LIVED EXPERIENCE
ADVISORY FRAMEWORK
(LEAF)

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

Sacred Heart Mission respectfully acknowledges the cultural heritage and enduring strength of the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways where we work, the people of the Boonwurrung and the Woiwurrung.

Our roots are in St Kilda and we acknowledge and extend our respects to the Elders and community of the Yalukit Willam people of the Boonwurrung and we are grateful for their guidance, wisdom and partnership.

Our work is deeply inspired by values that define First Nations peoples – community, respect and resilience. We are committed to fostering an inclusive and culturally safe environment, honouring the cultural significance of the land, waterways and its people.

We extend our respect to all First Nations peoples.

Statement of inclusion

Sacred Heart Mission celebrates people's diversity. We offer a safe and inclusive culture where everyone is welcomed for who they are. We apply an intersectional lens to all our work. We recognise there are many dimensions to one's identity including gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and ability.

Foreword by the CEO

Sacred Heart Mission exists to end homelessness, deep disadvantage and social exclusion by building people's capacity and promoting fairer and more inclusive communities and service systems.

We know that to be successful in achieving our purpose, we need to actively and meaningfully listen and act in response to the voices of service participants.

A key priority of Sacred Heart Mission's strategic plan, Strategy 2030, is to embed lived experience voice across our organisation.

We will achieve this by creating mechanisms that enable people to have a say in the decisions that impact them and providing opportunities for people to share their feedback and stories with agency and pride.

In late 2023, we established the Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE) with ten participants who have a lived or living experience of using our services. Together with the group, we developed the Lived Experience Advisory Framework (LEAF).

LEAF integrates our efforts in gathering participant feedback and promoting consumer participation under the concept of lived experience. This framework offers guiding principles, details the various levels and types of participation and defines the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved. An accompanying Lived Experience Action Plan provides practical steps that will enable us to implement this framework.

I am grateful for the trust participants have shown in Sacred Heart Mission and honoured to work closely with people, hearing their stories and aspirations, as we developed this framework together. Thank you to each advisory member for inspiring us with your courage, generosity, insight and humour.

Hang Vo
Chief Executive Officer

10 July 2024

Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE)

EAGLE is a group of passionate and skilled individuals with lived experience of accessing our services.

EAGLE also speaks to the freedom, hope and new beginnings symbolised by a bird and pays respect to Bundjil, the Wedge Tailed Eagle who is known to be the creator of all things by the Boonwurrung people.

We gratefully acknowledge each inaugural member of EAGLE for their invaluable contributions to this framework:

- Catherine Aloise
- Georgia
- Luke Mason
- Chris Reid
- Lee Jwa
- Gemma Leech
- Jessie Reinshagen
- Tim Morrisby
- Clifford De Gee
- Geoffrey Tevlin

Definitions

Lived experience: Refers to the personal knowledge that an individual gains through direct, first-hand experience rather than through what is told to them by another. When appropriate and with adequate support, we can work with individuals who have direct personal experience with specific characteristics or attributes to share their personal perspective and educate others. When people with lived experience are asked for assistance in a professional context, they may be compensated for their time and expertise.

Participant: Refers to anyone who is currently or has previously used a Sacred Heart Mission support service and includes participants, residents, consumers and NDIS participants.

Carer: A carer may be a family member, friend or other person who has a significant role in the life of the participant. The terms 'family' and 'carer' are interchangeable throughout this framework. Some of our participants are also carers.

Participation: Is how people who access Sacred Heart Mission's services participate or engage with decision-making processes including management and the board. It is the process of ensuring that programs, services, policies and systems are shaped by lived experience. It is about sharing power by meaningfully engaging, partnering with and empowering consumers at all levels of Sacred Heart Mission to design and deliver services that meet their needs and choices. Examples of participation activities include focus groups, interviews, surveys, workshops and working groups.

Co-design: Co-design is more than having a voice or influence in decision-making; it is treating participants as equal partners in design and decision-making. Rather than being viewed as a source of information, participants actively and equally work to shape the definition and direction of a project. It is an intentional approach that aims to create solutions, innovation and open up possibilities for better outcomes. Bringing people along on the journey means the process has the potential to be as powerful as the outcome.[i]

Who should use this framework?

The framework is for all staff and volunteers, including those who do not work directly with participants. All staff share a responsibility to uphold lived experience voice.

The roles and responsibilities section of LEAF (see page 20 and onwards), provides clarity for staff and volunteers about organisational expectations and accountabilities, as well as some practical examples.

Purpose of this framework

The purpose of the Lived Experience Advisory Framework (LEAF) is to create a roadmap for Sacred Heart Mission staff, volunteers and participants to work together to create positive change in people's lives by listening, hearing and acting on lived experience voice.

The purpose statement was co-designed with the Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE). The members of EAGLE were clear that this framework needs to provide both, background knowledge about what lived experience voice means and guidance on how to embed it at Sacred Heart Mission.

Lived experience voice needs to be meaningful, well supported, intentional and resourced. It needs to be embedded into the way we design programs, make decisions and prepare information for participants. Listening to lived experience voice should begin from the moment participants first engage with Sacred Heart Mission. The action plan that accompanies this framework articulates opportunities to enhance and embed lived experience across the organisation.

Lived experience principles: AIM HIGH

The following principles were co-designed with the members of EAGLE who developed the acronym, AIM HIGH. The principles will guide us in all endeavors involving lived experience voice.

Accountability – we commit to listen and respond to participants' feedback. We will be accountable for actions and activities in relation to lived experience voice.

Integrity – we make decisions that are true to our vision and purpose. We are honest in what we say and do and we keep our promises and fulfill the tasks we are expected to do. This includes being clear with participants that listening to input does not mean we can do everything and change everything that is suggested. It means clearly saying no when something is not possible or appropriate.

Meaningful – we will avoid tokenistic or non-meaningful activities that can further disempower participants. Opportunities to participate will be purposeful.

Health & Safety – we will ensure participants feel psychologically safe when providing feedback and being involved. We will provide safe spaces for this to occur.

Inclusivity – we will aim to seek a diversity of views when undertaking lived experience activities. We will engage in respectful and equal relationships between participants and staff, and value the rights and diversity of participants and their service experience.

Genuine – we will adopt a genuine spirit of lived experience participation. Being honest and open with participants will assist us to create positive change in people's lives. We recognise that participants have skills and knowledge they have acquired through their own lived experience and are 'experts of their experience'.

Honour privacy – we will respect participants' privacy and confidentiality and create a safe space for participants to share their lived experience.

Why is lived experience important?

We know that actively empowering participants to have their voices heard, to make informed decisions and to have real influence leads to services that are better tailored to individual needs, preferences and values.[ii]

What our participants and staff told us

When we asked participants what having a voice means to them, this is what we heard:

- *"For me, it's the ability to raise something and people listen to you."*

- *"To be listened to and heard is really important."*

- *"Having staff listen, understand and help. Just being heard."*

- *"Should mean that you're being listened to and a democratic right to an opinion – and not just yes, we'll take it on board."*

Staff told us that hearing the voice of participants with lived experience means:

- *"Participant being at the centre – because for so long organisations have set the agenda and participants have complained about not getting a look in. It's not one size fits all. Acknowledge everyone's differences."*

- *"Consulting with participants in whatever we do and support their voices and provide them with a platform."*

- *"Everyone should have a voice and should be included. How can we make decisions for anyone else if we don't know what they actually want?"*

- *"We want to empower our participants, we care about what they have to say and want them to know that it matters."*

The two tables below show the value of lived experience for participants and Sacred Heart Mission.[iii]

Embedding lived experience voice is important to **Sacred Heart Mission** because it…

- Ensures we remain true to our vision, values and strategic priorities.
- Ensures services reflect participants' needs.
- Enables us to design, develop and deliver high-quality, effective and relevant policies, projects, services and activities.
- 'Humanises' activities and services.
- Improves equal opportunities, inclusiveness and representation of people from diverse backgrounds.
- Enables us to draw upon and make effective use of people's unique capabilities, diverse perspectives and experiences, allowing this to contribute to all decision-making.
- Helps gain credibility and legitimacy within communities, the social sector, government and wider society.

Embedding lived experience voice is important to **participants** because it…

- Promotes equality, dignity, self-determination and respect, ensuring the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Helps participants feel listened to and valued.
- Develops, improves and/or enhances professional skills and abilities through meaningful activities.
- Enhances personal skills by building confidence, self-esteem, life skills and positive attention.
- Provides an opportunity for social inclusion and a sense of connection, leading to improvements in health and wellbeing.
- Brings people together to achieve mutually agreed and desirable goals and outcomes.
- Provides stable and safe spaces, improves trust in and understanding of services and community, and promotes greater hope and optimism.

Connection to organisational documents and frameworks

Sacred Heart Mission has made a clear commitment in Strategy 2030 to embedding lived experience voice as a strategic priority and one of five guiding principles that set the moral standards and beliefs underpinning everything we do.[iv]

We are committed to embedding lived experience voice through the following actions:

- Build and apply a customer centric mindset.
- Ensure the voice of service participants is embedded across the organisation.
- Embed principles of self-determination across all our engagement with First Nations peoples and communities.
- Ensure service design and delivery facilitates genuine participant choice and control.

The importance of involving the lived experience voice is also evident within the following key documents:

- Case Management Framework
- Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Framework
- Quality Framework
- Reconciliation Action Plan
- Diversity and Inclusion Framework

We will also develop Practice and Advocacy Frameworks where lived experience voice will be central.

Connection to external requirements

Involving lived experience voice is not only the right thing to do, it also helps us meet compliance, accreditation and stakeholder requirements as follows:

- The international standard for quality (AS ISO 9001:2018 QMS)
- Aged Care Quality Standards
- NDIS standards
- Funding arrangements and expectations
- Grant submissions
- Provides participant outcomes to donors

This is what we already do or have done to listen to lived experience voice:

- We had a Consumer Participation Framework.
- We implemented an organisational complaints and compliments mechanism.
- We conduct regular surveys to capture participant outcomes and experience.
- We undertake a variety of ways to receive feedback from participants.
- Fundraising, communications and advocacy utilise participant stories to promote our work, advocate and raise funds.

We are committed to building on past learnings, evolving and significantly strengthening lived experience voice to ensure it is deeply embedded in everything we do. The LEAF and accompanying action plan will help us achieve this goal.

Critical success factors for embedding lived experience

There are a number of critical success factors for lived experience voice and it is essential we consider and incorporate them to uphold our principle of accountability.[v]

Critical success factor	Elements of critical success factors	Examples
Transparency and trust	• Provide clear expectations and boundaries regarding the participation opportunity – participants need clarity of their role and what the purpose is. Be clear that it is a balance of hearing all views including staff. • Be honest with participants about the limits of their feedback in changing the organisation and that there are multiple factors to consider when making decisions. • Always explain the reasons for why we cannot do something or meet someone's need.	• Induction training for new EAGLE members. • Background information provided in preparation for a participant focus group.
Timeliness	• Engage early and ask participants how they want to engage. • Be proactive – deal with issues early through deep listening, in a non-judgmental, non-defensive, trauma-informed style. • Slow down – foster participation and build skills first. • Wherever possible, involve participants from the start of a project, development of a new program etc. It is essential to involve consumers before all the important decisions are made. • Close the loop and maintain trust – report back to participants in a timely way on the status of their issues and how their feedback has been used. It's our responsibility to loop back no matter how long it may take to contact the participant.	• Respond to complaints quickly and show participants how their feedback has informed improvements. • Organise a participant workshop to co-design a new project.
There are many different voices	• Stakeholder analysis – know and understand cohorts of participants, what may help or hinder engagement. • Provide accessible and easy to read materials and methods of communication to reflect different styles, preferences, abilities.	• The organisation provides multiple ways to respond to a survey e.g. online, on paper, with support of a case worker. • Essential participant information is translated into relevant languages.

Critical success factor	Elements of critical success factors	Examples
Commitment from the top	• Organisational buy-in from the board, CEO, leaders, staff – during planning, implementation and evaluation. • Leaders communicate and support a no-blame culture so that feedback can be safely received. • Provide clarity on the outcomes we are aiming to achieve when implementing lived experience voice. • Ensure staff have capacity and capabilities to meaningfully integrate lived experience voice into their work. • Commit to an annual budget to pay participants and appropriately resource staff. • Decision-makers including board directors are engaged in lived experience voice activities.	• EAGLE has a voice to the board e.g. through reports and/or membership. • Team leaders start meetings with participant story.
Robust policies, systems and processes	• Provide tools for undertaking lived experience voice activities e.g. policies and procedures, guidelines, templates etc. • Prior to implementing lived experience activities, consider what resources and support participants need to engage in the activities. • All feedback is valuable, don't lose it. Capture and record feedback – formal and informal. • Lived experience activities are appropriately resourced, planned, monitored and evaluated.	• A lived experience policy is written. • The organisation explores ways for staff to capture anecdotal feedback.
Staff support	• We all have a clear understanding of what lived experience voice means and why it is important. • There is a strong focus on building staff capability and capacity to embed lived experience voice through training, tools and resources. • Provide time for staff to embed this into their work and get meaningful feedback from participants. • Staff are supported to continuously improve and increase engagement with lived experience. • Staff are empowered and supported in receiving and managing participant feedback and involving participants in multiple ways.	• A toolkit is developed for staff around feedback mechanisms and facilitation guidelines. • Lived experience training is provided to all staff.
Ongoing communication	• Understand and acknowledge that all feedback is an opportunity for improvement. • Provide high-quality customer service. Answer the phone, return calls and emails, make time to listen in person. • Communicate and collaborate across the organisation and share information and experience, as appropriate.	• Develop participant information, e.g. posters, to show what feedback was provided and what improvement has resulted. • Share stories of success and failure.

Types of lived experience participation

When engaging with lived experience voice, it can be helpful to consider these three types of participation:

Individual: Participants have a say about the service they are directly receiving. It includes everything from ensuring participants are empowered to create their own goals to providing easy-to-understand information and an opportunity for feedback.

Program: Participants are involved in how a program is designed or run. They can also be involved in interview panels for new staff and workshops to provide input into specific projects or topics.

Organisational: Where participants are involved in organisation-wide priorities that impact more than one program. Examples include governance (such as board meetings), speaking at events, contributing to advocacy campaigns, organisational policy development and reviewing the quality and accessibility of participant information.

Sacred Heart Mission will ensure that lived experience voice is embedded within these three types of participation. You can find examples of what this might look like on the following page.[vi]

Individual	• Participants are involved in decisions about their individual goals. • Participants can easily access information about how to make a complaint or give feedback in different languages, easy read, electronic or hard-copy versions. • Participants are asked often about their experiences, for example through satisfaction surveys and conversations with staff. • Staff establish partnerships with participants to enable shared decision making. • Participants are informed about how their views are considered and used to influence change. • Participants benefit from providing input, for example through formal recognition, skill development or payment. • Participant-reported outcomes and experience measures are built into reporting frameworks. • Carers are involved in planning and assessment of services.
Program	• Participant views are sought and included in policy and program design. • Participants are asked about their experience of services. Their feedback is used in continuous improvement processes. • Participants are included on program advisory groups and in service-level consultation processes. • Program and service areas adopt person-centred design principles and methods such as co-design. • Participants are on interview panels when recruiting for new participant-facing roles.
Organisational	• Information from complaints and compliments is analysed, reported and used to improve services. • It is clear where person-centred practice and participant engagement skills exist within organisations, for example in position descriptions and staff qualifications or specifically designated roles. • Participants are included on working groups. • Governing bodies have formal methods for directly listening to participants, for example through lived experience advisory roles. • The Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE). • There are organisational policies and procedures about participant recognition, payment and reimbursement. • Organisational policies about self-determination are developed and regularly reviewed in partnership with First Nations leaders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Services. • All staff share a responsibility to uphold lived experience voice. This responsibility is described, for example in position descriptions.

Levels of lived experience participation

Engagement and participation activities exist on a continuum. The table below illustrates this using the example to 'inform'.[vii]

When involving participants, consider the level of participation you want to achieve, and be guided by these five levels. This continuum acknowledges that not all types of engagement are the same. There will be times when you want to inform, while at other times, you will want to empower and hand over decision making to participants.[1]

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
	Providing information to participants	Obtaining participant feedback on alternatives for potential courses of action or decisions made	Working directly with participants to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and reflected in proposals or policy	Partnering with participants at each stage of a project	Placing final decision making in the hands of participants
Example *Provide basic information about Sacred Heart Mission's Women's House, including opening times and available services.*	*Staff make relevant information available through the website, flyers etc.*	*Staff develop a survey, they choose the questions, conduct interviews with Women's House participants and provide information based on what they learn is a priority.*	*Staff recruit Women's House participants to conduct the interviews and synthesise the results together. Participants have significant input but the process is still largely controlled by the organisation. Participants involved in conducting interviews are reimbursed for their time.*	*Staff recruit a small team of participants to formulate the survey, undertake the interviews, synthesise results and design/be involved in the design of the final product. The team of participants has a high degree of input and control, but ultimately program staff have control of the final product.*	*A team of participants have full control. They decide if surveys and interviews are even the best way to understand what information participants need to know. They have full control over what the ultimate product is and how it is provided.*

Increasing impact on the decision

1. The Lived Experience Action Plan includes activities to ensure Sacred Heart Mission works towards increasing participants' impact on decisions. A self-assessment template has also been developed for services, prompting staff to reflect on current activities related to lived experience, identify areas for improvement and align their efforts with these five levels.
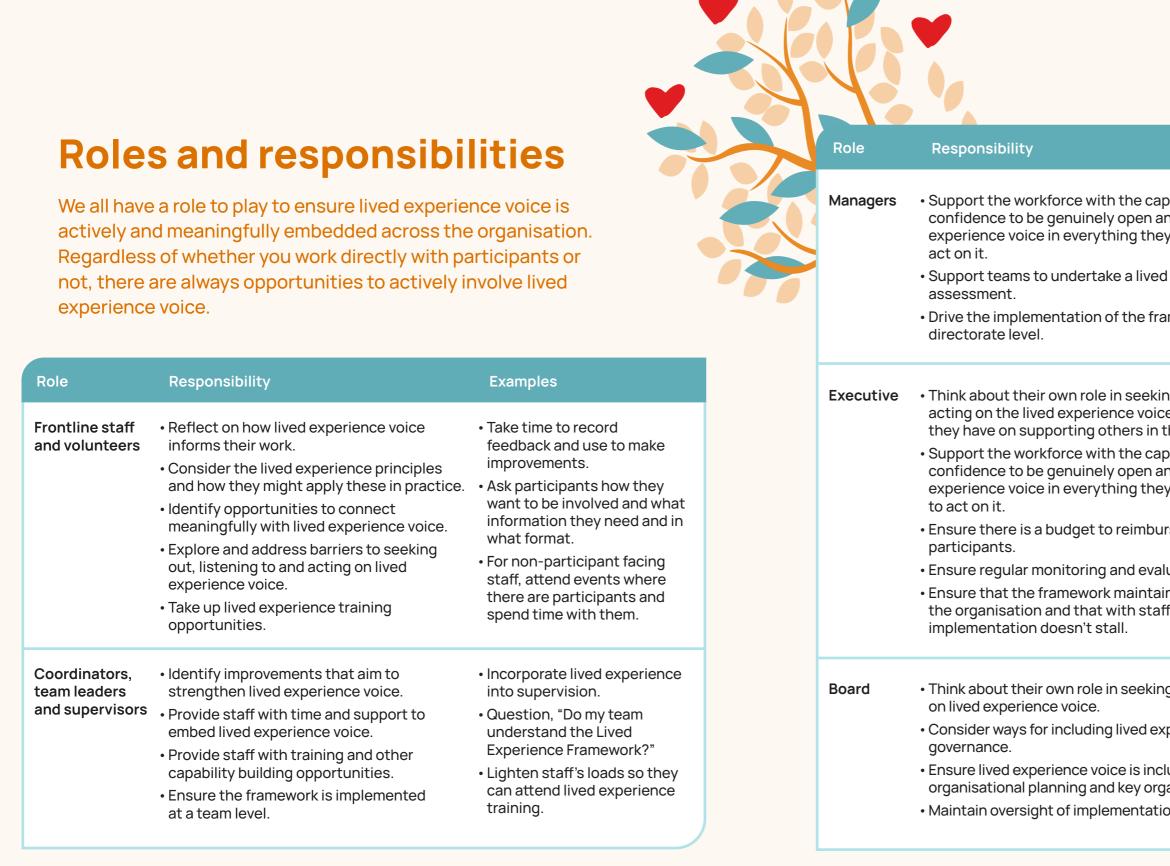
Roles and responsibilities

We all have a role to play to ensure lived experience voice is actively and meaningfully embedded across the organisation. Regardless of whether you work directly with participants or not, there are always opportunities to actively involve lived experience voice.

Role	Responsibility	Examples
Frontline staff and volunteers	• Reflect on how lived experience voice informs their work. • Consider the lived experience principles and how they might apply these in practice. • Identify opportunities to connect meaningfully with lived experience voice. • Explore and address barriers to seeking out, listening to and acting on lived experience voice. • Take up lived experience training opportunities.	• Take time to record feedback and use to make improvements. • Ask participants how they want to be involved and what information they need and in what format. • For non-participant facing staff, attend events where there are participants and spend time with them.
Coordinators, team leaders and supervisors	• Identify improvements that aim to strengthen lived experience voice. • Provide staff with time and support to embed lived experience voice. • Provide staff with training and other capability building opportunities. • Ensure the framework is implemented at a team level.	• Incorporate lived experience into supervision. • Question, "Do my team understand the Lived Experience Framework?" • Lighten staff's loads so they can attend lived experience training.

Role	Responsibility	Examples
Managers	• Support the workforce with the capability and confidence to be genuinely open and aware of the lived experience voice in everything they do and to be able to act on it. • Support teams to undertake a lived experience self-assessment. • Drive the implementation of the framework at team and directorate level.	• Incorporate lived experience into meeting agendas. • Always question, "How can I involve participants in this?"
Executive	• Think about their own role in seeking, hearing and acting on the lived experience voice and the influence they have on supporting others in the organisation. • Support the workforce with the capability and confidence to be genuinely open and aware of the lived experience voice in everything they do, and to be able to act on it. • Ensure there is a budget to reimburse lived experience participants. • Ensure regular monitoring and evaluation. • Ensure that the framework maintains visible across the organisation and that with staffing changes, implementation doesn't stall.	• Make time at least twice a year to visit programs and listen to lived experience voice directly. • Consider how to involve participants on internal committees and working groups.
Board	• Think about their own role in seeking, hearing and acting on lived experience voice. • Consider ways for including lived experience voice in governance. • Ensure lived experience voice is included in organisational planning and key organisational projects. • Maintain oversight of implementation of framework.	• Meet participants when attending different sites. • Call for reporting that includes participant feedback and improvements made as a result.

Examples of lived experience voice

Part of organisation	Examples of lived experience voice
CEO Office	Ensure lived experience voice informs strategic planning.
Communication and Advocacy	Have participants review written information e.g. brochures, flyers, website to ensure our communication is reflective of lived experience voice and needs. Enable and amplify participant voice through storytelling.
Data & Compliance	Develop a data strategy to ensure that lived experience voice is consistently and meaningfully captured, analysed and utilised.
Finance	Design systems and processes to reimburse participants and seek participant feedback on any information they send to participants, e.g. through a participant focus group.
Fundraising	Support participants to speak at fundraising events.
Governance	Participant Co-Chair of the Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE) is a member of the Quality and Services Governance Board Committee.
IT	Support the organisation to explore technological feedback methodologies to capture lived experience voice.
People and Culture	Establish supportive structures and guidelines e.g. guidelines for involving participants on interview panels and incorporating lived experience voice into staff position descriptions.
Property	Involve the Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE) in capital projects.
Quality	Involve participants in the development of ways to measure service outcomes and effectiveness.
Services	Ensure that every participant sets goals and is at the centre of their service journey.

Monitoring and evaluation

To ensure adequate implementation of this framework, the Lived Experience Action Plan includes the development of an evaluation plan.

This plan will monitor the effective implementation of actions and evaluate achievement against key elements of this framework. For instance, are people undertaking their responsibilities? Are people following the lived experience principles?

The Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE) should be involved in the evaluation and evaluation findings should be shared with staff, the board, volunteers and participants.

References

i. Mind's participation and co-design practice framework I Mind Australia (mindaustralia.org.au);

   Mind's lived experience strategy I Mind Australia (mindaustralia.org.au)

ii. Participant voice framework for community services I Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (dffh.vic.gov.au)

iii. The lived expierence I Baljeet Sandhu (thelivedexperience.org)

iv. Strategy 2030 - Serving more people and more communities I Sacred Heart Mission (sacredheartmission.org)

v. Participant voice framework for community services I Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (dffh.vic.gov.au);

   Renter voice implementation toolkit for CHOs I Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (chiavic.com.au);

   Straight from the source: A practical guide to consumer participation in the Victorian alcohol and other drug sector I Self Help Addiction Research Centre (sharc.org.au)

vi. Participant voice framework for community services I Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (dffh.vic.gov.au)

vii. We use the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum with their permission (iap2.org.au)