



Developmental Educators Australia



An exploration of how we can both
respond to violence and abuse and
promote personal safety for people
who live with an intellectual
disability

April 6 2016

Acknowledgement of Country



- We acknowledge that the lands we meet on today are the traditional lands of the Kurna people.
- We respect their spiritual relationship with their country and acknowledge the Kurna people as the custodians of the greater Adelaide region.
- We honour the Elders past and present.
- We acknowledge the heritage and cultural beliefs that continue to be vitally important to the peoples of the Kurna nation living today.



and Culture



All of us here today have a cultural background that helps shape who we are

We bring that culture to bear on how we understand the world



Who is here today?

**Tell us your name and what you hope
to get from the conversation**



Less Silence More Safety



- Background
- What we know now
- Why call it an anti-violence project?
- Where are the gaps?
- Who stands up?
- Why knowing about Rights isn't always enough



What some research and experience tells us



- 90% of women with intellectual disability have been sexually assaulted in their lives, and 60% before the age of 18
- 25% of people with intellectual disability will be subject at some time in their lives to restraint or seclusion
- 50% of young people incarcerated have an intellectual disability
- Women with disability are also 40% more likely to be the victims of domestic violence than women without disability
- People with disability experience far higher rates of violence than the rest of the community, up to 10 times more. There is no official gathering of data on this.
- In many cases, people with disability experience violence in places where they are meant to be receiving support
- People with disability can't always rely on the police for protection against violence
- People with disability cannot rely on being listened to with respect.



**What gets in the way of
people who live with a
disability telling of their
experiences of violence and
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What gets in the way of people who live with a disability telling of their experiences of violence and abuse?



- If a person has a compromised capacity to communicate, perpetrators know that they will not easily be able to voice a complaint – indeed they may be targeted because of this.
- Being rendered voiceless both by the way the organisation works and by the overwhelming nature of their circumstances.
- The person who has experienced - or witnessed - rights denial and violence will often be afraid to speak up.



What gets in the way of people who live with a disability telling of their experiences of violence and abuse?

- The experience is so ‘normalised’ to not be recognised as violence or abuse.
- The person may experience such trauma from the violence and rights denial that they are unable to pursue processes which require a revisiting of painful experiences.
- Being met with further abuse and neglect and not being believed. The disbelief can be added to by a process of ‘diagnostic capture’ i.e. that these signs of distress are attributed to another diagnosis e.g. autism spectrum disorder.



“Diagnostic capture”



- [Another] example is a woman who told family violence workers that she felt watched by her partner but could not substantiate her claims. Workers believed this was part of her delusion due to her mental illness. After prolonged abuse, it was found out ... her partner had indeed installed cameras in the ceiling and filmed her.



What gets in the way of people who live with a disability telling of their experiences of violence and abuse?



- Fear of retribution for complaining constrains individual's pursuit of justice and change, especially in services upon which they are highly reliant for basic life support services. Previous experiences of being punished for making a complaint.
- Conversations with people who live with a disability highlight the feeling and experience that despite a complaint being upheld, nothing changes.



What we learn from hearing the stories of violence and rights denial

- We know the reality of violence/abuse and its effects on people - these realities can stand against the denials
- It gives us a sharper capacity to recognise when violence and rights denial is happening and move to end it
- People's stories and experiences clarify where the avenues for support and redress are
- Most people have no idea how common and serious the problem of violence and abuse of people with disabilities is, including people who **should** know (e.g. legal justice systems). Real stories undermine the 'helpless', 'harmless' narratives
- It honours the reality for people who have been abused and breaks the silence



- ***‘experiences of abuse are not merely unfortunate encounters with bad people, but are more likely given certain environmental factors. These may include structures and processes promoting disadvantage and social exclusion, constraining individuals’ resources and life chances.’ (Daniel and Bowes, 2010)***



Abuse – subtle



- Ignoring requests for help or making people wait for help
- Refusing to recharge the battery of a person's wheelchair
- Being unnecessarily rough or careless in physical care
- Unplugging or turning off adaptive equipment
- The “I’m joking” response after verbal humiliation
- Talking negatively about the person in their presence to other people

“It’s neglect, passive aggressive behaviours, control, not listening, deliberately not following directions, treating my things as if they own them... You may not be aware of it and if you’ve lived with it for years and years, it may go right over your head”

Combating Violence & Abuse of People With Disabilities. – A Call to Action. Fitzsimons 2008



Abuse - overt



- This type of abuse may be more easy to see, but may have started as subtle abuse:- hitting, shoving, burning, rape, restricting freedom, denying food/medication/access to the necessities of life.
- Even though these behaviours seem obviously abuse, a culture of abuse can exist and these behaviours not challenged or even seen as violence and rights denial e.g. Yoorala Services in Victoria; Winterbourne View care home in UK
- Senate Committee inquiring into violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability in institutional and residential settings 2015 – many submissions tell of horrendous abuse



Barriers to being safe and heard



What are the barriers to people who live with disability being safe in our community?:-

- **Communication**
- **Attitudinal**
- **Service System barriers**
- **Economic**
- **Physical**



Responsibility



Relying solely on those who are subject to violence and rights denial in human services to **voice their allegations through formal complaints is to simultaneously overlook the nature of dependency in services and other evidence that violence may be present.**

Abuse and neglect, in a range of forms, remains a pressing problem for policy makers and others committed to rights protection and the safety of adults considered to be in heightened vulnerability.

This also drives the concerns of the SA Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner

(Towards quality and safety in disability services: Confronting the 'corruption of care' Lorna Hallahan, Flinders University, South Australia November 2012)



Getting to know or paying attention to what we already know about the person



- How do I get to know someone?
- Do I rely too much on file notes, gossip about them, other worker's opinions?
- How do I interpret changes in behaviour?
- Do I honour the knowledge of people who have known the person throughout their life?
- Do I work with them to make sure they have an understanding of their right to safety and respect?



Challenging questions



- What stops me from ‘seeing’ the violence and abuse?
- What might stop me from doing something about the violence and abuse?
- What stops me from ‘hearing’ the story?
- What are the consequences of not acting
 - for me?
 - for the person who is having violence, abuse and/or rights denial in their life?



Changing the experience



What happens for the person with intellectual disability when they

- get to tell their story?
 - be believed?
- have things change?



So, what might we do now?



- What might we do in our work life?
- What might we do in our personal life?
- What might we need to do this work?
- Who else do we know who may be interested in anti-violence work?
- Who can we work with who's already doing anti-violence work?
- Might you join in the work of Less Silence More Safety?



We are ALL entitled to enjoy our Rights – UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability



That means:-

- ✓ To be free from violence and abuse
- ✓ To choose my own support for living and work
- ✓ To get an education
- ✓ To make decisions and be listened to with support that I choose
- ✓ To have access to sport, leisure and community life
- ✓ To have the say in where I live, who with and who I have relationships with
- ✓ To get the right information needed to make a decision

Who else can you tell?



less
silence
more
safety



**Thank you very much for
talking with me
Go well in your work**

