

Lived experience persona narratives

These narratives have been gathered or developed from previous consultation activities, commissioning cycles, client feedback, presenting needs or service provider reporting for the Child, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP).

(*) all names have been changed

What we have heard:

To improve, we regularly listen to the experiences of Canberrans accessing services, supports, and programs. Generally, lived experience participants have told us there are opportunities to improve:

- Consistent levels of respectful customer service to vulnerable people
- Appropriate support and adjustments to people with disability (including communication support)
- Specialised support for people experiencing domestic, family, and sexual violence.
- Specialised support (or dedicated team) for First Nations people
- Services that have a trauma informed lens to delivery

Commissioning for Outcomes

Child, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP)

Client A – Lily* and her parents Kim* and Lan*

Clients A are a family who recently migrated to Australia from Vietnam. Kim and Lan have a daughter Lily (3 years old) and Lily has developmental delays that were identified by a childcare service and the family was referred to a community organisation for assessment and case management. The case management support would include working with the National Disability and Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Both Kim and Lan have basic English and have struggled to navigate services and systems within Australia. The case manager has helped Lily's parents navigate the NDIS with the support of a translator so they can make informed decisions about Lily's care.

As Lily reached school age, the case manager supported her school application and ensured that the NDIS supports were extended to the school. The parents wanted some social interaction for Lily and themselves so through the support and research of the local area the case manager was able to organise for Lily to join the local sports club. The case manager also enrolled the husband and wife into English classes where they were able to connect with new people.

As the family became more familiar with the case manager they were able to share more of their goals and family concerns. Kim revealed to the case worker his personal mental health concerns, that he did not want to tell his wife about due to the stress she was already experiencing. Eventually it all became too much, and Kim ended up in hospital. The case worker supported the wife by helping her to understand what was happening to Kim and to ensure he was getting the right supports.

The case worker was able to explain that seeking support for mental health wasn't a shameful issue and that they can get confidential help. The case manager advocated with government mental health services but was unable to find an appropriate service that was accessible within a reasonable timeframe. The Case worker was able to connect the family with a Community run intensive outreach mental health program targeted at supporting people following an acute episode of mental illness and to prevent relapse.

<i>THINK and FEEL - What do they think and feel?</i>	<i>SEE - What do they see?</i>
We have someone who can help us. Anxious. Shame.	There are places and spaces that are safe for us.
<i>HEAR - What do they hear?</i>	<i>SAY and DO - What do they say and do?</i>
You are not alone.	When we have support, we can do this
<i>PAIN - What fears, frustrations or obstacles are they facing?</i>	<i>GAIN - What are they hoping to get? What does a good outcome look like?</i>
Language. Ability to navigate complex systems.	Network. Community connection. Advocate and support system. Supports that improve wellbeing.

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Client B – Wiradjuri woman with two children

Client B, Jill is currently receiving women’s homelessness accommodation and support services. She is a Wiradjuri woman and mother. She has experienced trauma, domestic violence, and homelessness. Jill is living with trauma, and this has impacted her parenting of Mark (6 years old) and Tim (4 years old).

Jill and her children have been engaging with ACT Care and Protection who have raised concerns about Jill’s parenting. Jill has worked with her First Nation Case worker who referred the family to a CYFSP parenting program.

Jill was anxious about the arrangement and fearful her children would be removed and placed in care. Jill says that her experience with some case workers is that they lack life experience and were unable to relate to real life experiences of clients. She discussed the barriers to access support and how these are compounded when dealing with a case worker without the necessary skills to support a vulnerable person. *“We are usually at the lowest point in life, so we don’t know how to reach out. Personally, I’ve got really, terrible anxiety and it’s hard to reach out.”- Jill*

Together, Jill and the case worker co-create a plan and the case worker connects the family to the Circles of Security parenting program at the local children and family centre. Transport is provided to Jill and family so they can access the centre. Jill is less anxious and feels supported, particularly by a case worker who can advocate and support her and help her to navigate parenting challenges. *“Sometimes I thought I couldn’t do it and my case worker was there to give me tips, to break down parenting into small choices and to help me get the most out of the program.”- Jill*

The program provides trauma informed care and is family focused. Through the same child and family centre, the family can engage in playgroups and other supports for their wellbeing.

Jill felt understood, particularly that she was processing trauma and how this impacted her parenting. *“I have a way to check in with myself, to be kinder to myself and to then show up as a better parent. I use the breathing skill we learnt in the parenting program all the time.” – Jill*

The case worker checks in regularly with Jill and with the program providers at the child and family centre. The case worker provides ongoing support and guidance to Jill to help her and the family work towards their goals. *“Jill and her children are doing well. Jill was anxious and sometimes overwhelmed by parenting responsibilities. Being there for her as well as the program and other supports have helped her gain confidence and skills which are changing the way the family heals, relates, and cares for each other.” – Case worker for Jill*

The case worker can see healing, growth in parenting skills and improving outcomes for the children and family. ACT Care and Protection can step down their involvement and the case worker continues to work with the family to support them in maintaining their wellbeing. *“My kids are happy; they’ve settled in well at school and preschool. I feel like I can be the parent they need and that I know where help is when I need it too.” – Jill*

<i>THINK and FEEL - What do they think and feel?</i>	<i>SEE - What do they see?</i>
Anxious and fearful shifting to confident, trusting and supported. Case worker doesn’t have experience. That my children will be taken away from me.	Safe places and spaces for children and parents. Changes in the way they relate to their children. Happiness in their children and how they interact.
<i>HEAR - What do they hear?</i>	<i>SAY and DO - What do they say and do?</i>
You can do this. We can help and support you. It is ok to feel anxious.	I was anxious but now I know I can do this, with support. I have some skills I can use.
<i>PAIN - What fears, frustrations or obstacles are they facing?</i>	<i>GAIN - What are they hoping to get? What does a good outcome look like?</i>
Hard to find support when you are just trying to have a place to live. Needed people to help me navigate what support is available. Needed transport to get to the centre.	I have a better relationship with my children, they feel safe and supported. We are all healing and I know I can turn to people if I need parenting support.

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Clients C – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse family with two children

Clients C have lived in Canberra for two years since migrating to Australia from India. Aryan and his wife Dayamai have two children Jey (7 years old) and Mia (3 years old). For Aryan and Dayamai, English is a second language. Aryan and Jey are fluent and Dayamai relies on them to communicate until her English improves. Dayamai sought medical care for Mia who was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. The doctor then raised concerns about Mia’s health and welfare that prompted referral to A Community CALD integrated family support service.

Assessment reveals the family have experienced significant stress, with trauma, change through migration and periods of unemployment without financial support and undiagnosed post-partum depression. This collective experience is influencing the health and wellbeing of children, and Aryan and Dayamai need mental health and parenting support and assistance and financial assistance.

Aryan and Dayamai expressed anxiety about navigating the support system and raised concerns that if they “rocked the boat” they would be deported. Aryan and Dayamai say they had received some payments from the Australian Government but were missing the connected family and support they had in India to help with the children. They had reached out with the Indian Community networks in Canberra but were unable to find the right support. Dayamai said how hard it was to find information in language that could help her find help or other mothers. *“I am a good mum and I love my son and daughter. I knew something wasn’t right with Mia, but I didn’t have anyone who could help me understand what was happening.”* - Clients C

Together, deported. Aryan and Dayamai and the support service co-create a plan and the family was connected with a counsellor, who was able to work with them in their language, Dayamai was also connected with a playgroup with other CALD mothers. The playgroup provided an opportunity for Clients C to nurture their child’s development through play and is an opportunity for Dayamai to connect with other mothers going through a similar experience., *“Every Tuesday I have somewhere to go with Mia and I can ask questions about how to care for her and my family. I feel like I don’t have to pretend everything is ok anymore. I have people who understand my family.”* – Dayamai

The Service was also able to connect with India Association of Canberra to establish a relationship which helped the family to connect with others in the community through cultural events. The service also helped the family finds a pre-school program for Mia and an English language program for Dayamai. *“I feel like I have more community around me. Every day I am learning and meeting new people who have had experiences like me.”* – Dayamai *“I was worried about Dayamai and I can see she is more confident.”* – Aryan

The service regularly catches up with the family and checks in with the network established around the family.. *“the family had a lot of uncertainty and difficulty finding the right supports to help them settle and thrive in Canberra. While the plan supported the whole family, we worked closely with Dayamai to improve her skills, confidence and connections which is influencing the wellbeing of the whole family.”* Aryan and Dayamai’s Case worker

The case worker continues to work with the family to maintain their wellbeing and health. *“We thought moving to Australia was a mistake but now we feel it is a blessing. My children are happy and healthy. We know how to support our children and that we have support too, when we need it.”* – Dayamai

<i>THINK and FEEL - What do they think and feel?</i>	<i>SEE - What do they see?</i>
Afraid, lonely, and disconnected to confident, trusting and supported. That my family will be deported. .	Safe places and spaces for children and parents. Changes in the way they relate to their children. More community connections.
<i>HEAR - What do they hear?</i>	<i>SAY and DO - What do they say and do?</i>
You have put your child at risk. There is help and support.	I thought I made a big mistake. I can reach out to people for help.
<i>PAIN - What fears, frustrations or obstacles are they facing?</i>	<i>GAIN - What are they hoping to get? What does a good outcome look like?</i>
Hard to find support in language. Needed people to help me navigate what support is available. Needed people who understand my background and challenges.	My daughter is well. My family is connected to community. We have people and places we can turn if we need support.

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Client D – 12-year-old Sarah*

Client D, Sarah was in foster care for 18 months when she was three and then returned to the care of her Aunty. Sarah is in her first year of high school and has been hanging with a group of young people, some of whom have been charged and entered the youth justice system. While Sarah has not been charged, she has received a formal warning from ACT Policing for shoplifting and underage drinking.

Sarah’s Aunty is concerned for her wellbeing and for the path she is on that could lead to the youth justice system. Sarah has also been absent from school and has been referred by both the ACT Police and the school social worker to a community Youth Support Service.

A Youth Worker at the service places Sarah in a groups program that utilises high adrenaline, positive, safe risk-taking activities as a platform for engaging disengaged and vulnerable young people in a positive mentoring environment. Sarah says she is struggling with her mental health and that no one understand her but her friends and that’s why she hangs out with them.

Sarah says she will go to the Program as she doesn’t have to go to school, but she expects it to be lame. *“I know my Aunty is upset with me, but she doesn’t understand what’s going on. I don’t like school and sitting still all the time and getting yelled at because I am dumb. I am not dumb; I just can’t do some things.”* – Sarah

Youth worker meets with Sarah one day per week for 10 weeks during the school term. Together, with other young people, they explore topics and experiences such as domestic violence, consent and goal-setting. After the session, they do an activity such as downhill mountain-biking, motorbiking, welding, bushwalking and ball sports. *“I really like mountain-biking – that was way better than being at school and I was able to go on one of the hard trails.”* – Sarah

The youth worker checks in regularly with Client D, her school social worker and her Aunty. Through the same program, Sarah also participates in a day dedicated just to girls or female identifying young people. *“Sarah came to the program angry and disengaged with low self-esteem. While Sarah still has challenges, we worked closely to build her confidence through activities and to find an interest around which she could develop skills. There is no-doubt Sarah has experienced trauma and we have been able to connect her with other supports to help her heal and manage her wellbeing.”* – Sarah Youth worker

The youth worker continues to work with Sarah and her Aunty to maintain her wellbeing, grow her interests, set goals and build new positive relationships. Sarah has not interacted with ACT Police while participating in the Program and her attendance at school has increased. *“Things aren’t perfect, but they are better. [Youth worker] has been really helpful as she can talk to my Aunty or school when I don’t know what to say or do. I know people like me now and I have something I can do that is fun.”* – Sarah

THINK and FEEL - What do they think and feel?	SEE - What do they see?
Confused. Lonely. Misunderstood. People think I am dumb To confident and capable.	Adults getting angry. People trying to control me.
HEAR - What do they hear?	SAY and DO - What do they say and do?
That I am dumb and naughty. To – that I can do things I put my mind to.	This is lame. I know what I need. To this is fun. I have people I can turn to.
PAIN - What fears, frustrations or obstacles are they facing?	GAIN - What are they hoping to get? What does a good outcome look like?
Peer pressure. Transport and funding for positive activities. Emotional language and awareness.	Positive relationships. Connection with people who understand. Skills to heal and manage. Opportunities to try new things.

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Child, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP)

Client E – 10-year-old Rowan*

Client E, Rowan, was experiencing learning challenges at school and his teacher/school social worker met with his Mum to find therapeutic supports for him. As a young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student, Rowan was referred to an integrated youth service delivered by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation

Rowan’s mum felt she had let him down. She described how Rowan didn’t want to go to school and that each morning was a challenge to get him into the classroom. *“I could see that Rowan was having difficulty reading and understanding letters and numbers. We were trying to get him assessed but the wait -time were long.”* Rowan’s - Mum

A First Nations family support worker worked with Rowan’s family to assess their needs and to co-create a plan with goals for Rowan’s learning. As part of the plan, Rowan could access therapeutic services for an underlying learning challenge and participate in a boys mentoring group and a tailored Tutoring Program. *“Rowan had an underlying learning challenge which we were able to diagnose and then build supports to address and manage.”* Rowan’s Youth Support Worker

Through the Youth support worker and the programs delivered within the integrated youth service, Rowan received 10 x 1 hour tutoring sessions that were tailored to his needs. Rowan said his tutor made him feel smart and made the words make sense. *“[Tutor] is really good and it doesn’t feel like school. Sometimes we are outside and I can read things now.”* – Rowan

The family support worker continues to work with Rowan, his family and connects with his teachers to support Rowan’s wellbeing and to help him reach his learning goals.

THINK and FEEL - What do they think and feel?	SEE - What do they see?
Before support - Concerned. Anxious. I don’t belong at school. After support - Supported and I can go to school.	Before support - Disappointing adults. Other children doing things they can’t. After support -
HEAR - What do they hear?	SAY and DO - What do they say and do?
Before support - That I am dumb. After support - I can do this.	After support - I can read now. I know people like me.
PAIN - What fears, frustrations or obstacles are they facing?	GAIN - What are they hoping to get? What does a good outcome look like?
Wait times for assessment. Culturally safe environments for learning.	Literacy. Cultural safety and wellbeing. Belonging.

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Client F – Cody – 25 year old young person

Client F – Cody was new to Canberra and had come to the service after the Police suggested she might benefit from it. Cody has a long, quite serious criminal history, with offences including assault occasioning actual bodily harm. She lives with complex and profound experiences of cumulative trauma, including significant family violence and abuse and then being surrendered into the care of CYPS in her early teens.

At 25 years old, Cody is under the care of the Public Guardian and Trustee. She lives with disabilities that have resulted in the allocation of a National Disability and Insurance Scheme (NDIS) package, and is extremely vulnerable to manipulation, coercion, and exploitation. She is actively using drugs and has concerns around her mental health but has been denied access to mental health supports due to drug use.

Cody was very shy and quiet initially, only engaging sporadically and not really staying in the centre if there were other young people present. She spoke very little and was often hard to understand. She did not eat while in the centre and only drank coffee. The team allowed Cody to make the space what she needed it to be, and only engaged with her on her own terms, so long as she was following the rules of the space and being safe. Gradually, Cody began to tell the team about her life and said she like coming to the service because nobody is paid to pretend to be her friend, and nobody treats her like a child.

After five months of engaging with the service, Cody has attended several youth events with the team. One event provided an opportunity for Cody to interact with authority figures in a different way and is now able to have calm conversations with ACT Police colleagues who come along.

When asked what Cody feels is different for now, Cody said *“I’ve got somewhere to go where people are happy to see me”*.

Since turning 26 this year, Cody will no longer be eligible for the service. The Service has been working hard to connect Cody to other meaningful supports, as well as help build Cody’s capacity to be assertive when existing services are not providing the support they are supposed to. As part of thinking creatively about how Cody can remain an important member of our community, we have been exploring supporting her to get a Working with Vulnerable People Card and opportunities to volunteer with the service with clear boundaries, structure and a meaningful way.

The Guardian is very supportive of this since Cody has never been invited to, much less interested in remaining part of a community before. The Guardian was also pleased that an unpaid work experience would give Cody some employment skills in the event that she wanted to consider working.

<i>THINK and FEEL - What do they think and feel?</i>	<i>SEE - What do they see?</i>
<i>Before support – isolated. After support – engaged with other people and a better relationship with ACT Police and other authorities</i>	<i>Before support – people look scared when I am around. People use me to get what they want After support – a person who they trust</i>
<i>HEAR - What do they hear?</i>	<i>SAY and DO - What do they say and do?</i>
<i>Before support – No one wants me around, what is the point in doing “the right thing” After support – I have a place I feel welcome and safe</i>	<i>Before support – I can’t do this After support – I have someone who can help me do this</i>
<i>PAIN - What fears, frustrations or obstacles are they facing?</i>	<i>GAIN - What are they hoping to get? What does a good outcome look like?</i>
<i>Isolation Sense of control Feeling and being safe</i>	<i>Safety Ongoing support Stay out of criminal justice system</i>