

RMIT INNOVATION CATALYST

# THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENDING HOMELESSNESS

CASE STUDIES FROM THE CONSTELLATION PROJECT

DECEMBER 2023





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2023 RMIT University's Innovation Catalyst is a multi disciplinary team delivering applied and inclusive innovation initiatives. Our collaborations are activating a growing impact ecosystem to support RMIT's vision for a social innovation precinct in Melbourne's City North, aimed at solving the major challenges of our time.





RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

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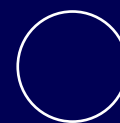
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Diane Brown, Max Hexter and Campbell McNolty from the RMIT Innovation Catalyst team, which is part of the Policy, Strategy and Impact portfolio at RMIT University.

The team would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who participated in the research through interviews and workshops. In particular we'd like to thank the Constellation Project Executive Team for their contributions to this report, and their productive collaboration across the life of this project.

We also acknowledge the critical importance of lived experience insights and the need for solutions to be designed with those who are impacted by homelessness. The input of people with lived experience to this report to interviews and feedback has been invaluable.

This work was made possible via trusts managed in Equity Trustees Sector Capacity Building Fund: Harold Moreland Oldham Perpetual Trust, J E & N Ganderton Endowment & Cederic Ivor Morrison Perpetual Trust.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the final output of the Lived Experience Inclusion and Impact (LEII) Project, commissioned by the Constellation Project (Constellation) and delivered by RMIT's Innovation Catalyst team. Through three case studies, the report documents the contributions made by people with lived experience to Constellation's systems change efforts, and the resultant impact on the quality and efficacy of this work.

Acting as a learning partner over the past two years, the Innovation Catalyst has been working collaboratively with Constellation to clarify, develop and share their approach to lived experience inclusion. By sharing Constellation's learning about lived experience practice, the project ultimately aims to support the wider social sector to more deeply and diversely include people with lived experience; and as a result, design and implement better solutions to complex challenges.

Constellation was established with a systems change agenda: to end homelessness in a generation. Convened in late 2018 by four founding members — Australian Red Cross, Centre for Social Impact, Mission Australia, and PwC Australia — the organisation intends to be a catalyst for cross-sectoral collaborative efforts in the pursuit of this mission. It brings together corporates, governments, academia, philanthropists, and not-for-profits to identify and accelerate solutions to homelessness that can be scaled and implemented in Australia. To date, this work has been conducted mainly through 'social labs' which are designed to bring diverse, cross-sectoral expertise and effort to bear. People with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity, along with First Nations voices, have been integral to the co-designing and co-producing of solutions in social labs.

From the beginning, Constellation's founders have operated under the belief that lived experience contributions enhance the quality and efficacy of solutions developed, and ultimately, have a critical role to play in ending homelessness. This research tests — and ultimately substantiates — that premise.

## THE THREE CASE STUDIES

The learnings shared in this report are drawn from 10 interviews with Constellation staff and stakeholders conducted by the Innovation Catalyst in April-May of 2023. Five of the ten interviewees have lived experience of homelessness.

A case study approach was selected to draw out explicit and consistent themes across disparate projects, as well as the nuance of lived experience impact within discrete project contexts and objectives. Case study subjects were selected in consultation with Constellation leadership, based on their potential to offer interesting contrasts and diverse learnings.

The three case studies are:

1. **Constellation's organisational inclusion model:** which focuses on the structures, policies and practices Constellation has employed to embed lived experience.
2. **Ready Transitions:** a project which sought to articulate a systemic response to young people exiting youth justice or out-of-home care in South Australia, to prevent them experiencing homelessness.
3. **Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ):** a policy solution aimed at addressing the shortfall of social and affordable housing in Australia by mandating that all new housing projects must include 10% social and affordable housing.

## KEY FINDINGS

The report documents the different kinds of lived experience contributions across the case-studies and the corresponding value, influence and impact these contributions have. We also identify and highlight enabling factors and critical learnings for others seeking to build upon Constellation’s lived experience inclusion efforts.

### THE NATURE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSTELLATION’S WORK

Our interviews and document analysis identified a range of ways that people with lived experience have contributed to the MIZ and Ready Transitions projects, and to Constellation’s organisational inclusion model. These contributions fell into three broad ‘types’:

- Problem definition.
- Solution shaping.
- Influencing, engagement and network building.



**Table 1. Categories of Lived Experience Contributions**

CONTRIBUTIONS	ACTIVITIES
Problem Definition	Exposing system gaps and providing concrete examples of how issues play out in an everyday sense.
	Gathering insights from others about issues and their experiences.
Solution Shaping	Providing strategic guidance on the scope and direction of the work.
	Contributing new and different ideas to be pursued.
	Providing insights about what ‘good’ looks like.
	Co-designing solutions in project teams.
Influencing, Engagement and Network Building	Contributing to the shaping of key messages and outputs.
	Public speaking/presenting on panels.
	Co-designing events.
	Building a network of others with lived experience to contribute to the work.
	Advocating for solutions to policy makers.

## THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS

These diverse contributions from people with lived experience have had deep, transformative impacts on Constellation's efforts to end homelessness. Our interviews highlighted direct impact on Constellation's operating model and the success of their work (their immediate sphere of influence). We also found emerging evidence of more indirect impact across their wider ecosystem of partners and stakeholders.

These impacts include:

- Direct value and impact:
  - ▶ **Developing more effective solutions** through deepening knowledge and generating new and better ideas.
  - ▶ **Increasing the influence of solutions** by anchoring issues in the real world, and lending authority and legitimacy to solutions (changing hearts and minds).
  - ▶ **Building stronger and more influential networks** of partners and contributors.
  - ▶ **Increased confidence, agency and skillsets** among individuals with lived experience involved in the work.
- Indirect value and impact:
  - ▶ **New knowledge and practice** and process changes seeded at other organisations within Constellation's wider network of collaborators.
  - ▶ **Mainstreaming of lived experience** inclusion and reducing stigma for others with lived experience in the workplace.

## ENABLERS AND KEY LEARNINGS

The research also identified a range of factors that enabled the value and impact described above to be realised, and some key learnings for others seeking to embed lived experience in their efforts to end homelessness.


These key factors include:

- Well-supported and clearly defined roles for people with lived experience, matching the opportunity for participation with an individuals' interests and skills.
- Structured *and* incidental opportunities for peer-to-peer support between and among lived experience contributors.
- Access to appropriate care and support, including briefing and de-briefing about participation.
- *Always* remunerating people with lived experience for their contributions and paying attention to the other resources needed to participate effectively (e.g. access to internet, professional development, travel, debriefing time).
- Creating a culture of equality, respect and learning about lived experience inclusion and practice among project teams and through organisational processes.
- Taking a reflective learning approach, being open to critical feedback and taking positive risks.
- Investing in the capability and pathways of lived experience contributors beyond their time or project-limited participation.

**"[Lived experience] ...it's a source of knowledge that otherwise would not be there. It's like saying, what if you didn't have a housing expert in the room?"**

Non-lived experience participant





**...to have a lived  
experience person  
there speaking  
passionately and  
authentically about  
their lives, I think  
that's a very, very  
powerful thing.**

Non-lived experience participant



# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

**“It’s pivotal. Constellation couldn’t, shouldn’t exist if lived experience isn’t at its core.”**

Non-lived experience participant

This report, prepared by RMIT University’s Innovation Catalyst, is the culmination of a two-year collaborative project focused on reviewing and further developing The Constellation Project’s (Constellation) model of lived experience inclusion. The report documents the contributions of people with lived experience to Constellation’s work over the past five years, and importantly, identifies the specific and tangible **value and impact** that these contributions have had on Constellation’s systems change efforts. We did this through three case studies of solutions developed by Constellation and its partners, in which we explored in depth:

- The varied **contributions of people with lived experience** to Constellation’s efforts to develop and advance solutions to homelessness.
- The ways lived experience has **enhanced the effectiveness and impact** of these solutions.
- The key factors that have **enabled these contributions**.

Established in late 2018 by four founding members — Australian Red Cross, Centre for Social Impact, Mission Australia, and PwC Australia — Constellation was formed to pursue a singular mission: **to end homelessness in Australia in a generation**.

In working to achieve this mission, Constellation’s founders built an approach based on a number of core principles, including:

- An extensive cross-sectoral network.
- Investing in the core to drive collaboration.
- Building on and contributing to the evidence base;
- Using social labs to accelerate solutions.
- A housing first approach.
- The intentional inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity.
- First Nations leadership.

Over the past five years, the implementation of these principles both strategically and operationally has been an iterative and evolving process. As work has progressed and learning deepened, Constellation’s commitment to lived experience inclusion has grown and strengthened. Constellation now strives to embed lived experience capabilities in all aspects of its work, including within the structure of the organisation. A Lived Experience and Project Co-ordinator on the Executive Team and a lived experience identified position on the Board have been appointed and the project has secured funding to review, enhance and share this aspect of its practice. This report forms a part of that important work.

Constellation's intentional focus on the principle of lived experience inclusion stems not only from an ethical imperative — that those impacted by homelessness have a right to be involved in efforts to end it — but a pragmatic one. From the beginning, Constellation's founders have operated under the belief that lived experience contributions enhance the quality and efficacy of solutions developed, and ultimately, have a critical role to play in ending homelessness. This research tests — and ultimately substantiates — that premise.

### What is Lived Experience?

Lived experience is defined as 'personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events, rather than through representations constructed by other people.'<sup>1</sup>

It is also defined as 'the experiences of people on whom a social issue or combination of issues has had a direct impact.'<sup>2</sup>

When Constellation refers to 'lived experience', they mean people who have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, or who have experienced being at risk of homelessness. This may include people who have been exposed to domestic and family violence, financial stress, periods of unemployment, contact with the criminal legal system and other intersecting issues.

We have used the term 'lived experience' throughout this report to refer to people with lived and living experience of housing insecurity and homelessness.

## RMIT'S LEARNING PARTNERSHIP WITH CONSTELLATION

Our learning partnership with Constellation has consisted of a range of activities over the past two years, including:

- **Clarifying and capturing** the Constellation approach and emerging model of practice, specifically through the co-production of a Lived Experience Practice Framework (separate to this report).
- **Evaluating the impact** of lived experience participation and leadership in this work, including cross-examination of initiatives for consistent themes and context-based nuance.
- **Identifying key learnings** and success factors in order to inform future approaches to lived experience inclusion.
- **Supporting Constellation to share** their learnings with the wider housing and homelessness sector.

In addition to enhancing the impact of future projects, a key aim of this learning partnership has been the documentation and sharing of learnings with Constellation's network of partners, other organisations seeking to embed lived experience in their own institutional contexts, and the broader housing and homelessness ecosystem. Ultimately, the ambition is to support the wider social sector to include people with lived experience more deeply and diversely; and as a result, design and implement better solutions to complex challenges.

1 Chandler, D., & Munday, R. (2016). *Oxford: A dictionary of media and communication (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

2 Sandu, B. (2017, July). *The value of lived experience in social change: The need for leadership and organisational development in the social sector*. Retrieved from [www.thelivedexperience.org/report/](http://www.thelivedexperience.org/report/)

## CONSTELLATION'S APPROACH AND EVOLUTION

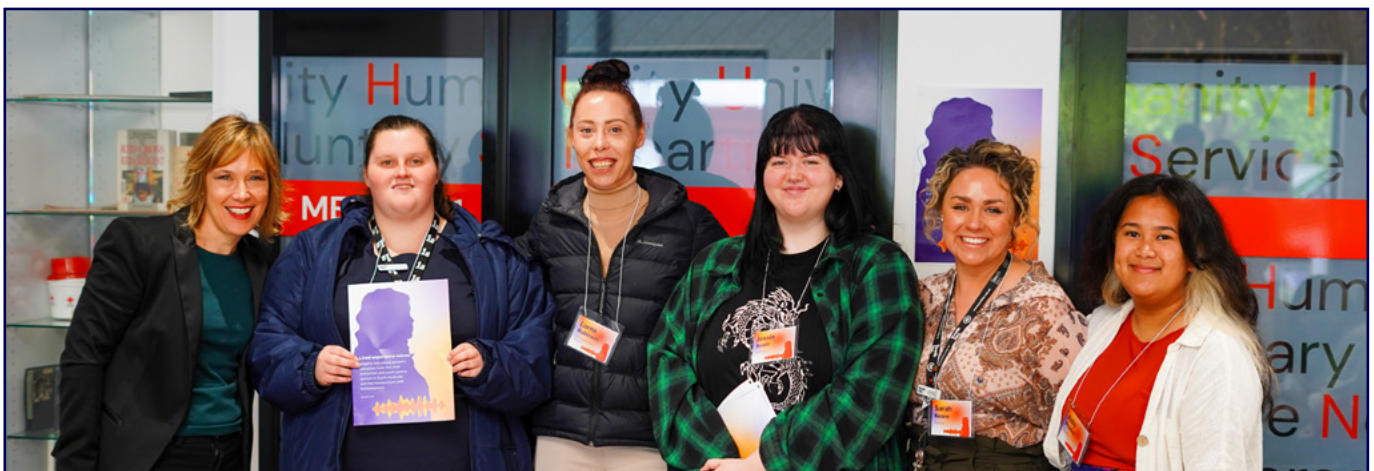
Originally acting as a coalition of founding members, Constellation has now become a registered charity comprised of a Board and a small core 'backbone' Executive Team. Additionally, Constellation has a wide network of partner organisations and individuals who are volunteering their time, alongside a network of individuals with lived experience who are paid for their contributions.

Constellation has brought together corporates, governments, academics, philanthropists, and not-for-profits to identify and accelerate solutions to homelessness that can be scaled and implemented in Australia. To date, this work has been conducted mainly through two 'social labs' which are designed to bring diverse, cross-sectoral expertise and effort to bear on complex problems. In the lab setting, proven modes and methods of convening and collaborating are used across disparate groups of stakeholders and interests to shape solutions and advance ideas.

The two social labs have been structured around a supply and demand understanding of the drivers of — and solutions to — homelessness. The 'More Homes' social lab focused on developing ways to increase the supply of affordable housing, while the 'Better Journeys' social lab focused on improving or diverting pathways into and out of homelessness. Each social lab kicked off by bringing together a diverse group of 30 – 40 people across corporate, government, service provision and advocacy sectors around a specific and deliberately ambitious 'challenge question'.

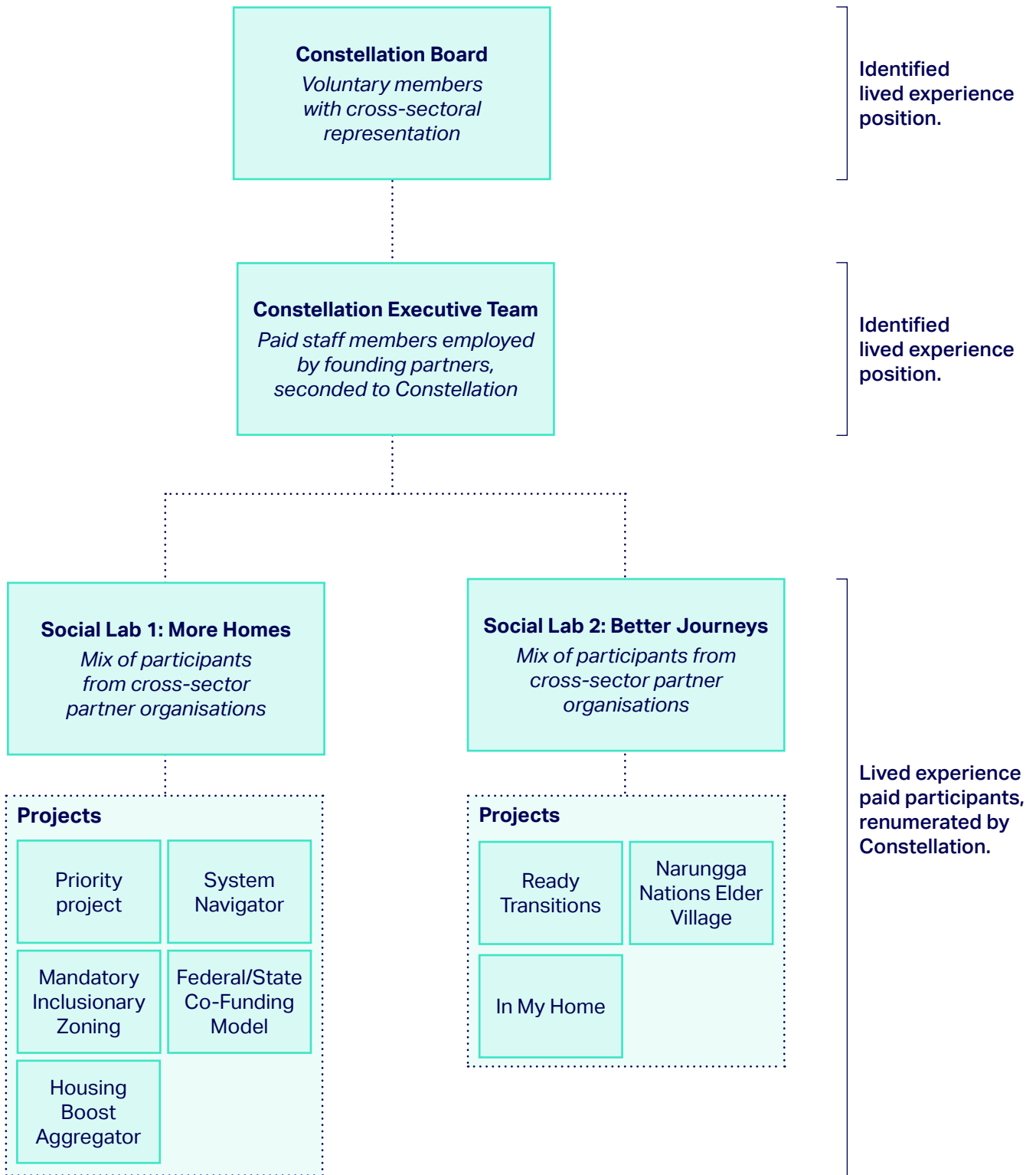
For More Homes, the challenge question was: *By 2022, how might we create a pipeline of 100,000 homes for people on very low to moderate incomes?* For Better Journeys, the challenge question was: *How do we make sure that every 16 – 24 year old transitioning from custody or out of home care in South Australia has a home and a supportive community where they can thrive?* The social lab generates a range of project or 'solution' ideas in response to the challenge question, and then collectively decides which ideas will progress. Finally, smaller project teams are formed to progress ideas over a series of sprints. All social labs and project teams have included at least one person with lived experience, unpacking the challenge and devising new solutions alongside a diverse mix of other stakeholders.

These social labs and project teams were progressively established and operated between 2019 and 2023. Importantly, Constellation has always seen its role as catalysing these ideas and stewarding them to prototype or policy for another organisation (government, advocacy organisation, service provider or business) to take up — rather than as the owner of these outputs or responsible for delivering solutions on the ground. As many of the solutions developed through the social lab process have reached a proof point and been handed to others to lead, Constellation has entered a transition phase, shifting away from the social lab model and instead focusing on a more limited number of solutions to continue to progress through to prototyping via project teams.





**Figure 1. Constellation’s Operating Model, 2018 – 2023**



# THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

**"I think we always forget the personal impact too. You know, there's impact at the system level, there's impact at the community level, but it's also just how it's shaped us as people."**

Lived experience participant

Systemically marginalised communities have a long history of using their direct experiences of oppression to advocate for social and political change and have given rise to influential leaders of new movements. First Nations fights for sovereignty across the colonised world, the women's liberation movement, the American civil rights movement, the LGBTQIA+ rights movement and the disability activism that popularised the term 'nothing about us without us is for us' are all grounded in lived experience.

Disciplined efforts to bring lived experience capabilities into service and policy improvement and delivery is, however, a relatively recent phenomenon and one that has been accelerating in the past decade. There is now widespread recognition across the for-purpose sectors that the experiences, knowledge and skills of those impacted by complex social and economic problems are critical to social and systems change efforts.

In public services and social policy, design-led methodologies (such as human centred design, co-design and user experience) are increasingly used to gather insight and ideas from those who are, or will be, using services and to test new propositions. Many organisations now employ or consult people with lived experience to identify and correct system failures; and to inform person-centred practice, policy and advocacy initiatives that genuinely respond to the needs and aspirations of service users. However, practices that support and enable lived experience contributions in housing and homelessness are in their early stages of maturity. While the sector is in the process of learning how to do this work well, many organisations are experimenting with and building new understanding around models for establishing and mainstreaming lived experience inclusion.

Constellation is one such organisation. Recognising both the criticality of lived experience to the development of effective solutions, and the need to iteratively learn about how to do this work well, they have sought to embed lived experience across the full spectrum of their work. Now five years into this endeavour, Constellation are keen to identify *how* lived experience has enhanced the delivery of their work and contributed to more effective solutions to ending homelessness. The following section of this report summarises and synthesises our findings in relation to this question from across the three case studies.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM ACROSS THE CASE STUDIES

A case study approach was selected for this research, to draw out explicit and consistent themes across disparate projects, as well as the nuance of lived experience impact within discrete project contexts and objectives. Case study subjects were selected in consultation with Constellation leadership, based on their potential to offer interesting contrasts and diverse learnings. The three case studies are:

1. **Constellation's organisational inclusion model:** which focuses on the structures, policies and practices Constellation has employed to embed lived experience.
2. **Ready Transitions:** a project which sought to articulate a systemic response to young people exiting youth justice or out-of-home care in South Australia, to prevent them experiencing homelessness.
3. **Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ):** a policy solution aimed at addressing the shortfall of social and affordable housing in Australia by mandating that all new housing projects must include 10% social and affordable housing.

The case study on **Constellation's organisational inclusion model** is of a slightly different order to the other two case studies. It was selected to provide an overall view of how lived experience can be structured into an operating model, and the kinds of value and impacts that come about from this intentionality.

Ready Transitions and MIZ are two projects that emerged out of Constellation's Better Journeys social lab and More Homes social lab respectively. The **Ready Transitions** project centred around lived experience voices and insight and was led by people with lived experience; the major output of the project was a *Lived Experience Voices*<sup>3</sup> report which outlined a concrete vision for a system which enabled young people exiting care to thrive. The project was selected as a case study to document the impact of such a strong and explicit lived experience focus on the direction and outputs of a project.

In contrast, the final case study is focused on the development of a highly technical solution, in which lived experience would not typically feature. The impacts of the lived experience contribution to the **MIZ** project are markedly different to those of Ready Transitions, but no less powerful; MIZ was selected as a case because of the contrasts and different learnings afforded by this diversity.

Our findings from these case studies are synthesised below according to three key insight areas:

- The nature of the contributions people with lived experience have made to Constellation's work.
- The value and impact of these contributions.
- The factors that enabled these contributions.

### THE NATURE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSTELLATION'S WORK

People with lived experience now play a variety of roles across Constellation's work, from Board membership to participation in teams progressing solutions. Involvement can look like sharing experiences and contributing expertise to solutions, leading research, contributing to media communications, being part of co-design activities, or influencing organisational strategy and delivery.

Our interviews and document analysis identified a range of ways that people with lived experience have contributed to the MIZ and Ready Transitions projects, and to Constellation's organisational inclusion model. These contributions fell into three broad 'types':

- Problem definition.
- Solution shaping.
- Influencing, engagement and network building.

3 The Constellation Project. (2022) *Lived experience voices: insights into young people's transition from the child protection and youth justice system in South Australia and the intersections with homelessness*. Retrieved from: [https://theconstellationproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Lived-Experience-Voices-Report\\_1122-1.pdf](https://theconstellationproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Lived-Experience-Voices-Report_1122-1.pdf)

**Table 2. Categories of Lived Experience Contributions**

CONTRIBUTIONS	ACTIVITIES
Problem Definition	Exposing system gaps and providing concrete examples of how issues play out in reality.
	Gathering insights from others about issues and their experiences.
Solution Shaping	Providing strategic guidance on the scope and direction of the work.
	Contributing new and different ideas to be pursued.
	Providing insights about what 'good' looks like.
	Co-designing solutions in project teams.
Influencing, Engagement and Network Building	Contributing to the shaping of key messages and outputs.
	Public speaking/presenting on panels.
	Co-designing events.
	Building a network of others with lived experience to contribute to the work.
	Advocating for solutions to policy makers.

These contributions exist across a spectrum of involvement, ranging from contributing through to leading and managing. Constellation and their lived experience contributors have been collaboratively experimenting with strategies across this spectrum, iteratively determining what kind of involvement is most fit-for-purpose for different projects and objectives.

### THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSTELLATION'S WORK

All 10 interviewees acknowledged the value of lived experience contributions and the tangible and proliferating positive impact they have had on Constellation's work. Interviewees consistently concluded that without the insight and effort contributed by those with lived experience, "effective" and "relevant" solutions could not have been designed or delivered.

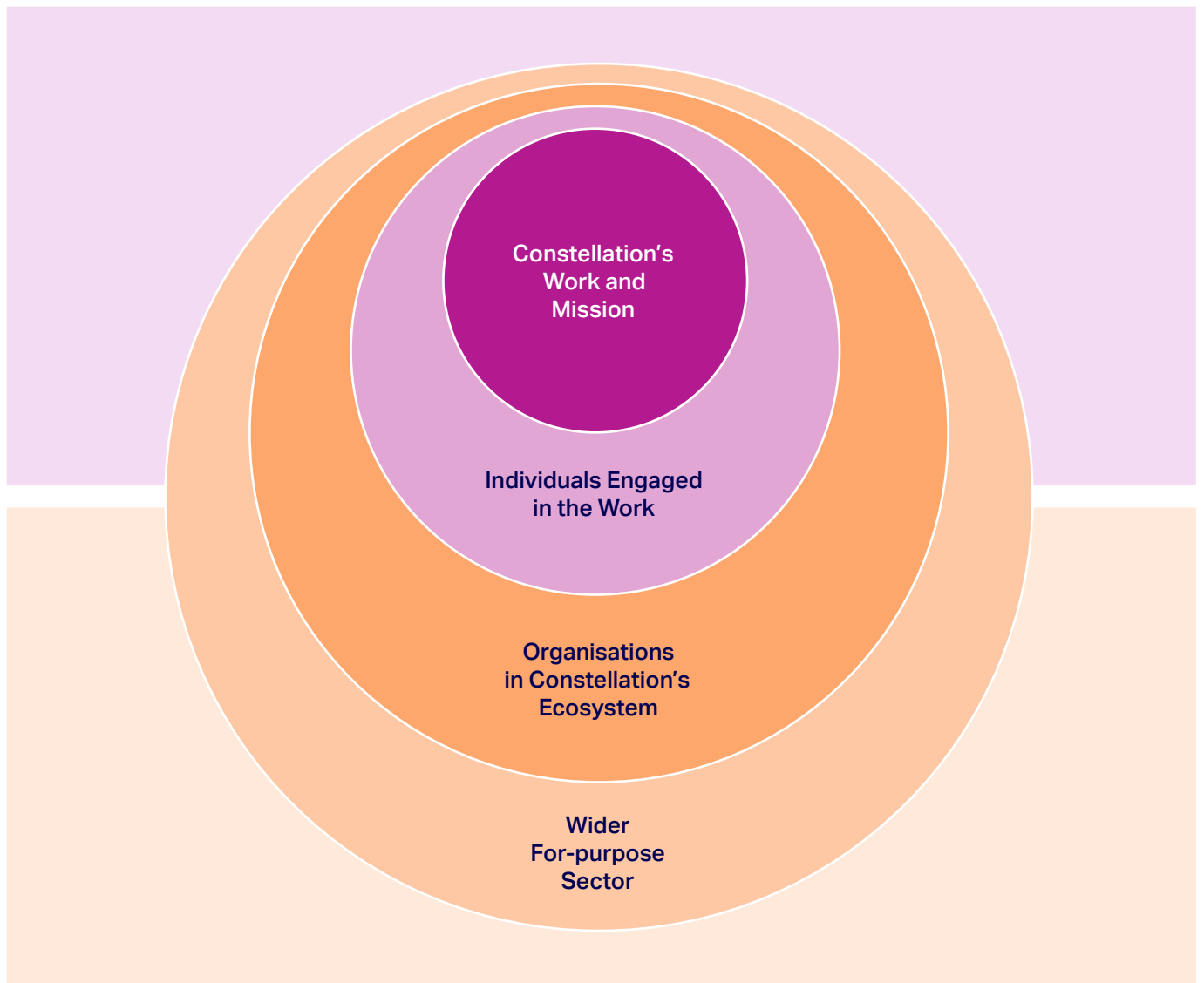
*Direct* impact is defined as changes within Constellation's direct sphere of influence — its operational activity, projects, and the people engaged in delivering the work. *Indirect* impact refers to examples of emergent change within the wider ecosystem and structures within which Constellation is operating (for example, other organisations' practices or the attitudes of people peripheral to the work).

In this context, value refers to the significance of the lived experience contribution to Constellation's work processes and solutions, and impact refers to the marked effect or influence these contributions had (directly) on Constellation's solutions and individuals involved in the work, or (indirectly) on the broader system and ecosystem networks.

It is important to note the value and impact we discuss in this report often came about through the interaction of lived experience alongside a range of cross-sectoral expertise. In other words, producing this impact is a deeply collaborative exercise. It is also emergent and has not come about without challenges and missteps. Systems change is a long-game, and inherently requires experimentation and innovation — a key strength and contributing factor for the successes outlined here has been the willingness by all parties to recognise and learn from these mistakes.



**Figure 2. Direct and Indirect Impact of Lived Experience Contributions**



**Direct Impact**

- More effective solutions through deepening knowledge and generating new and better ideas.
- Greater influence through anchoring issues in the real world, and lending authority and legitimacy to solutions.
- Stronger and more influential networks of partners and contributors.

- Increased confidence, agency and skillsets among individuals with lived experience involved in the work.

**Indirect Impact**

- New knowledge and practice and process changes seeded at other organisations within Constellation's wider network of collaborators.

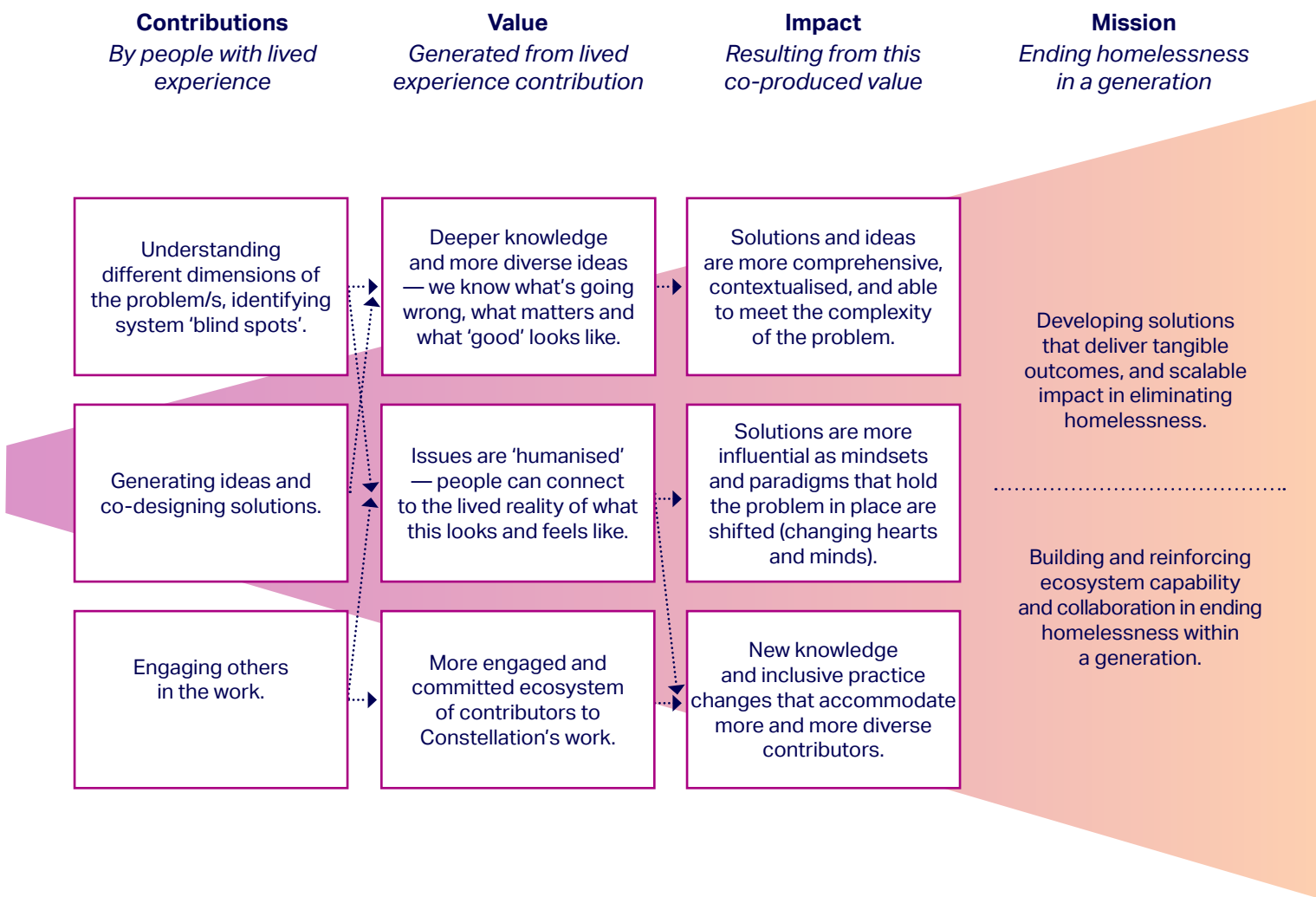
- 'Mainstreaming' of lived experience, becoming more expected and accepted.
- Greater visibility of job pathways for people with lived experience, reducing stigma and shame ('you can't be what you can't see').

This value and impact created through Constellation's work in iterating different models of lived experience inclusion can be seen as a virtuous cycle. New insights and learnings are captured and shared through each project cycle, catalysing and expanding value and impact creation over time. This expanding value, and the potential for *system innovation* it generates, is a result of making visible learnings that can be demonstrated, replicated, and scaled across different settings.

Impacts at times have been uneven in the early stages of Constellation's operation, as the organisation continues to explore what works and what doesn't. However, the findings outlined in this report clearly demonstrate that people with lived experience are making a unique and vital contribution to Constellation's ultimate mission — to end homelessness in a generation.




**Figure 3. Accruing Value and Impact Towards Constellation’s Mission**




**DIRECT VALUE AND IMPACT ACROSS THE THREE CASE STUDIES**

Interviewees recognised lived experience contributions across the projects as being high-value and at times indispensable. Reported impacts fell across four interconnected and mutually reinforcing areas:

- **Developing more effective solutions** through deepening knowledge and generating new and better ideas.
- **Increasing the influence of solutions** by anchoring issues in the real world, and lending authority and legitimacy to solutions (changing hearts and minds).
- **Building stronger and more influential networks** of partners and contributors.
- **Increased confidence, agency and skillsets** among individuals with lived experience involved in the work.



**You can't solve  
the problem if you  
don't understand  
the problem. And  
it's become apparent  
during Constellation  
how much you  
don't understand  
[without lived  
experience].**



Non-lived experience participant





## DEVELOPING MORE EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Lived experience inclusion was reported to enhance the effectiveness of solutions in a number of ways. Interviewees drew explicit links between lived experience involvement and project success, particularly in relation to understanding the problem at hand. The knowledge and experiences of people with lived experience were seen to enrich the depth of Constellation's working understanding of the related issues (be it transitions out of care or the experience of housing insecurity), exposing unseen or unrecognised areas and assumptions that would not have been visible otherwise. These insights and active direction from people with lived experience expedite the time to developing an effective understanding of the problem, and in turn, accelerated time to solution readiness. This sentiment was particularly common in reflections from those without lived experience.

**"You can't solve the problem if you don't understand the problem. And it's become apparent during Constellation how much you don't understand [without lived experience]."**

Non-lived experience participant

**"I think that has impacts, because the lived experience lead was able to even just in her language and her capacity to connect with those people, draw out better insights."**

Non-lived experience participant

This knowledge and experience with intersectional challenges provided project teams with a more nuanced understanding of gaps and opportunities for system interventions, which might only be visible or conceivable to those who have moved through housing and homelessness services. In this way, lived experience contributions enrich understanding of the system to those who don't directly interact with it.

**"We couldn't have designed [our inclusion model] ourselves if they [people with lived experience] weren't here. Which means, if the design's wrong, the output's wrong or the output's incomplete."**

Non-lived experience participant

Having lived experience voices at a governance level was also felt to positively influence the strategic direction of the organisation, enabling Constellation to make more effective decisions about where to focus its effort. Combined with other cross-sectoral expertise — policy, academic and research evidence, frontline practice — these contributions afforded a 360 degree understanding of the problem and potential solutions that are needed for systems change.

**"Having lived experience at the board level and at the executive level, I think that's really important. Without it we wouldn't have the insights, and we wouldn't have the critique [of the current systems] that we currently have. Our work wouldn't be so relevant, and wouldn't be so effective as it is now [without lived experience]."**

Lived experience participant

## INCREASING THE INFLUENCE OF SOLUTIONS

Interviewees observed that lived experience often helped to 'humanise' the work, providing an anchor for others to connect to the lived reality of homelessness and what it would mean for solutions to be implemented more broadly. Storytelling and personal experiences layered solutions with empathy and humanity, that aided in a more holistic and shared understanding across stakeholder groups, including policy makers, investors and adjacent organisations and communities.

The effect of this was twofold: it inspired greater intrinsic drive, commitment and momentum for those directly engaged in the projects, and it enhanced the credibility and authority of the communicated solutions to influencers and decision makers.

**"[There is] a bit more humanity in it. It became human and technical. It's actually the perfect combination, which I guess is the selling point. It's definitely not just about the numbers."**

Lived experience participant

For example, MIZ is a technical solution — a factor that might ordinarily preclude anyone without the required technical expertise from contributing to the project. However, the social lab gained the participation of a person with lived experience whose story resonated with not only the problem (a lack of affordable and accessible social housing), but also with the potential benefits the solution (MIZ) could provide.

This contribution validated and grounded the MIZ group in its purpose and potential, where it might otherwise have been lost in dialogue around investment and public planning. Lived experience in this case was felt as an anchor, giving the work mission and drive, strengthened by a new viewpoint on the issue that added depth and significance.

**"So, you know, MIZ is quite a technical solution, so it hasn't necessarily altered the solution itself, but it has given depth to an understanding of why it's a good solution and a necessary solution. It's given access and insights in a way that wouldn't have happened without the experience."**

Non-lived experience participant

This in turn was seen to have potential to change mindsets for those in positions of power, and to make for more influential messaging around the solution. Indeed, the lived experience contributor to the MIZ group became a strong advocate for the work, utilising a mix of personal experience and technical knowledge acquired. As a result, interviewees were able to meet with influential politicians and policymakers and attributed the efficacy of this advocacy directly to the involvement of lived experience.

**"If one day we get into the boardrooms of the major developers of this country, to have a lived experience person there speaking passionately and authentically about their lives, I think that's a very, very powerful thing."**

Non-lived experience participant

Similarly, with Ready Transitions, the ability for those in positions of influence and decision-making power (e.g. policy makers) to connect with the concrete experiences and stories shared by those who had been through the system lent weight to the insights and recommendations shared. Interviewees felt that the work had greater credibility and authority, and the utility of the report was strengthened as a result of its grounding in lived experience. This was reinforced by the reception from government representatives at the launch of the report, who fed back the impact that it had on them.

**"The reception and the utility of the report is strengthened because of people's knowledge that it is coming from that [lived experience] perspective. So it gives it a layer that it wouldn't have had if it were just another report that wasn't framed in that way. It's a more authoritative piece of work because it's not just another report where people make guesses about what is needed."**

Non-lived experience participant

Speaking more broadly to Constellation's operating model, interviewees reported that the sharing of personal stories and experiences to support the presentation of solutions, helped audiences across a range of sectors to genuinely empathise with the issues faced by those experiencing housing insecurity, and to better connect to the solutions posed.

**"I think the tone of Constellation would be very different in that it would be much more corporate without the lived experience overlay that offers more of a human feel and focus."**

Non-lived experience participant

## BUILDING STRONGER PARTNER NETWORKS

Interviewees with visibility of higher-level partnership opportunities noted the strength and influence that the lived experience element had in gaining buy-in and support from external partners. This was reportedly a flow on effect from the power of lived experience stories in building empathy and connection to the challenges and solutions, and a subsequent level of emotional and financial investment from partners.

**"I question whether or not we'd have the same level of initial buy-in once we really started to focus, because the stories we were able to tell created engagement and understanding of the real challenge."**

Non-lived experience participant

One interviewee highlighted the criticality of community and stakeholder buy-in and engagement to systemic change efforts, where personal alignment and connection to the challenges, particularly in early stages, power lived experience stories.

**"...when you're trying to change something systemically, you need personal connection and alignment to those challenges and who it's going to impact... without that engagement, we wouldn't have the right people in the room to then do some of those technical elements."**

Non-lived experience participant

Similarly, on the other side of the audience spectrum, interviewees have observed that lived experience engagement and involvement in solutions built trust and credibility amongst future users of the solutions. Lived experience team members were able to mobilise communities of others with lived experience, consequentially expanding the diversity of perspectives and efforts over the course of the project. Interviewees with lived experience spoke about how essential this was to building the required trust and rapport with others with lived experience to enable them to meaningfully contribute to Constellation's work.

**"That was a vital aspect of the [Coordinator] role. You had to be someone who had lived experience because that definitely sped up that process [of engaging people with lived experience in the work]. And it felt organic, being able to relate..."**

Lived experience participant

**"Having this role, so that we can bring in diverse and different lived experiences as well, that's important. Because my lived experience isn't going to be relevant to all the solutions that we're developing, but in my role I can offer different insight and different suggestions into what we can do or things that might need to be worked on [to engage others with lived experience]."**

Lived experience participant

## INCREASED CONFIDENCE, AGENCY AND SKILLSETS AMONG INDIVIDUALS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Another facet of the direct value and impact demonstrated through our interviews was the positive changes to individuals' mindsets, skills, and confidence as a result of their engagement with Constellation's work.

This was particularly felt by lived experience contributors. Every interviewee credited their work with Constellation as providing a growth in confidence. This often served as a counterpoint to the shame and stigma associated with experience of homelessness and had positive and sometimes profound ripple effects into other aspects of their lives.

**"I've been very transformed by my experience here and I know that I take that into lots of different realms now. And I dare say it'd be the same for every person that's been part of Constellation, just from what I talk to them about and what I hear."**

Lived experience participant

Many lived experience contributors also spoke about tangible skills they either learnt or refined through their work in Constellation, such as communication, policy and advocacy, or in research contexts. Lived experience contributors' experience in sharing their stories and insights, and the actual practice of communicating ideas and public speaking, helped to develop confidence and their 'voice' literally and metaphorically.

**"I've gotten a lot of new skills since doing this. I think communication and public speaking and confidence, and even interest in influencing policies or understanding how to strategically influence things and the right way to actually get something happening."**

Lived experience participant

**"I feel like I've really found my voice in a deeper and bigger more powerful way in regard to about what it actually means to be meaningfully involved as someone with a lived experience at the governance level."**

Lived experience participant

Lived experience contributors derived a great deal of meaning and validation from seeing how their contributions enhanced the outcomes of collective work and were valued by other team members. A culture of respect and recognition helped to empower individuals with lived experience, generating a sense that they, and their individual journeys were important, valuable and unique. This often had a profound impact on their sense of self, and aspirations for the future, as well as their economic security and employment prospects.


**"And I think, not just confidence, but potential in myself... Before, I felt like my lived experience and different things would be a barrier to me, but now I don't see that as such anymore."**

Lived experience participant

**"They helped build my confidence by just treating me as an equal. [The team] valued what I've got to say because my contributions are just as important as theirs. That was probably the game changer for me. I've never been shown that level of respect before."**

Lived experience participant





**I've been very transformed by my experience here and I know that I take that into lots of different realms now. And I dare say it'd be the same for every person that's been part of Constellation, just from what I talk to them about and what I hear.**

Lived experience participant



## INDIRECT IMPACT AND VALUE

In addition to tangible impacts on Constellation's direct sphere of operation, interviewees also observed a number of indirect impacts emerging in the wider ecosystem as a result of Constellation's efforts to embed lived experience. These positive flow on effects include:

- **New knowledge and practice and process changes** seeded at other organisations within Constellation's wider network of collaborators.
- **Mainstreaming of lived experience inclusion** and reducing stigma for others with lived experience in the workplace.

## NEW KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE AND PROCESS CHANGES

Since its inception, Constellation has operated under an open Intellectual Property (IP) approach, sharing learnings and outputs freely for use across the wider sector. This is reflective of the explicit objective of building the capability of the wider sector to develop and implement better, more effective solutions to ending homelessness. Constellation is not, and has never aimed to be, a service delivery organisation — rather they intend to be a catalyst for working differently and harnessing collaboration and diverse expertise to create scalable solutions.

As such, impact beyond the direct operational sphere is critical to Constellation's sense of success as an organisation. Our interviews demonstrated clear evidence that lived experience inclusion resulted in new knowledge, practice and process changes in Constellation's wider ecosystem.

**"There's an impact there where demonstration of inclusion leads to an understanding of the value of inclusion, or even people changing their practices to incorporate it."**

Non-lived experience participant

While this impact is emergent and difficult to quantify, tangible examples include:

- A corporate partner who changed their practice and processes to be more inclusive, looking at how they can better meet the needs of customers experiencing hardship by working with people with lived experience.
- A university partner incorporating the Ready Transitions *Lived Experience Voices* report into the teaching practice for a social work subject as the basis of an assignment, and to demonstrate to students' different ways of doing social research that prioritises lived experience voices.
- A large organisation in the homelessness sector creating new policies to facilitate more inclusion of people with lived experience in their events, and prioritising funds to enable people with lived experience to attend.

**"I would say that there are at least 10 different organisations that I've briefed about our work that have been incredibly receptive, information hungry, and gone on to make changes... And that has been across local, on the ground, homelessness prevention networks, to other kind of startup organisations focused on different issues like domestic and family violence."**

Non-lived experience participant

## MAINSTREAMING LIVED EXPERIENCE AND REDUCING STIGMA

Lastly, we saw emerging evidence of Constellation's lived experience inclusion work seeding social and cultural change within their ecosystem and the wider sector. People with lived experience of homelessness face significant stigma, and interviewees noted examples of a reduction in this. For example, people without lived experience now taking it as a given that lived experience will be included in the work (and calling it out if it's not) and people with lived experience feeling more able to disclose their experience in their own workplace, or imagining a career pathway where they can harness their lived experience and have that valued as skills and expertise alongside other attributes.

**"Say we did another cycle of the More Homes Social Lab now, and we didn't have lived experience in it, people would call us out, because their expectation and their sense of the value has changed over the course of [their involvement with Constellation] ...there are people who have become advocates for this approach having been part of it."**

Non-lived experience participant

**"I've been in meetings or at conferences and things where people have just come up to me and disclosed their lived experience to me. They're in professional roles, and they've said that they want to start disclosing their lived experience [at their jobs], which they haven't done before, and I think that that's super impactful."**

Lived experience participant

## ENABLERS AND KEY LEARNINGS

Over the course of the LEII Project, our research has identified a range of factors that enabled the value and impact described above to be realised, and some key learnings for others seeking to embed lived experience in their efforts to end homelessness.

Here, we share the factors our interviewees identified as most pertinent to the successes described across the case studies. Key learnings from across the full course of the LEII project are detailed further in Constellation's Lived Experience Practice Framework.

Key enabling factors include:

- Well-supported and clearly defined roles for people with lived experience, matching the opportunity for participation with an individuals' interests and skills.
- Structured *and* incidental opportunities for peer-to-peer support between and among lived experience contributors.
- Access to appropriate care and support, including briefing and debriefing about participation.
- *Always* remunerating people with lived experience for their contributions and paying attention to the other resources needed to participate effectively (e.g. access to internet, professional development, travel, debriefing time).
- Creating a culture of equality, respect and learning about lived experience practice among project teams, and through organisational processes.
- Taking a reflective learning approach, being open to critical feedback and taking positive risks.
- Investing in the capability and pathways of lived experience contributors beyond their time or project-limited participation.

Lastly, it should also be noted that one of, if not the most, important enabling factor for the impact generated by Constellation and its partners through lived experience inclusion, is funding. Interviewees in positions of oversight and governance of the organisation stressed that without a supportive funding partner specifically resourcing this work, it could not have achieved the depth and scale that has been possible to date. Government, philanthropic and corporate funders are increasingly interested in how lived experience can play a role in social and systems change efforts. This report demonstrates the worthiness of that attention, as well as the need for greater involvement from people with lived experience in defining how this work is resourced and supported.

# CASE STUDIES

Having shared the synthesised findings from across the case studies above, this section of the report now examines each subject more closely and unpacks the context specific value and impact our interviewees reported.

## CASE STUDY 1: CONSTELLATION'S ORGANISATIONAL INCLUSION MODEL

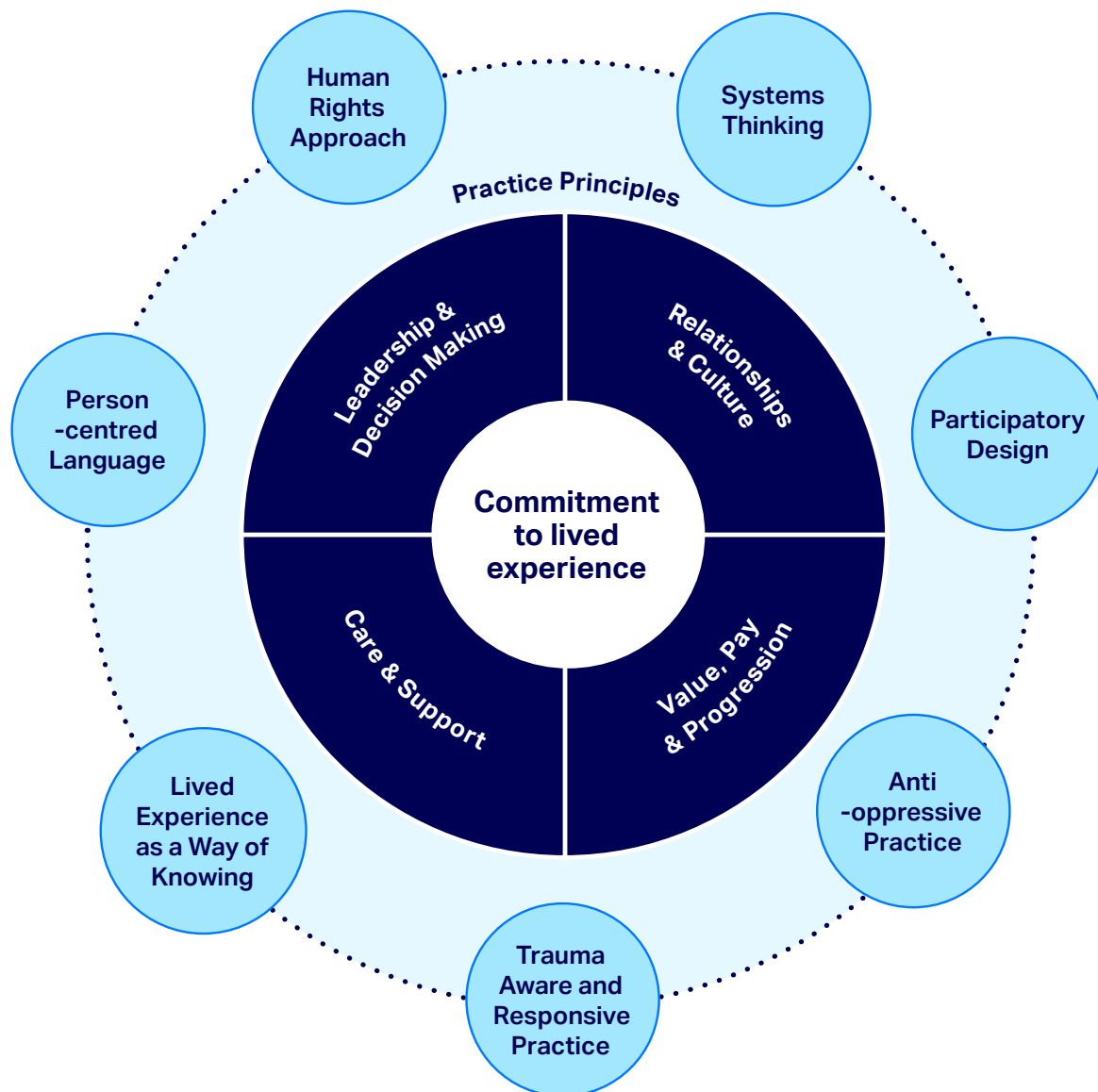
### ABOUT CONSTELLATION'S ORGANISATIONAL INCLUSION MODEL

Lived experience inclusion has been a key part of Constellation's approach to systems change from inception. As the work has progressed and learning deepened, this commitment to lived experience inclusion has also grown and strengthened. Over the past five years, Constellation has iteratively developed a model for lived experience inclusion across its operations. This model consists of a number of grounding theories and principles which inform and underpin Constellation's ways of working; and a series of 'practice focus areas' which encapsulate the practices, policies and structures through which the model is operationalised (see Figure 4 and Table 3 below). This organisational inclusion model has recently been documented in a co-designed Practice Framework, which is the second output of the LEII Project.

**"It's the human bit of it, which is the actual person's story... and a migrant story is different from an Indigenous woman's story, is different from a young Australian. They're all different stories, so the journey becomes quite important because if you don't understand that, you don't understand how to help."**

Non-lived experience participant

Figure 4. Constellation Lived Experience Practice Model



### Practice Principles

1. We recognise and value **the learnings of those with lived experience**, and that their voices and perspectives must be integrated into decision-making and solutions.
2. We work to **create the right conditions** where insights from people with lived experience are sought both formally and informally, and believe embedding these insights leads to more effective research and more informed responses to ending homelessness.
3. We **consult, involve and partner with First Nations people** and communities to co-create solutions to homelessness that are grounded in First Nations ways of knowing, being, and doing.
4. We **recognise the diversity that exists within communities**, including their unique capabilities, needs, and perspectives. We seek to involve participants whose lived experience aligns with specific focus areas of each project or activity.
5. We **value the time and skill of people with lived experience** contributing to our work, and remunerate them accordingly.
6. We are **committed to facilitating an organisational culture** which is open to continuous feedback about our approach and that seeks to continuously improve based on what we hear and are challenged by.

Source: Constellation's Lived Experience Practice Framework (forthcoming publication)



**Table 3. Constellation Practice Focus Areas**

<b>FOCUS AREAS</b>	<b>PRACTICES, POLICIES AND STRUCTURES</b>
<b>Leadership &amp; Decision Making</b>	Identified positions.
<b>Relationships &amp; Culture</b>	Relational practice.
	Reflective learning approach.
	Peer-to-peer support.
<b>Value, Pay &amp; Progression</b>	Paid Participation Policy.
	Social labs/project teams.
	Events.
<b>Care &amp; Support</b>	Briefing and debriefing.
	Recognising lived experience.
	Providing information on supports available.
	Breakout space/s.
	Coaching and supervision.
	Learning and development.

Source: Constellation’s Lived Experience Practice Framework (forthcoming publication).

## **LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSTELLATION’S ORGANISATIONAL INCLUSION MODEL**

People with lived experience now play a variety of roles in the organisation, from identified Board and Executive Team roles, to paid participation in project teams progressing solutions. The contributions of these lived experience staff members and paid participants is equally varied, and includes sharing experiences and contributing expertise to solutions, leading research, contributing to events, being part of co-design activities in project teams, and influencing the strategic direction and day-to-day operation of the organisation.

## **THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSTELLATION’S ORGANISATIONAL INCLUSION MODEL**

### **DIRECT VALUE AND IMPACT**

#### **DEVELOPING MORE EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS**

Embedding lived experience across their operations has afforded Constellation a breadth, depth and diversity of ideas and insights that they would not have gained otherwise. Our interviews identified tangible examples of lived experience contributions greatly enhancing the quality of specific projects, networking activities and strategic priorities. Across the breadth of the work Constellation has progressed, interviewees reported that lived experience contributors were fundamental in framing how various issues were understood and the different ways solutions could be constructed.

**“You’ve asked me about the impact of [lived experience]... it’s a source of knowledge that otherwise would not be there. It’s like saying, what if you didn’t have a housing expert in the room?”**

Non-lived experience participant

**"It's the human bit of it, which is the actual person's story... and a migrant story is different from an Indigenous woman's story, is different from a young Australian. They're all different stories, so the journey becomes quite important because if you don't understand that, you don't understand how to help."**

Non-lived experience participant

The Better Journeys Social Lab, which resulted in three distinct projects — one of which, Ready Transitions, is profiled in this report — was cited as a strong example of how lived experience contributions have positively shaped the strategic direction and scope of the work Constellation has pursued. People with lived experience put forward clear gaps in the out-of-home care and youth justice systems that they knew should be focused on and that Constellation, as a cross-sectoral platform for catalysing change, was well positioned to address.

**"I think lived experience in that pillar has completely changed the course of the work and the outcomes... It really determined where we went with our ideas and which solutions were even chosen for progression. And then once in those teams, the people with lived experience highlighted the need for that voice to be continually included, perhaps more strongly than would have happened otherwise... So I think that it's been fundamental to the design of the work in Better Journeys and to the different concepts that evolved."**

Non-lived experience participant

Having an identified role on the Executive Team has been particularly impactful to the practices, structures and culture of the organisation. Interviewees agreed that while Constellation no doubt would have still produced many of the outputs they have generated over the past five years, the quality of those outputs would have been substantially lessened without lived experience contributions. For example, the development and refinement of Constellation's lived experience Paid Participation Policy was led by the Lived Experience and Project Coordinator (an identified lived experience position) in consultation with other paid lived experience contributors. This policy is the backbone for Constellation's lived experience engagement across the full scope of its work and as such, is a critical enabler of much of the impact detailed in this report.

**"If we didn't have lived experience from the Lived Experience Coordinator, we would still have been able to come up with a paid participation policy. We'd still have people with lived experience, you know, contributing to the work. But I think the level and depth of engagement that [the LE Coordinator] has been able to achieve as a peer far surpasses what would have been able to be achieved in that piece of work specifically. And what that means is the potential impact of the work is greater."**

Non-lived experience participant

Practice changes extend to an increased understanding of how language can shape the quality and accessibility of outputs; the influence of place and space on peoples' capacity to meaningfully contribute; and the most effective ways engage others with lived experience in the work.

**"I think from a design sense everyone's learnt; for instance, how do you design a process like this to generate the information you need? How do you create the space to make it comfortable [to participate]? Who are we here for? I think we couldn't have designed that ourselves if [people with lived experience] weren't here."**

Non-lived experience participant

## INCREASING THE INFLUENCE OF SOLUTIONS

One of the strongest indicators of value that emerged from our interviews is the degree to which interviewees — particularly those in positions of strategic oversight and governance — feel that lived experience has enhanced the credibility and reputation of Constellation as an organisation, enabling them to be a more influential driver of change. This credibility and legitimacy has aided Constellation in building their ecosystem, and engendered a wider and more receptive audience for their outputs.

**"I guess I'm thinking about the benefits it's brought to the organisation in terms of that strength of reputation and legitimacy... that sounds like a not important impact, but it actually is really critical because it helps you do the work that you need to do. ...that brings the right people to the table in terms of progressing the solutions, but it also can bring the right funding, it can help people with lived experience themselves decide to sign up to or endorse or support an initiative as well, which is critical."**

Non-lived experience participant

## BUILDING STRONGER PARTNER NETWORKS

Investing in embedding lived experience across the organisation has also garnered Constellation more and more influential, partners and collaborators. The most tangible example of this is the organisation's relationship with Equity Trustees, who have funded not only this research project, but aspects that enable Constellation's lived experience model more broadly, including paid participation. This relationship came about as a result of the strong commitment to lived experience inclusion that Constellation (initially through the founding partners) have espoused from the inception of the organisation, and the intentional efforts to learn about and do this work well over time. This continued focus on the non-negotiability of lived experience inclusion (and an unfailing commitment to continue to learn from mistakes in this area) has served as a point of difference for Constellation.

**"That engagement, that involvement and the contribution of lived experience is opening doors and creating, perhaps further opportunities and relationships that might not have been there otherwise."**

Non-lived experience participant

## INCREASED CONFIDENCE, AGENCY AND SKILLSETS AMONG INDIVIDUALS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE


The embedding of lived experience in Constellation's organisational inclusion model has also had a deep and profound impact at an individual level. All of the people with lived experience we interviewed reported changes in their sense of self as a result of their contributions being recognised as valuable, sought after, and equally worthy of financial compensation.

**"It's helped me hone my own understanding of my own unique capability. I feel much clearer about the power that I do have and more powerful in a constructive and positive way about my impact and what I can achieve."**


Lived experience participant

**"I don't feel it to be a downside that those people [previous lived experience contributors] didn't remain in that role for a long time. Because I think [they] are stronger for it in being able to determine their life trajectory."**

Non-lived experience participant



**That engagement,  
that involvement  
and the contribution  
of lived experience  
is opening doors  
and creating, perhaps  
further opportunities  
and relationships that  
might not have been  
there otherwise.**



Non-lived experience participant



## INDIRECT VALUE AND IMPACT

### NEW KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE AND PROCESS CHANGES

Since establishment, a key measure of success for Constellation has been building the capacity of the broader housing and homelessness sector to better 'solve' the intractable problem of homelessness. As a cross-sectoral network of aligned partners, the organisation is well positioned to act as a platform for sharing learnings about new and better ways of working — including in regard to the effective inclusion of people with lived experience in these efforts.

Interviewees shared specific examples of organisations in their network changing their practice and processes to be more inclusive of people with lived experience of homelessness and other issues. For example, a large corporate partner in the financial sector reported to Constellation that they have changed their practice with regard to a program aimed at reaching customers experiencing financial hardship.

**"[A corporate partner] has told us that they changed their practice and started doing some things because we had been giving them updates about our work, and out of interest had been including stuff about lived experience and then all of a sudden they're changing the way they're doing things. ...essentially how they could use groups of people to inform their work."**

Non-lived experience participant

Beyond examples of specific organisations changing their practice, interviewees also spoke about the potential for ongoing and longer term impact to continue to materialise from changed mindsets and increased knowledge among the individuals who have been a part of these cross-sectoral efforts.

**"I think if the Constellation disappears, obviously homelessness is a long term problem to solve, it's not going to be solved by the time we leave. But if we can leave something in the sector, which is this is a better way of solving problems. [They will ask] what does lived experience and governance and strategy formulation and execution look like? How do organisations be better? Because lived experience is part of the machinery. That's the bit I think that is actually scalable out of the whole thing."**

Non-lived experience participant

**"I think each one of them is going to have to take something from it and go, well, how do we build this now into practice? Or how do we build this into how we fund? What are the questions you're going to ask in funding [other projects]? And for me, what are the questions I'm going to ask in partnerships around how they think about lived experience, what their ambitions are for it? I don't expect everyone to be there, but they need to be thinking about it. And how it will inform both their practice, but also their organisation."**

Non-lived experience participant

### MAINSTREAMING LIVED EXPERIENCE AND REDUCING STIGMA

Lastly, interviewees also spoke about the social and cultural impact of their organisational inclusion model on the wider sector. The visibility of this inclusion, and the direct exposure to the valuable contributions of people with lived experience, was seen to have a ripple effect on the individuals and organisations involved in the work.

Interviewees with lived experience spoke of being approached at events and conferences by people in non-identified professional roles who have never disclosed their lived experience of homelessness in their workplace. These people had now begun to feel they could do so, after witnessing the way lived experience contributions were being valued, recognised and sought after by Constellation and its network of partners. Others with lived experience also reported feeling that a career pathway based on their lived experience might be possible for them in the future.

**"She [lived experience paid participant] was telling me how much she's learning and that she can see a pathway from my pathway... I think being honest about the feelings of using lived experience and different barriers, and showing the different pathways, is helpful to build the capacity and confidence in other people as well."**

Lived experience participant

**"I think the more it's out there and the impact [of lived experience contributions] shown, the more the stigma will be reduced, because I think there's still such a strong stigma around different lived experiences."**

Lived experience participant



## CASE STUDY 2: READY TRANSITIONS

### ABOUT READY TRANSITIONS

Ready Transitions is one of three projects to emerge out of the Better Journeys Social Lab. The project sought to articulate a systemic response to young people exiting youth justice or out-of-home care in South Australia, to prevent them from experiencing homelessness. The project team set out to imagine what a system in which young people could transition when they were ready (rather than on a mandated date) would look like, and identify the tailored support that would equip young people with the skills, resources and relationships they need to thrive.

In doing so, the team also set out to build a body of lived experience insights, to serve as the foundation for their solution and bring to life the case for change. This focus on building a body of lived experience insights came about as the work progressed and the project team realised there wasn't a strong evidence base in this space.

**“We figured that we can't really understand the issue or understand what needs to happen without building on the insight of people that have gone through it.”**

Lived-experience participant

Over the course of four cycles of work, the team co-designed a lived experience-led qualitative research project, which captured the experiences of four young people with experience of the out-of-home care and youth justice systems in South Australia and six service staff who work within these systems. The interviews were peer-led, meaning they were conducted by someone with lived experience of those systems themselves. These insights were distilled into a report — *Lived experience voices: insights into young people's transition from the child protection and youth justice system in South Australia and the intersections with homelessness*<sup>4</sup> — which puts forward eleven components of holistic support for young people leaving the child protection and youth justice systems. The report was launched to government policymakers and the wider out-of-home care and youth justice sectors in South Australia, and now serves as the foundation for a service/system-based prototype, called *The Systems Navigator*.



4 The Constellation Project. (2022) Lived experience voices: insights into young people's transition from the child protection and youth justice system in South Australia and the intersections with homelessness. Retrieved from: [https://theconstellationproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Lived-Experience-Voices-Report\\_1122-1.pdf](https://theconstellationproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Lived-Experience-Voices-Report_1122-1.pdf)

## LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO READY TRANSITIONS

The Ready Transitions project was lived experience led from end to end. People with lived experience were involved in the Social Lab that generated the idea for Ready Transitions, and they were part of the project team that directed the scope of the work towards building a body of lived experience insights. The research process itself was largely led by a person with lived experience, with the support of academic researchers who were part of the project team. The interview guides were co-designed with young people with lived experience, and the interviews were conducted by a person with lived experience, drawing out the insights of others with lived experience of the systems in focus. This peer-researcher was deeply involved in the analysis and write up of the report, and also led the design and delivery of the launch event. Lastly, a young person with lived experience contributed to the final report through artistic interpretations of the key findings.

## THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO READY TRANSITIONS

### DIRECT VALUE AND IMPACT

#### DEVELOPING MORE EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

The quality and efficacy of the outputs generated through the Ready Transitions project were deeply dependent on lived experience contributions. The clearest demonstration of this is the lived experience interviews which formed the basis of the *Lived Experience Voices* report. Initially, Constellation had engaged a university partner to conduct the interviews with young people who had an experience of the out-of-home care and/or youth justice sectors and who had experiences of housing insecurity or homelessness. However, the academic researchers were unable to recruit young people to take part in the interviews, in part due to the young peoples' hesitancy to engage in traditional research processes, which required them to entrust their stories to people they did not know.

This was only overcome when a member of the project team with lived experience stepped in and conducted the interviews with the young people. The focus of the research project then shifted to enabling this peer-researcher to lead the project, by providing resources, support and advice. This outcome served as an important finding in itself, with the academic researchers concluding 'the way forward is a practitioner-researcher led project, with formative participatory, lived experience and trauma-informed input from young people themselves'.<sup>5</sup>

5 Meltzer, A., Hartley, C., Writer, T. and Barnes, E. (2021) *Preventing homelessness after release from youth justice detention: Reflections on planning a participatory, lived experience and trauma-informed project. Report prepared for the Constellation Project.* Centre for Social Impact, Sydney, p. 6.

Interviewees for this current report directly attributed the success of the peer-researcher to the connection, rapport and trust they were able to build with the young people as a result of their own lived experience.

**"I think that had a great deal to do with the trust that people had with me. I think that enabled me to build a rapport and a connection with the people that I was speaking with and really use the language that can facilitate open and honest discussions."**

Lived experience participant

**"I don't think we would have had the depth of research [without lived experience contributions]. I don't know that we would have even done the interviews if myself and the other person that was involved hadn't been like, let's interview people and talk to them. And they [lived experience contributor] were the one that facilitated it, so I don't think it would have happened otherwise."**

Non-lived experience participant

**"When you talk to someone that has lived experience of homelessness, there's a lot of shame associated to it... If you have someone that has that experience, that comes from that background, that understands that, there's that deep ingrained empathy that you know that they can relate to you and you feel heard and seen by them. Without that, you don't really have that same connection."**

Lived experience participant

These interviews generated a depth of insights about the gaps in the out-of-home care and youth justice systems, and conversely, what a well-functioning system would like. This output is now serving as the foundation for Constellation's next phase of work in this space — the co-development of a prototype for a model to support young people exiting custody and out of home care, focusing on reducing homelessness for young people exiting these systems.

## BUILDING STRONGER PARTNER NETWORKS

The lived experience-led nature of the Ready Transitions project has also laid the foundations for a larger, more engaged network of partners for the next stage of Constellation's work in South Australia. The launch event for the *Lived Experience Voices* report was well attended by representatives from the out-of-home care, youth justice, and housing and homelessness sectors in South Australia, including key government decision makers. The audience directly heard about what is needed for reform in the sector from people with lived experience who led the report and were engaged in the project more broadly. This has seeded the buy-in needed to co-develop the Systems Navigator prototype, and to ultimately have it taken up once it is produced.

**"I feel like we definitely don't get the partners we've got involved, and we don't get any credibility with those who we're actually trying to solve for without actually putting lived experience in. That's been key."**

Non-lived experience participant

## INDIRECT VALUE AND IMPACT

### NEW KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE AND PROCESS CHANGES

The *Lived Experience Voices* report has also generated a clear example of practice change at another organisation. Off the back of their engagement in the Ready Transitions project — and the launch of the report — a university partner is using the report in the teaching of a social work subject. The report will be used as the basis for an assignment, teaching social work students about the process of lived experience-led research, and the value of this way of working.

**"I think bringing lived experience insights and valuing lived experience in an academic environment can change the thinking of the social workers and hopefully influence the way that they work or what they consider when they're working."**

Lived experience participant

## CASE STUDY 3: MANDATORY INCLUSIONARY ZONING (MIZ)

### ABOUT MIZ

The Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ) project emerged from the More Homes Social Lab as one of five solutions to be pursued in project teams. MIZ is a policy solution aimed at addressing the shortfall of social and affordable housing in Australia. MIZ would mandate that all new housing projects must include a certain percentage (the Constellation MIZ team propose 10%) of social and affordable housing, which can be expressed in terms of land, dwellings or payment of an equivalent levy allocated to such housing. The social or affordable homes built as a result of MIZ would be owned and managed by not-for-profit community housing providers. In this way, community development and social support services are at the heart of this policy.

While not a new concept generated by the More Homes Social Lab — MIZ policies have been previously proposed by a number of housing experts, and there are examples in place internationally — the Constellation MIZ project team have considerably built out the idea. Over the course of a several years, the project team developed a comprehensive National Framework<sup>6</sup> for the implementation of MIZ which includes:

- A set of principles to underpin the consistent application of MIZ policies across Australia.
- The roles and responsibilities of key players in the housing system.
- Legislative and regulatory requirements for each state and territory to enact MIZ.
- An impact measurement framework.
- A MIZ transfer process that guides how and when land, dwelling or cash contributions should be made.
- A MIZ capability assessment to identify where capability uplift is required across the housing sector.

The team have also invested in considerable stakeholder engagement across relevant sectors, building buy-in and consensus around the need for, and viability of, MIZ as a key part of solving Australia's' housing crisis.

### LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO MIZ

While a highly technical solution, which would not normally seek lived experience inclusion or insights (as these contributions are more often sought in service delivery side solutions) the MIZ project team included a person with lived experience from the beginning.

This lived experience team member helped shape a foundational understanding of the challenge, and potential value of the solution. Beyond their contributions in the project team's working meetings, the lived experience team member also carried out valuable direct advocacy with various levels of government, whose buy-in to MIZ is critical to its success.



<sup>6</sup> The Constellation Project. (2021) *Lived experience voices: insights into young people's transition from the child protection and youth justice system in South Australia and the intersections with homelessness*. Retrieved from: [https://theconstellationproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Lived-Experience-Voices-Report\\_1122-1.pdf](https://theconstellationproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Lived-Experience-Voices-Report_1122-1.pdf)

## THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTIONS TO MIZ

### DIRECT VALUE AND IMPACT

#### DEVELOPING MORE EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

The impact of lived experience contributions to the MIZ project, while more subtle than what can be seen in other projects, are still tangible and powerful. These contributions to MIZ brought a different angle to the work, which interviewees felt greatly strengthened the project overall.

These contributions lent a depth to the team's understanding of why MIZ is a solution worth pursuing, and insights that would not have been available otherwise. Most critically, they informed the group's strategies on how to build the necessary buy-in and take-up of a national MIZ framework.

**"[MIZ is] a bit dry as a subject... But having people with real life experience of homelessness is terribly important to the process, because at the end of the day, that's what it's all about... making their life journey better so that they can better contribute to our community."**

Non-lived experience contributor

**"She really supported our thinking in terms of mixing the community and allowing homeless people or people at risk of homelessness to be better integrated within the community at large... she really helped us focus on the need for [mandatory inclusionary zoning]."**

Non-lived experience participant

#### INCREASING THE INFLUENCE OF SOLUTIONS

The clearest impact resulting from lived experience contributions to MIZ was the increased influence of the solution. The team member with lived experience became a strong advocate for MIZ with various levels of government, and was able to 'open doors' because of the combination of empathy and authority with which they were able to communicate the message of MIZ, by virtue of their own story.

**"That lived experience person did become a very strong advocate for the proposal. And she took it to her local community, to her mayor, and her federal member. She was very, very active and very, very strong in all of that. And we had briefings with those people because of her strong advocacy."**

Non-lived experience participant

**"I seemed to become, or rather my story seemed to become, the driving force. It was like, 'this is why we are all doing this'."**

Lived experience contributor

The involvement of a team member with lived experience — and Constellation's emphasis on lived experience inclusion more broadly — was also felt to have increased the buy-in from partners with the technical knowledge necessary for the development of the MIZ outputs.

**"I question whether or not we'd have the same level of initial buy-in once we sort of really started to focus, because the stories we were able to tell created engagement and understanding of the real challenge. ...without that engagement, we wouldn't have the right people in the room to then do some of those technical elements."**

Non-lived experience participant

This human element, particularly in the context of a technical solution that would otherwise have been quite divorced from the reality of peoples' experiences, had a subtle but profound impact on the work. The lived experience team member's story became a sort of anchor for the work, and a mechanism for 'winning hearts and minds'. This impacted not only those stakeholders the team were seeking to engage, but the team members themselves.

**"If one day we get into the boardrooms of the major developers of this country, to have a lived experience person there speaking passionately and authentically about their lives, I think that's a very, very powerful thing."**

Non-lived experience participant

**"Every now and then, I would say something from my perspective and you'd see everyone stop and you could almost see them thinking, 'Hmm, okay. That reminded us of why we're doing this again. Thanks for bringing us back to that.' They verbalised that more than a few times, too."**

Lived experience participant



For more information on RMIT's Social Innovation Hub, including partnership and collaboration opportunities, please email us [here](#).

