Youth Lived Experience Framework

Right Care, First Time, Where You Live Project

Purpose

Createa consistent framework for approaching research, program design and initiatives that are genuinely empowering and reflective of the needs of young people, and our cultural contexts.

Led by young people with lived experience

Young people and our lived/living experiences need to be central to the design, delivery and evaluation of products and services that are intended for our use.

Young people should be recognised for our expertise, wisdom, knowledge and resilience – and our lived experience provides a unique and integral component of understanding the complex reality of the mental health system.

The principles, actions and outcomes in this framework are inherently interconnected, and the themes often weave together. Understanding the importance of this interconnectedness is essential to the application of this framework and is integral to effectively embodying these principles in one's work.

Who is this framework for?

This framework was developed by the University of Sydney Brain and Mind Centre National Youth Reference Group for the *Right Care, First Time, Where You Live* project. The concepts and approaches outlined in this framework, however, are highly generalisable, and are based on best-practice models for youth engagement from the perspective of young people with a lived experience.

This framework should be considered standard practice for health sector stakeholders engaging young people for the *Right Care, First Time, Where You Live project*. It can also apply when engaging with young people for the purposes of:

- Research and evaluation
- Service design, development, and delivery
- Drafting policies, procedures, legislation or governance arrangements that will directly impact on young people with a lived experience
- Other forms of mental health consumer engagement where young people are a target demographic
- Education, training and resource development
- Any project that involves young people as a key stakeholder.

How to use this framework

Not all engagement is created equally. Before determining whether a project should be undertaken by and with young people with lived experience, consider the value the project will have for the young people involved and the impact on the broader youth community.

If a project will have a net positive impact, then this framework should be applied in its entirety – the concepts are interconnected and need to be applied in tandem. Engagement that is not thoughtful,

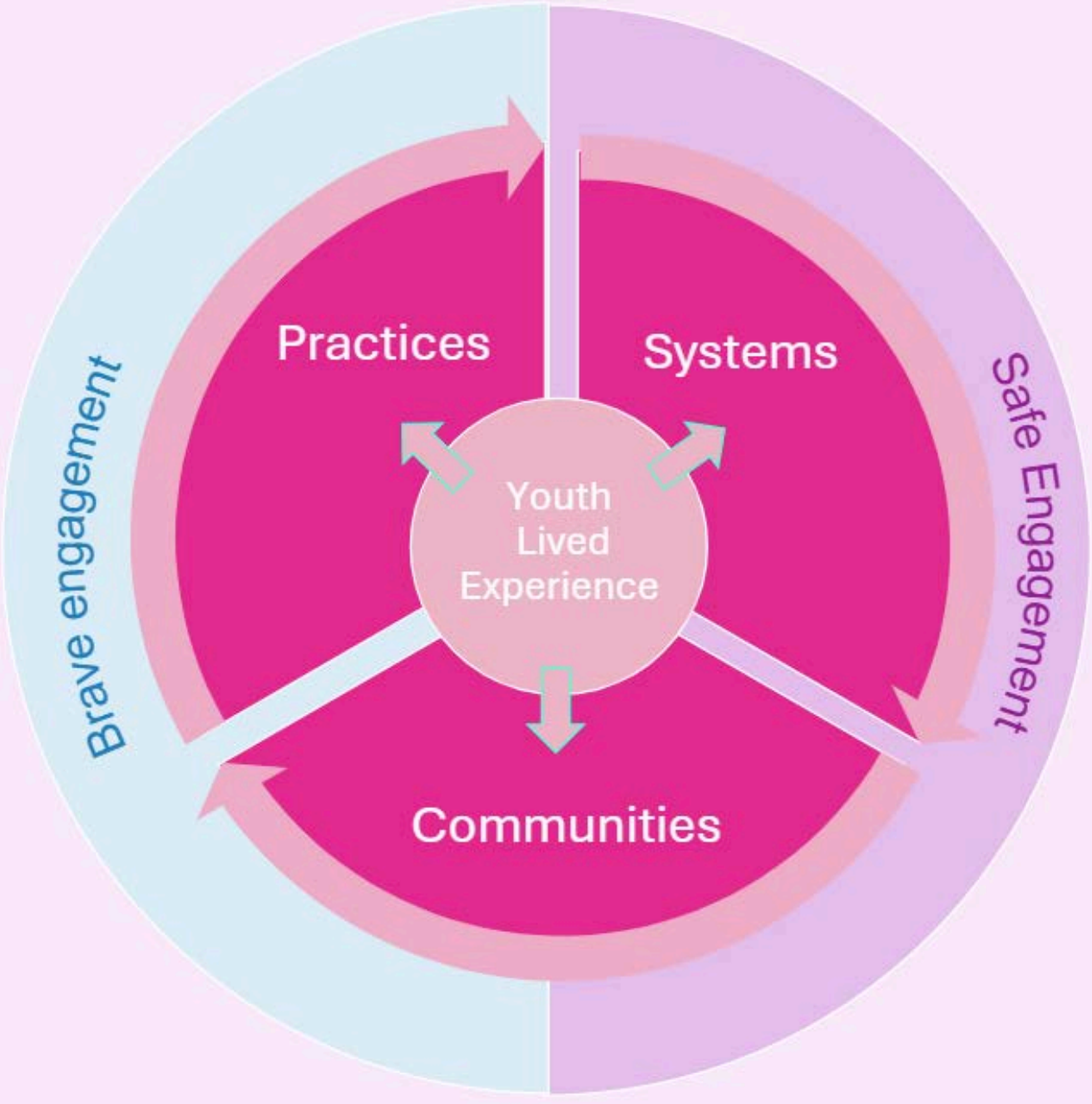
intentional and safe can be harmful to the young people involved, so it's important to be clear about how this framework will be applied in practice before engaging.

Finally, not every young person – or community of young people – is the same. The core theme of this framework is youth leadership and expertise, so listening to young people and their specific needs, wants and aspirations is critical. They will be best placed to guide you on what this will look like for your specific context.

A model of youth engagement

Youth engagement exists in relationship with other factors, systems, and relationships. The model below describes the interactions and success factors for effective youth engagement. These relationships are important to understand to effectively implement the framework.

Under this model, young people are central to the engagement process; their lived experience is a valued attribute, and the engagement approach is influenced by the context of the systems, communities and practices they interact with. Safe and brave engagement facilitates positive outcomes for young people within this broader context.



Young people	Lived experience	Young people are at the core of this framework, and their lived experience is integral and treated as expertise
Young people using their lived experience interact with each of these areas		
Systems, Communities, Practices	Systems	Are responsive and changeable- they impact on a young persons life and are not static
	Communities	Community surrounds the person and influences identity
	Practices	Practices enact and enable systems and communities. They can be the simplest and most visible way to effect change
All of these elements cannot work effectively without equal amounts of brave and safe engagement. These are not discrete elements.		
Supported by	Brave engagement	Engagement values and celebrates lived experience as a strength, not a vulnerability
	Safe engagement	Engagement is trauma informed and safeguards from harm

Framework Principles

Accountability

Engagement approaches are accountable and mutual, keeping young people at the centre of decisions.

Integrity

Young people and our data are treated respectfully, using clear ethical guidelines and practices.

Accessibility

Engagement is accessible and inclusive, and our diverse needs and experiences are accommodated.

Diversity

Recognising that young people are not homogenous, and our differences are our strength.

Transparency

Communication is honest and clear, so we can all participate in engagement processes as equals.

Accountability

Engagement approaches are accountable and mutual, keeping young people at the centre of decisions.

What this means

People who engage with young people are:

1. Committed to meeting and addressing all principles in this framework.
2. Committed to **acknowledging and addressing** the needs and voices of young people.
3. Committed to the **engagement** of young people in programs intended to support us; *working **with**, not just **for** us.*
4. Allow, embrace and strive to engage **positively** and openly to evaluation and scrutiny.
5. Committed to **flexibility and responsiveness** when challenged by young people.
6. Accountable to young people as **primary stakeholders** in any project related to young people's needs.

What this looks like

When engaging with young people, partners:

- Commit to receiving and incorporating young people's perspectives in many different ways.
- Own up to mistakes, be up front about potential issues, and take accountability when something does not go the way something was previously communicated/ intended.
- Provide young people with updates post project completion and ensure we have access to all final outcomes, resources etc. available to those involved in the process ("closing the loop").
- If you are unable to utilise information, or act on feedback recommendations - communicate this to participants directly as soon as possible.

What is the outcome?

Young people can meaningfully partner knowing that we are treated as equals. There are clear practices in place that allow for open communication, shared decision-making, and co-reflection.

In practice

An insights brief is presented to a youth co-design group for their feedback. The young people suggest that the insights do not accurately reflect the discussions at their session. The insights brief is amended with this feedback.

Ethics and Integrity

Young people and our data are treated respectfully, using clear ethical guidelines and practices.

What this means

1. Young people are treated with **respect** and held in the same regard as other stakeholders, researchers and experts.

2. Information and data are collected with **genuine intent** for utilisation, not simply for the act of doing so, and **accurately reflects** the lived experience of young people.

3. Commitment to **mitigating** potential **harm** and negative outcomes affecting young people being engaged with. Reasonably consider any potential positive or negative unintended outcomes as a result of engagement.

4. Ensure young people are provided **tangible** and **appropriate compensation** and are recognised for our contributions.

What this looks like

When engaging with young people, partners:

- Work in collaboration with young people to research and identify any possible unintended negative outcomes of a piece of work or project. Look at the wider context to consider whether an engagement could cause unintended negative outcomes.
- Work in collaboration with young people with lived experience to ensure the intended purpose of work will genuinely positively impact target demographics.
  Ensure it is working towards filling real gaps and meeting real needs.
- Accurately and authentically report information, data, and consultation outcomes collected from young people within our intended contexts; portray information without bias or favour.
- Are flexible in their work approach after consulting and collaborating with young people, and allow young people to interpret, re-interpret and modify the products of engagement.
- Ensure data collection, storage and utilisation processes are clearly communicated to young people and that we can provide informed consent. Update participants if there are any changes.

What is the outcome?

Young people can engage safely, provide informed consent, trust that our information is handled appropriately, and provide advice with confidence knowing it will be accurately reflected in engagement products.

Accessibility

Engagement is accessible and inclusive, and our diverse needs and experiences are accommodated.

What this means

People who engage with young people:

1. Reduce **barriers** to engagement and involvement; ensuring **all processes** are as accessible as possible - *whether it be admin, consultation, research, reimbursement etc*.
2. Commit to ensuring consultation participation is accessible for young people regarding **mode of delivery**, **location**, **sensory environment**, **platform**, and **time.**
3. Recognise that **psychological safety** is the bedrock of engagement.
4. Ensure that all work produced adheres to accessibility principles and actions.

What this looks like

When engaging with young people, partners:

- Consult with participants regarding their accessibility needs and be flexible to support these where possible.
- Communicate how consultations will be run in advance to allow young people to identify where we may need help with accessibility.
- Provide multiple modes for providing feedback - verbal, written, visual, activity based, in and out of consultation.
- Ensure language is accessible, use plain English, and avoid overuse of buzzwords and corporate jargon. Where specialist language is unavoidable, provide a glossary of terms and acronyms.
- Create a safe environment for participants to ask clarifying questions about content, free of judgment or assumption.

What is the outcome?

Young people with divergent needs can engage as equals; engagement environments and practices are designed with our needs in mind, and unique perspectives are incorporated because the barriers for engagement were removed. Young people can stay engaged for a longer period of time knowing that if our needs change, we will still be accommodated.

In practice

An in-person workshop is scheduled. A young person gives feedback that they will need a low-light environment and will wear headphones for the session. The co-design environment is adjusted to suit these needs.

Diversity

Recognising that young people are not homogenous, and our differences are our strength.

What this means

People who engage with young people:

1. Understand the **wider cultural environment** that young people experience, and how this relates to challenges to wellbeing and healthcare access.
2. Recognise how barriers and biases in engagement settings and existing literature can intersect with culture to impact diverse engagement.
3. Understand the **diversity** of cultural needs, expressions and communication styles, and that a 'one size fits all' approach to cultural safety does not capture this diversity.
4. Reflect on the role of dominant social hierarchies in **influencing agendas** and privileging some kinds of expertise over others, and actively implement strategies to recognise and address potential biases.
5. Understand that in order to achieve advocacy and co-production that genuinely supports young people - meaningful, non-tokenistic, diverse engagement is non-negotiable.

What this looks like

When engaging with young people, partners:

- Work with diverse groups to identify and understand what our unique accessibility needs are, and what approaches should be taken to meet them.
- Embed a flexible style of engagement that is accommodating, welcoming and safe for people of diverse backgrounds.
- Consult with young people on the words and language being used to describe diverse communities and provide room for feedback.
- Treat members of diverse communities as experts in their field and are prepared to rethink the engagement approach to incorporate this expertise and avoid tokenisation.
- Explore and consider systems and measures to evaluate the cultural background of the project, highlighting potential areas of concern in diversity, and include measures to address these barriers in co-design

What is the outcome

People of all backgrounds, cultures and identities are supported and embraced throughout the engagement process. Insights and products of the engagement process are higher quality because they reflect the expertise of diverse communities

In practice

A project team is planning to host a meeting at a conference centre and have lunch at a nearby café. A young person who practices Islam identifies that the scheduled lunch break will clash with their prayer time, and they will need access to a prayer room throughout the day. The schedule and location are adjusted so the young person can practice their religion without being excluded from the activity.

Transparency

Communication is honest and clear, so we can all participate in engagement processes as equals.

What this means

People who engage with young people:

1. Commit to making engagement processes and decision-making **honest, clear and transparent.**
2. Are clear and transparent from the start about the **purpose** and **role** that **young people's lived experience** will have in the program.
3. Acknowledge and **credit** where young people have created products and **acknowledge the contribution** of lived experience and codesign.

What this looks like

When engaging with young people, partners:

- Communicate clearly, effectively and accessibly with participants in a timely manner.
- Ensure information and notice is provided as soon as possible.
- Create a shared timeline between all stakeholders, including young people.
- Endeavour to make the engagement approach transparent and understandable to young people within and outside these programs.
- Provide a clear statement to all stakeholders, including young people, about the purpose of lived-experience involvement, what role the young people hold and how this will influence the program.
- Ensure transparency around how and where **youth participant data** is stored and utilised.

What is the outcome?

Young people can participate in engagement activities with the full information required to have effective working relationships. Young people are empowered to influence decision-making and have a say in how they are involved.

In practice

A project has been delayed due to changing requirements from the project funder. The reason for the delay is communicated to a team of youth advisors, and they identify opportunities for interim work while the main deliverables are on pause. The young people develop greater trust in the project partners as a result of the honest communication.

Acknowledgement of National Youth Reference Group

The principles and actions in this framework were created by a group of young people based on our specific context and may not be a perfect guide for engaging with young people from other communities. However, the vision of this document is to centre the desires, needs and abilities of young people of all backgrounds and across all contexts. Special thanks for the development of this document belong to the youth representatives of the University of Sydney Brain and Mind Centre National Youth Reference Group who contributed their time and expertise to make this framework a reality.

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