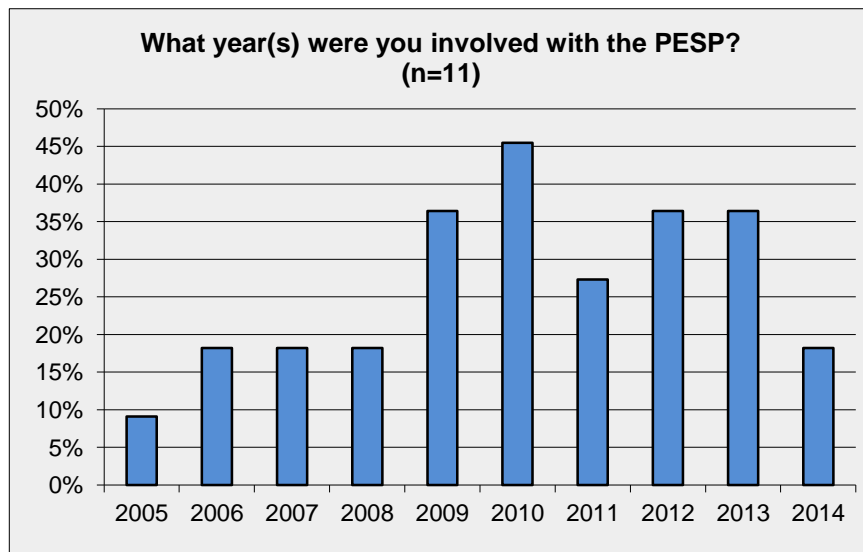


Appendix H: Findings from PESP interviews, focus groups and stakeholder consultations

PESP member interview findings

Q1 – What year(s) were you involved with the PESP?

Interviewees had been involved with the PESP over a broad time period (from first intake in 2005 through to current year as members or Graduates). The majority were only involved for a two year period as program members (this time limit was introduced in 2008 to allow for turnover of members).



However since the introduction of the Graduate Program in 2010, a larger number have had longer periods of involvement, ranging from 3-5 years. This means that the majority of interviewees have had significant involvement with the program over time, particularly in recent years.

Q2 – Had you been involved with any other consumer participation or peer education groups before the PESP? If yes, which groups?

Only 2 out of 11 respondents (18%) had been involved with another consumer participation or peer education group prior to their involvement with the PESP. Involvement with these other groups included:

- *As an Ambassador for Hope with mental health organisation MIND and as a Ward Visitor for VicServ (disability organisation)*
- *A member of APSU (Association of Participating Service Users), a consumer representative body of the Self-Help Addiction Resource Centre.*

However both respondents noted that neither of these other programs had involved the sort of intensive training or support offered through PESP and they didn't feel like either were comparable experiences.

A third PESP member had previously had significant volunteer involvement with VincentCare's Ozanam Community Centre in North Melbourne and involvement as a member of the Homelessness Action Group in North Melbourne. While these weren't formal consumer participation or peer education groups, they did require some similar skills (advocacy, research and peer support) to those in the PESP program.

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The other nine reported a variety of paid work and volunteer organisation backgrounds, and one had always been motivated to speak up on behalf of others, but none had ever had the opportunity or interest in other consumer participation activities.

Q3 Do you feel like you were given adequate information about the PESP and what was involved before you joined up? If no, what information was lacking?

Ten out of the 11 respondents (91%) felt that had been given adequate information about the program before signing up. The one person who didn't stated that while they didn't really know much about the program before joining, they knew from what others had said that *"it was something I wanted to be involved in"* and they didn't feel the need to do further research before joining.

Participants found out about PESP from a number of different sources including word of mouth, case managers in other support services, by direct involvement or contact with CHP staff members, and through online advertisements (InfoXchange) calling for volunteers.

The majority of participants commented that there was always plenty of information made available, both through the training session and throughout their involvement with the program. A number of them commented that the PESP staff were always very approachable and happy to answer any questions they had, and most felt very confident in asking more questions if needed. However as one participant noted:

- *Yes I was given adequate information at the start, but it's difficult to really encapsulate PESP in dot points – you need to be involved to really get what it entails.*

Another participant suggested that the program information could be more detailed for prospective participants, and emphasise that the public speaking involved is done with plenty of training and guidance, and that there is very much a 'team approach' to issues and presentations – that it's not just about participating as an individual but as part of a team.

Q4 Why did you decide to get involved in the PESP? What did you want to get out of it?

PESP members reported a wide range of reasons and motivations for becoming involved in the program, however the predominant reasons were to use their own experience to help benefit others and to help improve the homelessness service system. Secondary reasons included participating in PESP as a way of re-engaging in a workforce setting and as a means of moving on from their own experience of homelessness and/or marginalisation.

Some of the specific reasons given included:

- *When I found out about PESP I thought it was a good way to use my experiences to help others – I also wanted to help people get away from the stigma of homeless people as dole bludgers because that definitely wasn't where I came from.*
- *I wanted to keep working in advocacy but rather than do it as an individual, I wanted to work as part of a team to get things done.*
- *From my own personal experience (at the SRS and in hospitals) there was a lot I had to say, both good and bad – I saw the way people were badly treated, and knew this was wrong, and I wanted to be able to make a difference.*

A number of members identified the opportunities at PESP as being able to help them advance their own personal or social justice paths:

- *I had always had a strong belief in social justice, and that was reason enough to get involved, to seek equality for people.*

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- *It had all the elements of the sort of job I wanted after doing my Community Development diploma. It didn't ask for too much in terms of time commitment or skills, but had enough involvement and stability to make it attractive. I was keen to get into the homelessness field anyway and felt it was enough to help me get back on my feet.*
- *I wanted to keep working in advocacy but rather than do it as an individual, I wanted to work as part of a team to get things done.*
- *PESP gave me something to do, got me out of where I was living at the time (a very violent emergency accommodation place) – I was at a dangerous point of my life, and saw it as a way to turn my anger and negativity into a positive.*

Several of the respondents specifically mentioned the fact that PESP was being run by the peak body as a reason for wanting to get involved

- *I knew that if I became a PESP member I wasn't going to have the door closed on me, like happened many times when I was in homelessness services and I tried to get things fixed.*
- *I saw CHP as an organisation committed to consumers and that provided opportunities to give me more public profile for the rooming house issues I was working on.*
- *I knew I was going to meet with and talk to decision-makers and they couldn't shut me down – it was a chance to tell not just my story but that of thousands of women.*

While all of the respondents acknowledged that they would be joining PESP in a voluntary capacity, two of those involved (both with dependent children) mentioned the reimbursement for childcare costs as a factor in deciding to participate. Several participants also identified that on reading the job description they saw the role as a 'work opportunity', albeit unpaid but with reimbursement for travel and related costs.

Q5 Do you feel like the program lived up to your expectations? If no, what parts didn't meet your expectations?

Three of the respondents said that they didn't have any specific expectations of the program when they first started:

- *I didn't feel like I had specific expectations of the program prior to getting involved, but these were generated through involvement.*
- *I had no expectations to be honest, but I found the 8 week training program at the beginning mind-bogglingly professional and high quality, so I guess that was when I got the best idea of what might be involved.*

However the remaining eight were unanimous in saying that the program did meet their expectations and in many cases greatly exceeded them.

- *Before PESP I had no voice and no idea about my rights – now I have both. The program has changed a lot of people's lives including my own – it has given us a voice and so many opportunities to help make a difference.*
- *Absolutely – the program has given me strengths, skills, ideas and opportunities, experience at preparing and giving public presentations – now I feel worthy, wanted, belong somewhere and have a strong base to go forward from.*

Other specific opportunities members identified as having been provided through PESP include the opportunity to go onto further education/training, skills acquisition and development, a sense of purpose, the opportunity to sit on high level boards and advisory groups, the confidence to pursue personal career goals and the inspiration to continue helping others.

When asked to identify the parts of the program that didn't live up to expectations, responses included:

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- *Sitting on some of the boards and committees was a bit alienating at times – people didn't necessarily want to hear what you had to say.*
- *I experienced a lot of hypocrisy – it's disappointing when you hear about yet another research project for something we already know the answer to when the money could be better spent directly helping people.*
- *There were weird little things at the beginning that were a challenge – part of it being a new program so I guess you'd expect that. Some examples were that we were supposed to do some things like the phone service and a story board we made up, then they were whittled away and didn't occur. Initially we were told we were able to determine what activities we could do, but then they were not supported by the staff.*
- *Funding agreements make restrictions on how far CHP and other can take their advocacy work, and I have real concerns about how clients are being treated by some agencies – I realise there are limitations but these need to be addressed and not ignored.*

Q6 Tell me about your experiences as a member of the PESP...

This open-ended question allowed each member to talk about their own specific journey with PESP, including how they came to find out about the program, their recruitment and training experiences, and the variety of activities they engaged in throughout their time on the program. Words commonly used to describe their experiences included: empowerment, confidence, self-esteem, respect, trust, and positive.

As well as talking about the specific public speaking engagements, advisory groups, media opportunities, research projects and other activities they were involved in, respondents typically mentioned the following aspects of their experience:

- Learnings from being involved – about themselves, the homelessness services system, the restrictions and limitations placed on workers and agencies because of program rules and funding available, group dynamics and working with others, and the value of consumer participation;
- The benefits of the team approach offered by the PESP and the strong bonding experience of working with others who had experience of homelessness – this was overwhelmingly seen as a positive part of being involved;
- The depth and breadth of opportunities presented by the program, and the personal/professional benefits these offered;
- The opportunities for developing good networks and contacts with people in the homelessness sector but also in other sectors/industries;
- The power of consumer participation and advocacy as a means of influencing and educating people, in senior decision-making positions as well as throughout the general community.

A number of respondents spoke about the importance of the team building that occurred through the initial training sessions and that continued throughout the program – it was seen as critical that someone else was present and 'had my back' when speaking in public or in settings where they may have been the only consumers present. All indicated that they felt a strong sense of support not only from CHP and PESP staff but from other consumers involved in the program.

- *It was good to be part of a group to get more objectivity on your own experience, and get feedback from other members. A lot of self-reflection happens after a period of trauma, and it was very positive to the peer support of other PESP members during this time.*

For many, being involved in PESP was analogous to being in a paid job, providing the opportunity to attend regular meetings in a professional office environment and with formal presentation/speaking commitments to external agencies:

- *We all took it seriously – a lot of people referred to coming to PESP meetings as ‘going to work’, so it really made us feel worthwhile and like we were doing something important and valued.*

The issue of remuneration was raised by several members, with several stating that once they became more skilled and experienced in their roles they felt it unfair that they were not being paid more than a basic reimbursement for costs. While one member was adamant that it should always be a volunteer-based program, others felt like the opportunity to develop paid positions as consumer advocates should be explored further. One respondent noted:

- *I was shattered that it wasn’t going to lead to an actual job where I could get off Centrelink. We should be paid as professional public speakers – they get a minimum \$1500 just for turning up when we get \$60 no matter how long the engagement is for. Anyone who’s been through homelessness and domestic violence should get paid even more for speaking about such bad personal experiences, because these are priceless, especially if you are asked to relive it again and again.*

Several participants spoke of the difficulty of getting up in front of strangers and telling their personal story, however most felt that the training and support they received (including debriefing with the Team Leader after an engagement) made this experience more achievable than it would have been otherwise. Two members stated that they already felt comfortable speaking in public, however for most it was an obstacle they needed assistance to overcome and work on. Several mentioned that they are now very comfortable speaking in public, and no longer need to speak from notes, particularly if they prepare well beforehand.

Those who had been appointed to external advisory committees and working groups generally spoke of the positive nature of the experience and felt they were treated with respect by others on the group, however two members did talk about feeling like their presence was sometimes tokenistic or their views not treated seriously by those in power.

Several participants talked about the value of the ongoing supervision and support they received throughout the program and many mentioned in particular the role of the current Team Leader (Cass) in helping them deal with personal issues while on their PESP journey. Cass was regularly referred to as professional, compassionate, highly skilled and committed.

Another common theme in the responses was the benefits felt from being part of a broader movement to address homelessness, particularly being part of the statewide peak body in its efforts to advocate for change and improvements from services and greater financial support from Government. One participant noted:

- *Everyone is committed to ending homelessness and I can now see the results of that. Things like the recent announcement about the government continuing to fund homelessness - that came through a team effort of lots of people putting pressure on, including consumers.*
- *Having the backing of CHP and other organisations involved with PESP has been great – PESP has been a godsend and we all feel so lucky to be involved.*

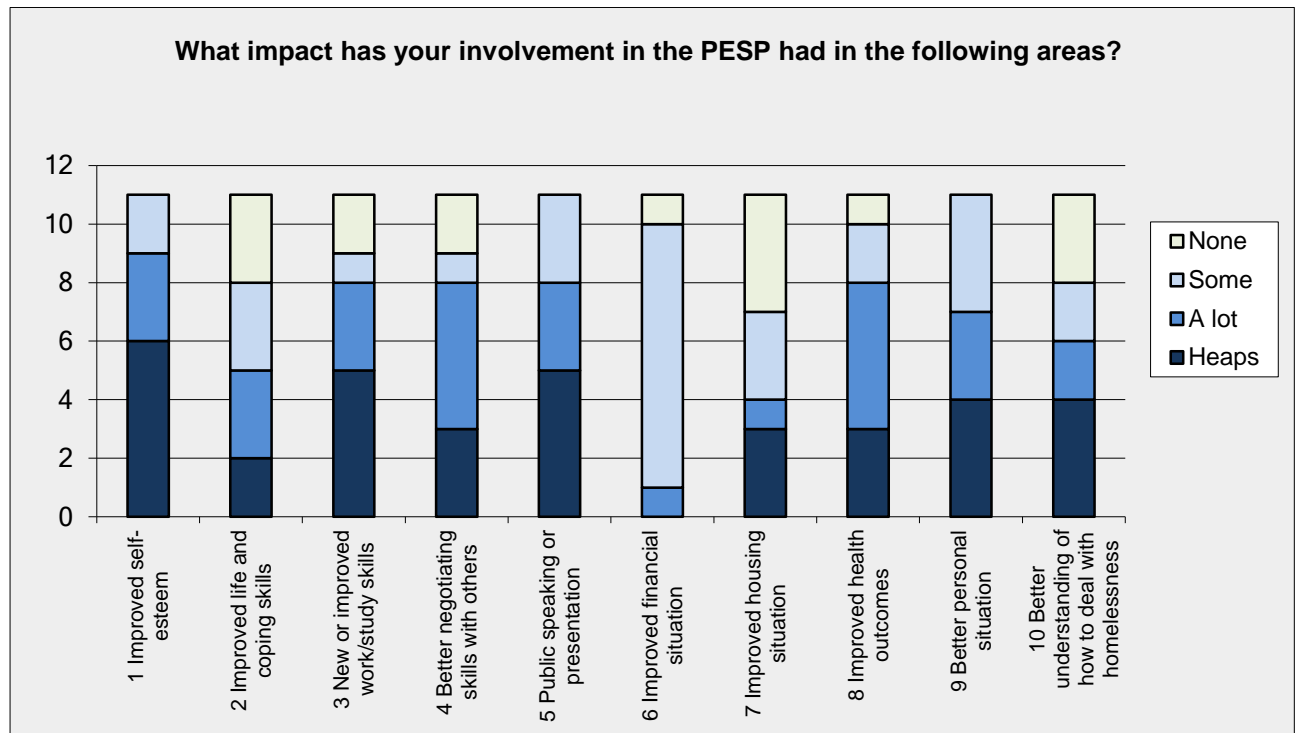
The experience with PESP has motivated one participant to explore establishing a separate structure for consumer-driven advocacy, similar to a Homeless Persons’ Union and a number of respondents spoke of their support for such an advocacy vehicle. However no-one argued it should replace the PESP but rather work in parallel with it to focus on common objectives but from a different (consumer-controlled) perspective. Other members have been encouraged through PESP to pursue

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their own dreams such as setting up a youth refuge for young GLBTI people, and another is establishing their own business to work as a life coach and mentor to others who have been through the same experience. Several have gone onto further study and paid work, and others continue to undertake speaking and advisory roles as Graduates.

Q7 What impact has your involvement in the PESP had in the following areas?

PESP members were asked to identify how their involvement in PESP had impacted on a range of different issues or aspects of their life.



The chart shows the following self-identified outcomes for participants:

- § The greatest overall impacts were in improved self-esteem, improved health outcomes, public speaking or presentation skills, and better personal situation;
- § The areas in which there was the least identifiable impact from PESP were in improved housing situation, improved life and coping skills and in better understanding of how to deal with issues that led to homelessness. The issue of housing impact was qualified by the majority of respondents by saying that they already had stable housing before joining PESP;
- § The area in which PESP had had the least overall impact was on the personal financial situation of members – this was attributed by many to the fact it is a voluntary position and reimbursement for costs only prevented them being out of pocket for their involvement.

Some of the qualifying comments and responses about additional areas of impact by respondents included:

- *In terms of financial impact, PESP it wasn't directly responsible but indirectly it did help me get other paid opportunities.*
- *It opened my mind and ears to my own situation and that of others, and has given me the tools to help others.*
- *PESP really encouraged me to get out into the workforce again – it's given me a really big desire to help and train workers in how they deal with clients.*

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- *It gave me a much better understanding of how the service system works - beforehand I really had no idea even though I'd been homeless for quite a long time.*
- *PESP gave me a real sense of achievement.*

Q8 Did you feel supported and valued by the PESP Team Leader/Coordinator?

Members overwhelmingly (100%) felt supported by the Team Leader/Coordinator of the PESP with many giving effusive praise for the way in which the current team leader in particular made them feel incredibly well supported and part of the team. The only recipient who indicated they hadn't felt this support and value qualified it by saying that at the start of their time on the program they had put up barriers to being supported, feeling that previous bad experiences with the homelessness system had led to a lack of trust of anyone involved in it. This person however felt that once they let those barriers down the support from the Team Leader was there and ended up being incredibly helpful.

Comments by respondents included:

- *Fantastic support – really good leaders.*
- *Always – the door to the Team Leader is always wide open and that makes a big difference.*
- *Definitely, incredibly supported and trusted and this is something I've never felt before in my life.*

One respondent who had been involved in the early years of the program however noted that while the Team Leader had been supportive, they had felt less support from higher management within CHP at times, noting that criticism of the program was often taken very poorly and that members weren't always trusted or treated respectfully. It was felt that for people in a very vulnerable situation, dealing more tactfully with issues or conflict that arose would have been more appropriate, and is important for anyone managing a volunteer consumer participation program.

Q9 Did you feel that the guidelines for the way the PESP was run (including things like the Grievance Procedure) were adequate? If not, what parts weren't adequate?

Again members indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the guidelines and the way the program was run with 91% (10 out of 11) feeling that they were adequate. Aspects of the program that were highly valued included the 8 week training/induction at the beginning of the program, the use of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for engagements with external parties, and the development by PESP members of a Code of Conduct for all participants. Respondents generally talked about the guidelines and Code of Conduct which emphasised showing respect for each other's contributions and rights made them feel safe and confident in being able to speak out in group situations, and being a good reference point for everyone to work from.

Comments included:

- *Like any workplace, you need procedures and rules to follow.*
- *Good to have guidelines, anything work doing has to have rules to make it work.*
- *The focus on helping others become empowered is a really important part of the guidelines, it sets the tone for the way the whole group works.*

Several members involved in the earlier years of the program felt that the program guidelines weren't strongly emphasised or necessarily followed, and that this had led to some internal conflict and behavioural problems by members. However, the way in which these matters were dealt with, in particular working to strengthen the emphasis on the Code of Conduct, was felt to have been a positive thing for the program.

A number of members spoke about the importance of the team aspect of the program, and the way in which they felt supported by other team members at public presentations and other events. The structure of meeting regularly as a group, as well as attending engagements in pairs or larger groups was seen as a very supportive approach particularly when people were being asked to tell their personal stories in an environment where they didn't know any of the audience. This was contrasted to the experiences some members had with other organisations where they were only contributing as individuals and had no support or back up. One respondent noted:

- *In the mental health sector consumer participation is really good on paper but not in reality – they have a lot they could learn from the PESP model, particularly in the training and ongoing support side of things.*

Some comments about the positive program elements of PESP included:

- *The opportunity to work with different team members gave me increased learning opportunities – exposure to people from all different backgrounds.*
- *The peer support aspect of the program and the ability to ask questions is always there – I never feel like we can't ask if we do have any questions or concerns.*
- *Sometimes people needed to be pulled into line and this could be done through the rules that were in place.*

One member specifically spoke about the value of the mentoring opportunities within the program, with Graduates and more experienced members being able to help mentor and guide the newer members. However another respondent stated that previous negative experiences of mentoring made them wary of this aspect of the program and they preferred to leave this role up to the Team Leader.

When asked about what parts of the current programs were inadequate or needed improving, respondents noted the following:

- § The two year limit on involvement before graduating – it was felt this limited the opportunities to continue active participation once skills had been gained;
- § The fact that PESP members aren't part of decision-making within the organisation, more an advisory role with no real powers or control;
- § The limited opportunities for PESP graduates, with current PESP members prioritised for speaking engagements – identified that more time/effort could be put into exploring more speaking/training opportunities.

Q10 Are there ways you would like to see the PESP develop or change into the future?

Respondents identified a range of ways in which they would like to see PESP develop into the future, with common themes emerging as:

- § Helping PESP **grow and expand**, both as a means of providing more opportunities for consumers to have their voice heard and in order to improve community understanding of the causes and impacts of homelessness through hearing directly from those with a lived experience. This could involve:
 - actively pursuing **opportunities for more engagements** both for current PESP members and for graduates with the skills and experience to continue contributing, with the suggestion that a PESP graduate could be engaged to help pursue these;
 - **Greater publicity and promotion** of the program, both statewide and nationally (some of the specific target markets for promotion were schools, tertiary institutions, prisons, health services (including hospitals, mental health services and GP networks), government bureaucrats at all levels;

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- **Increasing the size and diversity** of the PESP team so that groups like Indigenous, LGBTI, multicultural youth and women could be better represented.
- **Seeking more funding** avenues, and greater funding levels, for consumer participation across the sector. This would both allow the program to grow but also to have more autonomy in its operations, particularly around advocacy, if non-government funding could be sourced.
- § Developing more **structured graduate opportunities**, including work/study pathways into the homelessness sector and in other identified areas of interest – could include organising volunteer work experience at various agencies;
- § Allow **more self-generated and self-directed activities** by PESP members, as a means of fostering empowerment and initiative from those involved;

Other more specific suggestions were made about program improvements, including:

- § Explore opportunities for consumers to go into a governance role at CHP;
- § Return to the system of making reimbursement payments to PESP members in cash rather than through Coles vouchers (which can make those handing them over feel disempowered) – *“it’s also about dignity and I know that HomeGround still pay their consumer cash”*;
- § Encouraging PESP members to contribute in ways other than public speaking – acknowledging that not everyone feels comfortable telling their personal stories in public forums but that they have important things to contribute in other ways (such as written contributions, professional skills and other life experiences to contribute);
- § All members should have a mobile phone to make them contactable, particularly when attending public forums and presentations;
- § Program staff should help members create a CV of their skills and experience through PESP and assist with getting professional references for members from agencies/organisations that have engaged them;
- § PESP should have a facebook page and its own newsletter;
- § Photos and short personal profiles of PESP members could go up on the CHP website as part of promoting their services (as public speakers and in advisory roles);
- § Look at employing more PESP graduates in roles within CHP and broader sector.

A number of suggestions were about ways PESP could be used to gain even greater systemic improvements, including:

- § CHP lobby to ensure that every sector forum has a consumer speaking;
- § Make consumer-led training mandatory for all workers and boards/committees within the homelessness sector
- § Ensure all Specialist Homelessness Sector organisations have a consumer participation program;
- § Allow the PESP training/induction program to be used by other agencies wanting to set up consumer participation activities so that it is built on solid foundations.
- § Use PESP to undertake greater promotion of consumer rights and of CHP’s client advocacy service to raise grievances/issues with services that don’t uphold client rights;
- § Promote a wide range of ways of getting consumers involved at the service level (such as client BBQs, meet and greet programs for CEOs and staff to welcome new clients, mentoring and peer-to-peer advocacy opportunities) to break down the ‘us and them’ mentality many services have

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Overwhelmingly PESP members felt that the program had great potential to make significant change to the way the service system worked and improve community understanding of homelessness (including dispelling myths and stereotypes), but was being constrained by limited resources and limited capacity to reach a wider audience.

Q11 What would you describe as the highlight(s) of your time at the PESP?

Four members (36%) mentioned experience of attending a National Homelessness Conference as a highlight of their time at PESP, mostly for the positive feedback they received from presentations but also from the knowledge gained there. However, not surprisingly every PESP member had their own personal highlight from the program, and to honour this each will be reported here:

- *I really enjoyed the whole time at PESP. Loved the opportunity to travel to places like Seymour and Shepparton to give PESP presentations, and hear about experiences of other homeless people.*
- *The 2008 national homelessness conference in Adelaide and the 2010 one in Brisbane. I made a presentation with Giulia and we got fantastic reviews.*
- *I was one of 3 PESP members who were given AFL Grand Final Tickets as part of an appreciation package offered by the AFL – that was an absolute highlight sitting at the MCG on grand final day. It made me feel amazing!*
- *The Sydney conference [2006] was definitely a highlight – there were five of us and we developed our presentation as a group and it was facilitated by Mikaela [Coordinator]. It really allowed us to describe the importance and value of CP, both for ourselves and for others. It gave me an amazing feeling of confidence and feeling special after the really negative feelings of being homeless.*
- *Attending and presenting at the national homelessness conference in Brisbane was definitely a highlight – I presented with Allan and we got great feedback from the audience.*
- *Being asked to be on the Ministerial Advisory Group on Domestic Violence – this came about after participating at a national consultation and Mary Wooldridge who was the Chair of the group asked me to be involved – I've also been asked to put in an application to be involved in Stage 2 of that work.*
- *The time I went on JoyFM [radio station] on Youth Homelessness Day in 2013 – it was only 3 weeks into my training and gave me a real insight into how the media works. I also really enjoy the tours, getting to know the kids and having them ask really intelligent questions – it definitely help me learn new things from them as well.*
- *Just being involved is the highlight of my life, in a professional sense (Community Development Diploma and Arts degree aside). Receiving good feedback has made me feel better about myself, part of something, and a place where I belong.*
- *Seeing Kevin Rudd the Prime Minister at the homelessness conference in Adelaide – he was talking about social inclusion, ending homelessness, all amazing things to hear when you've been there and had those experiences.*
- *The CEO Sleepout – such a powerful event and experience. It really showed me how strong consumer voices can be and that people are willing to listen when you are given the chance.*
- *Heather Holst (HomeGround Services CEO) telling me I had a knack for running focus groups. I*

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really loved the positive feedback we got – it would make me jump with joy!

Q12 Is there anything else you would like to add in your reflections on your experience with the PESP?

When asked to add any other comments or reflections about their time with PESP, respondents typically used the opportunity to reinforce the positive influence the program had on their lives and their desire to see more consumers be given the same opportunity.

However some of the specific reflections also identified some of the more challenging aspects of being involved in consumer participation:

- *As a PESP member you can sometimes be something of a spectacle (telling your personal life story, warts and all) and this isn't always a good thing.*
- *You're asked to tell your own story about your lived experience, but other people you are dealing with you don't know anything about – would be great if others were also asked to reveal something personal about themselves to make the relationship more equal.*
- *Telling others about the worst things that you have done in your life is really hard; it's a really big thing to ask people to do. Some people don't have a problem with it, but for me it was just too difficult to do in a public way.*
- *There is a large pay gap between professionals and consumer volunteers, and this creates a financial and power gap which needs to be recognised in consumer participation activities.*
- *Even if you go onto paid employment somewhere, you are never going to get the sort of adulation and high level involvement we got through PESP. In some ways it is quite an extreme, the reaction and response you get from being part of PESP. There are really high levels of affirmation, and this means that the transition out of PESP has to be well planned. Currently there is some attention paid to this aspect, but probably not enough.*

However, the overwhelming nature of additional comments was positive, and included the following:

- *I learnt so much from my time with PESP, not just about myself but about the way the whole system works. I wish I had that knowledge when I was actually homeless as it would have changed my whole experience and I would have got out of homelessness so much earlier.*
- *Skills from PESP have definitely helped me articulate a clear message to people of influence and build networks and relationships that continuously give me more strength.*
- *Being in PESP changed my life, literally. It provided me with a turning point, an opportunity to cross the bridge back into mainstream society again. I had the opportunity to use my negative experience of homelessness in a positive way and see the value in myself again.*
- *Some agencies seem scared to give the power to people with lived experience and this needs to be challenged. I really believe in the PESP program [to do this], that's the only reason I've stayed with it this long.*
- *I just feel really fortunate to have kept involved with PESP, and I'm looking forward to staying involved...I really can't fault the program, with its great training and great feedback from others in the group – we can all really learn so much from each other.*
- *Empowerment – purpose - hope. These are the critical things you get from PESP.*

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FOR THOSE WHO ARE PESP GRADUATES

Q13 Have you received a grant from the PESP Advancement Fund? If yes, how did you spend the grant? What were the benefits you received from the grant?

Six out of the 11 respondents were eligible for a grant from the PESP Advancement Fund, given that they graduated from the program in 2010 or later. However only 3 of these (50%) had actually applied for and received this \$500 grant at the time of the evaluation interviews. Of those who had received the grant, two had put it towards a high quality camera so they could continue taking photos/videos to support their ongoing advocacy work. The third put it towards a computer so they could get access to emails and word processing to help with writing up and storing presentations and other documents related to their ongoing PESP engagements – as well as access to news and information via the internet.

Of those who hadn't yet applied for or received their grants, all mentioned that the process required for accessing the grant (getting a number of written quotes) had put them off applying. However all mentioned that they would be using the grant to either purchase or update existing computer hardware, and enable them to keep in touch by email and social media and to continue their PESP related advocacy work.

Q14 What have been the benefits (if any) of your involvement as a PESP graduate?

Five of the six 'Graduates' interviewed (83%) felt that the establishment of a formal graduate program and their graduation experience had been a positive one with the most commonly cited benefit being that it allowed them to maintain contact with the PESP and ongoing opportunities that provided. The use of the term 'graduate' was generally viewed very positively as it gave a sense of achievement and recognition of the skills and experience that had been gained through the program.

Other benefits mentioned include that it maintained feelings of positive self-esteem and value that had been endorsed through the program, and it provided the opportunity to contribute to improving the program over time through greater experience and knowledge of what works and what doesn't. One respondent noted:

- *The graduate program also recognises the right of homeless people to continue contributing – separation from a program like this can be very disturbing for individuals. Many graduates have worked hard and earned the right to continue to have opportunities that CHP and PESP provides.*

Another said:

- *The term 'graduate' is a real positive – it makes me feel like a professional and reminds me how far I've come and how much more knowledge I have now.*

The respondent who felt ambivalent about the Graduate program found it difficult to identify what they had actually gained from becoming a graduate, noting that having to hand over their various PESP related roles to new PESP members felt very unsatisfying particularly as they were now starting to feel comfortable in those roles. Missing the ongoing opportunities to be involved and called on for PESP engagements was also noted by several respondents as a negative aspect of being officially 'graduated from' the program.

Several graduates identified ways in which the graduate program could be enhanced in future, including the introduction of monthly social events whereby graduates could catch up informally and compare notes on other advocacy and consumer participation roles they were involved in, as well as

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providing separate opportunities for PESP graduates to talk/socialise with new members in an information sharing and quasi-mentoring role.

Notably, nearly all graduates have continued active involvement with CHP in some form and a number have instigated their own ongoing consumer advocacy projects or opportunities. One is currently exploring the idea of establishing a stand-alone Homeless Persons Union, one is trying to find a publisher for a book they have written on their homelessness experience and recovery, another is establishing a Life Coaching business which will have a focus on helping marginalised or formerly homeless people and another continues to pursue ways of establishing improved program responses for women and children escaping violence.

PESP members focus group findings

Two focus groups were held at the beginning of the data collection stage (March 2014) to introduce PESP members to the project and get their initial feedback on a series of broad questions. Eight people attended in total including one current PESP member and seven graduates.

The questions posed to these two groups were the same and focused on some of the fundamental aspects of the program, such as the 'peer/group/team' model, and looking at some of the other strengths and weaknesses of the program. The following represents some of the key outcomes from these focus groups:

Q1 – What do you think of the terms used in the PESP and in consumer participation more generally? (such as peer, consumer, service user, client, citizen)

There were a wide range of views about which were the most appropriate terms with one group generally preferring 'peer' and the other group preferring 'consumer'. Some thought that the term 'consumer' was a more equalising and inclusive term given that most people in the community thought of themselves as consumers:

- *All of us are consumers, aren't we, so it makes us sound like we're part of the mainstream, not a special label*
- *Consumer suggests stronger engagement, it's more inclusive*
- *I prefer the term 'consumer advocate' because that's what we do.*
- *For most of us we've moved on from homelessness services, so we're not really consumers any more so it's inaccurate. I don't consumer their services any more, but I can still say what they should be doing better.*

Whereas others thought that 'peer' or 'peer advocate' was a better term when trying to engage with others who had experienced homelessness:

- *The word 'peer' gets rid of the stigma associated with 'service user' which can sound like you are just using up the service, not really engaged with it*
- *The real value we have is that lived experience – people will actually come up and talk to us because of our experience. So we are 'peers' of people in the homeless population.*

Many didn't like the use of the word 'program' in the title of PESP and 'support program' was also seen as a bit confusing/ambiguous. Generally the terms 'peer educator' and 'consumer advocate' were supported as representing what the program members did, acknowledging the educational role of the program and the fact that members were speaking not just on their own behalf but on behalf of others.

Q2 – What are the benefits of the peer/group/team model used by PESP?

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This elicited a great deal of discussion with participants overwhelmingly in support of the team approach used in the PESP. Some members spoke of their experience with other consumer groups where individuals were sent out to speak at events or sit on advisory committees with no backup, little training or organisational support and reflected on how poorly this worked for everyone.

- *It's like a footy team, we all come together and make it work.*

The team approach was considered important for many reasons, both for the individuals involved and for the better outcomes it achieved for the whole program:

- *We really back each other, support each other and learn from each other – that's the best part, we've got each other's back*
- *As a team we all have different talents, we all have different and unique experiences, but we all learn how to respect and work together to get our message across. You can make a certain impact as an individual but together we have so much passion for what we're doing, it's really amazing.*
- *When we walk into presentations as a group, we had incredibly strong cohesion and this made a huge difference to how we all felt about presenting, and the power of our presentations.*

One member also reflected on the fact that the PESP members had been encouraged to work together to write their own Code of Conduct, and how that strengthened the group and its purpose.

Q3 – SWOT Analysis – what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the PESP?

Members in both focus groups discussed this question collectively and arrived at the following list of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. This comprehensive list identifies that members saw both strengths and weaknesses in the program, and many more opportunities than threats. The opportunities focused on ways of building on the current strengths of the program, rather than any major shift away from current operations or directions. The conversation also definitely reiterated the view that the program had many more strengths in its current form than weaknesses, and they greatly valued the way it was both structured and managed.

Table 6: SWOT Analysis by PESP Members in Focus Groups (March 2014)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Training provided at start of program ✓ Support provided while you are a member (including supervision) ✓ Requirement for regular involvement as a job readiness and self-discipline tool ✓ Public speaking opportunities and impact ✓ Real benefits for members (e.g. opportunity for members to organise their lives and build self-esteem, contribute to something positive, build relationships and networks, etc) ✓ Educational tours (for school groups and others) ✓ Networking with others (people experiencing homelessness and other groups) ✓ Community involvement – ‘we’re out there in the community, educating the community about homelessness’ ✓ Team approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Importance of commitment to the program not respected by all members all of the time (needs to be made really clear that when you join PESP you must honour your commitments to turn up on time and be prepared) ✗ Some people not always contactable – makes it difficult when participating in off-site events and other members need to contact someone ✗ When numbers reduce (through attrition) the ‘team’ impact is diminished ✗ When PESP rules are not followed problems arise ✗ Not working enough with the Indigenous or gay communities ✗ Sometimes workers or other organisations don’t really want to hear what we have to say ✗ PESP seems to have lost focus on service system improvement/change

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<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☠ Inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour by PESP members (can threaten reputation of the whole program) ☠ Changes to Centrelink rules put more pressure on us to drop volunteer roles, particularly for single parents ☠ Constantly telling your personal story can be draining/disempowering (but can also be cathartic/therapeutic) ☠ Lack of commitment to program by individuals ☠ Homelessness sector being tokenistic about consumer participation – just asking to speak to them so they can ‘tick a box’ to say they listened ☠ Losing funding from government 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 💡 PESP training accredited similar to a Certificate 3 in other areas – gives the program more legitimacy/value 💡 More educational tours (with different community groups, politicians, Councillors, policy makers etc) 💡 A probation period for new PESP members – use a ‘3 or 6 month check-in’ to see how things are working out, and if it’s not a good fit recruit a replacement from shortlist of earlier applicants 💡 Mid-year intake if numbers dwindle 💡 Work with Indigenous/GLBTI/elderly community groups to increase diversity and reach 💡 More outreach to homelessness agencies to promote PESP and value of CP 💡 Develop more peer worker opportunities (particularly for PESP graduates) in homelessness, health and other services 💡 Provide a ‘meet and greet’ service for new clients within larger agencies 💡 Provide testimonials about PESP activities on website 💡 Attract philanthropic \$\$ to PESP 💡 Develop video materials with PESP members to allow greater reach of member stories 💡 Use technology more to undertake CP activities (video, website, etc) 💡 Promote PESP more widely across the community sector (eg schools, hospitals, community health agencies, etc)

Q4 – Looking at the ‘6 degrees of participation’ framework in the CHP/HomeGround Consumer Participation Kit (see below), what degree of participation is encouraged at PESP, what degree of participation should consumers have and how could this be achieved?

1	Information
2	Consultation
3	Deciding together
4	Acting together/partnership
5	Independent initiatives
6	Consumer control

Generally members stated they weren’t aware of the framework or this document but it provoked a lot of discussion and exposed differences of opinion about the ideal form and structure of consumer participation.

Most respondents felt that the PESP allowed for lots of participation in the first two areas (information and consultation), and that there was often scope for involvement in the 3rd and 4th areas (deciding/action together, partnership).

While there was some discussion about the benefits that could be gained from moving toward greater levels of independence and consumer control (with one or two members particularly passionate about this), the general feedback was the PESP members were happy with the level of participation offered through the program. In particular, the discussion in both groups identified Homelessness, learning from those who’ve lived it: the PESP evaluation

strong appreciation of the role of CHP as the peak body in the homelessness sector in leading and supporting the program:

- *There are lots of benefits in being part of CHP because it gives access and reputational advantage that you might not otherwise get.*

Members talked about the fact that PESP encouraged strong levels of empowerment and engagement from them, and several believed that the program did aim for or foster 'consumer control'. In addition, people spoke about the value of PESP in helping them think through and reflect on their own experiences of homelessness. This was usually done in a respectful way and members felt supported by the other members and by the Team Leader to raise often traumatic and personally destructive experiences in a way that wasn't judged or dismissed. Several spoke about how they felt in control of their own levels of participation in the program and that this was a positive thing (rather than feeling dictated to about their levels or regularity of involvement). However others disagreed and felt that this is an area that could be really improved at PESP with members given more autonomy and power in deciding what project to pursue and how to pursue them.

There was some discussion in both groups about the benefits of setting up a separate consumer-controlled organisation for people either currently homeless or with experience of homelessness, and most members felt like this would work well alongside the PESP and would receive support from CHP.

- *There's nothing about PESP that stops other consumer initiatives from happening alongside it.*
- *Consumers can always come to CHP and ask for support for different things. You might not always get it, but I always feel able to ask.*

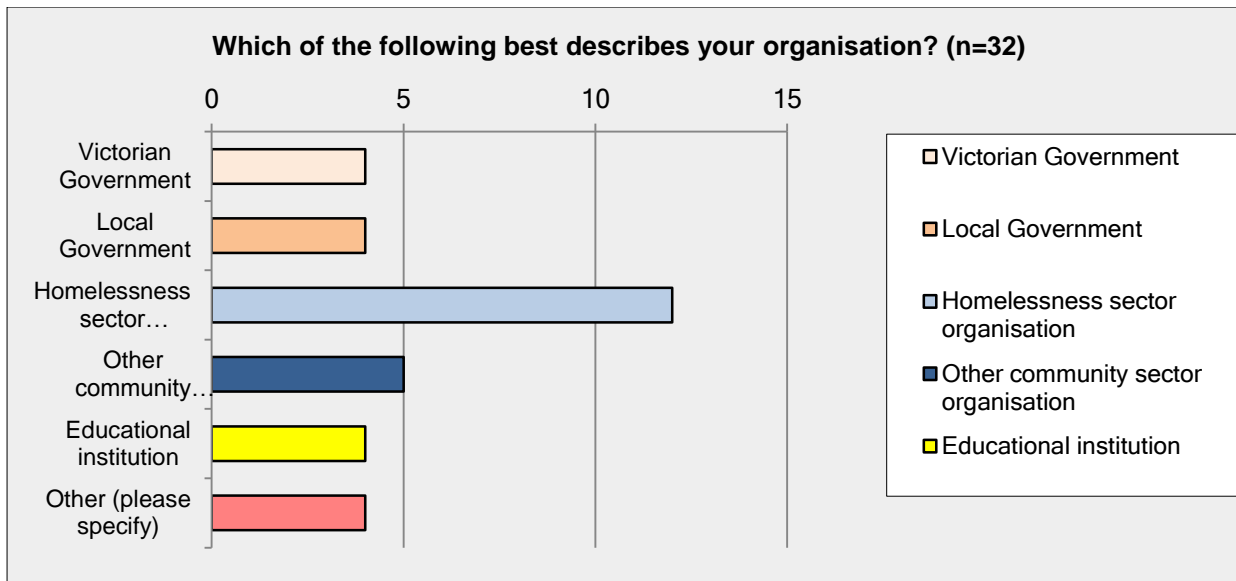
Members also talked about the value of the PESP as a place where people could talk and share ideas about independent initiatives that they were thinking of pursuing (for example photo exhibitions, video documentaries, program improvements) and how valuable that opportunity was. However most members still felt that consumer participation in the homelessness sector in general was undervalued and needed to attract greater support:

- *You could always have more participation, you can never have enough, but where do you draw the line?*
- *As homeless people we still don't have the validity of people who've been through other traumatic events. Like breast cancer survivors, they're always expected to become part in support organisations. Once homelessness gets recognised for the damage it does people, and PESP is recognised for what it can do to help, then we can have authentic consumer participation at all the different levels that are needed.*

Stakeholder interview and online survey findings

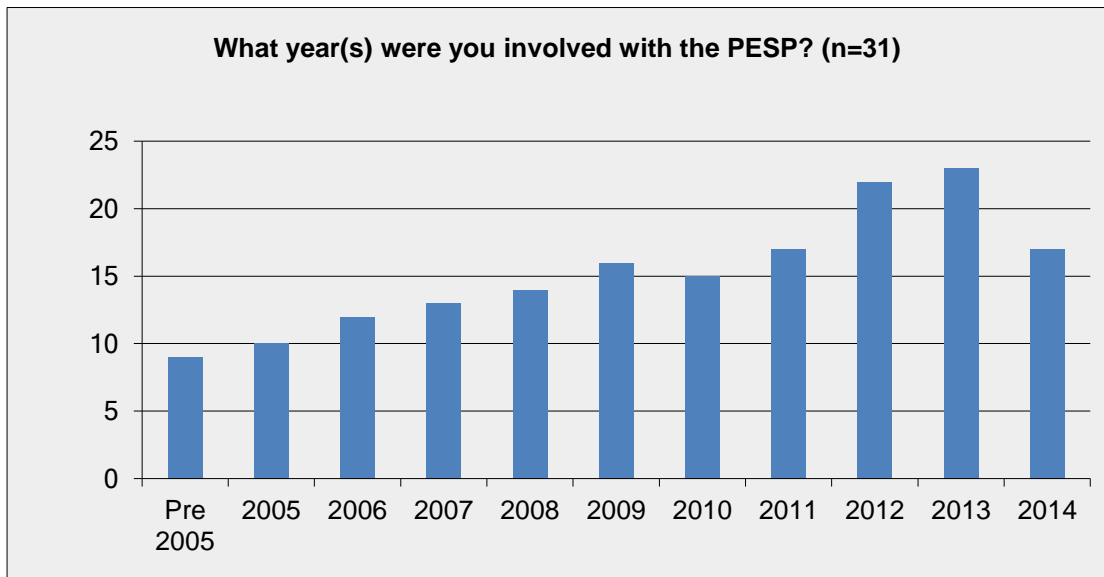
Q1 – What type of organisation are you involved with?

Of the 32 stakeholders, just over one third (36%) were associated with a homelessness organisation, followed by government (local/state) at 24%. There were then an almost equal number of respondents from other community sector organisations, educational institutions and 'other' categories (including a former Federal Minister and several consultants that had worked with PESP). This indicates a good cross-section of sectors and roles represented in the stakeholders consulted.



Q2 – What year(s) were you involved with the PESP?

Respondents were involved with the program across a wide range of years, some in every year since its inception in 2005, others for only one or two years. The greatest involvement was in the years 2012-13 which reflects the fact that the sample for Group B was from organisations that had specifically been involved over these two years. This was to ensure that reflections on the program focused on its most recent performance/activities, not just from its formative years, given that the program has changed and evolved slowly over time. Respondents from Group A (the smaller sample) typically had greater involvement in the early years of the program.



Q3 – How did you find out about the PESP?

Respondents in Group A primarily found out about the program directly from their involvement in or contacts at the Council to Homeless Persons (82%), whereas those in Group B were most likely to have heard about the program from a work colleague, including from someone involved with CHP (70%). Other ways in which people had found out about the program were listed as:

- § Through the Melbourne Metropolitan Rooming House Working Group
- § Word of mouth (partner)

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- § From a presentation made at a community leadership dinner
- § From a proposal put to the Department for funding (2 responses)

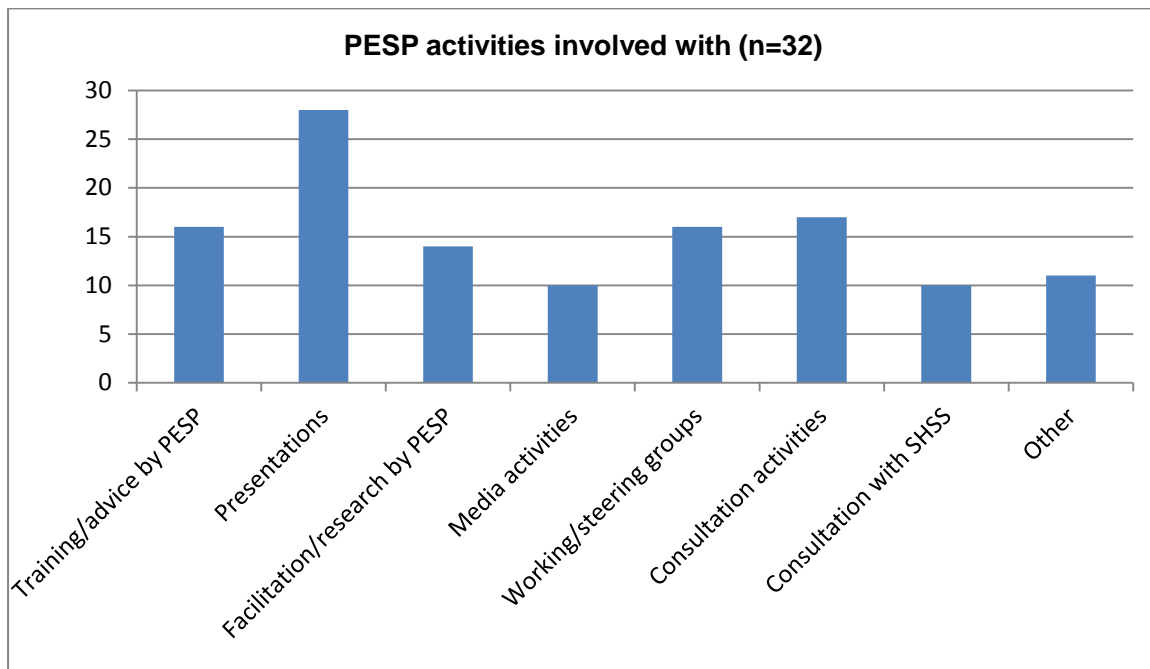
Interestingly none of the respondents had found out about PESP from coverage in the mainstream media, and only 3 people (from Group B) had read about PESP in an industry newsletter or website. This indicates that direct involvement or contact with CHP is the most likely way that information about the program is communicated, suggesting scope for greater promotion of it through other sources and mediums.

Q4 – Which of the PESP activities have you been involved with?

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the 7 major PESP activities they had been involved with or to nominate other specific activities.

The most common activity respondents had been involved with was individual or group presentations from PESP members (28), followed by 27 instances of being involved in PESP consultation activities either in a specialist homelessness service or with other stakeholders (which could be government, educational institution or community organisation). There were 16 instances each of being involved with PESP members on a working/steering group or providing training/advice to other organisations.

Activities listed under ‘other’ include meetings with individual PESP members, working on the development or funding of the PESP model, helping PESP members with writing skills or supporting the growth of the program over time.



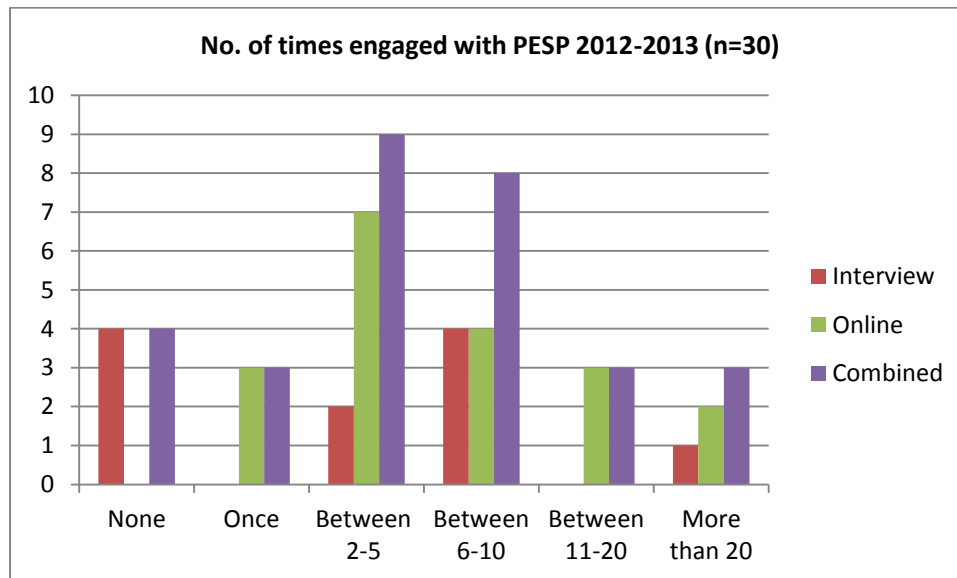
This shows that the stakeholders consulted have been exposed to a wide variety of activities and interactions with different parts of the program, and are well placed to comment on the performance of PESP across its various functions.

Q5 – How many times over the period 2012-2013 have you been involved with the PESP?

This question was asked to identify how many times over more recent years (2012-13) there had been interaction with PESP. Results showed that respondents in Group A tended to have greater involvement in the earlier years of the program, but all from Group B who answered this question Homelessness, learning from those who’ve lived it: the PESP evaluation

(19 out of 21 respondents) indicated they had at least one period of involvement, with the majority having either 2-5 involvements (7 people or 37%) or 6-10 involvements (4 people or 21%).

The combined results show that of the 30 people who answered this question, 10% had more than 20 involvements with the PESP and another 10% had between 11-20 involvements. This indicates that some stakeholders are heavily engaged with the PESP program and its members, whereas the majority have at least a couple of interactions with them each year.



Q6 – What were your expectations of the PESP prior to your involvement with the program?

This question revealed a wide range of answers from the 31 people who responded, from very low (“I had no expectations”) to very high expectations (“that they would ensure the voice of the homeless consumer at the centre, rather than at the margins of public and policy debate”). In fact 16% of respondents indicated that they had no particular expectation at all.

The most common response (68%) was that the PESP would be able to provide a perspective from people with a lived experience of homelessness. Another 20% indicated that they had high expectations of a quality program because of the fact that it was associated with CHP, and that they respected the work of this organisation.

Several respondents spoke about their expectation that the program would allow consultation with consumers to occur in a more meaningful and less tokenistic way than had occurred previously, and that they would be able to offer a consumer perspective on planning and service delivery issues. Those who engaged PESP members as trainers, researchers or facilitators identified an expectation that they would provide an impartial and evidence-based approach to their work.

Other expectations were identified as:

- § That they would facilitate authentic and power change within the sector, based on their expertise in the area of homelessness;
- § That they would be trained and supported in their roles, and that they would have broad background expertise and diverse experiences;
- § To provide a first person view of homelessness and the issues and impacts of the risks associated with homelessness for older people;

- § *Provide information to students (potential homelessness workers) on effective strategies for working with people experiencing homelessness and a view about 'what works' to address homelessness;*
- § *That the program would be a sustainable way of getting consumer input into the policy and service response debate – not just the one-off individual perspective;*
- § *To provide an understanding of the individual and structural causes (and impacts) of homelessness.*

Two respondents had expectations that the PESP would be a consumer-controlled or directed program with hands-on involvement of consumers as volunteers in delivering services and determining program activities. One had prior involvement with the Public Tenants Association, which ran more along these lines, and expected that PESP may be similar in structure and operations.

A number of respondents mentioned that they didn't expect the PESP members to be very sophisticated in their approach or presentations, or have a very high degree of understanding about the complexities of either the policies or restrictions around service delivery in the homelessness sector. One of these also felt that the broader sector didn't have high expectations of what the PESP could achieve when it was first established.

Q7 – Were your expectations met?

An overwhelming 93% (27 out of 29 respondents) felt that their expectations of the PESP were met once they became involved with the program, with about a third of these saying their expectations had actually been exceeded. Responses included:

- § *More than met – if I may add!*
- § *Showed great consideration in their assessment of system settings and ideas for change*
- § *Pushed boundaries in ways that really made a difference (e.g. involvement in advocacy work)*
- § *PESP made a difference in many ways, including helping to establish other consumer groups*
- § *The fact that their advocacy was often on behalf of others experiencing homelessness, not for their own situations, demonstrated a real integrity and was a particularly useful perspective.*

At least 4 of the respondents mentioned the current PESP Team Leader as being a significant factor in their expectations being met, with several noting that her involvement initially as a PESP member provided noticeable additional value to the program.

One respondent felt that expectations were 'mostly met' depending on which PESP member was involved in their presentation and how long they had been involved in the program, and another felt that the program at least in its initial years was run by staff in a much more controlled way than they would have like to see, with more emphasis on members completing regular set-tasks (like diary writing) than promoting a strengths-based or rights-based approach to consumer participation. Those who were involved in the early years of the program did provide examples of 'teething problems', particularly around accountabilities of PESP members and the lack of clear processes for dealing with member performance. However these were invariably described as having been resolved once the matters arose and not having significantly impacted on the value of the program.

Q8 – Were there aspects of the program that you consider successful? If yes, what were they?

Of the 27 respondents who answered this question, 100% responded that they felt the program was successful with a wide range of examples of this success.

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From a quantitative perspective, 10 respondents (37%) mentioned the training and support provided to the PESP members as a particularly successful aspect of the program, and another 8 people (30%) noted the excellent public speaking skills and impact of presentations made by PESP members.

From this open-ended question, responses typically fell into the following three categories (with a selection of comments listed in table below):

- § Strong and effective program management
- § Positive attributes and impact of PESP members, individually and as a group
- § Impact/value of program elements meeting the needs of stakeholders

Strong and effective program management	Positive attributes and impact of PESP members	Impact/value of program elements to stakeholders
<i>Strong program guidelines and consistency of approach critical</i>	<i>PESP members always reliable and very responsive</i>	<i>Training/support at the beginning and ongoing is critical</i>
<i>Team is very well supported by Cass. Cass is a great manager and excellent to deal with.</i>	<i>Very powerful public speakers. Ability to speak about very personal stories in a clear and balanced way very valuable.</i>	<i>Professional standard of public speaking/presentations in various forums</i>
<i>Program embedded and supported by CHP as the peak body gives it access to quality information and insights</i>	<i>In Committee work, PESP members have always provided good value and good input</i>	<i>Consultation/advice provided to range of services and committees</i>
<i>Very high standard of professionalism, wisdom and knowledge</i>	<i>They have developed a really strong sense of their self-worth through the program</i>	<i>Quality of training sessions they provided to workers in the sector and to students (tertiary and secondary)</i>
<i>Focus on empowering PESP members and making it a sustainable program both equally important</i>	<i>Ability of PESP members to use their experience constructively</i>	<i>Peer support activities at homeless services (eg sitting in foyer and speaking to new clients about their experiences in the homelessness system)</i>
<i>Extremely well presented and managed program.</i>	<i>Confident, articulate and very informed about the service system</i>	<i>Empowering for members, skilling and starting a career path for some</i>
<i>Graduate Program has been a real value add giving experienced members opportunity for continued involvement and contribution</i>	<i>Very approachable for our students after the presentation</i>	<i>Research activities (survey design, conducting surveys with peers, interviews, running focus groups etc)</i>
<i>Use of MOU agreements excellent</i>	<i>Passionate about their role</i>	
<i>Program staff always available to discuss different projects and how they can be implemented</i>	<i>Broad range of members over the years has given us a range of perspectives in our policy work</i>	<i>'Grass roots' nature of PESP presentations and contribution supported by knowledge.</i>
<i>Good reputation and ongoing work of the PESP evidence of its success</i>	<i>Ability to relate directly to peers in the service system</i>	<i>Advice provided directly to government</i>

Some of the specific PESP activities that were noted as having been successful were:

- ✓ Development of the Consumer Rights Charter (~2007 developed under Minister for Housing, Candy Broad)

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- ✓ Contributions to the development of the 'Consumer Participation Resource Kit' published in 2008 through feedback on the project and facilitation of consumer focus groups
- ✓ Input to the Green Paper/White Paper on Homelessness by the Federal Government in 2008
- ✓ Consumer input into the "Call this a Home" advocacy campaign, that led directly to a statewide rooming house taskforce being established
- ✓ Involvement in the City of Melbourne 'Street Count' since 2008, as advisers and data collectors
- ✓ Training sessions offered to tertiary social work students, rated as much more valuable than any learning they had received from textbooks throughout their course
- ✓ PESP members training and advising consumers in other areas about consumer participation and how to effectively provide input to services/local networks
- ✓ Involvement with Community Health Centres to improve consumer participation of vulnerable/homeless people at those services

Some of the verbatim comments made by respondents are listed below, and note the wide range of ways in which PESP members and the program make a positive impact:

- § *They provided balanced consumer insight into how programs succeed and fail.*
- § *Lots of people I speak with interstate see PESP as a fantastic model and are very envious that we have such a program here in Victoria*
- § *The preparedness of PESPers (sic) is exceptional. They are confident and know how to deliver personal information in ways that grabs people's attention and has high impact. It results in consumers being approachable but also vocal and comfortable with self-disclosure.*
- § *It was fantastic for the Year 9 students involved in the presentations to meet with the presenters and develop a relationship with them. The presenters were very approachable.*
- § *All consumers I have met via the PESP seem confident in their participation. They seem to be aware of their role and their lived experience comes through... I see people with hope and purpose who are stepping into their lives with vigour and it warms me every time I think about it. This personal development aspect is an extremely successful component of the program. I also think that we as a sector have benefitted enormously from the easy access we have to consumers for the variety of activities that we have gradually developed which utilise consumer input.*
- § *The support provided by Cassandra to the PESP person was clearly invaluable, and until I witnessed the presentation i didn't realise how important that supportive role was.*
- § *PESP didn't put themselves forward as 'the experts' but worked with others to contribute to addressing issues and barriers.*

Q9 – Were there aspects of the program that you thought didn't work well, and what were they?

Of the 23 people that answered this question, 17 felt there was nothing about PESP that didn't work (74%). Of the other six who did identify aspects that hadn't worked, three spoke about problems in the early years of the program around accountabilities and behaviours of some individuals that were acknowledged as having been addressed through improved program guidelines and better enforcement of existing guidelines.

Other comments included that the way the program ran could sometimes be seen as a bit tokenistic and too focused on individuals telling their personal stories (as opposed to the broader range of consumer participation activities), that the early emphasis on consumer rights and advocacy had dropped off as a focus in recent years, and that there should be more efforts to provide peer support

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rather than just engaging with service providers and policy makers.

One respondent involved in the early years of the program noted that despite efforts to document and evaluate the program earlier in its life this hadn't happened, and this was a missed opportunity to promote the achievements and value of the model more broadly.

Another respondent noted that even were individual cases where experiences with PESP members weren't optimal, "*there is always the expectation of feedback which clearly articulated in the MOUs*" that are drawn up between CHP and external parties engaging a PESP member.

Finally it was noted that sometimes the most effective advocates can become the 'go to' people for policy makers and the media, and it is important to balance this with getting a wider perspective on consumer views and experiences. This comment was made as a note of caution rather than suggesting that PESP works in this way.

Q10 – What change have you witnessed in YOUR organisation as a result of your involvement with PESP?

Of the 27 who responded to this question, 25 (93%) reported that they had witnessed a change in their organisation, all in a positive manner. The most common ways in which change was evident was through a greater commitment to involving consumers in decision-making processes (on service delivery, policy development and training), an improved awareness of the needs and interests of consumers in daily practice, and the inclusion of consumers in evaluation/feedback processes. A number of respondents also noted that it had helped their organisation in raising awareness of the issues around homelessness both within their own community and in the broader community they deal with.

Some of the specific examples of given demonstrating the ways in which change had occurred include:

- § *We learnt that consumers find it empowering to be 'named' and not anonymous in their advocacy work – we are now much more prepared to use and train our own clients in media work*
- § *After involvement with PESP we now make our own budget allocation for consumer participation activities*
- § *One of the areas that made a real difference was in hearing the stories about women and children trapped in rooming houses at the same time they were trying to escape family violence – this influenced the government to work really hard to get as many families as possible out of rooming houses which were completely inappropriate and unsafe*
- § *PESP has made our organisation/service more useable to clients through their feedback on the physical environment, their feedback about our communication with clients and their direct involvement in a program designed to assist clients engage more with the range of services in a different, more interactive way*
- § *Consumer participation is now part of daily business at most levels*
- § *It has become part of our annual training calendar and essential for all our volunteers to participate in.*
- § *We are currently in the process of establishing a Consumer Participation Policy due to the positive influence CHP and PESP have contributed to our organisation.*
- § *Involvement with PESP saw us move away from the 'charitable' approach to homelessness and towards an 'equality' approach – treating consumers as equals with staff in terms of*

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expectations and behaviours was critical to the program gaining a good reputation.

A number of respondents also spoke about PESP influencing them to make their organisation a more inclusive and accessible place for this client group with services being offered in a more flexible manner. They also spoke about involvement with PESP causing their organisation to 'lift the bar' for participation of their homeless clients and have greater expectations of what could be achieved through this.

Educational institutions that have used PESP talk about the strong impact this has had on their student body, with the noticeable change in perceptions and attitudes evident immediately following PESP presentations/interactions. One respondent said:

§ *The school I work with has completely changed their Year 9 curriculum to build it around the homelessness experience they have with PESP. They now include 4 weeks on food security – and a trip to the Food Bank, the homelessness tour, a couch surfing awareness day, and for world homelessness day students must complete a project on social issues...The young people are asking more questions about social justice and are working with their Shire Youth Council to make a difference about homelessness in the area.*

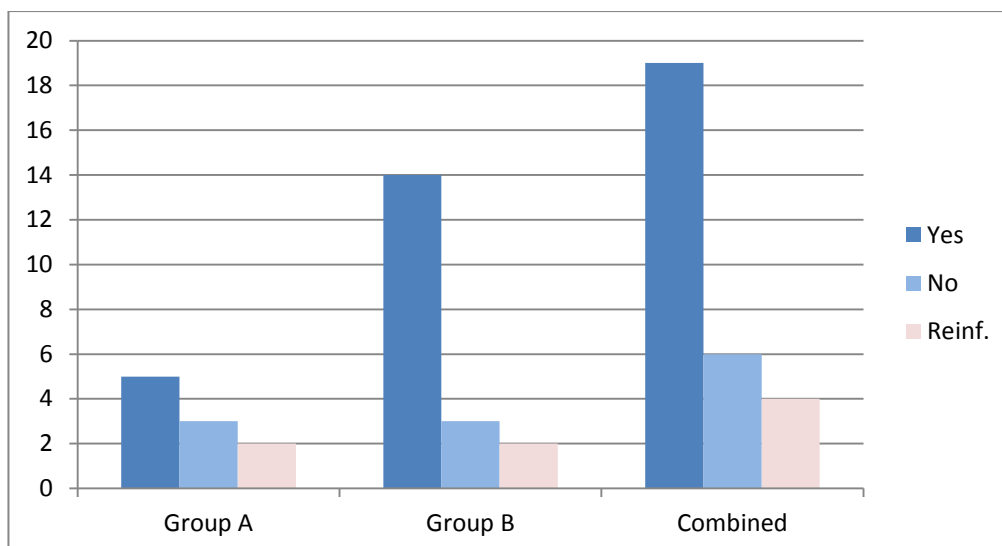
A respondent who had worked in the Department of Human Services claimed that involvement with PESP had enabled DHS to encourage other stakeholders to undertake more consumer participation, and it strengthened the seriousness with which Government looked at homelessness.

Several respondents from local governments noted that it had changed the way they responded as an organisation to homelessness, and for one it encouraged them to offer regular training with their staff about the impacts and causes of homelessness – the personal stories were seen as particularly powerful in changing the attitudes of staff who would otherwise have had little understanding of the issues.

Two respondents noted that while PESP had had a positive influence on their organisation, there was still further to go in fully embedding consumer participation practices and principles and in making consumers feel fully a part of the organisation.

Q11 – Have you experienced a change in your personal attitude towards people experiencing homelessness as a result of your involvement with the PESP? If yes, what has that been?

Of the 29 responses to this question, 19 people (66%) said they have experienced a change in their personal attitude (unanimously in a positive way) from their interactions with PESP, while an additional four (14%) said their existing attitudes had been reinforced through their experiences.



The positive impact was greatest amongst Group B, who are likely to have had less direct interaction and experience with homelessness in the past, whereas Group A respondents were more likely to have had longer and more in-depth involvement with consumers of homelessness services.

While six people (21%) said their personal attitude had NOT changed, this was typically qualified by statements like:

- § *I always knew how powerful consumer voices can be.*
- § *I never thought of homeless people being 'other' anyway.*
- § *No – already had a strong commitment to consumer participation and this didn't change.*
- § *No – it's been in the blood for a long time.*

For those who had experienced a change in their personal attitude, explanatory comments included:

- § *It's made me really connect with the personal impact the homelessness has on people*
- § *I have noticed that consumers of homeless services are a much more colourful group of characters, more creative and artistic – and made me realise that this should be celebrated*
- § *Only that I get more excited about the possibilities and realities of what consumer participation can achieve*
- § *I noted that the views of people experiencing homelessness wasn't always the views of the service providers - this doesn't mean that either party was always right, but that there are different perspectives to be taken into account when making policy. It's important to know what the points of friction or difference might be and really important to get information directly from the clients themselves*
- § *I see PESP as a powerful tool in the personal journey of those involved*
- § *It's confirmed the positive value of consumers in a peak organisation and in an advocacy role*
- § *The passion of the PESP members has reinforced my belief in the need for people have been homeless to be involved in the development of services. Spending time with them has taught me a lot about the effect their experience has had on them and how they have adapted, which has changed my practice*

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- § *My experience with PESP has exposed me to a much greater range of capacity than before – some truly remarkable people who have so much to offer, PESP has shown me a much broader spectrum of homeless people.*
- § *Yes, I am much more aware of the causes and prevalence of homelessness and the different types of homelessness. I have also developed a much greater empathy for the homeless individuals as a result of the tours and presentations I have attended.*
- § *Yes, even more impressed with the resilience of these people and deeply appreciative of them sharing their often extremely personal story.*
- § *My respect and admiration has grown for the participants*
- § *I'm always learning that every story is different and interesting and everyone can contribute knowledge from their personal experience.*

Q12 – What impact (if any) do you think the PESP has had on changing the attitudes of others toward people experiencing homelessness?

This is a purely subjective question, but aimed at identifying whether those who have personally had direct experience with PESP have witnessed specific changes in the attitudes of colleagues and others.

Of the 30 people who answered this question, 90% believed that PESP had positively changed the attitudes of others towards the experience of homelessness, and those experiencing it. Of the other three respondents, two stated that they didn't feel like they were in a position to make a comment on this and one felt that the small scale of PESP was the limiting factor in its ability to change attitudes, rather than the nature of the program itself.

Many respondents spoke about the powerful impact of the personal stories presented by PESP members and the humanising nature of these presentations, giving the audience a 'real-life' understanding of the causes and impacts of homelessness. One respondent noted:

- § *When the PESP Member (Pete Burns) spoke at the Wheeler Centre event last year, he nearly brought the house down, his presentation was so powerful. This is the sort of thing that more people need to hear, how homelessness can affect people's lives, but also how people can move out of homelessness again when they get the right help.*

Another said:

- § *They offer a personal connection to what is an abstract experience for many Victorians.*

A common theme in the responses was that PESP had had both a direct and indirect impact, through influencing those who heard the stories and issues first hand but also through the broader understanding of homelessness that they were able to spread into their own networks and wider communities. Some of the comments from those who commissioned PESP to talk to students (secondary and tertiary) were:

- § *I had a massive impact on a number of my students. They are now actively involved in activities and events to raise awareness and funds for homeless support services and some have expressed interest in pursuing study and careers in this field*
- § *I witnessed an almost immediate impact on students after the PESP presentation...it helped students understand something of the trauma of homelessness, which is critical for students going into community services to understand.*

Others talked about the impact of PESP through its work on advisory committees and working groups on various issues, noting that the outcomes achieved were noticeably improved than if the views of PESP members hadn't been included. One respondent noted, '*they bring a dose of reality to discussions and ensure people remain mindful of the real impact of decisions and policies*'. The Equal

Service Guidelines project undertaken by Consumer Affairs Victoria, aimed at promoting equality of access to public and private services and facilities, was noted by a number of respondents as a powerful example of the impact of PESP members and consumer involvement. Other specific examples were PESP members speaking at the recent launch of the HomeGround Real Estate Agency, media appearances of PESP members in the rooming house campaign, and the recent call for a homeless persons union to be established by a PESP graduate.

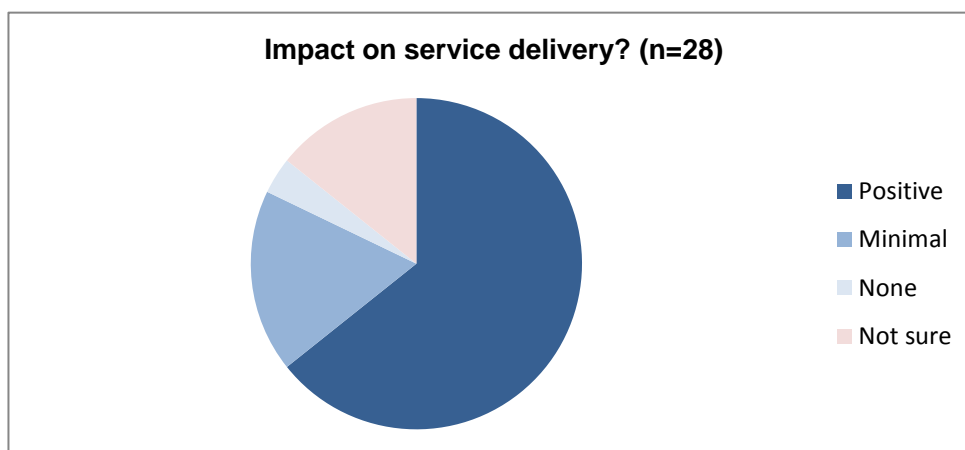
At a very personal level, one respondent noted how her own involvement with PESP had led her to encourage her husband to attend one of the homelessness tours and the impact that had:

§ *A few months later (after the tour he went on) he was in Melbourne with time to kill and was asked for money by a homeless man. They got talking and my husband took the man out for dinner. They talked for 3 hours, looked for family members on facebook, called me and I linked them into some homeless services (St Peters for breakfast – this guy was recently out from prison, new on the streets and hadn't connected into any services). Both men are still in contact with each other. The released prisoner now has a home and a new friend.*

Notably the most commonly reported examples of the impact of PESP are those related to the personal stories and presentations given by PESP members, either in sector forums, training sessions or the 'homelessness tours' provided to different groups.

Q13 – What impact (if any) do you think the PESP has had on service delivery?

Of the 28 respondents to this question, 18 people (64%) felt that PESP had had a positive impact on service delivery for people experiencing homelessness and another 18% felt that it had had some minimal impact. Only one person thought PESP had had no impact on service delivery, and another 4 people (14%) didn't feel sufficiently informed to answer this question. Interestingly, respondents in Group A were more sceptical about the impact of PESP on service delivery than those in Group B – who are both more directly engaged in service delivery and more positive about PESP's impact.



Those that felt the PESP had had only minimal impact noted that the service system hadn't engaged with PESP as much as they could, or that PESP hadn't actively promoted its services and functions as well as it could have. One respondent felt that if PESP refocused on its early objective of promoting grievance procedures and education within services about the benefits of consumer participation, this would provide a positive platform for greater sector engagement with the program.

Respondents who believed PESP has had a positive impact on service delivery provided various examples of this, including:

§ *Impact made through the valuable input to sector forums and discussions they have participated in*

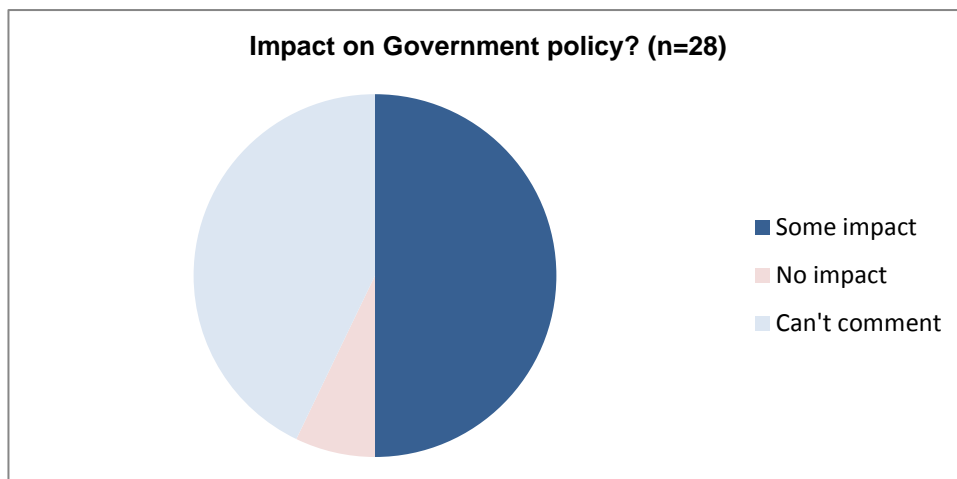
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- § *Has led to more attempts at consumer participation and recognition of the high value of consumer input*
- § *Important from the perspective of inclusion and improved accessibility*
- § *Consumer focus groups are well respected by staff and clients*
- § *PESP has helped agencies consider how they might better support the needs of diverse groups in the community through partnership development*
- § *It has made us more willing to engage consumers in the community consultation process*
- § *Regional homelessness networkers have worked closely with PESP in our work*
- § *Has possibly had more impact on smaller agencies rather than the larger ones – only a few large agencies have really engaged with PESP on a regular basis*
- § *PESP has been a pre-cursor to lots of other agencies engaging in their own consumer participation work – beyond the HASS standard requirements*
- § *Peer-to-peer work being undertaken at the Central City Community Health Service is notable*

The responses to this question underline that there are currently no mechanisms for collecting data or measuring actual impact on service delivery (or other objectives of the program). However, those who have engaged with PESP value its 'soft' impact or influence as a change-agent in the area of consumer participation and believe that it has helped lead the way in introducing consumer participation to the sector.

Several respondents noted that the powerful impact of PESP presentations was a valuable way to get the consumer participation message out even more widely, and this platform should be used as a means of promoting greater penetration into the service delivery sector.

Q14 – What impact (if any) do you think PESP has had on Government policy?



While 50% of respondents to this question (n=14) felt that PESP had had some impact on Government policy, nearly the same number (43%) felt they didn't have enough information or knowledge to make a comment or answer the question. Only 2 out of 28 (7%) felt PESP had had no impact on Government policy.

This again illustrates the difficulty in measuring impact of a program such as PESP without any hard data or indicators, and particularly the difficulty in attributing impact to any one group or stakeholder

within the broader policy sphere.

Some specific examples that were given about PESP impact on policy were:

- contributions to the developments of the Homelessness Assistance Service Standards (HASS)
- the very practical suggestions around information provision and access through the new 1800 phone service
- contribution of PESP members to the cross-sector campaign on rooming house standards, particularly their media and advocacy roles
- influence on the Victorian Government Opening Doors system review
- contributions to the Consumer Charter for the homelessness service system
- contributions and participation in the Green Paper/White Paper Homelessness Policy development process

However a number of respondents from Local Government did feel that the PESP had contributed in direct ways to different aspects of their responses and policy towards homelessness. This was attributed to PESP involvement in public forums, focus groups and other consultative processes where their views had helped form responses that might otherwise have been different.

Noticeably the State and Federal Government Members of Parliament interviewed for this evaluation believed that the views and contributions of PESP had been valuable in their policy work, but alongside that of other advocacy groups (including service providers and peak bodies). This was reinforced by comments from other respondents which included:

- § *I think PESP has raised an awareness of the issue of homelessness, but has not had enough influence on funding.*
- § *Governments have a greater appreciation of the value of including people because of PESP – more empowering and respectful.*
- § *Taking a long view, PESP has had a positive impact in modelling the importance of consumer participation and the capacity of clients to manage their issues. However Government could engage more frequently with PESP.*
- § *PESP has reinforced that there was a great deal of complexity and variety among clients.*
- § *Not sure about impact but useful for politicians to be exposed to people who are affected by their policies and programs and hear their stories directly.*

A number of respondents noted that the State Government had in the early years of PESP been very active at engaging them, with one saying “at one stage there wasn’t much the Department would do without asking PESP to be involved” – however it was felt that in more recent years the level of engagement had dropped off considerably and there was very little involvement in policy discussions or consultations any more.

Q15 – Are there ways you would like to see PESP change or develop in the future?

22 respondents provided suggestions about ways in which PESP could improve its services or emphasis in the future. Given this was an open-ended question there was a wide range of responses and ideas put forward, but grouping them together five common themes were:

- A. Expand numbers and diversity of PESP members
- B. Engage with a wider range of services/audiences, including through partnering opportunities with other agencies interested in/committed to promoting consumer participation
- C. Program development through building on existing successes and improving skills/capacity of PESP members and graduates
- D. Develop better career pathways for PESP members/graduates on completion of the program (both within the homelessness/welfare sector and into other employment/training)

opportunities)

- E. Provide PESP services and activities in outer-metropolitan, regional and rural locations, not just inner Melbourne

To ensure that the depth of suggestions is captured in this evaluation, the following represents a list of specific measures under each of these themes (and some individual suggestions) that were proposed for consideration by CHP and others interested in expanding/undertaking consumer participation activities:

Theme	Suggested measure/activity
A. Expand numbers and diversity of PESP members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruit more women and Indigenous members (given the high proportions of both groups within the homeless population) - Need to develop specific strategies for engaging with and recruiting from Indigenous and CALD organisations (could involve CHP staff undertaking training with specialist organisations in these fields) - Ensure all groups in the homeless population are represented to allow full diversity of views to be heard
B. Engage with a wider range of services/audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote involvement of PESP in sector/agency working groups in a wider range of fields - Promote capacity building role of PESP in helping other agencies build their consumer participation programs/policies - Expand on the stories/photos exhibition run at the City Library into other locations (metropolitan and regional) - Expand on the peer support service running at the Central City Community Health Service to other specialist services (such as Frontyard for young people, AMES for migrant population, ASRC for asylum seekers and refugees etc) - Partner with peaks such as the Centre for Excellence in Child Welfare to strengthen consumer participation principles and practices in other sectors - Explore opportunities to partner with the Victorian/Australian Electoral Commissions on an ongoing basis to promote enrolment of homeless people - Explore opportunities to working with outreach agencies that focus on 'hidden' homeless populations (such as Salvation Army Project 614) to provide benefits of peer-to-peer engagement - PESP graduates could advise the City of Melbourne Volunteer Brigade to provide insights into what 'newly homeless' people in the city may need - Use the 'Consumer Participation Kit' (2008) to engage with services at the local level – very practical resource currently under-utilised - Offer other training programs (in addition to the 'Understanding Homelessness' training sessions) to expand their reach - Develop more community awareness training and materials to help address the stereotypes (including by the media) commonly held about homeless people and issues - Actively pursue more engagements with social work and other human services related tertiary courses (Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Psychology, etc) - Promote research/interview/survey skills of PESP members to

	assist in program evaluations and other research activities undertaken by services
C. Program development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consumers could have their own newsletter, produced by PESP members - Develop more written materials to promote PESP activities and objectives (DVDs, flyers, posters, online content, etc) - Explore creative opportunities for promoting the consumer participation and rights message for consumers - Arrange quarterly BBQs for existing PESP members and to attract potential new recruits - Visit services in more informal ways to promote value and positive culture of consumer participation - Encourage CHP CEO to take PESP members on visits to politicians and other advocacy meetings to provide consumer perspective - Explore opportunities for PESP members to initiate and undertake their own research projects – be producers not just subjects of research - Enable PESP members to initiate their own activities and strategic directions, not just be led by CHP priorities - For some PESP members it would be useful to have more active engagement with their other case managers/support workers, rather than just support through the Team Leader – this would particularly assist in preventing any re-traumatisation through the re-telling of their personal stories (could involve an MOU between PESP and their support organisation) - Explore more innovative ways of providing rights-based training, both to service providers and to consumers in other services - Potential for CD and online resources to be developed (YouTube clips etc) as a training tool around rights) - Explore avenues for PESP involvement in advocacy at a national level - Investigate ways PESP could value-add to homelessness prevention initiatives (given there is a strong focus on prevention and early intervention in government funded initiatives) - Explore capacity to have PESP 8 week training course to become an accredited training module - Develop the consumer register as another pathway into PESP or as an additional consumer participation activity - Aim for funding independent of Government to allow greater freedom in advocacy activities
D. Develop better career pathways for PESP members and graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide job ready skills for PESP volunteers - More opportunities for ‘hands-on’ involvement in services and in running PESP as a skills-development tool - Provide more training opportunities throughout the program (in addition to the initial 8 week training course) - Ensure that tasks undertaken by each PESP member are documented and legitimised, rather than just being done verbally – this could be presented alongside the Graduation Certificate

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make creating/updating their resume a formal part of the program so that all members leave/graduate with a resume that includes their new skills and activities through PESP - Individual succession plans could be developed for each member - More structured way of linking PESP graduates into other opportunities (training, employment, consumer participation roles etc) - Look at ways of overcoming barriers to the employment of ex-consumers within homelessness agencies (local HR resources often limited – a centralised employment policy/resource could be developed) to expand diversity within the workforce - Establish a scholarship fund for PESP graduates to undertake further study
E. Expand PESP into outer metropolitan, rural and regional locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand on successful involvement of PESP at inner city Councils into other local government areas where homelessness is an identified issue (outer metro in particular) - ‘Franchise’ the PESP model into the new DHS divisions (this concept has acknowledged risks but worth exploring) - Provide outreach training by PESP to consumers in regional communities to skill up locals (rather than asking PESP to come in and provide advice in a context they are not familiar with) - Investigate ways in which Regional Networkers could provide a localised support/coordination role for a pool of trained consumers at the local/regional level

Q16 – Do you think expanding the PESP model into other settings would be a positive contribution to improving responses to homelessness? If yes, in what ways and in what settings?

Respondents overwhelmingly thought that the PESP model should be expanded, with 93% in support, none opposed and the remaining 7% stating they were not sure.

The benefits of expanding the model were seen as helping to improve the diversity of consumer views that could be obtained, embedding consumer participation across the whole sector/State, and expanding community awareness of homelessness to a broader audience. The cost effectiveness of the model was also noted as a positive and one that should be promoted.

A number of respondents noted that the health, mental health, aged care and drug and alcohol sectors already had a strong culture of consumer participation in their service systems and that the PESP could aim to do something similar in the homelessness sector. Suggestions included introducing the PESP model to Community Health Centres, hospitals, Neighbourhood Houses, Men’s Sheds, community gardens.

However it was noted by a number of people that the strength of the PESP model is closely tied to its location within the peak body (CHP) and that this level of support, and the reputation of the organisation within policy circles, would be difficult to replicate in other settings. Having a PESP model introduced at a regional level was seen by several respondents as more feasible/achievable than at an individual agency level, noting that there needs to be some form of coordination and ongoing support for individual consumers in order to make it work.

Finally it was noted that if PESP was to be replicated in other settings, it may need some modifications to ensure it was relevant to the local conditions and needs – a simple transfer without Homelessness, learning from those who’ve lived it: the PESP evaluation

any changes would be unlikely to work as successfully. This acknowledges that the PESP model was designed specifically to fit within the statewide peak body and as such has access to decision-makers and key policy/program development processes that may not be accessible from other settings.

Q17 – Do you think the PESP is an effective consumer participation model that should be replicated elsewhere?

Again there was a strong level of support for the PESP as a successful consumer participation model (although respondent weren't specifically asked to compare it with other consumer participation models) with 87% agreeing that it should be replicated elsewhere. There was one respondent who didn't believe it was the most effective model (citing the Victorian Public Tenants Association as a more effective model with greater focus on policy and issues) and another three (10% of those who answered this question) who stated they weren't sure if it was the right model to be replicated.

Those supportive of the PESP model of consumer participation spoke highly of its training and support components contributing to its success and suggested that these must be continued in any other settings. One respondent suggested it could be more proactive in its approach (i.e. direct its own agenda more rather than respond to requests), but that otherwise it was likely to be more effective than any form of 'mandated' consumer participation such as occurs in the mental health and other sectors. Other specific responses to this question included:

- § *Yes – I have no doubt that this is one of the best and most effective models of consumer participation anywhere*
- § *PESP provides an important space for people who've experienced homelessness to meet as equals*
- § *Yes, because it has continued for all these year and the participants who graduate appear to effective, well-connected and committed*
- § *Yes, it allows for real relationships to be built and stories told – and those stories are life-changing*
- § *It has been effective at engaging participants and having them mentor new representatives into recovery pathways*
- § *Yes, it is effective because it is a peer-based model not like some other consumer programs.*
- § *Cass (the Team Leader) is the best example of the success of the PESP, having started as a PESP member and then being appointed in a competitive process to her current position. It would be great to have more opportunities to employ more people like her in similar roles in other settings.*

Q18 – Is there anything else you would like to add in your reflections on your experience with the PESP?

This open-ended question allowed for a wide range of responses, but of the 23 people who answered this question there was overwhelmingly positive messages of encouragement and praise for the members and staff associated with the PESP program. Some of the comments include:

- § *Every time a PESPer (sic) has been involved in any committees or events I have participated on they have only added to the experience. They bring a different perspective that cannot be provided by any other members of the group nor from someone who has not experienced homelessness.*
- § *This has been one of the most rewarding and amazing opportunities for me and my students. Over the years of participating in the program and doing tours I have developed a close*

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relationship with both of the members of this program and have seen the positive changes that this has made for their confidence and their situation. Listening to (one of the members) tell of how this program has changed his life and given him a focus for his future and real hope and happiness demonstrates the power and value of this program.

- § *I am a different and better person because of working with PESP – thank you.*
- § *I have always found the PESP Team, including participants and staff alike to be responsive, helpful, informative and invaluable to the work I do as a Regional Homelessness Network Coordinator. They have made a significant contribution to a better understanding of homelessness, particularly for agencies and other community members who may not have had an understanding of homelessness in a regional setting.*
- § *Every time we've had consumer participation as part of policy development we've ended up with better policy, and the earlier you can engage consumers the better.*
- § *We need to ensure that consumer voices are engaged at an appropriate level and place within community organisations. There is a big difference being involved as a consumer advocate and being members of a governance body, and this needs to be worked out at each service/organisation that engages consumers.*
- § *It is important that governments ensure that the voice of the consumer is integrated into public policy discussions, without it being patronising, but in a meaningful and ongoing conversation. I sincerely believe PESP provides this opportunity.*

One respondent commented more broadly on the future of consumer participation within the sector, noting that with the imminent introduction of the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) and other service system reforms there will be a far less community-centred response, so the homelessness sector needs to look at models like the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner and other ways of incorporating consumer perspectives into service delivery mechanisms and policy processes.

Another noted that it needs to be remembered that consumers telling their own personal (and often traumatic) stories as part of advocacy work need to be adequately prepared and supported to avoid re-traumatisation or to be exploited in any way – they also noted that some consumers are better suited to different types of consumer participation and they should be streamed in a strengths-based way into activities that are most suitable for them. One final comment:

- § *All of you at PESP are the ones that inspire and fuel my passion working in the homeless sector! I have nothing but high regard for everything you do in our community and the advocacy work you do on behalf of the many homeless persons.*