



Survivor perspectives on institutional use of CSAM

SURVIVOR PERSPECTIVES ON INSTITUTIONAL USE OF CSAM

Project Evaluation Report

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Public



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge the strength and resilience of all victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age or ability.

We affirm that efforts to combat child sexual abuse must be informed by the voices and lived experience of victims and survivors.



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	1
INTRODUCTION	3
PROJECT BACKGROUND	3
WHO WE ARE: ABOUT AILECS AND BRAVEHEARTS.....	3
OUR COMMITMENT	4
PART 1: PROJECT OUTCOMES EVALUATION SUMMARY	5
Impact area: Trauma informed	5
Impact area: Rights-based	6
Impact area: Equity in Power and Control	7
Impact area: Demonstrating accountability	8
Impact area: Shared understandings	10
Part 2: THE EVALUATION EVENT	11
THE WORKSHOP	11
Participants	11
Safety and Wellbeing	11
ENSURING SURVIVOR CENTRICITY AND TRAUMA INFORMED RESPONSIVENESS	13
OUTCOMES AND KEY THEMES	14
1. Communication.....	14
2. Accountability.....	16
3. Agency and Choice	17
4. Trust and Safety	17
5. Utilisation of Lived Experience.....	18
6. Language	19
7. Participant Experience Overall.	20
RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS	22
Limitations and Challenges.....	22
Key Considerations	22



INTRODUCTION

The report provides an evaluation of the Survivor Perspectives on Institutional Use of CSAM research project. It comprises two parts – the first being an evaluation summary of the project outcomes in the context of the project’s stated goals; and the second being a reflective description of outcomes from a one-day victim and survivor in-person evaluation and feedback event facilitated by the research team in Brisbane, Queensland. The purpose of this event was to bring together victims and survivors who had participated in interviews for the Survivor Perspectives on Institutional Use of CSAM research project, to seek their views on the project design, process and engagement.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In order to support the investigation, prosecution, and prevention of child sexual abuse and online distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), law enforcement and legal entities make use of CSAM in a range of ways. In some cases, and in accordance with relevant legislative and ethical standards, this may also extend to provision of image/video or text access to researchers and data scientists as part of efforts to develop effective tools and responses to counter online exploitation.

Funded by the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse, our project, *Survivor Perspectives on Institutional use of CSAM*, promotes the incorporation of the views and needs of victims and survivors in relation to uses of material documenting abuse, held by law enforcement for the purposes of case investigation. This means engaging victims and survivors with lived experience of CSAM in the research process, and helping to break down the stigma around CSAM that may be creating barriers for victims and survivors when it comes to asking questions or expressing their needs about how material depicting abuse is handled after it comes into police custody. Our project engaged with adult victims and survivors, with research and advocacy organisations, and with members of law enforcement and justice professions in a collaborative and trauma-informed study.

The research findings and project recommendations will help guide Australian and international organisations to recognise and support survivor needs, experiences, and wellbeing as an integral part of procedural, technological and operational design (see: “Calls to Action & Recommendations” report).

WHO WE ARE: ABOUT AILECS AND BRAVEHEARTS

AiLECS (Artificial Intelligence for Law Enforcement and Community Safety) was launched as a research lab in July 2019 in a formal partnership between Monash University and the Australian Federal Police. Evolving out of research collaboration on accelerating digital forensics and countering online child exploitation, AiLECS has subsequently grown to a Monash University Research Centre that brings together Australia’s largest university and Australia’s national police agency to research how AI can help create a safer and more just community through effective, ethical, and explainable technology and data practices.

Bravehearts Foundation is a national non-government organisation working to protect children. Established in 1997, Bravehearts has been solely dedicated to the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse and exploitation. We work holistically to educate, empower and protect children and young people from child sexual abuse and exploitation, and advocate for the rights of children and adult survivors by supporting evidenced-based legislative reform. Bravehearts aims to stop the stigma around child sexual abuse and exploitation through innovative research,



public awareness campaigns and community education, and by collaborating with sector partners as we strive to eradicate child sexual abuse.

OUR COMMITMENT

As outlined in the project's "Engagement and Evaluation Strategy", the research team is committed to a process that is transdisciplinary, participatory, and strengths-based in its approach, that is trauma-informed and prioritises the safety of participants. An impact and outcomes model, illustrated in Figure 1, has been developed to integrate the research into a broader framework aimed at fostering survivor-centered stewardship of CSAM:

Change goal	INSTITUTIONAL (RE)USE OF CSAM IS SURVIVOR-CENTRED				
Impact areas	TRAUMA INFORMED	RIGHTS BASED	EQUITY IN POWER/CONTROL	DEMONSTRATING ACCOUNTABILITY	SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS
High level outcomes	1. Holding and reusing organisations in all sectors are implementing trauma-informed & healing-informed approaches to how CSAM is managed and used once it enters police custody.	2. Decision makers across all sectors within the stakeholder environment champion survivor-centred regulation to govern how CSAM is reused.	3. Victims and survivors have the knowledge and agency to make choices regarding institutional (re)use of CSAM.	4. Socio-technical frameworks are in place and operating effectively to support consistency and transparency of approach at systems level.	5. All stakeholders are working from the same set of assumptions about how CSAM may be used in order to create better outcomes for victims and survivors of both CSAM and child sexual abuse more broadly.
Intermediate outcomes	<p>1.1 Protocol exist to ensure that law enforcement discuss and notify how CSAM is managed and reused with victims and survivors and/or their parents/guardians in ways that are trauma-informed, consistent, and meaningful</p> <p>1.2 Guidance exists so that all sectors making use of CSAM understand and treat the material as being deeply affective to victims and survivors (not abstract data)</p> <p>1.3 Resources and referral paths for victims and survivors are working effectively and holistically</p>	<p>2.1 Practitioners and policymakers see evidence that survivor-centred approach can facilitate more effective use of CSAM in ways that counter CSE and also support victim and survivor healing</p> <p>2.2 Attention is focused on moral rights of victims and survivors, and on how the preferences of victims and survivors can be integrated into systems that process generic or individual decisions</p>	<p>3.1 Evidence of the views and preferences of a range of victims and survivors regarding (re)use of CSAM is being documented and communicated</p> <p>3.2 Support for dynamic consent is embedded in human and technical systems</p> <p>3.3 Victims and survivors have opportunities to influence and utilise policies that govern the (re)use of CSAM after it enters police custody</p>	<p>4.1 Interoperable technical systems to manage CSAM and associated metadata are equipped to capture and share survivor preferences and impact statements</p> <p>4.2 Policymakers have access to trustworthy evidence of the outcomes being achieved via (re)use mechanisms</p> <p>4.3 Victims and survivors have simple, secure, and reliable access to information about where CSAM in which they are depicted has been used after entering police custody, if and when they choose to know</p>	<p>5.1 Existing use cases (ways that CSAM is or can be used after entering police custody) are clearly articulated and comprehensible to all stakeholders, inclusive of victims and survivors and regardless of sector knowledge or expertise.</p> <p>5.2 Potential benefits and harms associated with CSAM reuse are acknowledged and documented.</p> <p>5.3 Policymakers champion and effect greater standardisation across jurisdictions, moving to greater legislative and regulatory harmonisation</p>

Change goal	INSTITUTIONAL REUSE OF CSAM IS SURVIVOR-CENTRED				
Impact areas	TRAUMA INFORMED	RIGHTS BASED	EQUITY IN POWER/CONTROL	DEMONSTRATING ACCOUNTABILITY	SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS
Supporting hypotheses	<p>If victims and survivors encounter trauma-informed environments where their experience is that at any point in time they have options and can access support, then they will feel safe to participate in institutional processes</p> <p>If law enforcement employs trauma informed approaches in all aspects of dealing with victims and survivors, then the capacity of those individuals to participate in institutional processes is improved, which leads to more complete and robust evidence</p> <p>If law enforcement employs trauma informed approaches in all aspects of dealing with victims and survivors, the capacity of those individuals to engage with people and processes who are seeking to protect them is strengthened, which better remedies the loss of trust experienced through child abuse</p>	<p>Victims and survivors have a right to understand how CSAM in which they are depicted is used after it comes into police custody</p> <p>Victims and survivors have a right to express their preferences regarding how CSAM in which they are depicted is used after it comes into police custody, should they choose to do, and at the points in time when it becomes important for them to do so</p> <p>Victims and survivors have a right to have their boundaries and preferences regarding how CSAM in which they are depicted is used respected UNLESS use is directed at identifying and/or locating a specific child deemed to be in active danger</p>	<p>If victims and survivors can express preferences for how CSAM in which they are depicted is used, at the point/s in time when they choose to do so - and be assured those preferences will be acted on - then as adults they can claim a measure of control over experiences in which they were powerless as a child</p> <p>If victims and survivors know what the potential (re)use cases for CSAM are, they are in a better position to express their views and preferences to law enforcement about what happens to CSAM in which they are identified as a victim once it enters into police custody</p> <p>If victims and survivors have visibility and understanding of where/why their preferences can and cannot be taken into account, they are less likely to feel misled if an expressed preference is not acted on.</p> <p>If victims and survivors know what the potential (re)use cases for CSAM are, they are in a better position to express general views and preferences to researchers about what happens to CSAM once it enters into police custody (including material which depicts victims who are unidentified or known to be deceased)</p>	<p>If downstream users of CSAM within, or sanctioned by, law enforcement ask for and listen to the views and tolerances of victims and survivors regarding institutional (re)use of CSAM, then they will have a clearer mandate for use</p> <p>If downstream users of CSAM within, or sanctioned by, law enforcement ask for and listen to the views and tolerances of victims and survivors regarding institutional (re)use of CSAM, then they will obtain a deeper understanding of where they need to prioritise safeguards in order to minimise unintended consequences and/or potential harms to victims and survivors</p> <p>If technical systems to manage CSAM can capture and update relevant preferences of victims and survivors in relation to data governance and reuse of CSAM, then mandates for preference-based use remain fit for purpose through time</p> <p>If technical systems to manage CSAM can capture and update relevant preferences of victims and survivors in relation to data governance and reuse of CSAM, and track where those preferences are queried/activated, then sharing and reuse actions and/or notifications relating to law enforcement, legal, or research purposes will be more transparent to victims and survivors if they want that information</p>	<p>If all stakeholders are having conversations about how CSAM is (re)used, and the requirements around that use - and share common understandings of the types and purposes of reuse, and the impacts on and for victims and survivors - it builds greater confidence for all parties that these actions contribute to safety and success at micro and macro levels when countering CSE and CSAM.</p>

Figure 1 – Impact and outcomes model



PART 1: PROJECT OUTCOMES EVALUATION SUMMARY

The evaluation event aimed to assess the five key areas of research participation as outlined in the impact and outcomes model (Figure 1). Feedback from throughout the project, along with outcomes from the evaluation workshop has been aligned, along with the research methodology, with these impact areas below in Table 1:

IMPACT AREA: TRAUMA INFORMED

Goals	Measures	Indicators of achievement against measures	Evidence
<p>Participants have a research experience that prioritises safety, reciprocity, and care.</p> <p>Researchers respect and respond to mutable circumstances - <i>meeting people where they are on any given day</i>.</p>	<p>a) Interview participants report feeling safe, valued, and supported to participate in ways that accommodate their individual needs.</p> <p>b) Percentage of survey completions (how many people who start the survey go on to complete it).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants express having had an overall positive research experience• Participants express positive personal impacts associated with involvement• Participants describe ways in which the project facilitated their feeling supported and/or safe• Survey conversion rate: majority of people who begin the questionnaire go on to submit responses	<p>Quantitative (100% would do again) & qualitative (verbatim) feedback from Brisbane ...</p> <p>incl. attachment w/ responses to questions:</p> <p><i>Knowing what you know, would you make the same decision again to participate in the project?</i></p> <p><i>What are some of the words you would use to describe your involvement with the project?</i></p> <p><i>Did you feel safe?</i></p> <p>Survey completion rate</p>



IMPACT AREA: RIGHTS-BASED

Goals	Measures	Indicators of achievement against measures	Evidence
Research methodology recognises, champions, and protects the moral, legal, and human rights of participants; and of CSAM victims and survivors more broadly	<p>a) Project provides access to tools and information to support a spectrum of needs for victims and survivors who want to engage with the project and share their views</p> <p>b) Demographic diversity among participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants verify that mechanisms/info (consent forms, online questionnaire, etc) were accessible and understandable• Participants report new or enhanced knowledge and/or understanding of the (lawful/sanctioned) ways CSAM is used• Participants express rights or requirements they consider most important as principles to guide sanctioned use of CSAM• Demographic information collected as part of anonymous survey responses	<p>Brisbane victim and survivor event feedback (qualitative)</p> <p>Demographic overview per findings report, including limitations (can note this was also identified by participants)</p>



IMPACT AREA: EQUITY IN POWER AND CONTROL

Goals	Measures	Indicators of achievement against measures	Evidence
Relevant lived experience is embedded at multiple levels of the project to influence evidence and policy design, on the principle of: <i>nothing about us without us</i>	<p>a) Significant lived experience representation on project advisory group</p> <p>b) Peer researcher as key member of research team</p> <p>c) Research participants report feeling heard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation by victims and survivors extends beyond research subjects • Lived experience participation includes representation in roles with power to advise and influence decision making • Participants are compensated equitably for their time and expertise. • Participants verify if (and how) they felt heard and/or empowered, and describe having gained or created positive value from their participation 	<p>The project achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employment of a peer researcher with lived experience of child sexual abuse as the primary Research Fellow; - Project Advisory Group with 44% lived experience representation (4 of 9 members), and paid compensation; - Choice of participation methods to input lived experience perspectives into research data: anonymous survey (unpaid); interview (paid); design and evaluation workshops (paid). <p><i>NB- Payment rates were set in accordance with advice provided by the National Centre</i></p> <p>Brisbane feedback (qualitative verbatim quotations)</p>



IMPACT AREA: DEMONSTRATING ACCOUNTABILITY

Goals	Measures	Indicators of achievement against measures	Evidence
<p>Findings are synthesised into recommendations that are actionable as well as being aspirational</p> <p>Research findings and Recommendations provide fair and accurate representation of the range of views, priorities and concerns shared by participants</p>	<p>a) Feasible opportunities to integrate, adapt, or build upon existing policy/practice models as implementation paths for Recommendations</p> <p>b) Insights are supported by the research data</p> <p>c) Validation cohort and Project Advisory Group have avenues to endorse or contest findings prior to finalisation of Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Calls to Action” that crystallise key research findings of this project (i.e. provide insight into survivor perspectives) and which are directed toward all sectors that intersect with CSAM or its effects, to motivate individuals toward reflection and collaboration for survivor-centred practice• “Recommendations” that enable translation of Calls to Action into practical application (i.e. support process interventions, policy instruments, and/or the ability to influence these), including addressing sector-specific opportunities to achieve short term gains and long term change• Potential for existing frameworks or practice models to be leveraged in design of implementation pathways	<p>Final report includes calls to action, recommendations, and appendices to highlight possible approaches and sector priorities.</p> <p>These appendices are intended to set the stage for taking this research forward. They draw attention to some of the environment and design considerations for effective implementation paths, however they do not provide a comprehensive mapping for this work. Potential opportunity areas are similarly provided as illustrative. Comprehensive multi-sector and interdisciplinary investigations to identify and evaluate best possible implementation paths for the findings was not in scope for this research.</p> <p>Positive and negative feedback from validation cohort and advisory group shows research process and insights having been tested, challenged and refined. Documented in Advisory</p>



Survivor perspectives on institutional use of CSAM

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feedback loop with survivors regarding research methodology and outputs	Group minutes and reports of participant workshops.
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IMPACT AREA: SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS

Goals	Measures	Indicators of achievement against measures	Evidence
Policymakers, professionals and the public (including victims and survivors) have access to consistent and accurate information in relation to how and why CSAM is used lawfully in institutional contexts; and impacts of such use for victims and survivors are included as an integral part of such information packages	<p>a) Institutional use of CSAM is reframed to include overt recognition of victims and survivors as stakeholders</p> <p>b) Improvements to transparency and trust</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research outputs convey the core message that victims and survivors are key stakeholders in sanctioned institutional use of CSAM.• Participants report increased clarity and understanding of how CSAM is/can be used• Participants report less fearful about CSAM use• Documentation of use cases	<p>Research outputs centering the experiences of survivors</p> <p>Feedback reported by participants in Brisbane</p> <p>Limited documentation of use cases - unfortunately we really didn't achieve this measure beyond the basics provided as pop-ups in the survey - still an urgent need here.</p>



PART 2: THE EVALUATION EVENT

We note the work of the WEAVERs project in establishing a comprehensive set of best practice principles for co-designed research involving victims and survivors. This initiative is part of their Australian Framework aimed at ensuring ethical collaboration in research and evaluation concerning individuals affected by domestic, family, and sexual violence¹.

Our interactions with victims and survivors within this research project, included various levels of participatory engagement in research design and methodology, as well as their participation in the research itself.

Throughout the course of the project we became increasingly aware of the desire of lived experience participants to engage with each other. The idea of on-line focus groups for communications design was greeted enthusiastically, which led to the possibility of an in-person workshop, again with unanimous support from the participants. The purpose of that event was to facilitate our identified lived experience participants meeting each other (many, for the first time), discuss their experiences in the project and to gather feedback on how we performed in our research project.

THE WORKSHOP

The workshop employed a qualitative, participatory research methodology which incorporated focus groups and mixed-modality engagement to gather feedback and evaluate our project's approach and validate the calls for action and recommendations. The approach was trauma-informed and survivor-centred, ensuring that victim-survivor voices remained central to the research process.

To achieve this, we held a one-day, in-person workshop in Brisbane, Queensland, where participants engaged in brainstorming sessions, structured information-sharing activities, and guided discussions with co-facilitators from the research team.

Participants

Participants who participated in the one-to-one interviews for the research project, were invited at the time of interview to be part of further processes within the project framework. The research design integrated dynamic consent processes, allowing participants to withdraw consent at any stage and engage at their preferred level of involvement. This ethical framework aligned with best practices in survivor-centred methodologies, prioritising participant autonomy and psychological safety.

Those participants who had agreed to further involvement were invited to participate in the project evaluation event.

Eleven of the original lived experience interview participants attended the workshop.

Safety and Wellbeing

As discussed in more detail below (see: "Ensuring Survivor Centricity and Trauma-Informed Responsiveness"), the workshop planning included important risk mitigation measures aimed at delivering trauma-informed responses and maintaining a survivor-focused perspective to facilitate effective and safe participation for all involved.

¹ Lamb, K., Dembele, L., Nina, Fiona, Hegarty, K (2023). *An Australian Framework for the ethical co-production of research and evaluation with victim survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence*, University of Melbourne: Australia; pp 7-9.



Workshop approach

The structure of the workshop was specifically focussed on the participants' reflections and feedback related to the project and their engagement. Through an open-ended, focus group approach, participants were split into two smaller groups to encourage free conversation. Each group was facilitated by two of the lead researchers.

Group 1 was focussed on reflecting on the project's engagement and communication approach (including, digital communication). Key areas explored included:

- As you engaged with us, did we explain the project well enough; the team; our aims; the outcomes?
- Did you use the project website? What were your impressions?
- Did you see any of our social media posts and were they useful?
- How did you find our email communications?
- How did we do with the explanatory statements and consent forms?
- Would you give us any advice regarding our victim survivor engagement and research practice?
- How should victims and survivors be included in co design methods - like the focus group?
- Is there anything else about the way we communicated that you'd like us to know?

Group 2 considered the survey and interview processes and participation. Key areas explored included:

- Was the information provided to you about the survey (the information sheet/page) useful?
- Did you find the survey easy to access and navigate?
- Were the questions, and any provided explanations, clear (language)?
- Would there be any changes in the way the survey was conducted?
- Were you comfortable with the way the interview was conducted?
- Were the questions, and any provided explanations, clear (language)?
- Did you feel as if your views and voice were heard?
- Would there be any changes in the way the interview was conducted?
- What words would you choose to describe how involvement in this project made you feel?
- Knowing what you know now, would you make the same decision again to participate in the research?
- Has this project increased your skills and confidence to contribute to lived experience research or co-design in the future?
- Did the project meet your expectations for shared control over knowledge production & representing individual contributions as part of a collective vision?

After thirty minutes, the research leads moved groups to allow all participants to provide feedback on both sets of questions.

To ensure the voices and views of participants were accurately captured, time was allotted to a broad group discussion on the feedback gathered in the small group discussions.

The second half of the workshop day was dedicated to participants' input to validate the draft research recommendations and calls to action. Holding this process within the workshop was critical in validating what the researchers had heard through the interviews and surveys, and to ensuring that participant contributions were accurately captured and research outcomes (recommendations) effectively reflected participant responses, providing valuable insights on institutional uses of CSAM through a unique perspectival lens.



Overall, this approach encouraged collaborative knowledge production, ethical rigour, and the meaningful inclusion of victim-survivor perspectives in shaping future policy and practice.

ENSURING SURVIVOR CENTRICITY AND TRAUMA INFORMED RESPONSIVENESS

The organisation of the in-person event was considered and included significant risk mitigation to provide trauma-informed responses and a survivor-centric focus to maintain effective and safe participant involvement.

The approach taken is outlined below:

Table 2:

Category	Considerations and Implementation
Engagement	Participation was optional and participant-led, ensuring that all attendees engaged at their own comfort level.
Travel	Considered participant needs during flights, including early boarding and appropriate seating arrangements to enhance comfort. Travel expenses unfortunately were not able to be funded for those living within the workshop locale however all accommodation expenses were covered for those who were travelling interstate or outside the workshop locale.
Accommodation	Designed to minimise overwhelm by ensuring adequate preparation time before the workshop, particularly for those travelling. Accommodation was not able to be funded for those living within the workshop locale however all accommodation expenses were covered for those who were travelling interstate or outside the workshop locale.
Remuneration	Participants were remunerated \$30.00 per hour in alignment with the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse's guidelines for participant engagement. The workshop was conducted over a five-hour period and participants therefore were provided with a \$150.00 gift card for their time and participation.
Space	The venue was trauma-informed, offering a safe space, privacy options, and the freedom to step out as needed.
In-Person Support	A Lived Experience Research Lead provided peer support throughout the event. Dr Sharelle Smith (Clinical Psychologist) was engaged for professional support. All researchers were trauma-informed.
Communication & Documentation	A commitment to transparency, ensuring participants had a clear understanding of the workshop's aims and objectives to reduce anxiety. Personal emails and text messages were used for follow-ups.
Pre-Event Social Gathering	An optional in-person gathering the night before helped break the ice and reduce feelings of apprehension.
Team Dynamics	Facilitators and participants were divided into two groups based on personality strengths and individual capacities for more effective engagement.



Workshop Length

Capped at five hours, including a break for lunch and snacks, ensuring a manageable and supportive structure.

OUTCOMES AND KEY THEMES

From the evaluation workshop, we identified a number of themes which are reflective of the overall results and themes identified throughout the research project.

These themes include: Communication, Accountability, Agency and Choice, Trust and Safety, Lived Experience, and Language.

1. Communication

Initial Engagement

Participants noted the diverse pathways through which they became aware of the project. Notably, most participants heard about the project through known and trusted avenues of engagement and industry experts who have previously demonstrated understanding and advocacy, and an understanding of survivor experiences. Engagement pathways were multi-faceted leveraging both personal and professional outreach channels. Sources of engagement included;

- Direct outreach, including mailing lists and conversation within known survivor advocacy groups
- Personal and public facing social media channels
- Public facing social media platforms
- Trusted organisational advocacy assistance through social media, mailing lists and newsletters. These included, for example, Bravehearts Foundation, the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse, the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children and other organisational platforms.

Building Bridges in Understanding

Many participants expressed their experience of anxiety at the prospect of engaging in this project due to the nature of the discussions which were involved. The mechanism of a direct conversation was required to build meaningful participation and ease the apprehension felt by a number of participants. A number of approaches helped to reduce this anxiety, which included a comprehensive website created by the team which allowed participants to read further, or ask questions directly regarding their participation. The website also helped to clarify potential points of misunderstanding and define key terms.

Documentation provided as part of the research project also assisted in this regard, including a statement of explanation about the project. Participants expressed a range of attitudes towards this more formal documentation - from feelings of calm and connection to the project, to feeling like it was a little 'stiff.' What was helpful to the majority of participants was having the lived experience researcher facilitate conversation around expectations, deciphering and contextualising the implications of the study, and framing the objectives, purpose and meaning as it pertained to each participant.

Suggestions for improving knowledge and understanding and bridging the gap included potentially explaining the 'forms' in person prior to having the participants read the documentation themselves. This speaks largely to the diverse range of participants and their varying needs and capacities for understanding. The diverse backgrounds, experiences and knowledge levels of participants were evident throughout the project, reflecting a wide spectrum



of needs, and capacities for understanding. To support these needs the project sought to enhance engagement and accessibility with survivor centred language including framing and contextualising key terms to resonate more powerfully with survivors. Participants indicated that even more so, key words framed more personally would allow them to feel more connected to the project.

We considered the adaptive methodology and participant centred evolution of the project as both necessary and a key strength. To this end we ensured where possible participants' needs and the emergent findings were reflected, and adapted to improve outcomes for each participant. These adaptations were communicated as much as possible with efforts made to keep participants informed of methodological shifts, including canvassing the idea of this in person event with participants. However, while participants noted the responsive evolution of the project and its revelatory nature as being positive, they also indicated that defining the sequence of activities within the study better was necessary. It also led to the initial perspective held by many participants that the project was smaller in scale than initially perceived. This highlights the critical importance of delineating the research boundaries and maintaining adaptability and trauma-informed and survivor-led approaches to research.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

Participants collectively felt there could have been more accessibility in terms of engagement for readers and those who may have struggled with detailed information. It was further suggested that other-abled persons, youth, or CALD persons may have had trouble with the website and engagement and, as such, participants felt there could have been some alternatives explored in relation to how the information about the project was presented. Participants suggested alternatives such as providing information in multiple formats/modes, offering translated materials or interpreters for CALD individuals to improve comprehension, ensuring website accessibility with screen reader compatibility and simplified navigation, and either live or over-the-web Q&A consultation with researchers during completion of the survey to clarify terminology or understanding of key concepts.

Further information could potentially have been offered upon request; however, this was often mitigated by having a researcher with lived experience who engaged participants in a way tailored to their needs. This method of engagement inspired involvement, contributing to meaning and value, particularly when participants were involved from start to finish. Participants collectively felt there could have been more accessibility in terms of engagement for readers and those who may have struggled with detailed information. It was further suggested that other-abled persons, youth, or CALD persons may have had trouble with the website and engagement and as such participants felt there could have been some alternatives explored in relation to how the information about the project was presented.

Communication and Humanisation Key to Participation.

"I felt personally involved, valued and purposeful in contributing...." "Validated", "professional", and "encouraging". These are all words our participants used to describe our emails and follow up communication regarding engagement and participation in the project; with a number of participants stating they shared more of their personal story than ever before.

These speak to a level of safety and trust garnered from effective communication which is not only dynamic, but survivor-centric and nuanced for each participant in a way that they can feel individually safe and included. It also stems from taking significant time to build safety and rapport which may otherwise have been lost if processes were more rigid and clinical in approach.



In terms of the interview and survey specifically, it was noted that the consent form documentation included key words that made the information easy to access. Also, key words suggested to some participants a level of understanding by the research team, increasing comfort with the prospect of engagement. Both the survey and the interview processes provided adequate information to enable understanding. This was supported by multiple communication approaches, including in-person conversations, website material, and documentation. Additionally, the lived experience researcher acted as a mediator, further enhancing accessibility and comprehension.

Feedback

Feedback was recognised as an essential component of the project, serving as a catalyst for refinement and adaptation to better accommodate the nuanced needs of participants. Insights were gathered through multiple channels, including survey findings, focus groups, and discussions during project-related events, ensuring that a diverse range of perspectives informed ongoing improvements. Participants expressed that having these structured opportunities for feedback allowed them to feel validated and actively involved at every stage of the process. This was further reinforced by the principle of two-way knowledge sharing, wherein participants not only gained insights but also contributed to the researchers' understanding. This reciprocal exchange underscored the collaborative nature of the project, fostering a sense of shared learning and mutual growth.

2. Accountability

Accountability was noted by our participants generally to have a significant impact on the way they engaged with and connected with institutions about their matters. Likewise, accountability was important to participants when engaging and participating in this project. The interview provided reassurance that institutional use is not about placing blame on individuals but rather about addressing systemic sharing of images.

Information Security

Clarity of information was reported as a fundamental component of the research process, particularly how the information provided by participants was going to be utilised, stored and safeguarded. Participants highlighted the most concern around

- The intended use of their contributions.
- Data storage, confidentiality protocol and retention and,
- The process of recording and documenting interviews

What information was not provided in writing was addressed directly by researchers and opportunity for additional clarification was provided, reinforcing participant- centered approaches. Participants noted that accountability was a key theme which ensured trust and reliability which was provided throughout the process.

Participant Accountability and Trauma Informed Responses during co design

Accountability and the balance between encouraging contribution and avoiding pressure to respond were noted as being positive. Understandably, participants found it hard at times to retain some information, which meant having a researcher explain certain parts of the process or particular details of the project multiple times. This was done in a trauma sensitive manner, and was necessary to ensure all participants felt able to understand and feel safe to respond and participate.

This included, as above, the ability to reschedule interviews, provide information and responses when victims and survivors felt able, or even provide alternative methods to give information when it felt overwhelming or the methodology of response felt uneasy. One example of this was



the creation of a downloadable survey form for participants where they could print the survey and take the required time to complete their responses.

Overall, we recognise participants are at varying stages of their healing and this reflects in the way participants need to hear and understand information, and the way it is handled and communicated.

3. Agency and Choice

Choice to have a voice.

Aligning closely with our core themes which underpin our recommendations, the principles of Agency and Choice were fundamental for participants. Our project achieved this with victims and survivors indicating unanimously they felt we honoured the need for autonomy, ensuring participation was voluntary, and guided by individual comfort levels. In particular we note the level of safety victim survivors felt, with participants reporting they felt included, valued and supported. This secure and affirming environment helped participants feel they had control over their participation.

Flexibility

Safety could not be present without flexibility, namely adapting and responding to victims and survivor needs when necessary, or when challenges arose for individual participants. Participants felt these considerations, such as options to reschedule, step back from participation, ask questions or share ideas, demonstrated flexibility, leading participants to feel they owned their contributions.

Consent

Victims and survivors also knew they could withdraw consent at any time for any reason which was considered extremely important to them. They also indicated they felt there was considerable information to ensure that consent was informed and understandable.

One thing the project team considered heavily was whether to allow participants to identify with their responses within the writing of our reports. We made the decision not to do this for a number of reasons including safety; however, participants noted in their feedback they would have valued the choice to own their contributions publicly. This is something we could have done differently with more effective planning around the victim survivor's need for agency and choice.

4. Trust and Safety

Trust: an ongoing issue.

Our participants were very clear on their lack of trust in institutions generally, and more specifically involving law enforcement or government represented organisations. General anxiety and apprehension arise as a result of lived experience, but furthermore is exacerbated by poor past experiences with these institutions. With every new type of uncertainty, our research team understood there needed to be a level of reassurance and safety provided. As participants felt safe to air their concerns, those concerns were met individually as needed which was noted as a positive by participants and this further allowed for safe disclosures.

Participants indicated their need to understand more thoroughly when it came to comprehending and contextualising questions and challenges as they arose which required at times a much more detailed response.

In terms of interviews and survey responses the detail of information provided contributed to feelings of safety, particularly with understanding how those responses would be used. Having



free text fields within the survey was also appreciated as it allowed participants to capture more of a full picture beyond yes and no responses.

Feelings of apprehension arose when reflecting on the magnitude of how information is used institutionally, and this required time for participants to process these realisations.

Adaptive, Dynamic and Purposeful

Participants noted that during engagement, interview and communication processes with the team, the ability of the lived experience researcher to pick up on nonverbal cues contributed to a sense of safety which was felt almost immediately, allowing participants to feel more comfortable. Furthermore, participants were able to let go of disorienting and overwhelming thoughts throughout the process as trauma responses may have manifested as a result of the interview process.

Participants appreciated that there was more of a focus on listening rather than questioning which further fostered value, validation and trust.

Personal Connection, Support and Understanding

Participants appreciated support to speak with their partner, supervisor, or others if needed and take their time with the process. A number of participants felt that engagement brought up moments of flashbacks for some participants. Participants at times expressed difficulties in terms of feeling triggered and overwhelmed regarding institutional failings, and some parts of the process eliciting certain traumatic responses. Further there were a number of fears generally about engaging with the project which caused fear, but was validated and supported through the personal connection of the participants to the team's research fellow. This personal connection reduced struggles with trust and safety and acted as a link to break down these barriers.

Many participants noted that without engagement with a lived experience advocate, and knowing the research fellow, they would not have participated.

5. Utilisation of Lived Experience

Integrity in approach

One of the most resounding pieces of feedback from participants was that without lived experience as part of the research team, many participants would not have participated in the project. This resonates through the majority of all parts of the project but most importantly, engagement and accessibility. The assurance of lived experience was noted not as the only factor that made victims and survivors feel safe, but having lived experience leadership in the research team created an integrity around the approach and execution of the project and humanised engagement for victims and survivors.

Lived experience v. the person

One comment was that lived experience alone was not enough but what made a big difference was who our lived experience researcher was as a person. It is hard to know whether this would have made a difference if there was a different lived experience researcher in the same position and how that would have affected outcomes for participants or engagement. What is clear is that many participants would not have participated without this trust and understanding. This also reflected through the interview process with reflections around previous interviews with police, or job interviews noted as being highly stressful. Because of the research fellow's individualised approach, the interview experience felt different for participants.



Humanisation

For many participants, this approach fostered a sense of trust and reassurance, with feedback indicating that it created a feeling of being 'in safe hands.' The project was also recognised for helping to humanise collaborations with those with lived experience. Additionally, participants suggested that incorporating lived experience stories and examples could make the website more accessible and relatable, further enhancing engagement by adding a more personal and human-centred touch.

From Victim to Survivor

Critically, having a survivor-centred approach where participants felt safe, seen, valued and supported was significant. This approach has undoubtedly contributed to the comment that a number of participants felt they were able to transition their perception of self from victim to survivor.

6. Language

Language critical throughout the project.

One of the themes that presents throughout all parts of the project is the way in which language is used in a trauma informed manner to communicate objectives. This is also true for explanations, critical for participants in their understanding and engagement in meeting them where they are. This was assisted with verbal explanations by researchers which helped participants understand what was required of them within the process.

The diversity of experiences within the participant cohort called for a linguistically diverse approach coupled with a deep understanding of the nuances of trauma, and specifically the way in which CSAM victims' and survivors' experiences differ, and so, required adaptability and individualised approaches to avoid retraumatisation. Language and terminology were sometimes considered to be confusing or inappropriate – for example the term '*bad actors*,' a term used often to describe perpetrators in online offending, did not resonate with the cohort.. Such language was interpreted to mean some form of pretence; whereas perpetrators demonstrate clear intent in their actions and this is not a movie, science fiction or a depiction of false events.

A Definitional Problem

Many survivors indicated confusion when trying to conceptualise the meaning of 'institution'. It was mentioned that it was unclear at first and suggested an alternative terminology may have been helpful. Institution also has negative connotations in relation to past experiences for many victims and survivors, as a place where abuse occurred. This was largely mitigated upon participating in the interview process where this was explained more broadly, however may have been confusing for other participants who did not participate in the interview process.

The abbreviated use of the term 'CSAM' had didactically opposing perceptions: by shortening the term, the harsh reality of child sexual abuse may feel more abstract or clinical, rather than directly confronting the disturbing nature of the content. This could make discussions more palatable or easier to manage in professional, legal, or policy contexts, but it might also risk downplaying the severity of the issue. Some participants also reflected that "people already know what that is" without needing further explanation. There was also some validation required around the definition of CSAM and it was helpful to participants to understand that self-generated material also fell within the definitional realms of what constituted CSAM.



A Definitional Solution.

Participants were grateful for the provision of definitions in the form of pop-up boxes within the survey which overall contributed to a better understanding and more informed responses for participants.

It's not fiction, it happened to me...

Participants generally mentioned a dislike for words such as 'triggering' and 'story,' noting; "it's not fiction, it happened to me." They also stand firmly in the acknowledgement around the need to move past the stigma and shame of their abuse, and language, process and the way work should be done acknowledges that "CSAM is not something that lives in the past... it continues to exist."

A 'Trigger Glossary'

Understandably, a number of terms used were most likely unavoidably triggering, however generally participants reflected this did not mean they did not want to know or understand. Subsequently, it was suggested there could be an option of a 'Trigger Glossary' where terms could be explained in a way that was safer and more sensitive to the victim survivor experience. Furthermore, where they could be expanded and labelled more appropriately, and in a more generalist manner.

7. Participant Experience Overall.

I am not alone

Significantly, the CSAM survivor community appears to be largely unsupported and isolated in feelings of shame and guilt, which has perpetuated silence. Individually, many survivors shared with the lived experience researcher feeling alone in their experiences and struggles. Interestingly, as a result of the process and application of an adaptive, dynamic and trauma informed process many survivors, some, for the first time were able to let go of these feelings. A number of participants felt increased feelings of unity and connection, reassurance and, *'not as alone in our experiences with a shared sense of purpose and meaning.'*

I am not alone in this process

Along with feelings of unity and connection, participants felt they were supported through the process. The combination of personal guidance led by the lived experience researcher and written documents was extremely useful, valued and helped bridge the gap between trauma impacts and understanding.

Participants observed that written information alone would not have been sufficient and there was the requirement of a lived experience researcher to act as an interpreter of jargon and processes, which felt incredibly supportive.

This and a combination of other trauma informed processes led to further feelings of value and a combined sense of purpose in this project.

Survivors at the centre

Participants were complimentary in the methodology of the project in achieving a trauma-informed and survivor-centric approach to this work and valued the reciprocal nature of the process, with information shared between participants and researchers.

Participants shared they would have liked to be more involved in the evolving nature of the project and suggested more opportunities to refine the project through reciprocal knowledge as it evolves.



It's hard... but I still want to know.

Overall, participants reflected on the impact of the engagement between participant and researcher: fears and apprehensions experienced in engaging so vulnerably with this project with some participants experiencing triggers and flashbacks. Understandably, participants contextualising their abuse experiences in order to provide opinions and responses to the questions asked, may have struggled when providing these insights.

Researchers acknowledged the need for participants to take time and process information and reflect on their own journey to comprehending the scope of 'use' of material and what that means personally.

It was noted that the survey caused 'massive' anxiety amongst some, but upon reflection, it seemed more innocuous and again there was a requirement of time to process and understand. Some suggested it would have been useful to have participated in the interview before completing the survey.

Participants felt there were gaps still in knowledge as to how CSAM was 'used' and therefore it was difficult to answer and respond to questions or have an opinion on the use of CSAM.

An empowering and transformative experience

For many participants they indicated a sense of relief that this process was not as daunting as their initial perceptions, and did not come across as "dry and scary." The lens survivors share may shift, but their incentives remain the same, each wanting to use their experiences to make an impact, and contribute to change.

The involvement of the lived experience researcher made participants feel validated and empowered, and contributions were considered valuable leaving participants feeling encouraged and providing hope and avenues for advocacy.

What words would you use to describe your experience overall?

We asked participants what words they would use to describe their experiences with our project and this is what they said:

- Informed, heard, and respected
- Inclusive and safe
- Accessible and validating
- Balanced and useful
- Felt privileged and empowered
- Constantly evolving
- Life Changing
- Believed and understood

Most powerfully, the project was described as transformative, fostering empowerment and shifting narratives positively. Survivors unanimously felt believed and understood and were able to learn through the process in a way that felt safe and supportive.

"Relief, we didn't have to hold on like we normally do as survivors."



RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

This project for researchers was an honour and privilege to be part of, and to bear witness to such vulnerability and courage. The potential to impact change in policy and practice through survivor centred research is powerful, and to do this with unheard voices, even more so. As participants acknowledged, this was a two-way process of learning, growing, adapting, changing and courage. The task to amplify these unheard voices in a way that honours the victim survivors, experiences and communicates accurately the needs, necessary actions and responds appropriately, and then communicates that in a way that is impactful and capitulates change.

Limitations and Challenges

Participant Cohort

The participant group was limited to victims and survivors who were participants in the interview process and had the opportunity to engage directly with researchers. This is a specific demographic of participants who already had connections with researchers. Opinions of those who participated in the surveys alone, were not provided with an opportunity to give feedback on their experience with the project.

Time Constraints

Workshop time constraints meant that we only had five hours to elucidate and gather the appropriate feedback from survivors. The timeframe was deliberately kept to one day, to ensure a safe space, understanding the personal impact of participation, however, this potentially reflected on participants and their feelings of being able to share what they were thinking more exhaustively. It was noted that there was a feeling of being rushed and perhaps not all feedback was able to be captured due to the allotted time.

It was felt, time in the workshop provided on the recommendations was not long enough given the complexities of some of the draft calls for action and the impact of some of these recommendations.

Budgetary Considerations.

The budget was quite restrictive and meant we needed to be somewhat flexible, and transparent in what we could and couldn't achieve in conducting this evaluation event. Subsequently, it meant we were unable to facilitate certain aspects such as paying for everything in terms of participants' travel.

Participants were funded for their time while in attendance at the workshop, and their travel to and from the airport at the workshop location, and accommodation where applicable. We could not however include other aspects such as a second night's accommodation and allow for participants to spend more time post workshop to connect. This may have impacted victims and survivors in their post workshop recovery...

Key Considerations

Initial Funding considerations to broaden accessibility, outreach, engagement and productivity.

Participants and researchers alike, noted a number of considerations of value in the forecasting of project requirements and when seeking funding which would have allowed for a number of improvements overall to the project.



This included additional funding which may have expanded outreach efforts and allowed for even more impactful work. Considerations like this would in future allow for more effective planning given the feedback from this event, and the inclusion of in person focus groups and travel budgets to allow for more trauma informed one-on-one conversations in qualitative data outcomes.

This may have also allowed for the inclusion of a more robust participant call out campaign, which considered accessibility and targeted more diverse communities. The approach for this project was rather organic and did not include avenues for paid social media advertising which may have reached a more diverse audience.

Survey and Interview

The interview process for participants was noted to be quite powerful and positive in terms of feedback, however participants noted they may have responded to survey questions differently had they done the survey after the interview. Whilst this considers participants to then be more knowledgeable about the 'use' of CSAM material, the project also wanted to capture current knowledge of use, prior to the qualitative components of the study. Some consideration could be given to project design to capture before and after responses or approaches which may have encapsulated questions which considered how participants' opinions changed after they learnt of certain processes and approaches.

Another key point of feedback is the survey design to allow for processing time and considering how long it might take participants to complete the survey. It would be more valuable for participants to have the ability to save responses and come back.

Lived Experience Crucial.

For a project of this nature, participants unanimously highlighted the value of having a lived experience researcher as part of the research team. In considering project budgets and design of future projects, the benefit of a lived-experience research team member is unquestionable in improving victim and survivor engagement and project outcomes. Consideration should also be given to support that may be required depending on that lived experience researcher's skills and research experience.