Prospectus - Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships in Gippsland

For people who want to have respectful relationships in their lives.

Patsie Frawley, Amie O’Shea, Janice Slattery, Linda Stokoe and Danielle Houghton

Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships
Background

In 2009 a network comprising self advocates, disability services, the Centre Against Sexual Assault and Rural Access in Gippsland participated in Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships (LSSL:RR), a pilot program funded by the Australian Government to provide education and information to people with an intellectual disability about respectful relationships. The program was developed and implemented by a research group at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at LaTrobe University led by Dr Patsie Frawley (Frawley, Slattery, Stokoe, Houghton, & O'Shea). The program was evaluated by Dr Catherine Barrett, Dr Sue Dyson and Dr Patsie Frawley (Frawley, Barrett, & Dyson, 2012).

The goals of the LSSL:RR program were to:

- Develop, implement and evaluate a peer-led primary prevention of violence strategy that would enable people with an intellectual disability to engage in respectful relationships.
- Develop a training resource that would be transferrable to other sites.
- Develop an evidence base concerning respectful relationships education with people with an intellectual disability using the program model.

The program uses a community development model to engage people with an intellectual disability, disability services, advocates and mainstream community services to work together to run the LSSL:RR program. People with an intellectual disability are trained as peer educators and community professionals are trained alongside the peer educators as co-facilitators. Together they run the LSSL:RR program that focuses on relationship rights, respectful relationships and develops knowledge about and connection to local sexual health and sexual assault services.

The program evaluation found that despite initial scepticism in some of the pilot sites, the LSSL:RR model and in particular the peer education – co-facilitation component was successful in providing people with an intellectual disability with the opportunity to explore ideas about respectful relationships and to gain insights into their relationship rights with their peers. It also connected mainstream sexual health and sexual assault services to the disability sector and enabled them to provide education and information about their services directly to people with an intellectual disability. (Frawley et al., 2012)

The Gippsland LSSL: RR Network [comprising members from New Wave Self Advocacy, Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault (GCASA), Rural Access at South Gippsland Shire and Wellington Shire Councils, and the Department of Human Services] has been running LSSL:RR in the region since the completion of the pilot program in 2011. Seven programs have been delivered with 7 people with an intellectual disability involved as Peer Educators. The program planning and delivery has been funded largely in-kind through the support of the Network agencies and in part by financial contribution by participants and service agencies.
The success of this program, resulting in a current waiting list of around 10 people has led to the current plan of the Gippsland network to expand the delivery of the LSSL:RR program across the region and to identify ways of sustaining the program within the region.

This is being supported through an action research project led by Dr Patsie Frawley and funded by VicHealth. This project, ‘Adopting a mainstream approach: Effective violence and abuse prevention strategies for people with an intellectual disability’ is looking at how a targeted program like LSSL:RR can work as a platform to more strongly link people with an intellectual disability into mainstream violence prevention work and be recognised and included by mainstream services. However to maintain the success of LSSL:RR and to address the current waiting list, resources are needed to train more peer educators and co-facilitators and to engage other parts of the region more strongly.

Components of the LSSL:RR model

There are four components to the LSSL:RR model:

(1) A peer led respectful relationships program
(2) Engagement of learning partners in the LSSL:RR program
(3) Sector development and
(4) Research and evaluation.

The two key components – the peer led program and sector development are discussed in more detail below:
**The peer led LSSL:RR program**

Fundamentally, the program is for people who want to talk about having respectful relationships in their lives. It is also about changing the way others think and act so that people with an intellectual disability can be safer in relationships and individuals can have lives that are free from violence and abuse (Frawley, Slattery, Stokoe, Houghton, & O'Shea, 2011). It was developed by a project team including women with an intellectual disability using the existing relationship education and training program Living Safer Sexual Lives (Frawley, Johnson, Hillier, & Harrison, 2003). This program was developed using the stories of people with an intellectual disability as the basis for training and education about sexuality and relationships and to advocate for changes to policies and practices in this area. (Johnson, Frawley, Hillier, & Harrison, 2002).

There are four sessions in the program each addressing different themes:

(a) Talking about sexuality and relationships

(b) Having rights and being safe

(c) Respectful Relationship

(d) Men and respectful relationships.

Adult learning principles underpin the program, acknowledging the life experiences of participants and their capacity to learn through exploration of and reflection on these individual and collective experiences. This process is aided by activities focussed on rights in relationships, intimacy and personal strengths. Information is also provided on understanding sexual assault and supports and services for reporting and responding to sexual assault.

**Peer Education**

The aim of the peer education approach in the LSSL:RR model is to engage more directly with people with an intellectual disability as ‘the experts’ in exploring what respectful relationships are, understanding the range of personal and social factors that impact on their risk of violence and abuse and positioning people with an intellectual disability as knowledgeable and skilled rather than as ‘vulnerable victims’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Education has been used in mainstream sexual assault prevention programs (CASA, 2010) but there are few examples where it has been used with people with an intellectual disability (Fitzsimons, 2009).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This correlates with Sobsey’s (1994) ideas about the need for personal empowerment to combat violence and abuse, as well as Holloomotz’s (2011) view that there is a need to provide education for people on their rights, decision making, knowledge and awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
about sexuality and relationships to address the risk of sexual violence.

The Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships model reflects the principles put forward in these peer education models, in particular the interactional aspects, and addresses violence and abuse prevention by acting on a number of levels see Figure 1 above.

The individual/relationship level is addressed through the primary prevention program led by people with an intellectual disability and through resourcing supporters using a learner-partner approach.

The community/organisational level is addressed through the recruitment and training of co-facilitators from the disability and community sectors and embedding research and evaluation into the model addresses aims related to societal change through increased knowledge, awareness and attitudinal change.

(Frawley, et al, Participant Handbook).

Sector Development: Training and Engaging Co-Facilitators

In the LSSL:RR program, this component of the model seeks to influence the community of professionals, paid carers or support workers from the disability sector and from other community sectors who could be directly involved in supporting people to access a violence and abuse prevention program.

Historically, a 'silo' approach has seen each sector working in isolation, often resulting in the disability sector functioning separately from other community supports and services. This model therefore seeks to engage across these sectors through recruiting co-facilitators to be trained to implement the program with the peer educators.

Future Directions for Gippsland

Would you like to be a trained Facilitator or Peer Educator?

The LSSL:RR is a source of innovative training for the Community Sector and for Women and Men with an intellectual disability. This program will provide the quality of training that is required in supporting people in this important area of their lives.

The training will be delivered under the auspice of Latrobe University and Dr Patsie Frawley whose research informs this valuable program.
Should you undertake the training you may elect to be a member of a trained pool of facilitators (peer educators and co-facilitators) who are accredited to deliver this innovative program across Gippsland and in other regions.

This is an ideal opportunity for the Gippsland Community Services Sector given the current evolution of the disability sector and the involvement of credible research partners i.e. Latrobe Uni. Founder of program delivering the training.

The strength of the partnership, with members from across the Gippsland Region, including Advocacy and Rights groups, Community Services and members of the Gippsland Community Building Team that includes Rural Access and Deaf Access worker across Gippsland funded by DHS) mean this program can reach across local government boundaries.

**Moving towards sustainability**

The Gippsland Prevention of Violence Strategy has contributed $5000 to train a new group of peer educators and co-facilitators in Gippsland. These funds will only cover the expenses of the trainer and materials.

Limited access to funding and training has meant a reduced number of trained people are available to currently run the program, placing a strain on resources and program delivery.

To make the LSSL:RR program sustainable into the future, a “train the trainer” model will be implemented. This model will allow the Gippsland Network to utilise locally trained peer educators and co-facilitators who have invested in the training, to deliver the program across the Gippsland Region.

This highly sought after training can increase professional practice across a broad range of sectors and increase engagement with people with an intellectual disability in the community service system. Please note that undertaking the training does not mean you must become a peer educator or co-facilitator.

**Contributing to this program and its outcomes**

By making a financial contribution you will receive quality training in the area of Respectful Relationships education. In return, you are enhancing opportunities for people with an intellectual disability in peer educator roles to work with professionals and form meaningful connections and networks in their local communities. Peer educators have much to offer can inform practice and evolution of best practice in the field.
You also become a part of this very powerful work. The work that Dr Patsie Frawley has done in the area of empowerment and relationship education has seen elements of the Living Safer Sexual Lives program delivered at conferences and forums both nationally and internationally.

The Hand – Five Fingers of Feedback is used to gather information to evaluate the program.

Here is some feedback provided by program participants in the past:

- Great – fun – heaps of fun
- Learnt a lot of stuff – good stuff
- Love Control DVD – bought up stuff, know what help I need
- Liked the smaller group size
- Thinking more about who I can ask for help and support
- Respect – others/control and get more awareness
- Gaining more confidence to go out to more places, like dancing...
- Feel more secure
- Better understanding of safe sex.
- We connected with the stories
To talk about being a part of this program as a co-facilitator, peer educator or program participant please contact a Rural Access representative:

Alisha Gilliland on alisha.gilliland@southgippsland.vic.gov.au or 5662 9376 or

Leanne Wishart on leanne.wishart@wellington.vic.gov.au or 5142 3464

References


