project change

FREE PRACTICAL TOOL · NO. 13

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A glossary without the nonsense

Plain-English explanations of care experience, lived experience, participation and design language.

Useful words can become foggy when organisations use them to mean everything. Here is what we mean, and what each idea asks you to do differently.

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PEOPLE AND EXPERIENCE

Words about people are never only technical.

Care experienced

A broad term used in Scotland for people who are or have been in care. People's experiences, identities and preferred language vary.

IN PRACTICE **do not assume the label tells you someone's story, needs or ambitions.**

Care leaver

A term with specific legal and service meanings in some contexts, as well as a term some people use for themselves. It is not interchangeable with all care experienced people.

IN PRACTICE **use precise definitions when eligibility or rights depend on them.**

Lived experience

Knowledge that comes from directly living through or navigating an experience, system, service or set of circumstances.

IN PRACTICE **value what people know, not only what happened to them.**

Experiential expertise

Knowledge developed by reflecting on lived experience, connecting patterns and applying insight to questions or decisions.

IN PRACTICE **invite analysis, ideas and challenge as well as story.**

Whole-person approach

Seeing someone in the context of their identity, relationships, strengths, experiences, hopes and environment rather than reducing them to one label or need.

IN PRACTICE **stay curious about the person and the system around them.**

PARTICIPATION LANGUAGE

Not every invitation is co-design.

Engagement

A broad umbrella for interacting with people. It tells you almost nothing about how much influence they have.

IN PRACTICE **say what people can actually shape.**

Consultation

Seeking views on an issue, proposal or set of options, often after the organisation has framed the question.

IN PRACTICE **explain what feedback can change and report back.**

Participation

People taking part in decisions, processes or activities that affect or matter to them. The depth of influence can vary significantly.

IN PRACTICE **design for influence, access and feedback.**

Co-production

People with different forms of knowledge and responsibility working together to produce or deliver something. Definitions vary by sector.

IN PRACTICE **be specific about roles, power and shared responsibility.**

Co-design

People affected by something working alongside others to understand the problem, develop possibilities, test ideas and shape what is made.

IN PRACTICE **involve people before the answer is fixed.**

PRACTICE LANGUAGE

Useful concepts, used carefully.

Person-centred	Organising support or decisions around the person rather than forcing the person around the service. **IN PRACTICE** **choice and control need to be real, not decorative.**
Trauma-informed	An approach that recognises how trauma can affect people and seeks to avoid causing further harm. **IN PRACTICE** **do not turn "trauma-informed" into permission to assume everyone is traumatised or fragile.**
Strengths-based	Paying attention to capabilities, relationships, resources and possibilities alongside needs and barriers. **IN PRACTICE** **strengths should expand the picture, not hide structural inequality.**
Tokenism	Participation that creates the appearance of influence without enough power, access or connection to decisions. **IN PRACTICE** **ask what changed because people were involved.**
Structural listening	ProjectChange's term for an organisation's ability to move what people tell it through understanding, decisions, action and response. **IN PRACTICE** **build a route for voice, not just opportunities to speak.**

If a word sounds impressive but nobody can explain what changes because of it, the word is doing too much work.