



Early Years™  
Catalyst

# Exploring Leverage Points for Transformational Change:

Recognising families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for  
the purposes of evidence, policy and decision making

June 2024

# Purpose

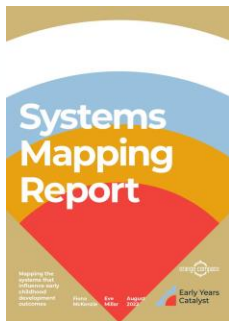
- To fill out the picture from the formal evidence captured in the Evidence for Action (E4A) report.
- To help people:
  - use and build on the leverage points detailed in the Evidence for Action report
  - see how their work fits into wider work across the sector
  - understand what else needs to happen to drive change across the early years system for improved outcomes for children.

# And we will do this by

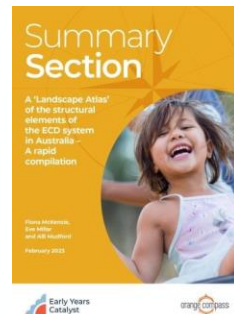
- Sharing:
  - some of what's already happening
  - some of what's starting to happen
  - some of what needs to happen
- Informed by conversations with stakeholders across the sector

# It's the next layer in the EYC's work

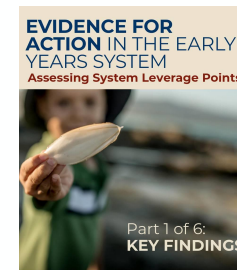
- The Early Years Catalyst seeks to support the field to disrupt and transform Australia's early years system so that it supports all young children and their families to thrive. Its focus over the past three years has been on evidence-gathering through four major projects:



Systems Mapping - identifies the forces influencing early childhood development outcomes in Australia today, possible leverage points for change and the key elements of an ideal future early years system that is capable of supporting all young children and families to thrive.



Landscape Atlas - provides a detailed overview of the government-driven structures that underpin 10 key systems that are integral to children's early development.



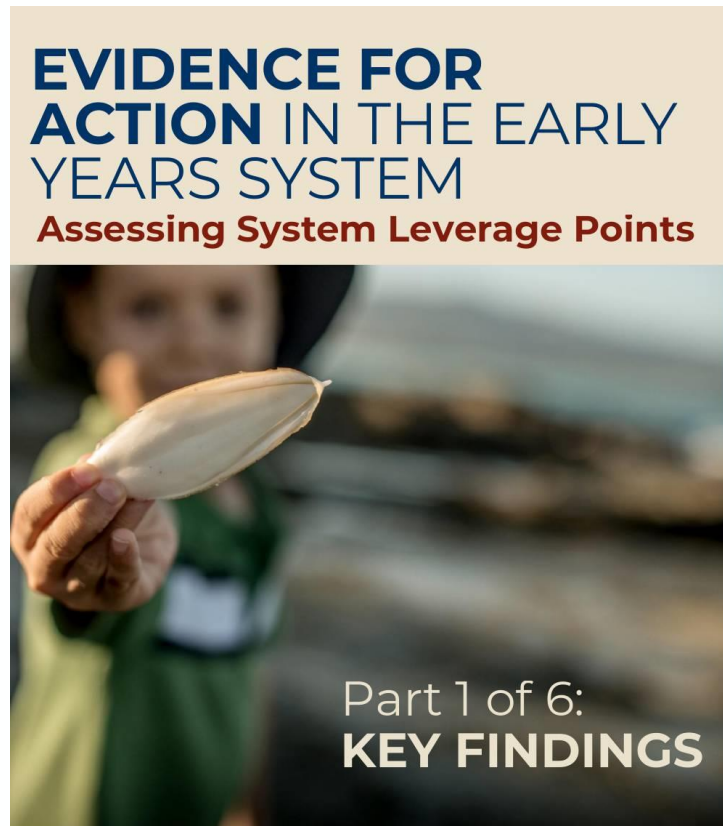
Evidence for Action - an evidence-informed inventory of actions to transform Australia's early years system based on an assessment of 18 leverage points (split into 4 clusters) identified in the systems mapping process.



Mental Models Deep Dive - An in-depth exploration of the mental models shaping Australia's early years system and outcomes and effective strategies for shifting these at scale to enable the desired 'future state'.

# Builds on the Evidence for Action report

- A focus on how different leverage points can generate positive change to the early years system and the outcomes it produces.
- Leverage points are places in the system where, by intervening or applying pressure, we can influence change across the system.
- Evidence for Action (E4A) assessed 18 leverage points, grouped into 4 clusters. It draws on published research, First Nations' wisdom and ways of knowing, frontline practitioners' experience and the voices of families.
- All of the leverage points are interconnected and interrelated – action across all clusters and levels of the system in the short, medium and longer term is required to bring about change.
- E4A shares case studies backed by publicly available evaluations. Here we share examples of work in progress, or where there may not be a published evaluation.



Prepared by:

- Orange Compass
- Centre for Community Child Health
- Clear Horizon
- Sefa (Social Enterprise Finance Australia)

**1. Grant greater decision-making power to the local community level**

2. Fit-for-purpose funding and commissioning approaches

3. Redirect funding flows to support local priorities and responses

4. Feedback loops from families and communities to government and service providers

5. Amplify family and community voices as partners in program design and delivery

6. Recognise families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for the purposes of evidence, policy and decision making

**Cluster 1:  
Communities and families in the driver's seat**

**Cluster 2:  
Re-imagining the service system**

7. Expand the universal service system

8. Invest in a proactive and preventative child protection (child thriving) system

**9. Ensure service systems are staffed by high quality workforces**

10. Recognise the voice of children in policy and program design

15. Create a shift in Australia's socio-cultural identity to become a society that prioritises the wellbeing of all children

**16. Change our framing/ conceptualisation of and approach to 'care' in Australia**

17. Create a shift in our collective mindsets to recognise First Nations ways of knowing, learning, being and doing about care

18. Create a shift in societal perspectives of disadvantage and difference; free of racism and judgement against disadvantaged children and communities

**Cluster 4:  
Shifting society's perspectives**

**Cluster 3:  
Shared accountability for children's outcomes**

11. Reform the culture of measurement and evaluation

**12. Enforce accountability for outcomes for children and families**

13. Government to guarantee equitable access to services for all children – regardless of where they live in Australia

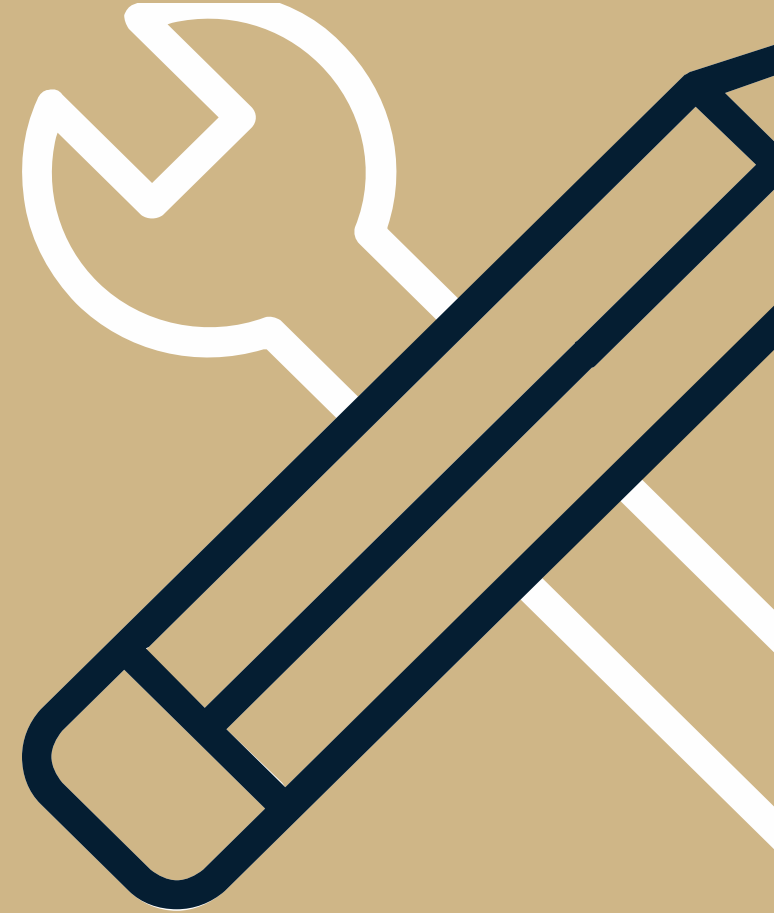
**14. Ensure all children have their families have their basic material needs met**

**Evidence for Action: 18 leverage points and 4 clusters**

# **Recognise families and those with lived experience as 'experts'**

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For the purposes of evidence, policy  
and decision making



# Why focus on this leverage point?

## LP 6: Recognise families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for the purposes of evidence, policy and decision making

<p>This leverage point is about making sure that the real-life experience of families is heard and respected (and given as much weight as formal 'experts') when decisions are being made about policy, funding and programs, and that these perspectives are reflected in final decisions.</p>	<p>This leverage point is situated in the '<i>Communities and families in the driver's seat</i>' cluster.</p> <p>Elements of the ideal future early years system that link to this cluster include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening families, parents and carers</li> <li>• Strengthening local communities – particularly <i>Empowering local voices</i></li> </ul>	<p>This cluster is focused on the potential for transformative change in the early years system through significant shifts in power. It aims to devolve decision-making to the local level and foster new ways of working in new ways with communities and families.</p>	<p>For genuine and sustainable change, key ingredients identified in E4A include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful process design and delegation of decision making</li> <li>• Consideration of supporting engagement from those who have not previously been well engaged</li> <li>• Removing practical barriers to engagement and participation such as transport and additional costs; and less tangible barriers such as creating safe spaces and building confidence.</li> </ul>	<p>The potential of empowering First Nations communities through engagement and participation as genuine decision makers could be transformational.</p> <p>Recognising lived experience as expertise would indicate a significant shift.</p>
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# Connections to other leverage points

Together with other leverage points, *'Recognising families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for the purposes of evidence, policy and decision-making'* (LP 6) could be an enabler for other leverage points including:

## Recognising families and those with lived experience as 'experts'

### 'Communities and families in the driver's seat' (within same cluster)

### 'Re-imagining the service system' (across other clusters)

LP1: Grant greater decision-making power to the local community level

LP2: Fit-for-purpose funding and commissioning approaches

LP3: Redirect funding flows to support local priorities and responses

LP4: Feedback loops from families and communities to government and service providers

LP5: Amplify family & community voices as partners in program design & delivery

LP10: Recognise the voice of children in policy and program design

# Lived experience expertise is becoming more common in organisations

People are experts about their own experiences. Definitions vary – but a person with lived experience is generally understood to be a person who is living (or has lived) with the issues that a community is facing and is able to offer insight.

Engagement in co-design and/or co-production requires different processes and structures. Too often organisations are trying to shoehorn lived experience into existing practices.

It takes time and expertise to genuinely embed lived experience expertise into organisational practice.

Despite all the progress there are still gaps that create barriers to engagement, risks to the individual and to the system. Most of the risks are a result of decision-making power not being shared.

A growing number of organisations and projects now reference lived experience as core to their approach.

Lived experience is different to a case study and to personas.

The risk of not investing in lived experience expertise strategically is that it feels tokenistic and that it's ticking a box and a one-off contribution.

The following provides a snapshot of observations and examples from current practice. There are also numerous toolkits and guides available to support organisations to understand how to best work with lived experience expertise to generate sustainable outcomes for individuals, families and society.

# A future state in which lived experience expertise is valued

## Communities & families in the driver's seat

### LP 6. Recognise families and those with lived experience as 'experts' for the purposes of evidence, policy & decision making

Areas to focus on to achieve impact*	What success would look like
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance structures reflecting and valuing lived experience expertise</li> </ul>
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuing lived experience as experts</li> <li>• Incorporating lived experience as experts in service design</li> <li>• Using lived experience to influence the policy agenda</li> <li>• Recognising lived experience expertise valued in paid employment</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overcoming direct barriers to engagement and participation – eg. with support and transport costs covered</li> <li>• Overcoming indirect/less visible barriers to engagement and participation – eg. culturally safe spaces, confidence</li> </ul>
Relationships and Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trusting that organisations genuinely value lived experience expertise</li> <li>• Supporting individuals to be recognised as more than their lived experience</li> <li>• Recognising that there is 'demand' for lived experience expertise with opportunities across service design and delivery; as well as policy</li> </ul>
Power Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making a commitment to sharing decision-making</li> <li>• Investing in ongoing rather than one-off engagement</li> <li>• Ensuring strengths-based approaches</li> </ul>
Mental Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising lived experience as expertise</li> <li>• Ensuring that the lived experience expertise is central to effective decision-making for laws, policies, programs and services</li> <li>• Trusting that lived experience insight is robust and not the 'bottom' of a data hierarchy</li> </ul>

\* The Six Conditions of Systems Change from the Waters of Systems Change (Kania, Kramer & Senge 2018)

# What is happening now

The Australian Human Rights Commission is **leading by example** on valuing lived experience expertise especially from children.

The emphasis is on making sure that engagement is meaningful and authentic with a clear view of how insights will be used and how children will be updated. In planning engagement, key questions asked include:

- Why are we talking to children?
- What are we going to do with what they tell us?
- What's our capacity to do this?
- How will we feed back in an authentic way about what we heard?

POLICY

PRACTICE

Lived experience engagement is integrated in the growing number of **place-based approaches**. Backbone funding to support integration of infrastructure and services is becoming more common. Some Commonwealth Funded programs include: Stronger Places, Stronger People; and Connected Beginnings. Jurisdictions are also funding place-based approaches such as Belconnen: A Village for Every Child (ACT). These communities are just some of the many examples where lived experience expertise is embedded into governance, design and delivery.

PRACTICE

**Governance structures** are slowly evolving to enable joint decision making. Connected Beginnings is an example. The first iteration of the program was 'to do', and the second iteration has been more focused on 'working with'. Governance arrangements now include a focus on transforming institutions; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations primarily delivering services. This deeper and wider engagement places greater emphasis on policymakers to listen and elevates lived experience to be fundamental to decision making and delivery.

PRACTICE

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership is an example of a more strategic partnership. The partnership has been co-developed by SNAICC and Australian Government Departments with responsibility for children's outcomes across ECEC; maternal and child health; and child protection and families. Governance arrangements reflect different departments working towards joint outcomes and potentially provides a more strategic approach to embedding lived experience expertise to maximise impact throughout the policymaking process.

POLICY

## RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

In some organisations, lived experience expertise is **valued in paid roles**:

- The lived experience of the service user is instrumental to the re-design and re-organisation of services. Having someone with expertise and knowledge of co-design on the team helps with power dynamics and building trust.
- yourtown is developing an employment pathway to have service design associates with lived experience expertise.
- Kiind's peer navigation team all have lived experience of caring for a child with a disability and have extensive knowledge of navigating a sometimes-complex system.
- Beyond Blue has a Speakers Program where community members with lived experience of mental health challenges share their experiences. The speakers are volunteers; with co-ordination support by paid staff.

**People like me + professional advice = a helpful model.** Kindred has a closed and moderated Facebook group which is a good example of where families share their experiences and moderators link to advice that could be relevant. It values the individual lived experience and connects others to it. In making people feel like there are others like them, and at the same time providing information, it opens up avenues for support.

PRACTICE

# What is starting to happen

## RESOURCES

People's **time is precious** and should be valued. Vouchers tend to be the most common way to remunerate people for their time as they don't interact negatively with employment and/or the tax/benefit system. Different amounts should be offered depending on how resource intensive the engagement is – eg. a prize draw for responding to something short, a voucher for a workshop, focus group or interview; expenses paid, and time covered if going to an event.

Lived experience is a prominent theme in the *Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System* recommendations. They are now being implemented and include:

- Have at least one person with lived experience of mental illness on the newly established Regional Mental Health and Wellbeing Boards
- Improve capability and capacity of people with lived experience to participate in the policy process
- Create a new agency led by people with lived experience of mental illness to deliver training, develop services and foster new partnerships.

POWER DYNAMICS

POLICY

## POWER DYNAMICS

**Strength based models** that recognise the value that families and individuals bring are important. These contrast with more traditional attitudes of needing to fix the family. The advice is to look at the gifts, experience, knowledge and insight that families bring. This enables lived experience expertise to be considered. Gowrie South Australia is one example where a genuine commitment to inclusion and diversity through their Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) results in a strength-based approach that values families' contribution.

There are of course a range of approaches to deepen understanding of some of the nuances between the different ways that lived experience can be influential. For example:

- Someone who shares their lived experience for an organisation talked about knowing how to read the room and understanding the complementary skills that lived experience brings to a setting. They also talked about being able to frame the experience to be solutions focused: *"You're not in a therapy session – it's about taking the experiences and be solutions focused and be active in."* This is about recognising complementary skills and contributions to influence change.
- A Beyond Blue Ambassador volunteers to share his lived experience on mental health to raise awareness and normalise the experiences of mental health challenges especially for men.
- Lived experience expertise is integral to the development and implementation of SEED's (Brave Foundation) One Door Intergenerational Framework for Families, a 10-year plan to support all families to access the support they need. The project aims to translate directly from families and the organisations that work with them, the challenges families face on a day-to-day basis into practical reform recommendations which will be tabled with the relevant portfolios and level of government.

## PRACTICE

Continuing to adapt governance processes is leading to more genuine lived experience expertise being valued. The governance group at Logan Together is a leadership group with community leadership at the helm – this was the result of learning – it wasn't like that at the beginning. Research and strategy is now defined by communities. There are four regions; each with a local backbone and local governance structure to reflect the community. It also creates local employment opportunities.

## POWER DYNAMICS

POLICY

PRACTICE

# What needs to happen

When considering lived experience as experts, key considerations should include:

- Are there resources (time/money) to capture and feed back to people in authentic ways about what's been heard and how their insight has been considered?
- The process must be transparent and robust to build people's faith and trust in it. It may be in the form of senior leadership engagement; a commitment to human design; or a genuine change to decision making processes.
- Frontline staff are often juggling competing demands and may not have the capacity and/or capability to learn or know how to engage in the right way with lived experience experts.
- There can be a fine line between representing lived experience and lived experience – and some organisations manage that better than others. This is the case study vs lived experience tension.
- It's important to avoid making assumptions about what people said – if you are asking for voice – then share voice – not an interpretation of that voice.
- Too often lived experience expertise feels tokenistic, like it's a method ticking a box. If organisations are genuine in their ambition to impact change, then lived experience expertise needs to be authoritative and authentic with decision-making power shared to sustainably influence change.

RESOURCES

PRACTICE

POLICY

RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

MENTAL MODELS

POWER DYNAMICS

## Navigating uncertainty and doing things differently:

- Commissioners, funders and policymakers can be risk adverse and uncomfortable with not knowing where a process may lead; it's not the way that it's always been done and doesn't fit neatly into a box. Seeking ethical approval may also be difficult in some contexts such as academia when it's not clear what the questions or engagement may be. As teams develop experience and expertise they become more comfortable with not always knowing where projects or services will end; but it takes time to build that confidence. Are there ways to structure funding proposals and create the demand from funders for this type of uncertainty?
- Despite many organisations being committed to partnership and collaborative working in theory, the practice can be more difficult. In a tight financial climate, organisations may be trying to build partnerships for one project but may be in competition to deliver others. These tensions can be difficult to resolve. Offering financial security would be one solution, but what other ways can collaboration be fostered recognising the tension with competitive funding?
- How can lived experience expertise be effective in shaping political decision-making? There are likely to be short-term and longer-term opportunities.

RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

POWER DYNAMICS

The 'supply' of lived experience expertise is increasing, but not necessarily the 'demand'. Many organisations are developing their lived experience capacity within the organisation; building confidence for people to advocate for themselves and families; but sometimes services don't know how to receive that and so it is blocked by 'system says no.' Are there ways to increase demand?

MENTAL MODELS

# A starter of additional resources

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## Thinking about lived experience expertise and doing it:

- [On Our Own Terms](#) – project funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF) and convened by Morgan Cataldo in partnership with Kelsey Dole and others on social change through the lens of lived experience
- [User voice: Putting people at the heart of impact practice](#), New Philanthropy Capital
- [Centering Lived Experience: a strategic approach for leaders](#), New Philanthropy Capital
- Mission Australia's [Learning from Lived Experience: A Framework for client participation](#)
- [A conversation with Morgan Lee Cataldo](#) podcast from Loose Change – Conversations about social change

## Examples of projects and programs that are embedding lived experience expertise:

- Mental health
  - [Our Agency](#) – partnership between Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC) and Self Held Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC) responding to recommendations in Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System
  - [Lived Experience Australia](#) (LEA) - a national systemic advocacy, research and capacity building organisation for those with lived experience of mental ill-health, their carers and families
  - Wellcome Trust's [Lived Experience Journey map](#) on mental health support
  - [The Influence and Participation Toolkit](#) – from Mind to support any workplace that wants to engage with mental health problems in a meaningful way
  - The Commonwealth Government's [National Mental Health Commission](#) has resources to help train managers without lived experience
- Families - [Family by Family](#) is a family network support program designed by The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TASCI) and South Australian families
- Climate - [Community-Led Collaboration for Climate Justice](#) – a project from Collaboration for Impact
- Poverty - [The role of people with experience of poverty in social change](#) – Sarah Campbell, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

# Thank you

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# Thank you

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