

The Value of Client Participation in Homelessness Services

'Empowerment and participation make sense for consumers, because when you've experienced rejection you can see it. You're sensitive to it. It reminds you of stuff in the past. I'm not liked or loved, but I need to know that I'm cared for, cared for enough to be involved.'

'I'm dedicated to making a difference for others so that they don't have to endure what I've been through.'

'People in trouble still have the right to say what they think and feel.'

'I think the most effective form of feedback for any homelessness service is negative feedback. If you interviewed people who are on the streets, chances are that you will get the feedback that is really required for change.'

'The more ideas the better.'

'I think it's good to hear from others who have the same problems.'

'Having opportunities to discuss (service) issues is important.'

'We're the experts.'

'I had no energy. I had no purpose. Since I've been involved it's empowered me. It's energised me.'

'I really enjoy interviewing peers as it's inspirational to me to know that I'm not alone in what I've been through.'

'I'd talk to anyone about my experiences. I think it's good to get it out.'

'I've been involved in feedback processes for over sixteen months now...I've really quite enjoyed it. At first I was quite hesitant about it, but now I quite enjoy it. I've met people from all walks of life and it's been just fascinating.'

'Once you become socially excluded, you feel like you become redundant, obsolete. I've gained confidence and a broad range of knowledge. It's like a smorgasbord of success.'

'I wanted to make a difference and that's why I'm here.'

'I'd love to use my story to help others.'

These observations were made by participants in the LASN Client Feedback Group's case study project, client focus groups, and Client Inclusive Practice workshop.

Practice Principles

For the Effective Involvement of Clients in Homelessness Service Delivery

1. The regional homelessness service system *values* clients and recognises that it is their right to be *self-determining* and *involved* in service delivery.
2. Fulsome client participation strategies may be difficult to implement; but homelessness services are committed to *making a start* towards improved client participation.
3. Opportunities to be involved in homelessness services are *available* and *accessible* to all clients.
4. Homelessness services offer a *variety* of ways for clients to be involved.
5. Client participation strategies are *purposeful* and *meaningful* for clients and the service; tokenistic activities may be discouraging for clients and the staff alike.
6. Clients are *actively encouraged* and *supported* to be involved in homelessness services, and are assured that their participation and feedback is *confidential* and will *not affect* their access to any part of the service system.
7. Homelessness agencies *feed back to clients* the outcomes of their involvement.
8. *Informal feedback* is heard and addressed.
9. Opportunities for client involvement are *ongoing* and *regularly reviewed*.
10. Homelessness services *share* their client participation strategies and learnings, to the benefit of other service providers and the regional service system.