



Youth Participation

History and Practical Resource

Version 1. Published by Home Stretch WA LEXC Project Team August 5th, 2025
Owners, Home Stretch WA Community of Practice
Review by Lived Experience via Community of Practice date. August 5th, 2026

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Executive Summary

“...Participation of children and young people must be encouraged and reinforced through positive experiences of having their contributions taken seriously by workers and by the system as a whole...”

An Outline of National Standards for Out of Home Care (2011), published by Australia's Department of Social Services (DSS).

Young people with lived experience have been at the heart of the Home Stretch journey—a transformative social policy reform that now extends support to young people leaving the child protection system until the age of 21.

A decade ago, CEOs across Australia united around a shared vision: to advocate for extending care beyond the abrupt cut-off at age 18. At that time, support for young people in state care ended overnight on their 18th birthday. The need for change was undeniable—with a strong commitment from Home Stretch key stakeholders to lead that change. Through persistence and collaboration with key stakeholders—including young people with lived experience, the Department of Communities, Yorganop, and the broader sector, a co-designed trial model was developed. With support from Lotterywest and the Department, the Home Stretch WA model was born, grounded in lived experience and community wisdom.

This commitment continued in 2021, when Home Stretch was announced as a State Government election commitment. By 2024, service providers—including many Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)—were delivering supports across every region of WA. The Home Stretch WA Community of Practice played a key role in enabling the reform and championing the voices of young people in shaping the program's future.

It is essential that Home Stretch WA continues to embed the participation of young people with lived experience to shape said future—ensuring they are encouraged and empowered through meaningful engagement and participation, and that their contributions are taken seriously by workers and the system as a whole. Youth participation is not just a principle—it is embedded in the model's integrity, service standards, Out-of-Home Care Standards, the Out-of-Home Care Charter of Rights for Children and Young People, and other key frameworks and legislation that elevate the voices of young people with care experiences.

This document captures the journey from the inception of Home Stretch WA to its current position as a permanent part of the leaving care continuum. It

reflects a decade of lived experience, learned expertise, and live action research. Our goal is to embed these learnings in a way that is transparent, accessible, and representative of the diverse voices and experiences of young people with out-of-home care backgrounds.

The impact voices have already had, has been profound—hopeful, inspiring, and transformative for our care leavers.

Thank you for the time, dedication, effort, and power that is lived experience. We hope this document serves as a practical resource to understand how youth participation can be supported and offers insights to help foster empowerment and confidence of young people in their communities.

This document is not a “one size fits all” approach, nor does it capture everything about lived experience or youth participation. Rather, it is a community resource for Home Stretch WA stakeholders to access and apply in ways that empower the communities they serve.

This document belongs to the Community of Practice and the young people of Home Stretch WA.

Thank you to the Community of Practice and Home Stretch WA young people for inspiring incredible work and driving meaningful change across the system.

Permanent Model – Embedding Lived Experience Project Team & Lived Experience Consultants, 2025

Acknowledgment of Country & First Nation Communities

Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which Home Stretch WA works across, and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

Appreciation for First Nations Young People Lived Experience

We extend our deepest appreciation to the First Nations young people involved in and contributing to the Home Stretch WA program. Your wisdom, resilience, and strength continue to shape and inspire the work of Home Stretch WA and the broader Lived Experience movement.

Commitment to First Nations Self-Determination

First Nations people and communities have a fundamental right to self-determination. Wherever possible, First Nations-led organisations should be the ones delivering the Home Stretch WA program for First Nations young people and their families.

Commitment to First Nations Young People and Their Families

We recognise that every First Nations community across Western Australia is unique, with distinct circumstances, cultures, and needs. Country is central to this understanding.

Local First Nations young people, families, and community leaders are best placed to determine the most appropriate approach to delivering the Home Stretch WA program in their communities. Home Stretch WA is committed to ensuring that the voices of First Nations young people, families, Elders, and community leaders are elevated and embedded in everything we do.

We also commit to a vision where young First Nations leaders are empowered, supported, and invested in — supporting opportunities to lead, influence, and shape the future of care and support systems.

History of Youth Participation & Lived Experience in Home Stretch WA

Home Stretch National Campaign (2016)

Young people in partnership with key stakeholders nationally advocated for an extension of support across Australia as part of the National Home Stretch Campaign to extend support to care leavers to 21.

Home Stretch WA Campaign (2017)

Young people joined policy makers and sector representatives to participate in the Home Stretch WA Campaign, this included participating in media and advocacy events to raise awareness for extended support for carer leavers from 18-21.

Home Stretch WA Trial (2019)

The Home Stretch WA trial commenced as a three-year co-design process centred on the voices of young people with lived experience of leaving care. More than 137 young people contributed in various roles, including 37 direct participants, an 11-member Youth Advisory Group, and over 100 others who shared their stories, joined workshops, or supported evaluations as peer researchers. Young people were actively involved in shaping policy, service design, governance, and feedback mechanisms- embedding youth participation as a core principle throughout the model.

Home Stretch WA Statewide Roll out (2022-2024)

When the decision was made to make Home Stretch WA a permanent part of the system, there was an opportunity to build the role of lived experience and young people in guiding the roll-out. The Home Stretch WA Trial helped design and develop Lived Experience Consultant Roles, and the structure of youth participation with support from Create WA.

Lived Experience Consultants

From July 2022 to December 2024, the Home Stretch WA Community of Practice (CoP) employed 12 young people with lived experience as Lived Experience consultants within its backbone team. These roles provided meaningful opportunities for young people- many with advocacy backgrounds from youth advisory groups or Create WA- to take on greater responsibility, lead their own projects, and represent young people in Home Stretch WA for the statewide roll out.

The CoP engaged a mix of casual and part-time consultants, each contributing unique skills and perspectives and roles were built around their strengths. Together, they co-authored the first Youth Engagement Plan in consultation with other young people, outlining how young people would be involved in the Home Stretch WA rollout. This was endorsed by Department of Communities.

Youth Engagement Plan

The purpose of the Youth Engagement Plan:



The first Youth Engagement Plan was closely aligned with the CoP Backbone Team's key pillars: workforce development, continuous improvement, youth participation, monitoring and evaluation, and Aboriginal culture and community. This alignment ensured that young people's contributions were embedded across all focus areas during the rollout, informing many of the projects undertaken by consultants.

As independent agents of social change, Lived Experience Consultants drew on both their lived and learned experiences to support the successful statewide implementation of the program. Their involvement significantly contributed to many actions outlined in the Home Stretch WA Youth Engagement Plan, with strong support from the CoP Backbone Team.

Youth Engagement Plan Review (2024)

The annual review is part of the continuous improvement plan (*Youth Engagement Plan*), which is obligated for review by young people and Department of Communities every 12 months to meet the needs of young people in Home Stretch WA and ensure they have a permanent role in the system including having support, remaining independent and being diversely represented. The review holds everyone accountable to young people in Home Stretch WA's expectations. The actions from this review were discussed in collaboration with key stakeholders, particularly the department in walking and working together meetings with the hope of a commitment to a transition of the lived experience responsibilities and facilitation.

Walking and Working Together Meetings – Lived Experience Consultants and Department (2024)

The Lived Experience Consultants had ongoing meetings with Department of Communities called “Walking and Working Together” to establish transparent, accountable and empowering dialogue between young people and the department. The focus was the Youth Engagement Plan Review and the next steps for Lived Experience in Home Stretch WA. This was to ensure that lived experience voices in Home Stretch WA are maintained once the Community of Practice backbone team is no longer there (including the possibility of no consultants). Other issues were raised to the department by the consultants such as, Waitlists & Demand, Training and Advocacy. Consultants chaired and led the discussion, while following an agenda and equal speaking opportunities.



Youth Participation Plan Recommendations (2024)

In September 2024, the Youth Participation Plan (YPP) Recommendations were presented to the Department as a tangible reference for embedding lived experience in future planning. The document aimed to secure a long-term commitment to a permanent role or structure for youth participation.

The plan's name was changed from "Youth Engagement Plan" to "Youth Participation Plan Recommendations" to reflect a shift from one-way consultation to a two-way, action-oriented approach. Lived experience consultants emphasized that participation should empower young people to thrive—not just be consulted for engagement's sake.

Key Recommendations also included;

- Establishing a permanent, paid role for young people as independent, diversely represented lived experience consultants in Home Stretch WA and the broader out of home care system.

6- Month Project- Permanent Model- Embedding Lived Experience & Youth Participation in Home Stretch WA (Feb- July 2025)

In December 2024 a proposal was submitted with Anglicare WA to continue Lived Experience roles and the Youth Participation Plan (YPP) and implement its recommendations. Funding was secured for a six-month project aimed at exploring how to permanently embed youth participation within Home Stretch WA and the broader leaving care continuum.

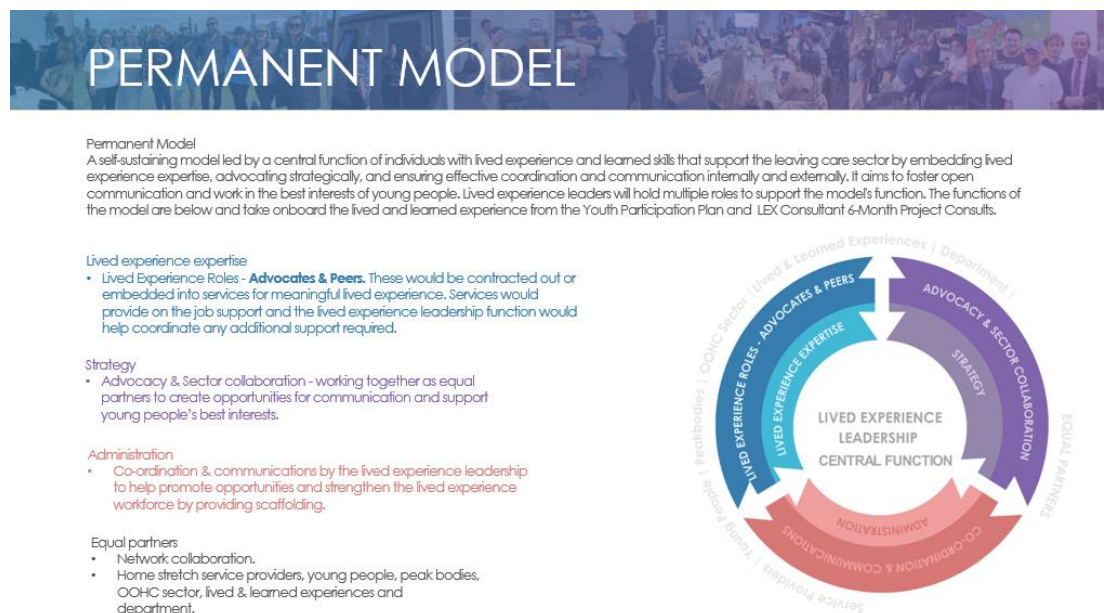
The project was co-led by lived experience consultants from the Home Stretch WA rollout and included a newly created role of a lived experience project lead. Its key objectives were to:

- Continue progress on youth participation action areas
- Ensure key stakeholders understand their responsibilities for youth participation
- Develop a sustainable model for lived experience roles and youth participation through consultations with Home Stretch WA providers, CREATE WA, the Department of Communities, and the Advocate for Children and Young People.

Through live action research and consultation, the project produced a aspirational permanent model for youth participation with key features:

- A central function for lived experience voices across out-of-home care.
- Embedded peer/advocate roles within service providers to ensure diverse representation and participation.

A transition plan and potential host have been identified, with work ongoing as of August 2025.



Practical Resources for Youth Participation

This section presents insights from the six-month permanent model project, offering practical guidance on implementing Youth Participation in Home Stretch WA. It includes:

This resource is intended as a working document for Home Stretch WA Service Providers and may be updated based on the outcomes of the permanent model development project, revisions to the Youth Participation Plan Recommendations and to update a future Youth Participation Plan resource.

Home Stretch WA Youth Participation or Engagement

Home Stretch WA uses both youth engagements and youth participation to actively include young people in continuous improvement of the program. The program was created from and by the voices of young people with OOHC lived experience. Youth engagement and participation is important to understand, as both look different and have different purposes. To implement it into Home Stretch WA as part of the model integrity, below are some explanations and examples.

Youth Engagement

Youth engagement involves a broad range of activities that connect young people with their communities. However, these activities are often passive or consultative- organised by adults, with young people attending but not influencing decisions. When feedback is collected, it's usually through fixed processes, and responses are rarely shared back with the youth.

These engagements tend to focus more on recreation, relaxation, or social connection rather than genuinely listening to young voices. As a result, they often serve to meet performance targets rather than improve programs or services based on youth input. This makes them surface-level forms of involvement, lacking depth and meaningful impact.

Examples of Youth Engagement:

- Camps
- Events
- Consultations and feedback forums

Youth Participation

Youth participation empowers young people by involving them in decision-making and service delivery that meets community needs. It helps them see the positive impact of their actions and develop valuable skills for personal and community growth. Participation is not just beneficial—it's a fundamental human right, recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many other global agreements. To participate effectively, young people need access to the right tools: clear information, meaningful opportunities, education, and awareness of their civil rights.

Examples of Youth Participation include:

- Governance groups
- Paid and employed roles
- Leadership, planning and facilitation of event and activities,
- Creating youth-friendly resources
- Developing, delivering and contributing to training

A useful tool for measuring and understanding youth participation is the [Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation.](#)

The main difference between youth participation and youth engagement is the level of agency given to young people. Youth participation involves young people taking initiative and leading actions themselves. In contrast,

youth engagement includes activities provided to young people within community settings, often organised by others.

While youth engagement may be more passive, it can still empower young people and serve as a valuable entry point into more active participation. It offers positive benefits and can help build confidence, skills, and interest that lead to deeper involvement.

Examples of Youth Participation- Home Stretch WA Lived Experience Consultants & Project Team (July 2022- July 2025)

A summary of the lived experience consultant team's achievements follows, showcasing youth participation in action by having employed Lived Experience young people leading projects.

Area	Achievements
Lived Experience Advocacy	Shared personal stories with leaders, policymakers, media, and service providers to influence systemic change. Represented youth in justice pathways, disability, homelessness, parenting, and regional/Aboriginal communities.
Training & Workforce Development	Co-designed and facilitated staff training, practice hours, and forums to embed youth perspectives in service delivery.
Governance & Decision-Making Representation	Participated in governance groups (e.g., Guiding Panel, Staying On Subsidy) to ensure lived experience informed decision-making.
Co-Design & Evaluation	Co-developed outcome measurement tools, evaluation frameworks, and youth participation strategies to define and assess success through lived experience.
Branding & Communications	Led the creation of Home Stretch WA's visual identity—logo, model diagram, fact sheets, and resources—ensuring youth perspectives were central and accessible.
Youth Engagement Activities	Facilitated Youth Advisory Groups and organised connection events to amplify youth voices and promote meaningful participation across WA.

Strategic Influence	Advocated for transparency in rollout decisions, waitlists, and funding to ensure youth concerns were addressed at a strategic level.
Public Speaking & Representation	Co-presented at national and international conferences, including the Home Stretch WA Symposiums and International Foster Care Conference. Co-facilitated the 2024 Symposium.
Legacy & Sustainability	Developed Youth Participation Plan Recommendations and advocated for a permanent Lived Experience Model to ensure ongoing youth involvement.
Project Management & Stakeholder Engagement	Led stakeholder consultations to co-design a permanent lived experience model. Provided peer mentoring and role modelling for other young people and team members.
Operational Resources & Tools	Created templates for event planning, meeting agendas, minutes, and newsletters. Developed event planner roles to showcase youth leadership in operational tasks.

Home Stretch WA Model Integrity Framework- Youth Participation

The Home Stretch WA Model Integrity Framework directly supports youth participation by setting practice standards that reflect a shared vision for consistent, high-quality support for young people transitioning from care. These standards were co-designed with young people and developed in collaboration with Lived Experience Consultants, the Community of Practice, and service providers.

Importantly, accountability for upholding these standards is a shared responsibility- not solely on young people. Ownership lies with the Home Stretch WA Community of Practice, service providers, and the Department of Communities.

Service Standards- Youth Participation

Youth Participation is a core standard within the Home Stretch WA Model Integrity Framework. It ensures young people feel heard, understood, and respected in the service. They are given meaningful opportunities to participate and hold Home Stretch WA accountable to its commitments.

6- Month project permanent model- embedding lived experience- consult findings

To support the development of a permanent youth participation and lived experience model, consultations were conducted using the Youth Participation Plan's action areas. The focus was on understanding current practices and generating recommendations- not auditing providers.

Key Findings

- **Early Stage Implementation:** Youth participation initiatives are still emerging and need time and resources to grow- some providers have well established processes others are just beginning.
- **Structured Feedback:** Providers highlighted the need for formal feedback mechanisms (e.g., exit interviews), as most feedback is currently informal.
- **Governance Involvement:** There is strong support for youth involvement in decision-making, though implementation approaches vary.
- **Centralised Support:** Stakeholders endorsed the Lived Experience Consultant Project Team and recommended a central hub for lived experience support.
- **Partnership Opportunities:** Key organisations identified to strengthen youth participation include CREATE WA, the Advocate for Children in Care, and the Youth Affairs Council of WA.

Examples of Youth Participation in Home Stretch WA

What we heard

- Feedback is mostly informal, occurring through trusted 1:1 relationship with Transition Coaches (in car/ Ad-hoc, at exit, events)
- Formal mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation are inconsistent; some providers have them, others are exploring.

- Young people are contributing to communications and training at a service level, but there's room to expand.
- Most decision-making is informal; formal governance roles are rare but of high interest.
- Some providers have initial youth participation and lived experience frameworks to build from and some have explored lived experience roles
- Significant Change Stories collected as part of reporting
- Survey Monkeys to rate transition Coaches
- Informal feedback at exit / exit interviews
- OOHLC Leadership Programs in some regional ACCO's
- CREATE's "Speak Up" Training and Young Consultant is a useful resource
- Youth-led / informed camps/events happening
- Cultural Leadership Programs/ board opportunities exist
- Work readiness partnerships happening (e.g., Wilson Security, Sister Kate's, Community business mentors).
- Youth-designed materials (e.g., flyers, posters)
- Organizational Governance boards, Home Stretch WA Working Groups, Leadership Programs
- Community leadership is emerging through cultural programs, events, and partnerships with employment and training services or cultural programs
- Advocacy and skill-building happens in everyday work with young people

Youth Participation Recommendations

Based on consultation feedback, initial recommendations were developed using the current Youth Participation Action Areas. These were informed by common themes identified across consultations and a collation of insights from the permanent model project team. They are intended to guide future youth participation in Home Stretch WA and supported by practical examples.

Recommendation for Monitoring and Evaluation

- *Introduce exit interviews post-Home Stretch.*
- *Standardise feedback tools across providers.*
- *Introduce process for model health checks and capturing young person voice*
- *Use group activities for meaningful feedback.*
- *Invite Lived Experience voices into team meetings or case consults.*
- *Introduce 1:1 Meetings with Coordinator/ Manager /meet the manager*

Recommendation for Community and Advocacy

- *Trial youth participation in interview panels and team meetings.*
- *Create more formal leadership opportunities.*
- *Create roles for young people over 21 to share experiences or become paid peer mentors/ coaches*
- *Provide more opportunities for Create Speak Up & Advocacy training*

Recommendation for Governance and Decision Making

- *Ensure Lived Experience representation on Home Stretch WA Governance Groups (Guiding Panel)*
- *Include young people in recruitment/interview panels.*
- *Develop or strengthen Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs).*
- *Provide structure and support for youth governance roles*

Recommendation for Communications and Training

- *Create a pool of young people to lead training and attend / lead events or group activities*
- *Young people invited to conduct info Sessions to young people*
- *Engage young people in recruitment processes and internal training.*
- *Leverage existing platforms like CREATE and Advocate for Children in Care for lived experience and advocacy training*

- *Introduce Youth participation and lived experience frameworks*
- *Young people to make more youth friendly versions of ways to participate and be involved*

Suggested Activities to Increase Youth Participation

Based on consult findings a collation of activities increase youth participation and the non-exhausted practical resources/tools that may be used.

Model Health checks

Providers are encouraged to reflect annually on the Model Integrity Framework practice standards including how they practice model integrity and embed youth participation and lived experience voices in their practice.

Young Persons Voice

Providers should offer regular opportunities for young people to give feedback, understand their rights, and track their progress. A draft outcomes survey and model integrity audit survey have been developed to support this and will be integrated into future reporting and practice.

7 Rights Of Support for Young People- Key Document

Developed by the Lived Experience Project Team, this resource aligns with the seven standards in the Model Integrity Framework. It should be used to help young people understand their rights and be included in model health checks and feedback processes.

Area	Suggested Activities	Relevant Resources & Tools
Young People Evaluating or Giving Feedback to Improve the Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- As part of model integrity health checks – get feedback from young people on their rights in Home Stretch and individual outcomes- Create exit interviews for every young person exiting Home Stretch- Create youth-friendly feedback and complaints processes- Make sure young people are aware of Home Stretch WA feedback & complaints process when	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Rights in Home Stretch Survey (Standards of Support)/ Outcomes Survey- 7 Rights of Support – Young People- Model Integrity Framework – Practice Standards – Youth Participation

Home Stretch WA – Youth Participation Practical Resource

Area	Suggested Activities	Relevant Resources & Tools
	<p>they sign up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask young people who have exited to return as peer mentors or share experiences at info sessions/social events - Introduce regular meetings with Manager/Coordinator (e.g. "Coffee/Yarn with the Coordinator") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant Change Stories - Home Stretch WA Feedback & Complaints Process - Home Stretch WA Transition Coach Reflection Tools - Survey Monkeys / Microsoft Forms
Young People Involved in Meaningful Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invite young people to participate in staff team meetings - Create opportunities for young people to sit on organisation board or leadership meetings - Invite young people to participate in Home Stretch WA working groups - Set up Youth Advisory Groups or Committees - Ensure young people can participate on Home Stretch WA Governance groups- Guiding Panel 	<p>YACWA Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yactivate - Youth Advisory Group - Advocacy training <p>CREATE WA training</p>
Young People Learning to Advocate, Lead and Participate in Their Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop cultural leadership programs - Providers to build partnerships with organisations for work readiness, work skills, cultural training, cultural identity - Attend CREATE WA Speak Up Advocacy Training – Level 1, 2, 3 and become a young consultant - Attend advocacy training with YACWA - Create opportunities for young people to share their lived experience – media events, storytelling workshops, sharing their story at group events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business mentors - CREATE WA Speak Up Training - YACWA Training
Young People Events & Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create opportunities for young people to lead or co-facilitate events - Create youth-led camps/events - Create a youth-led event planning committee or invite to join an existing one - Create paid opportunities/internships for young 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Event Planner Role (LEX) - Info Session Templates

Home Stretch WA – Youth Participation Practical Resource

Area	Suggested Activities	Relevant Resources & Tools
	people to run events/groups	
Young people leading info sessions with young people/ service offer	<p>Invite young people to run or attend info sessions on Home Stretch WA and share their experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young people attend with Transition Coaches to discuss Home Stretch 	
Recruitment Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage young people in recruitment (interviews, questions, reviewing selection criteria) - Young people to design Home Stretch posters or communication materials - Poster competitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment Resource – Link - LEX Event Planner Role Example JDF
General Ways to Increase Youth Participation or Involve Lived Experience Meaningfully	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Undertake training in safe storytelling, lived experience training - Invest in opportunities for young people to participate - Develop an organisation framework for client/youth participation or lived experience - Employ young people with lived experience as peer workers, advocates, or transition coaches (post-21) - Create paid casual opportunities for young people (e.g. internships, advisory groups, speaking roles) - Set up a policy for paying and reimbursing young people 	<p>Harts Ladder of Participation</p> <p>Example Training: CREATE WA YACWA, COMHWA Peer Work Training/ Lived Experience Training, Peer Pathways:</p> <p>Example Youth Participation / Lived Experience Frameworks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission Australia – Client Participation Framework • WACOSS – Lived Experience Framework (Dec 2023) • My Peer Toolkit – https://mypeer.org.au/ • Paid Participation Policy – WACOSS Example

Creating a Safe Space for Lived Experience

Home Stretch gives young people spaces to be involved and speak about choices that impact them. While the values (Transparency, Accountability and Empowerment) help workers create these spaces, these guidelines help inform practice. It also helps young people understand what safe lived experience work looks like. It is also important to acknowledge and value the impact of OOHLC Lived Experience, which continues to drive the work of Home Stretch.

Safety & Wellbeing



- Respect the rights of people to own their own story.
- Only share what you are given permission to share.
- Avoid referencing names but be transparent with relevant and appropriate information.

Personal & Community Boundaries



- Mindful of personal, professional and community boundaries.
- Avoid tokenistic behaviours.
- Don't mention personal connections without permission.
- Don't make assumptions about lived experience.

Sharing Lived Experience



- Actively listen & create meaningful dialogue.
- No disempowering or invalidating lived experiences.
- Acknowledge diversity and omission of experiences within group (no tokenism).
- Understand ways which trauma and experiences can impact lived experience staff.
- Ensure practices are trauma informed. Flexible Ways of Working

Flexible Ways of Working



- Understand that lived experience have social factors which impact them, so flexibility is important in ways of working. This supports them to achieve their goals and work effectively which is important.
- There's no "one way" of working with lived experience, offering multiple supports and resources is respectful, helpful and creates impactful work.
- Breaks are okay! They help with the mental and physical costs of lived experience.

References:

“Voices of Children and Young People” section from *An Outline of National Standards for Out-of-Home Care (2011)*, published by Australia's Department of Social Services (DSS)