



# Lived Experience Network (LEN)

Practice Guide for seeking advice and  
engagement with LEN 2022



Government of  
South Australia



## EIRD - Lived Experience Practice Guide

### Background

As an agency, the Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for leading the design and delivery of a new Child and Family Support System (CFSS). In 2019 DHS undertook a co-design process to identify priorities for the CFSS. The voices of families were a valuable part of this process. In 2020, the Early Intervention Research Directorate (EIRD) invited the System Advisors to design a Lived Experience Network (LEN) to support the voices of lived experience to inform the implementation of the CFSS reforms.

The LEN contributes to a commitment to bring together knowledge from diverse sources - research, practice and lived experience - to create and sustain a more evidence-informed and culturally responsive support system for children and families. Lived experience in the LEN, is defined as experiences of:

- Significant family stresses that make it harder for children and families to feel safe, secure and valued.
- Supporting family, community members or friends who have been living with family stresses.
- Seeking and/or receiving help from child and family support services, or helping others to do so.
- Diverse cultural knowledge about what services need to be and do to be truly helpful.

The LEN has 15 positions for System Advisors with a 12-month term. The membership requires a diverse representation of the community and currently includes, Aboriginal families, culturally and linguistically diverse families, fathers, LGBTQIA+ families and single parent families.

The LEN works closely with EIRD as System Advisors, to help reform the Child and Family Support System of government, non-government organisations and community, and to provide advice on how best to reach and support others like them. The LEN has co-designed their Terms of Reference and role description and are actively involved in the recruitment of new System Advisors. EIRD meets regularly with LEN to keep them abreast of the CFSS reforms and its implementation. EIRD values the contribution LEN provides and ensures a robust feedback loop to ensure they are informed about how their advice has been acted upon and impacted change.



LEN has played a central role in the development of the following initiatives:

- Contribute to the design of policy relevant to the CFSS such as the Trauma Responsive System Framework.
- Contribute to the design of websites, marketing and communications to reach families going through tough times, such as the ASK website [www.adultssupportingkids.com.au](http://www.adultssupportingkids.com.au).
- Participate in the Communities of Practice forums and speak on discussion panels.
- Provide advice to service providers about how practitioners can best to work with families.
- Provide advice to universities and training providers about how practitioners can best work with families.
- Share the perspectives of their community i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQIA+, and families with additional needs.

## Considerations for consulting with the Lived Experience Network

### Values and supporting a healing system

Common values are important to help LEN work together productively and to create a platform for equitable participation. The LEN values include:


- creating a welcoming and safe group culture
- transparency and accountability
- honesty and integrity
- collaboration and real engagement
- mutual trust and respect
- confidentiality
- fairness, opportunity and choice.

At the heart of the new CFSS is a healing approach, where all those involved (children and families, practitioners, organisations and funders) are intentionally working together to create a system and practices that support healing and avoid further traumatisation.

Our healing approach will be guided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander System Design Criteria and co-design principles developed in the CFSS reform co-design process, and the Trauma Responsive System Framework.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander System Design Criteria:

- Where Aboriginal children are front and centre.

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- That reflects Aboriginal cultural strengths.
  - That reflects Aboriginal people's right to self-determination.
  - That reflects the truth of our shared histories, the hurts, the strengths and the healing.

Taking a system's approach to building trauma capacity means that all those involved in the CFSS work together to get better at responding to trauma, wherever it presents. The following principles are required to be integrated at all levels of the CFSS:

- trustworthiness
- safety
- peer and community support
- collaboration
- empowerment and self determination
- know yourself and learn.

## **Planning**

### ***Clarity of purpose***

What might you like to know from LEN? Consider them like you would a consultant. Is the purpose information sharing, to understand a problem, seek solutions, or involve them in co-design?


What voices are required? Consultation can be with the whole group or a small group who represent a particular population group e.g., Aboriginal families, culturally and linguistically diverse families, dads, or another population group.

### ***Meet with the Community Engagement Coordinator***

Speak to the Community Engagement Coordinator about the purpose of your meeting with LEN and consider what questions you may want to ask them. Some issues you consult with LEN about might be sensitive and relate to recent personal experiences. In these situations, it is helpful to frame questions in a way that are general rather than asking about their own personal experiences. This can be done by asking questions about how to improve service outcomes for families, or by using case studies to prompt feedback.

Consider the format of the session, e.g., will a large group conversation be appropriate or would smaller groups allow more discussion and support quieter members to participate.

Please provide relevant information about your service, your project and the proposed consultation questions in advance to LEN members so they can take the



time to consider them beforehand. Some members need this time and others will be happy to speak without preparation. An email introduction or short description of your organization or project is really beneficial.

The Community Engagement Coordinator will support communication with LEN, book the venue, creche workers and organise catering if needed.

### ***Other considerations***

Consider the needs of the whole group. Some people are visual learners, others are verbal learners. If meeting with the whole group, some will be in person and others might be online. It can be challenging to manage the two modes at once. Consider offering two sessions, one in person to allow for those who want to access the creche and one online for those who live regionally or further away.

Consider the length of time required to speak to LEN. With potentially 15 System Advisors it takes time to allow everyone to have a say. Please allow a minimum of 2 - 3 hours. Give the group space to tell their stories and engage in discussion. Sometimes just listening will provide you with the information you are looking for.


Consider confidentiality and let LEN know how their feedback is intended to be used and where consultation notes will be shared.

### **When meeting with LEN**

Be respectful, trauma responsive and come to the session with an open mind. Be aware that the System Advisors may have experienced trauma and may need support to participate. Always discuss self-care and encourage the group to take breaks if they need. If System Advisors need support, they can speak to the Community Engagement Coordinator or one of the facilitators if they need to debrief.

When meeting with LEN, practice deep listening without judgement. Holding space for the group means being present, listening and not necessarily offering solutions. Show empathy and compassion but not pity. If LEN have questions you cannot answer, just let them know you will find out and get back to them via the Community Engagement Coordinator.

Be aware the System Advisors may have been clients of your service and other services in the past. These experiences may have been positive or negative. Even if you are a policy maker, from the perspective of someone with lived experience, you represent the system, and this may include taking on board negative feedback about how the system may be not working. Please do not take this personally, the feedback is not about your practice but may be about how other practitioners, services and the system have failed to best support families. This is an opportunity



for the System advisors to provide feedback about their experiences which can contribute to healing their trauma.

It can be difficult to hear the experiences shared by System Advisors. Make sure you allow time to debrief with someone afterward the session and practice self-care.

If staffing is available, it is helpful for two staff to attend the LEN meeting to allow one person to facilitate and one to take notes. The Community Engagement Coordinator can support but it is best to have dedicated resources when meeting with LEN.

### **Post consultation**

Once you have written up your consultation notes please share this with the LEN members via the Community Engagement Coordinator and provide an opportunity for feedback.

Consider coming back to LEN to provide an update about your project and inform the group of any outcomes as a result of meeting with LEN.



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