



Linker Conference June 2024

Learnings from Co-Designing and Prototyping a service with people with lived and living experience of financial hardship

Acknowledgements

The Wyatt Trust (Wyatt) acknowledges the people of the Kurna nation on whose unceded lands we conduct our business. Wyatt acknowledges the people of the Barnarla nation and the people of the Bowandik nation on whose unceded lands our partner agencies conduct their business. Wyatt acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging.

Wyatt acknowledges the people with lived and living experience of financial hardship who co-designed and prototyped the Linker Network with us. Wyatt acknowledges the partner agencies who have committed to this way of working. Without the engagement of people with lived and living experience and our partner agencies the Linker Network would not be what it is today.

Introduction – The Conference

Wyatt coordinated a conference in June 2024, co-presented with people with lived and living experience of financial hardship, to share what we learned with women over 50 and sole parents and carers and how services can better meet their needs. Specifically, the conference program focused on sharing the process of prototyping with people with lived experience, and how organisations and services might be able to do similar work at a smaller scale.

The conference involved 25 lived experience participants who were involved in the organisation, facilitation and presentation of conference sessions and workshop panels alongside Linker Project Officers, Coordinator and Consultant, with a variety of community sector programs and services in attendance.

This paper is a summary of the wealth of experience, knowledge and insight shared at the conference and through co-design and prototyping processes undertaken by The Wyatt Trust with people with lived experience of financial hardship, which led to the co-production of the Linker Service Network.

Workshops were a feature of the conference, sharing lived experience perspectives on working with different communities and contexts. This paper follows the program of the conference with each section aligning with a plenary session or elective workshop.

Glossary

Lived and living experience - Refers to individuals who have direct, personal experience that encompasses unique knowledge and insights about this experience. For the Linker service, this knowledge and understanding focuses on older women and sole parents/carers experience of financial hardship and poverty. In this document any reference to 'lived experience' encompasses both lived and living experience.

Testing - involves evaluating and refining solutions collaboratively.

Co-design - A collaborative process where individuals with professional expertise and lived experience work as equals to enhance services by actively listening, learning, and jointly making decisions.

Prototyping - involves creating tangible representations of program ideas and interventions. These prototypes can range from initial sketches to interactive models. By testing and refining these prototypes with stakeholders, this can ensure that the final solutions align with community needs and enhance service delivery.

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Background

The Wyatt Trust (Wyatt) is committed to partnering with people who have lived and living experience of financial hardship and inequality to co-design, test and evaluate solutions to the complex challenges of poverty together, to impact poverty in South Australia and see systemic change for good.

Data tells us that older women are disproportionately experiencing poverty and at risk of poverty. This has increased at an alarming rate of more than 30% from 2011 to 2016 (Patterson et al., 2019). Sole parent families and carers are also at significantly higher risk of experiencing poverty, with three times the number living on very low incomes compared to families with two parents (Wilson et al., 2021).

In response to increasing vulnerability and experience of poverty, Wyatt wanted to design a grant program to support women over 50, sole parents and sole carers, and set out to undertake a co-design approach with people with lived experience of hardship. In meeting with women over 50 and sole parents and carers, who shared their experiences of trying to get help and support when they need it most, what emerged was the expression of a significant gap in the service ecosystem in relation to navigation, finding support to know where to go and what steps to take to move forward. This informed the conception of the Linker/Navigator role and service.

The development of the Linker service involved two iterative projects, the Initial Research and Co-Design Project in 2022, and the Prototyping Project in 2023-24. These are explained further below.

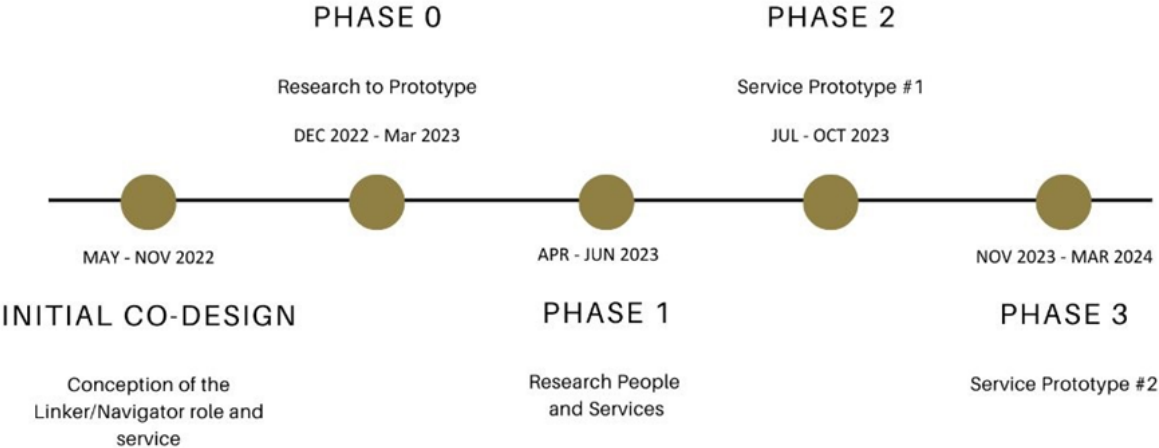


Figure 1 Co-design to Prototyping Timeline

Introducing Co-design

When we talk about co-design, these definitions are useful:

“A process where people with professional and *lived experience* partner as equals to improve services by listening, learning and making decisions together.”

Metro North Health Queensland Government. (2022)

"Identifying and creating an entirely new plan, initiative or service, that is successful, sustainable and cost effective, and reflects the needs, expectations and requirements of all those who participated in, and will be affected by the plan."

National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum. (2021)

In preparing for co-design, a number of conditions for change needed attention and development in order to be ready to engage in co-design. Without undertaking the inner work, developing the skills, tools and process, and building strong relationships and connections, the co-design process was unlikely to be authentic, meaningful or productive.

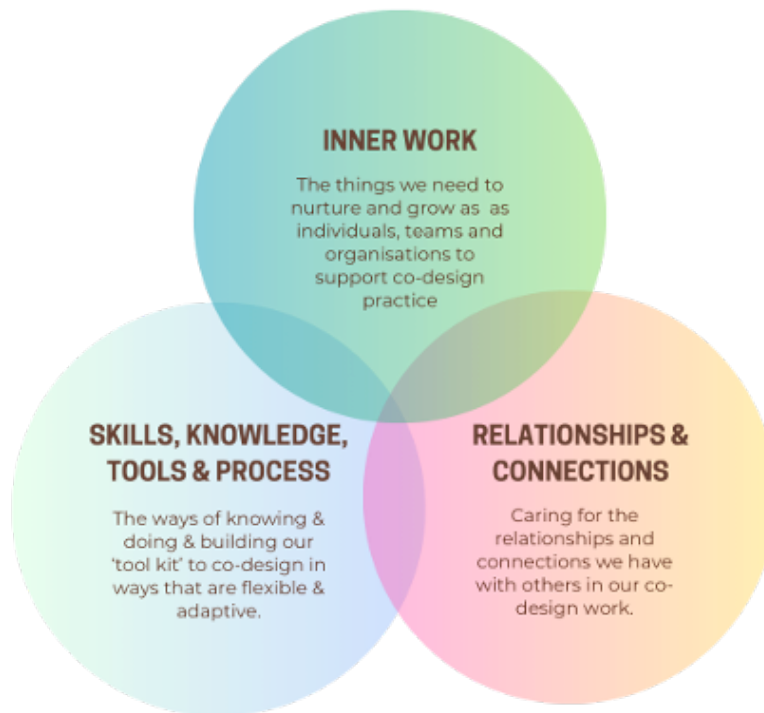


Figure 2 Conditions for change

Co-design principles underpinned the process and approach, and we were held accountable to these co-design principles through reflective practice, feedback, learning loops and independent evaluation of the process (through Flinders University).

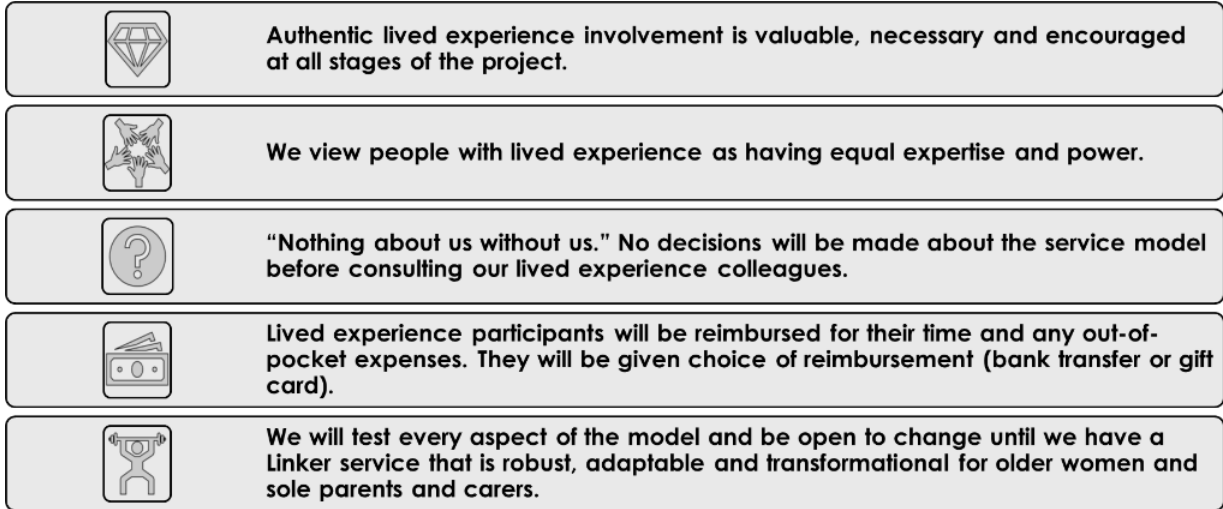


Figure 3 Our Principles of Co-Design

Approach and Methodology

A range of opportunities and means for participation were used to encourage people to be involved to the extent they chose, based on each person’s capacity, sense of safety and wellbeing, and interest. Lived experience participants could choose to move in and out of involvement as they chose.



Figure 4 Methods and opportunities for involvement

Initial Research and Co-Design

In 2022 Wyatt engaged consultants, Dana Shen Consultancy and Think Human to train, facilitate and mentor Wyatt through co-design principles, approaches and. Wyatt invited expressions of interest from women over 50, sole parents and sole carers to participate in a co-design project.

The invitation was well received, and Wyatt interviewed more than 40 people from this cohort about their experiences of financial hardship and the successes, challenges, gaps and blocks of seeking and

accessing support. Those who had participated in an interview were invited to a series of co-design workshops, with 20 individuals participating in one or more workshops over a number of months. The first iteration of the Linker/Navigator role and service was conceptualised. The concept, explained below, was then presented and explored in a workshop with the broader service sector.

Service sector organisations were invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to participate in a 12-month prototyping project, to further develop and test the Linker/Navigator concept. Lived experience participants partnered with Wyatt in reviewing the organisational EOIs, interviewing short listed organisations and selecting the seven partner agencies for the 12-month prototyping project.

Guiding Principles

During the initial co-design phase a number of *guiding principles* or values were voiced by people with lived experience, and became the foundation to guide the service design, prototyping and delivery, holding us true to the intent and values of the service concept.

- Assume first that each person has a legitimate need for help due to financial challenges.
- Help each person to step forwards in ways that are meaningful to them - never backwards.
- Nothing about us without us.
- Understand and respect each individual's personal situation and values and work within and towards them.
- Be alongside as a partner, working together - especially for the tough phone calls and the setbacks, but for the celebrations as well.
- Aim for thriving, not just surviving.
- Take the time to understand what is culturally important and find a way to meet needs in a way that aligns with cultural value.

The 'Linker' Concept

'Linking' refers to the inherent responsibility of the Linker role to link clients into the support services and programs they are eligible for and can benefit from. Being a Linker involves having a direct, tailored and relationship-based experience with an individual and their family. Linkers support clients and families to connect into and navigate the service system, having a continuous presence in a client's service journey.

A Linker is:



A listening ear - someone who listens, believes, and affirms your experience, and helps you determine what part of the story to tell



A linker - someone who helps you determine your pathway, navigate your next steps, and helps you 'link' up the pieces of the system and link you in where and when you need it



A witness - someone who is there with you when the good or the bad news comes, and can share the celebration or help hold the system to account if it fails you



A guide - someone who helps you know what to expect, decide how you'll approach it and build your confidence to face the system

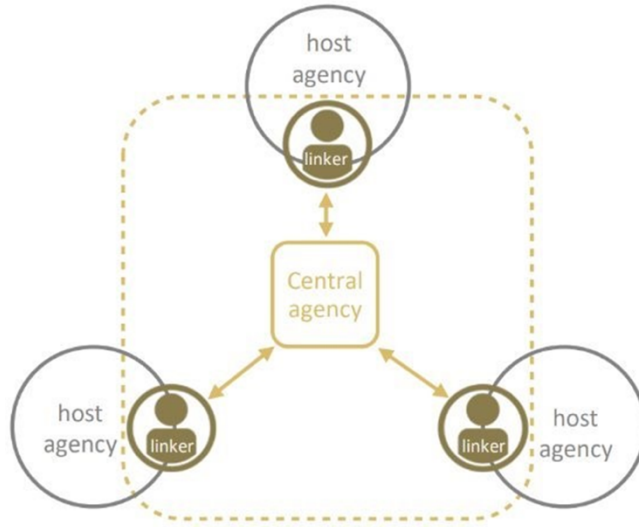


Figure 5 Conceptual design of the Wyatt Navigator/Linker model, as created by consultants, Think Human to explain the concept to potential partner agencies.

Prototyping and Testing

Following the initial co-design phase, Wyatt set out to further develop the Linker/Navigator concept and prototype all elements of a new service over a twelve-month period through 2023-24, continuing to design, test and share decision making with people with lived experience of financial hardship, and service organisations.

Process

The twelve-month prototyping included three large learning loops, or phases:

- Phase 1 - Research People and Services
- Phase 2 - Service prototype #1
- Phase 3 - Service prototype #2
- Phase 4 – Preparing for service delivery, conference delivery

To undertake the co-design and prototyping phases collaboratively, funding was provided to employ:

- Linker Project Officers employed by seven non-government community service agencies, five based in Adelaide Metro; one in Port Augusta; one in Mount Gambier
- A Program Coordinator based at the Wyatt Trust
- Consultants to support prototyping

The Linker partner agencies for prototyping:

- ac.care (Mt Gambier and the Limestone Coast)
- Centacare Catholic Country SA (Port Augusta region and the Northern Line)
- Grandcarers SA
- Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation (KWY)
- Uniting Care Wesley Bowden (UCWB)

- Uniting Communities
- The Zahra Foundation

These seven agencies and Wyatt formed the Linker Network. The Network engaged with people with lived experience of financial hardship to co-design and prototype all elements of the new service model, collaboratively testing, learning, and adapting the service in line with the lived experience expertise and insights. The wide range of partnering agencies allowed varied organisational structures and processes to be tested for service suitability and fit, and enabled shared service and organisational learning across the network.

Workshops with Lived Experience

Six series of co-design workshops were facilitated over the 12 months of prototyping. A range of workshop modes were offered to give people choice and in control in attending. Each series of workshops included a Women’s in-person workshop, a Women’s online workshop and a Men’s hybrid workshop. On average 30 – 40 lived experience participants participated in each series of workshops.

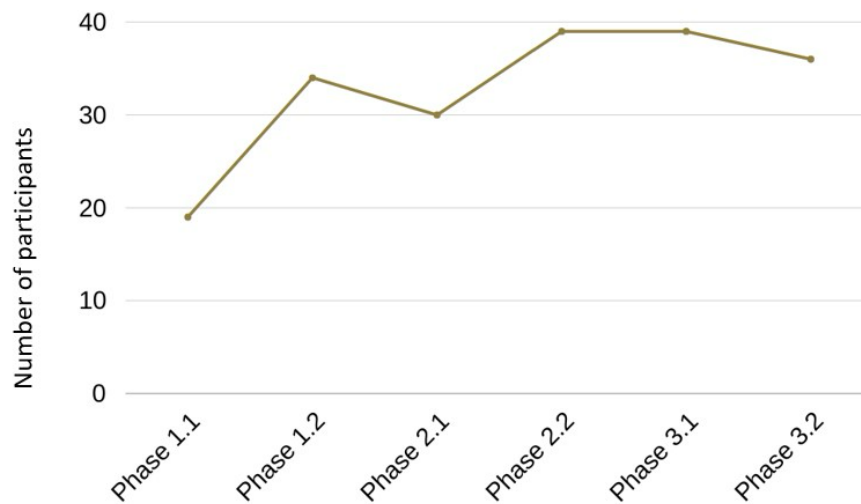


Figure 6 Lived Experience participation in workshops throughout phases

In all, engagement of people with Lived Experience included:

- 114 participants;
- 101 women, 13 men;
- 36 First Nations people;
- 15 CALD people;
- 36 people living in regional areas.

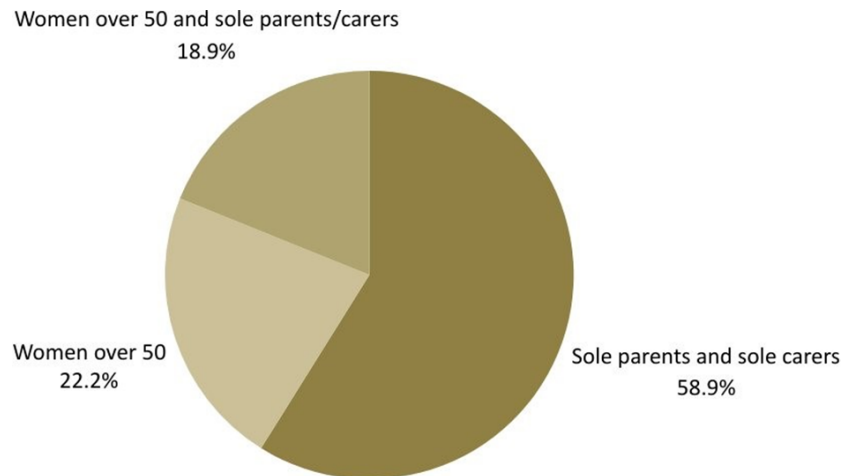
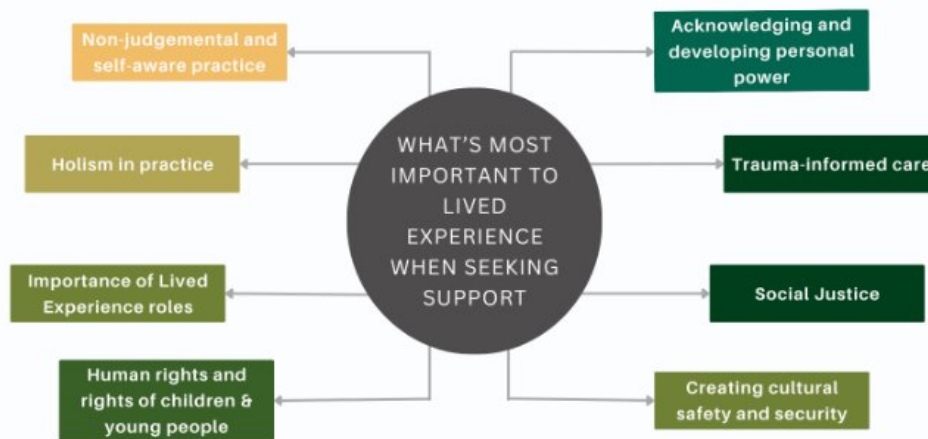


Figure 7 Lived Experience Participants - Women over 50, sole parents and carers

Developing Core Practice Principles

Throughout the co-design and prototyping processes, core *Practice Principles* emerged through the experience and practice of developing and testing the Linker service and network. Alongside the *Guiding Principles* developed by lived experience these provided a key foundation for the development of the Linker service.

PRINCIPLES INFORMED BY LIVED EXPERIENCE



These core *practice principles*, such as holism in practice, the need for peers and volunteers, and trauma-informed care, informed by lived experience underpinned considerations of principle-based work and their application as part of the Linker service. A couple of these are expanded upon below. All

practice principles were documented in a *Practice Framework* which continues to underpin the service as it moves into delivery.

Holistic care

Holism is an idea that when applied to people recognises that they are much more than the sum of their parts. When applied to an individual's well-being, holism seeks to appreciate the complexity of people, the lives they live and the services they interact with. A more profound, comprehensive, and effective form of engagement can be practiced by understanding this.

Importance of volunteers/peers

The importance of lived experience roles includes a Linker Peer / Volunteer with direct lived experience of financial hardship. The Linker peer would be passionate and committed to help implement the goals set by the client working alongside the Linker. This would include support in navigating different parts of the service system and to connect clients with community supports. The volunteer or Community Linker would support clients to connect with their community and/or offer specific skills and experience.

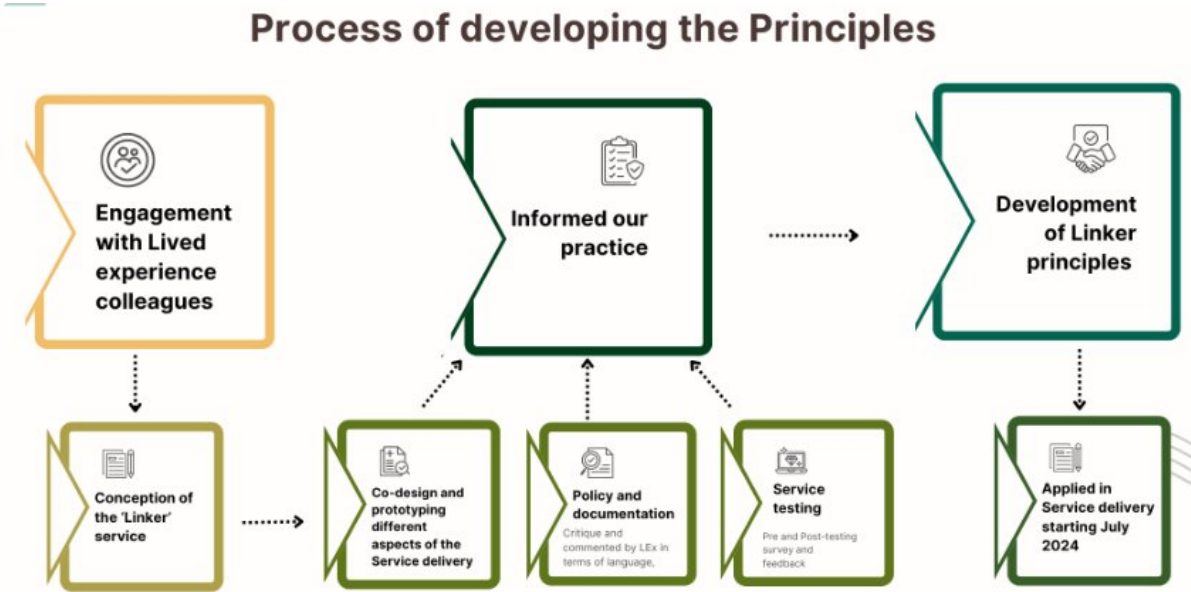


Figure 8 Process of developing practice principles

Prototype Phases

Research to Prototype

- Expression of Interest submitted by NGO Non-Profit Partner Organisations
- Shortlisting by team of lived experience colleagues and Wyatt staff member, with co-led interviews held with shortlisted organisations.
- Recruitment and onboarding of Linker Project Officers and Program Coordinator, with a lived experience participant on each of the interview panels.
- Onboarding and induction of Program Coordinator, seven partner organisations, and Linker Project Officers. Co-design and prototyping training and development.

Phase 1 – Research People and Services

Linker Project Officers interviewed women over 50 and sole parents/carers, during two interview rounds. The first set of interview questions focused on understanding what it means to live on a low income and the challenges this brings, and what would be helpful from this new support service concept. The second set of interview questions focused on the service blueprint. Linker Project Officers interviewed colleagues and other services about client needs and challenges they are facing.

We held two workshops with lived experience. These focused on understanding the kinds of assistance people need. Some key needs emerged around:

- Health – both physical and mental
- Finding secure housing
- Creating a stable income / financial security
- Surviving on a limited income
- Impacts of family and domestic violence
- Being a parent / carer
- Isolation and loneliness
- Navigating Centrelink
- Navigating other services (My Aged Care, NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme), Housing etc.)
- Support with advocacy



A Service Journey, or Service Blueprint was mapped in workshops with Lived Experience participants and the network to break down all the elements of the service model, to understand all the stages and aspects involved in a client’s experience of a service, and to provide a guide for each element to be designed, prototyped and tested.

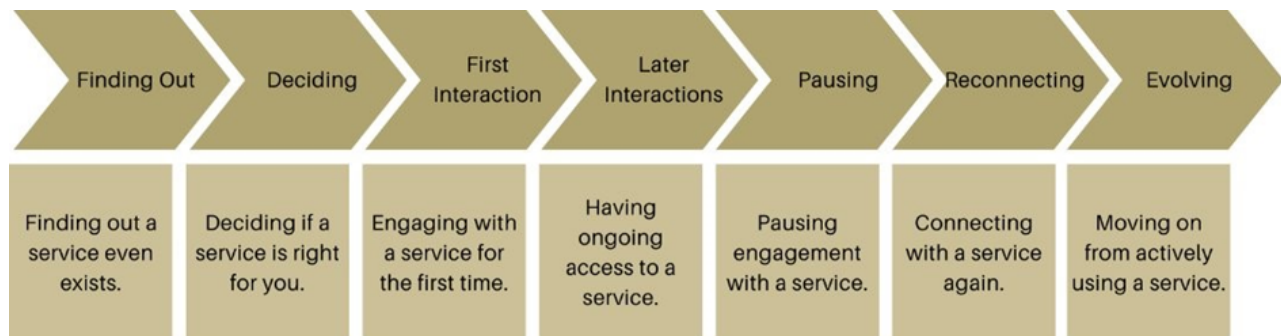


Figure 9 The Service Journey / Blueprint

Phase 2 – Service Prototype # 1

Based on our learnings about the service blueprint, we developed several prototype activities to test with lived experience participants. A strong message from the lived experience participants was that they wanted a service they can access which removes the barriers they normally face including:

- Meeting service criteria
- Wait lists
- Receiving time limited services.

Two co-design workshops with lived experience participants were undertaken to adapt the service model based on these learnings.



Phase 3 – Service Prototype # 2

The Linker Project Officers, Coordinator and Consultant then wrote a set of Linker policies and practice guidance including a practice framework and how each element of the service model would operate. The lived experience participants were provided the opportunity to read these documents and provide feedback. Eleven people provided feedback which was then incorporated into the final documentation.

Live testing of the service model commenced with a smaller group of lived experience participants. Twenty-five participants agreed to become clients to the Linker service over a four-week period. On average, each Linker worked with four to five clients. Clients provided verbal feedback to Linkers as well as anonymous surveys completed individually or verbally over the phone (with the coordinator).

Based on these learnings from the service testing, two co-design workshops were held to update the service model.

Pre and post reflection and feedback was incorporated into live testing, and external evaluation interviews undertaken by Flinders University with test participants, Linkers and organisation representatives.

Phase 4- Preparing for service delivery and Conference

The final phase involved refining the service blueprint, policies and practice guides, tools, processes needed for service delivery, such as intake, and planning for ongoing prototyping needs, learning and evaluation, and identification of training needs for the network.

In preparation for delivery to begin in July 2024, an expression of interest to Deliver the Linker Service was invited from the seven organisations involved in the prototyping.

The Network Approach

When networks of people or organisations are better connected and have identified and shared purpose, they are more cohesive, productive, and resilient. A service network fosters coordination and collaboration. The Linker Network includes the Linkers, the Intake officer, any future peer/volunteer roles, and the Relationships Manager (Wyatt). The Linker Network aims to provide a community of practice, coordinate support services for clients and identify system issues.

The Partner Network includes the partner agencies and Wyatt who participate in a shared approach to delivering the Linker service, address continuous improvement and advocate for system level changes.

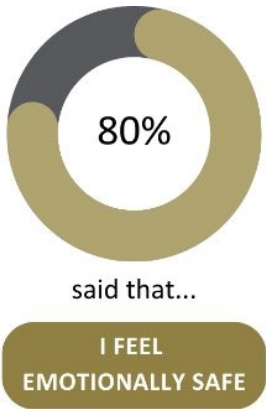
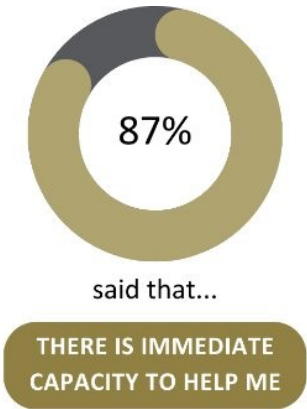
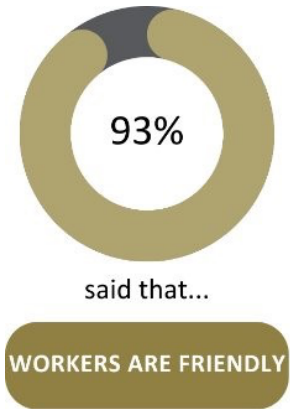
The network approach includes the way in which clients access services. People seeking support will become clients of the networked partner agencies and potentially have access to support services and peer/volunteer roles across the network.

Lived experience perspectives of how services can offer choice and control to clients when linking

With this prototype we wanted to explore what 'linking' should involve. Recognising it can be challenging to navigate service systems, we wanted to learn how to refer clients appropriately. Despite this, all too often within community services, the referral process ceases once a client is provided with the name and phone number of another agency. We know that finding the 'right service' is rarely that simple and setbacks can arise that leave clients feeling vulnerable, unsupported, and back to square one. We wanted the Linker program to go beyond this to ensure clients continue to feel safe, comfortable, and welcome once they have been connected to a new service.

Lived experience told us about linking to the right service:

- Researching and identifying the support services available to a client before you make a referral is crucial. There is no point in making a referral to a service if it's no longer active, the client doesn't qualify for support, or there is no capacity to receive the client.
- Take the time to provide warm handovers. Clients want to know about the services they are being referred to and be prepared for their intake processes.
- Tailor your referrals to each individual and offer them choice. Take time to understand each client's experience of services, acknowledging that some can be traumatic.
- Support clients to choose their own service journey by acknowledging and respecting their choices. People living with experience of financial stress often understand their needs and recognize what will assist them in moving forward.
- Work at their pace and keep their decisions at the centre. Some clients may find referrals and accessing services overwhelming.



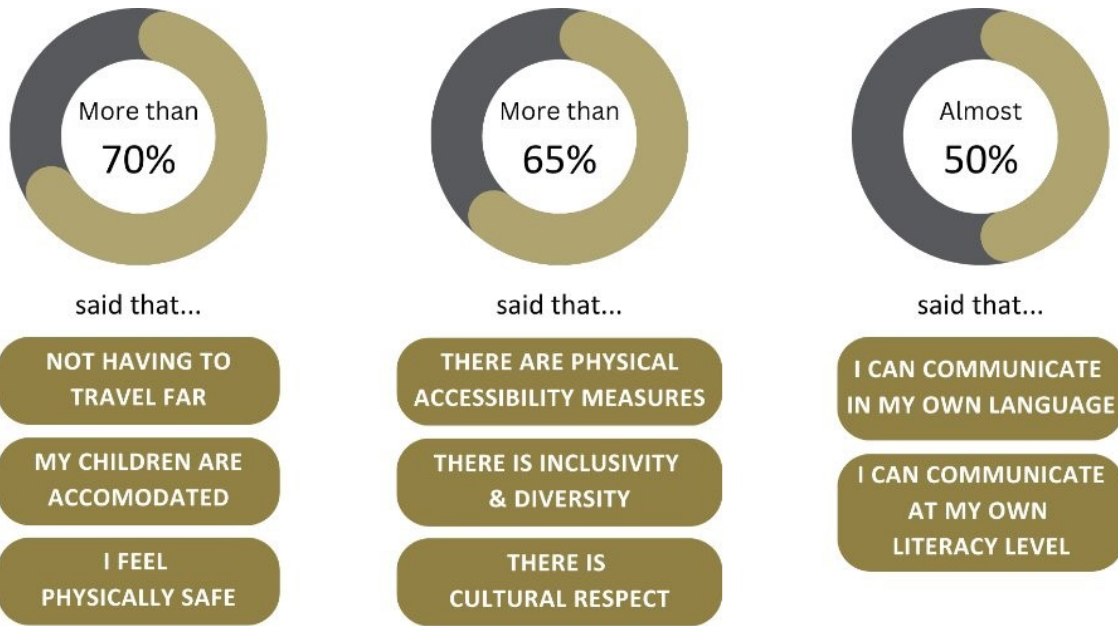


Figure 10 Accessing Services and Programs – What is Important to Users?

Lived experience perspectives of how services can Create a Safe and Welcoming Space

Through conversations, workshops and prototyping we heard from lived experience that we can create safe and welcoming space by:

- Having an open-door approach
- Being available by phone, email or in person
 - Respond in a timely manner (48 hours if urgent, otherwise, up to 3 days)
 - Check if a person has any safety concerns
 - Confirm the best contact details and preference
 - Arrange the best day and time to meet with people
- Being friendly, warm and welcoming
 - Warmly greet people
 - Be a good listener
- Being culturally considerate and respectful
- Being someone who really listens
 - Welcome people and acknowledging their effort to be present
 - Every person is and wants to feel important - what they have to say is significant.
 - Remember that difficulties and challenges for each person is relative
 - Believe what they tell you
- Working side by side and together
 - Explain the expected process and duration. Check this is okay with them

- People feel reassured when they know what to expect
- Check regularly if they need to take a break or ask them to let you know when they would like to take a break.
- At the end of your discussion, thank them for being there
- Being Family Friendly
 - Meet where children will be safe and in full view
 - Consider any cultural needs and diverse abilities
 - Ask them their preferences E.g. is it okay if I sit here? Are you comfortable? Do you need anything?
- Considering location and setting
 - Comfortable temperature
 - Calm and relaxing
 - Being in nature can be therapeutic and less 'formal'.
 - Access to the Internet
- Considering transportation needs to and from appointments
- Keeping confidentiality and being trustworthy
- Connecting people with the right service
 - Ensure staff are well trained
- Not underestimating the value of a coffee catch up

And, people with lived experience shared that to feel emotionally and mentally safe:

Feeling Emotionally and Mentally safe



Some questions to consider as we reflect on our spaces and places:

- How is your signage presented? i.e. Words and/or Images?
- How is your reception / waiting area set up? E.g., heating / cooling, drinking water, good lighting, and reading material. Would you want to visit your workplace?
- What feedback mechanisms do you use to engage and listen to your clients?

- How do you ensure your staff are supported, so they can be the best version of themselves when offering services to others?
- What staff training is provided to ensure your staff are not only skilled but warm, friendly, and helpful?
- How does your organisation deal with someone when they are obviously heightened or upset?

Lived experience perspectives of how communities can work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote South Australia

Linkers held prototyping workshops in Marree, Copley, and Beltana, as all three communities have a high percentage on Aboriginal people living there. We used a Yarning Mat that had been designed and painted by Adnyamathanha woman, Noeleen Lester for us to use. Lived Experience participants agreed to be recorded and gave their views on many of the issues they deal with living remotely.

Many of the people that were interviewed or attended the workshop were dealing with financial hardship. Living remotely placed a large burden on the cost of living as everything from food to petrol cost a lot more than it would in the larger regional centers and cities. They spoke of the lack of services in small remote towns, including health services, counseling, mental health services, domestic and family violence services and programs for young people. Although the Flying Doctor visited Maree and Leigh Creek fortnightly, it was reported that there was often a change of social worker and people were unable to establish a relationship with the worker.

Most Aboriginal people that we spoke to said that they experienced racism. Often racism would show up in the way they were spoken down to and when they were left to wait while others are served before them when going to a Service for assistance. This meant that they often avoided seeking help and went without an entitlement that they should be receiving. Some did not want to leave their community because of past treatment. We heard that it takes a lot for Aboriginal people to be able to trust who they are working with because of this. With this in mind, give the people the time they need to trust that you are doing what they want and not try and rush the process.

It is a must that people going to a remote community have a general knowledge of their Culture and always check that it is an appropriate time to visit. When unsure, ask an Elder or significant person from the community. Although the communities that I visited are beautiful and the people resilient, there is an urgent need to help people connect to services by walking alongside people to ensure that they receive the service that everyone is entitled to.

Lived experience perspectives of domestic and family violence and financial hardship and poverty

There is significant overlap between financial hardship and poverty and family and domestic violence. Older women are one of the fastest growing cohorts of homelessness (ABS 2021) with the largest driver of homelessness in Australia being family and domestic violence (AIHW 2017). Sole parent families have the highest poverty rates of all family types (ACOSS 2023) with 60% of women who are now single mothers experienced violence from a previous partner (Summers, 2022 The Choice).

The majority of lived experience participants involved in the co-design project have experience of family and domestic violence. The experience of family and domestic violence is intimately linked to the experience of poverty, as long-term impacts of violence and abuse impede pathways out of poverty.

Lived experience told us:

- They were economically dependent on a partner due to financial abuse, including debts and loans in their name with limited or no access to money/bank accounts.
- Capacity to earn/study is undermined.
- Isolation is both pervasive as a tactic by perpetrators and a reality post separation.
- Authorities are not always deemed safe or responsive.
- Exit relationships with little finances and a lack of access to resources.
- Services “drop off” post crisis.
- Family and domestic violence significantly impacts mental and physical health.
- Centrelink and income support payments are inadequate.
- Access to safe and secure housing is a key challenge.
- Post separation abuse includes perpetrators weaponizing financial processes such as legal proceedings and child support that compounds financial hardship.

What lived experience want from services:

- Consider individuals’ needs
- Manage expectations with communication and engagement
- Services that are flexible, responsive and have less barriers for meeting criteria
- Recognise elements and behaviours of financial abuse
- Housing is a huge factor in capacity to move forward
- Understand how perpetrators use and abuse systems

Lived experience perspectives of how to work with CALD communities

At the conference, we heard Lived Experience colleagues talking about their service navigation journeys and provided recommendations for the broader service sector on how to design services to make them more accessible and culturally responsive as well as culturally appropriate.

As of 30 June 2023, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics, the proportion of Australia's population born overseas increased to 30.7% in 2023 (up from 29.5% in 2022). So, approximately 1 in every 3 individuals in Australia is born overseas and will be from a CALD background. Hence, it's imperative to co-design with CALD communities and focus on improving our cultural responsiveness.

Everyone has cultural biases and their own cultural lens from which they view the world.

Reflecting on your biases requires you to be open to possibility, to learn new things about people and their culture and to be ready to acknowledge that some things you have learned are incorrect. It is important to reflect on your own cultural bias and to think carefully about the ideas and beliefs that you hold about other cultural groups.

Lived experience participants from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (CALD) told us the that change and development is needed to enable accessing services:

- Clear, plain-English information is required to break myths or misconceptions of new arrivals/migrants. With little legal education/awareness, it's easier to assume that these services might be like their home country, e.g. not informing and discussing how the police and shelter accommodation works. Provide:
 - More modes of communicating information regarding community services.
 - Awareness and education around women's rights for migrants and refugees as well as multicultural women living in Australia e.g. the emergency number 000.
 - Information pack for female new arrivals on women's rights.
- Education for girls in schools around safe relationships, safety, and emergency numbers
- Brochures in different languages in public safe spaces e.g. toilets and libraries.
- Migrant Settlement Starter information pack in different languages. The existing one is only in English.
- Employ more workers from migrant/multicultural backgrounds.
- Engage multicultural Lived Experience peer workers, and provide formal education pathways for people into these roles.
- Promote multicultural services at Airports.
- Posters of emergency contacts in different languages, like greetings in different languages.
- Support services for English-speaking migrants. Don't assume they will be able to advocate for themselves in a crisis.
- One bad service experience which is culturally inappropriate can make victims lose trust from the system e.g. religious/cultural comments
- Words have power. Using the wrong words can deter clients from accessing services in vulnerable circumstances.
- Communication between services can help avoid client re-telling their story and retraumatizing.
- Child-friendly facilities and provision of creche during appointments especially for FDV victims from CALD backgrounds whose kids have witnessed violence and wouldn't want their mother to be out-of-sight. Individuals from CALD communities usually don't have family or strong social ties for babysitting.
- Avenues/opportunities for clients to give constructive feedback for the services availed and services being open to feedback and incorporating them on an ongoing basis.
- Offering choice and control to clients. Not being forceful to act. Offering clients a choice to choose a worker and not assuming that a multicultural worker would be their preference.

Lived experience perspective of how to work in Regional/Remote communities- Mt Gambier and Pt Augusta/Northern line

A Linker located in regional South Australia, specifically Port Augusta and Mount Gambier will be invaluable to assist women over 50 years and sole parents and carers, experiencing financial vulnerability and/or disadvantage. Linkers can offer support by walking alongside a client and addressing underlying issues that impact upon families and our ability to connect into the wider community.

Regional areas experience a range of barriers with accessing services. Travel, time and cost constraints uniquely impact upon regional communities. Furthermore, people from surrounding smaller country

areas regularly travel large distances to main regional cities such as Port Augusta and Mount Gambier to access the closest service available. Additionally, accessing services, long waiting times and navigating services are met with some difficulties.

In regional areas the voices of lived and living experience participants report that people often do not know what services are available to them, furthermore services that are often needed, such as domestic and family violence services, transport facilities, drug and alcohol and mental health services do not exist in regional areas, or if the service does exist they are limited with what they can provide. Often, people are directed to Adelaide to access emergency health care and rehabilitation services.

A Linker located regionally will ensure that service users or clients are connected to the right service, provide support for travel reimbursements such as Patient Assistance Travel Scheme, (PATS), and assistance with seeking financial counselling, support with social connections, and provide an advocacy service to help bring much needed services to regional areas that may not yet be available.

Moving forward – service delivery

Five partner agencies will commence service delivery from July 2024, with funding committed for delivery and evaluation for five years. This will see a tested model, co-designed and co-evaluated with people with lived and living experience of poverty move into ongoing, long-term delivery of the Linker Service.

A central, part-time Intake Officer will be recruited to support the partner agencies. A part-time Relationships Manager (Wyatt) will oversee the Linker Network partnerships.

During the prototyping phases it was clear that a fundamental element of the Linker service was yet to be implemented is the inclusion of lived experience peers. While prototyping explored what roles and tasks peers might take, a model for practice is still to be tested and implemented. This peer model will be developed and tested during the first year of service delivery.

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