critical for success was education and training for staff. This mandatory training resulted in staff better understanding the benefits of this approach when undertaking reviews of their services. They were supportive and open to critical feedback as they saw it as an opportunity for improvement, rather than something negative.

MCM Group boards and executives have expressed a commitment to prioritising lived experience engagement and participation, and agreed to promote this as an expectation with leadership and staff across MCM Group.

Questions and challenges

Ideas for improving our practice

There is also opportunity for case studies or good practice examples to be widely communicated across MCM Group and with stakeholders to offer practice inspiration and motivation.

An existing way to build relationships was shared by a staff member who reflected that 'awareness days' helped bridge the disconnect between the people MCM Group supports and staff.

“Activities like Pride March showed we have more similarities than differences and enabled better connection.”

“How do we ensure our engagement and participation approaches are ethical and appropriate?”

Staff expressed a need to consider readiness in relation to engagement and participation activities if the people MCM Group supports are experiencing crisis/es.

This is a fair and essential consideration.

In general, feedback or participation from the people MCM Group supports must be sought in ways that deeply consider a person's capacity at any time to meaningfully participate, and the potential impacts an engagement or participation activity might have on them (in partnership with the person themselves).

For example, although the people MCM Group supports are encouraged to give feedback at any time, within the context of palliative care services, feedback is sought from bereaved carers six-months after the death of their family member or loved one. This helps ensure a considered amount of time for grieving has passed, enabling a more considered and respectful opportunity to reflect on possible service improvements.

Questions and challenges

Ideas for improving our practice

“How can we create opportunities so that people are active participants in decision-making? We don’t want to encourage people to *only* share stories, or be solely represented as statistics in survey analyses.”

MCM Group staff want to avoid tokenism, and ensure they aren’t just selecting “representatives” who already align with majority or dominant thinking.

To support active participation, engagement activities should be tailored based on the needs of the people MCM Group supports and broader principles of inclusion.

Qualitative data is important too. Talking to individual people is not about collecting select opinions to validate pre-existing ideas, it’s about identifying patterns. It also enables us to reach people who may not reply to surveys or more traditional ways of gathering feedback.

Advocacy at MCM Group is not just about the people we support sharing stories and experiences, but also ensuring they are informing policies and strategic decisions, and sharing insights and expertise that is embedded in our research, public campaigning and media.

In MCM Disability services, a Client Advisory Group was created and improvements were made based on feedback to increase participation. Improvements included: moving information and training sessions online, setting themes for each session that helped provide clearer purpose and meaning for more effective discussions, and furthering opportunity for actionable tasks.

One staff member suggested, *“Every executive should have a Gen Z mentor.”*

Questions and challenges

Ideas for improving our practice

“We feel restricted by a lack of funding and resourcing.”

Concerns about adequate funding and resourcing was a common theme. These are some of the solutions that came from interviews with MCM Group staff.

Co-creating something small from the get-go, together with the people MCM Group supports. Hallway conversations and ideas can be continued, together.

Apps or online surveys that are filled out by the people MCM Group supports at the end of each session to be utilised.

There are creative ways to have people involved in operations that aren’t necessarily costly. For example, for an MCM Youth Foyer open day, site tours were facilitated by young people who gave speeches and were involved in different roles during the day, including serving food to attendees.

Lived experience engagement and participation is an approach and way of working, as well as a methodology. One staff member reflected, *“It’s part of my work. Everything I do, I ask clients ‘what do you think?’”*

It was reported that communities of practice can be useful, but still require support and prioritisation from MCM Group, including coordination and resourcing to overcome barriers such as policy or procedure revision.

It was recommended that remuneration for lived experience engagement and participation should be written into program budgets and bids.

Questions and challenges

Ideas for improving our practice

“How can we have a shared commitment to lived experience engagement and participation, but still design our own approaches that best suit our team and the people we support?”

Staff reflected that although a shared vision and approach is needed, it shouldn't be too prescriptive so that they can adapt to localised needs.

There will be many nuances and differences in how engagement and participation practice evolves and takes shape across different areas.

Staff told us that this framework should be offered as a starting point, to help people understand what lived experience engagement and participation is, and how it can be utilised for the benefit of all. It offers a shared vision and commitment, so that MCM Group staff are empowered to act on, or create, localised opportunities.

One example of localised planning came from Frontyard who had a *‘Guide for Engagement’*, with practical examples of how staff could integrate the lived experience of the people they support in their everyday work.

Other ideas from across the organisation included involving the people MCM Group supports in: recruitment panels, the development of program logics, reception areas look and feel, and meals and activity programming for residential services.

“There is a risk this will just happen in pockets, and not broadly across MCM Group. How do we keep each other accountable?”

This framework shouldn't just influence service delivery, but also the way MCM Group operates in shared services and executive leadership.

The development of implementation plans for all areas of MCM Group will keep teams and leaders accountable. It will help to set expectations, address any structural challenges, and support monitoring the progress and success of initiatives.

One staff member suggested that no new plans should go forward until engagement has been facilitated and any proposed solutions deeply consider the experiences of the people MCM Group supports.

Questions and challenges

Ideas for improving our practice

“How can we get better at closing feedback loops and making sure the people we support know that their feedback has been heard and considered?”

There is an opportunity to learn about where our gaps of awareness and understanding are, but MCM Group staff still want to ensure that the people they support know their input is valued and acted on.

There are already identified opportunities for MCM Group to review current practices with an aim to better close feedback loops.

Various surveys have been a useful tool, however have had limitations due to reportedly capturing those who are already happy with our services, and those who are not. This means that we're missing the perspectives of people in-between or who have declined a service.

Alternatives to surveys should also be explored. Feedback can be sought in more informal ways, such as conversations with frontline staff and workers, or phone calls with staff who do not have direct contact with the people we support.

We also heard that the most successful activities offered a variety of options for engagement and participation, including in-person, over the phone or online.

Questions and challenges

Ideas for improving our practice

“What can we do to promote and plan for equal opportunity in engagement and participation for all?”

Inclusion is more than accommodating for cultural safety and diversity, but also needs to consider how we are inclusive of children, those who are non-verbal, and disabilities such as vision impairment, deafness and hearing loss, for example.

As stated in MCM Group’s **On for Inclusion - Diversity, Equity of Access and Inclusion Strategy**, we aim to ensure that *‘our people reflect the communities and people we support’*.

MCM Disability services shared that they often offer interpreters in sessions and Client Advisory Group meetings.

In addition to engaging interpreters, there is also opportunity to start with the people MCM Group supports at the centre, having bicultural workers and face to face engagement in-language from the very beginning.

Simple language formats should also be used for surveys, and printed and electronic communication.

The MCM Group website offers a translation function in six languages other than English. These include: Arabic, Chinese (simplified), Urdu, Persian, Somali and Vietnamese.

It is also imperative for MCM Group to recognise low literacy levels and have mechanisms in place that are not always dependent on written communication.

Practice and implementation considerations



Child voice



Disability



Palliative Care

This framework was written in a general sense to reach across MCM Group’s diverse range of support and service areas.

Due to the breadth of MCM Group’s services that cater to and support people across lifespan, developmental age and ability, and social issues, it means that different approaches and practices will work for different people and that no one single approach will work for everyone.

The engagement activities we undertook to develop this framework unearthed specific examples from across MCM Group that draw our attention to the importance of adapting frameworks to meet the unique contexts of different groups and communities of people.

Across MCM Group, all services will explore developing individual implementation plans to meet unique service needs around strengthening lived experience engagement and participation. These implementation plans will ensure that the guiding principles in this framework are incorporated into everyday practice along with creating clear actions aligned with our *‘model for collaboration’* (pages 37-38).



Child voice

The Early Childhood and Family Services team understands how critical it is to build staff capacity to provide developmentally informed and therapeutic responses to the children they see across their services. To be able to truly give children a voice, an understanding of where they are at currently must be established first.

Staff shared about a historical service mindset of focusing on parents and caregivers, and that this would be seen to somehow 'fix' experiences for children. This approach is now challenged in contemporary practice, with practitioners having a better understanding that there is a need to have specific evaluation mechanisms for children *and* their parents, caregivers or kin.

Up until three years old, children's voices are often overlooked. When children are four or five years old, services generally start to pay more attention to their voices.

Doing and talking need to go hand in hand, as talking is not the primary way of speaking with under seven year olds. There is a common misunderstanding that because a six or seven year old might talk a lot that they therefore understand, but they do not always understand what adults are asking them.

Although the goal is to create empowering processes for and with children, often this is approached in adult-centric ways with an emphasis on language. When thinking about lived experience engagement and participation with children, there needs to be creative ways of developing behaviourally informed approaches about what is happening for them.

For example, if asking children questions, workers must keep in mind that children often say what they think the adults around them want to hear as they want to be validated by them. *Children make sense of themselves based on what adults think of them.*

When it comes to service feedback, there must be multiple surveys and ways of engaging for different ages to meet where they are at developmentally.

Creative ideas for implementation:

- **Social stories with children**

Asking children to draw a picture of what they think is currently happening (e.g. child shares that mum is crying, so asking them to describe more about it).

- **Fantasy based questions for school age children**

Asking school aged children to describe the characteristics of their ideal case worker or which superhero they might be.

These sorts of prompts can help to support children's understanding, particularly when they can sense that important adults around them are distressed, which then causes them to become distressed.

It is also critical for workers to explain who they are in children's lives. Workers often build great relationships with children but they might not know who they are and why they are there. *How might workers introduce themselves and their role in children's lives in creative and developmentally appropriate ways?*

The Early Childhood and Family Services team are currently developing a **Child Wellbeing Framework**, including a risk assessment for children going into refuge with their parents and exploring their experience of a safe place. As part of this Child Wellbeing Framework, social stories could be used to help children understand what is happening in the refuge and why they are there, particularly when there will be other families there with them.



Disability

The Disability Client Advisory Group is an important mechanism that MCM Group has in place to regularly seek and receive feedback from participants and/or their representatives.

The Advisory Group chooses a different topic for discussion for quarterly meetings, and allows time for general feedback and dialogue. Improvements that are suggested are captured, reviewed by the disability leadership team and then implemented where appropriate. There is also communication provided back to the Advisory Group on what feedback they shared was actioned.

In disability services, there are perspectives to be considered from *two distinct cohorts* with lived experience. The participants themselves and their carers, guardians or kin. Information received may be consistent between the different perspectives, but typically varied and both offer advantages. A person MCM supports will offer deep, contextual and direct experience, insights and advice. A carer or guardian's perspective can offer a distinct and sometimes broader lens and information that is critical to service and systems change.

It is vital that our services work with both groups to capture a comprehensive and holistic picture of what is happening for the individual accessing the service and those supporting and caring for them.

Implementation considerations:

- Working under the broader disability service system funding model can be limiting in terms of dedicating staff and resources to work on lived experience engagement and participation activities. This will be a consideration when mapping out the implementation plans for this framework.
- Additional costs must be factored into the implementation phase, to create documents that are accessible to participants and their representatives. The use of alternative means of communication, such as imagery, will be essential to ensure messages are conveyed accurately and accessibly.



Palliative Care

MCM Group understands that there are nuances and unique challenges to lived experience engagement and participation initiatives in Palliative Care services.

People who are in more marginalised positions (such as people with a life-limiting illness) may require more resource-intensive methods to connect with and be involved in service design or improvements. To be truly meaningful, creative methods to include qualitative input must be sought.

Our palliative care services have incorporated a system of feedback surveys to ensure we are listening and acting upon the suggestions and ideas of the people we support, and their carers. The Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey (VHES) invites clients and carers to complete surveys which are then collated into reports twice a year. These survey invitations are automatically generated via a client management system to all current palliative care services clients and their carers.

Additionally, bereaved carers are invited to participate in a survey, or to contact a Quality Coordinator for a conversation to offer feedback on the service their family or loved one received and suggestions for service improvement.

There are current limitations to this process, including:

- The survey invitation only being delivered in English and a low take up of calls back with an interpreter.
- Bereaved carers are approached six-months following the death of the person MCM Group supports, an intentional approach to provide for a period of grieving. Sometimes, the time that passes might mean certain details are lost or forgotten. However, calls and thank you cards are often received from many families in the days and weeks following the death providing informal insight into service satisfaction.

Other mechanisms for lived experience engagement and participation include a volunteer program, which while not limited to people with experience supporting loved ones in palliative care, often attracts people who have been service participants. This can provide another layer of insight into direct experiences and influence future service support provided. Often the shared experiences, empathy and understanding that the volunteers offer are very beneficial for the people MCM Group supports.

Implementation considerations:

There is an opportunity for Palliative Care services to further explore the ways in which people who are in more marginalised positions (such as people with a life-limiting illness) may require more resource-intensive methods to listen to their voices and connect with their perspectives. Most of the client experience within Palliative Care is at a time when the person MCM supports is dying, so there is an ongoing need to ensure their individual voices are consistently and systematically considered as they are engaged with the planning of their care and support.

An opportunity for co-design

A Comprehensive Palliative Care In Aged Care project is underway, with the interim report outlining an action to develop an information resource for people who are residing in residential aged care facilities and their families. For this resource to be of value and benefit, it is essential that it is co-created with the people MCM Group supports, together with their carers and loved ones.

“We can’t have a hiccup and throw it all away. We need to understand that it’s going to get better over time. Creating expectation and permission that it’s going to evolve and extend over time and challenge us all. We can’t expect to always be comfortable. In some ways, this should just be obvious for us to do – it shouldn’t be special.”

- MCM Group staff member

Appendices

Appendix A

Levels of participation

IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation describes the different levels of engaging people in any sort of participation process, including corresponding goals and promises.

In the context of this framework, the spectrum can be used to help guide MCM Group staff and teams to get clear on what level their lived experience engagement and participation activities are being pitched at, and the associated commitments required to deliver on specific participation level expectations.

IAP2 Spectrum

IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and found in public participation plans around the world.

Increasing impact on the decision					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood or considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	The place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Reference: International Association for Public Participation (2018). *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation*. iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/



Appendix B

Client voice activity

Alongside the client partners who were involved throughout the entirety of the project, we also wanted to capture client voice more broadly.

To do this, we designed this activity worksheet for the people MCM Group supports to fill out and send back to us as part of gathering insights.

The worksheet was distributed across MCM Group’s services with a detailed instruction guide for workers who were supporting people to complete the activity.

Your voice

1.

Why is it important for us to hear the voices of clients, students and people with lived experience?

Please feel free to write or draw your answer. Whatever feels right for you. If you draw your answer, please explain to us what it means to you.

2.

How does it feel when you are heard and your opinion is valued?

Please feel free to write or draw your answer. Whatever feels right for you. If you draw your answer, please explain to us what it means to you.

morgan&co

mcm

mcm housing

HESTER HERRINGBROOK ACADEMY

By completing this activity worksheet, you consent to this information being used to inform the MCM Group Lived Experience Engagement and Participation Framework.

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Appendix C

Good practice resources

A selection of helpful resources when setting up for safe enough engagement and participation activities, projects, and processes.

KA McKercher, Beyond Sticky Notes – Model of Care for Co-design

The Model of Care for Co-design⁸ offers techniques for people who want to lead inclusive, ethical and care-ful co-design. A Co-design Planning Tool⁹ is also available on the Beyond Sticky Notes website to support building the conditions for successful co-design processes.

TACSI & LELAN – How ready, willing and able are you to embark on an authentic co-design process?

This reflective resource is designed to support both individuals and teams to understand how ready, willing and able you are to embark on an authentic co-design process.¹⁰

Vikki Reynolds – Workbooks and workshop exercises

Vikki’s work focuses on ‘justice-doing’ and ‘witnessing resistance to violence and oppression.’ Her workbooks and workshop exercises are critical resources for lived experience engagement and participation activities.¹¹

Y-Change – Learning from lived experience: a guide for professionals supporting children and young people experiencing family violence

This guide is designed to help practitioners better support children and young people with experiences of family violence.¹²

8. Beyond Sticky Notes. *Model of Care for Co-design*.
beyondstickynotes.com/model-of-care-for-codesign-expanded

9. Beyond Sticky Notes. *Co-design Planning Tool*.
miro.com/miroverse/co-design-planning-tool/

10. TACSI & LELAN. *How ready, willing and able are you to embark on an authentic co-design process?*
tacsi.org.au/news-ideas/how-ready-are-you-to-embark-on-an-authentic-co-design-process-prompt-book

11. Vikki Reynolds. *Workbooks and workshop exercises*.
vikkireynolds.ca/writings/workshop-exercises/

12. Y-Change. *Learning from lived experience: a guide for professionals supporting children and young people experiencing family violence*.
berrystreet.org.au/news/y-change-partners-with-safe-and-equal-to-support-young-victim-survivors

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