"We have the expertise": Lived experience methodologies that promote participation, influence and leadership in homelessness research.

Helen Matthews and Professor Robyn Martin

RMIT UNIVERSITY

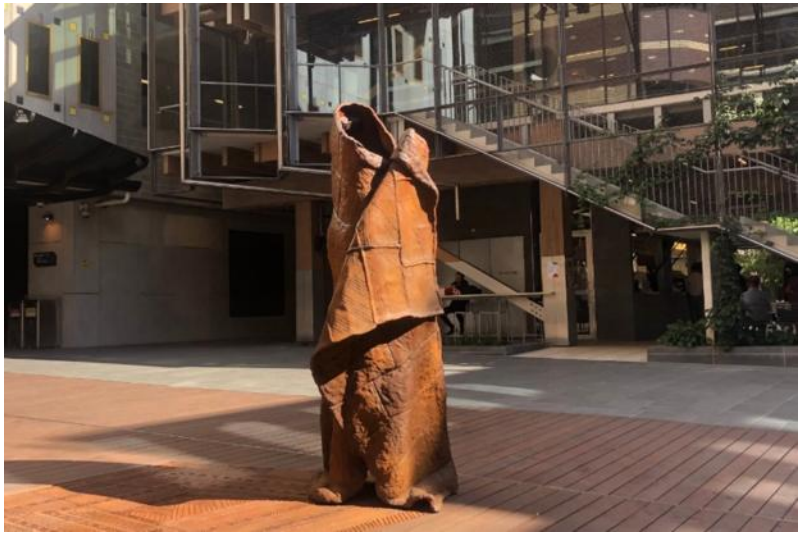
CRICOS provider number: 00122A | RTO Code: 3046

Our commitment to Reconciliation

RMIT is committed to redefining its relationship in working with and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **self-determination**.

The University's goal is to achieve lasting transformation by maturing its values, culture, policy and structures in a way that **embeds reconciliation** in everything we do.

In line with the principles of **Bundjil**, we are changing our ways of 'knowing, working and being' to support sustainable reconciliation and activate a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, students and community.



In 2018, the Wurrunggi Biik – Law of the Land public artwork was installed in the New Academic Street to signify a long-lasting spiritual connection to Country.

The study

Martin, R., Stubbings, J., Corrone, C., Cataldo, M., David, C., Edwards, K., Fisk, L., Jarldorn, M., Lovett, D., Maihi, A., Martin, S., Matthews, H., Nipperess, S., Thirkell, C., Watson, J. & Zufferey, C. (2024) *Lived experience participation and influence in homelessness and housing policy, service design and practice,* AHURI Final Report No. 433, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited



lived experience; Lived Experience; lived expertise – defined (Cataldo et al 2026)

Lived experience: Difficult life events that lead a person to change their ideas about themselves and the future

Lived Experience: Capitalised to reflect the distinct discipline, body of knowledge and practice wisdom enacted by those who are leading change and intentionally applying lived experience to improve systems and people's lives.

Lived Experience leadership: "transformative social movement that operates across both formal and informal spaces to restore justice and drive systemic change .. builds relationships, coalitions and movements within and beyond organisations … confronting epistemic and structural injustices – including colonisation" (Cataldo et al., 2026, p. 9)

Democratising knowledge (or learning from each other)

- Broadening ideas about evidence and knowledge
- Enabling access for different types of knowledge (reducing the dependence on colonial knowledges and practices)
- Examining power as it relates to knowledge
- Whose or which type of knowledge is valued?
- How can epistemic injustice be addressed through research?

What is lived experience research?

- Starts with researcher positionality and reflexivity (who am I, what is my motivation, how do I think about and enact power …?)
- Committed to epistemic justice and democratisation of knowledge
- Relational
- Flexible, dynamic, evolving, responsive
- Based on shared understandings
- Concerned with “repair and reconnection” (Kehoe 2026, p. 2)
- Three stages proposed by Kehoe (2026, p.2): “acknowledgement and truth telling … restoration and relational repair … codesign and collective future making”



Trust, relationships and authenticity

- Without relationship, the work is limited and transactional
- It is not a performance – it is an authentic meeting of people with different life experiences, worldviews and ideas
- The BS detector – authenticity shows and matters
- Rupture happens – relationship facilitates restoration and respect
- Kehoe (2026, p. 4) argues:

Restoration does not require agreement, forgiveness or closure. Its function is to enable participation to move from coerced or extractive engagement towards voluntary and ethically grounded collaboration through active listening.



Time, resources, pressure and demands (or the work is what is in front of us)

- Deep recognition of the pressure on researchers
- These pressures lead many of us to adopt a task orientation
- The work is what is in front of us (an unrelated conversation about cloud watching as an example)
- Yet, the time invested in building relationship and demonstrating trustworthiness save time in the long run

Where to start?

- Create spaces for truth telling
- Explore previous experiences with research/ers (epistemic justice/injustice, silencing/genuine influence, tokenism/genuine participation, extractive/generative)?
- Listen deeply, don't be defensive, remain open to the explicit and tacit messages about what would make it worthwhile for Lived Experience Researchers to collaborate with you
- Always have budget to compensate Lived Experience Researchers and Consultants at academic rates (not vouchers)
- Be willing to change and do things differently – decentre yourself and your knowledge or preferred ways of doing things
- Find a Lived Experience mentor (or two)
- Make a start and critically reflect on yourself



References

Cataldo, M., Martin, R., Ballantyne, P., Hayes, S., & Dole, K. (2026). *On Our Own Terms: Emerging insights report. Systems change through Lived Experience Leadership – unearthing practices and possibilities of lived experience-led change*. RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. https://www.rmit.edu.au/research/our-research/enabling-impact-platforms/case-studies/on-our-own-terms

Kehoe, M., (2026). The Cycle of Equitable Codesign' Using Restorative Practice Principles to Address Epistemic Injustice and Advance Codesign in Mental Health. *Health Expectations,* pp.1-5. https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.70746