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In their shoes: Sexuality and relationship programs for people with an intellectual disability by people with an intellectual disability

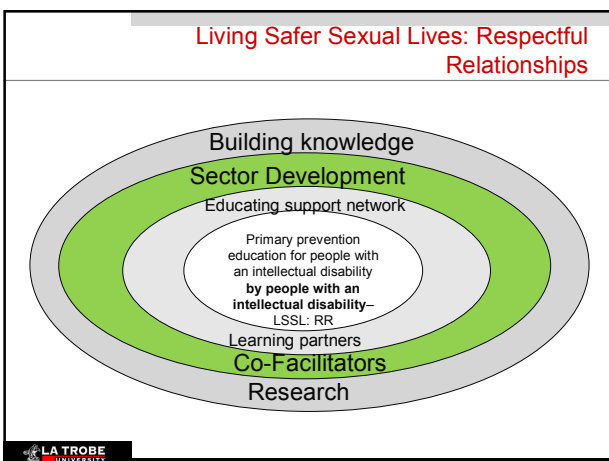
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Background

- Within a policy and education context people with an intellectual disability are positioned as 'vulnerable victims' - leads to protection and protective behaviours education; ignores ecological model, contradicts broader policy and practice – inclusive approaches.
- *Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships (LSSL:RR) model* – primary prevention of violence and abuse - ecological model (Sobsey, 1994; WHO, 2002; Fitzsimons, 2009; Hollomotz, 2009; [lssl_rr_model.pptx](#))
- Dearth of relationship programs that go beyond 'protective behaviours'; need for programs that are comprehensive, theoretically based, and "consumer owned" (Barger, Wacker, Macy & Parish, 2009).

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Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships

- LSSL:RR **program** based on earlier work (Frawley, Johnson, Hillier & Harrison, 2003) uses stories by people with an intellectual disability about relationships to focus facilitated discussion in a rights based framework
- New modules and peer education approach developed by team of people with an without an intellectual disability; 4 x 2 hour sessions facilitated by two peer educators and one or two co-facilitators
- Implemented in five sites across Australia 2010; recruited and trained 21 peer educators & 20 co-facilitators

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Peer Education and people with an intellectual disability

- Few examples in relationship programs for people with an intellectual disability (Limelight, Family Planning Northern Ireland, 1999; Taking Charge, Fitzsimons et al, USA;) – little or no focus on peer education approach in research/evaluation of these programs
- Is the basis for self advocacy, however not often defined as peer education; very little research on experiences and approaches (Weeks et al, 2006); people with an intellectual disability as trainers in professional development (Black & Roberts, 2009; Owen, Butler & Hollins, 2004)
- In LSSL:RR furthering the presence of people with intellectual disability in relationship education - recognising, acknowledging and valuing experiences; using adult learning principles, challenging the view that people with an intellectual disability can only be the 'vulnerable victim'



Research of the peer education approach

Research Questions

1. How can peer education be used in violence and abuse prevention education for people with an intellectual disability?
2. What do people with an intellectual disability bring to the role of peer educator and get from this role?
3. What can be learned and gained from involving people with an intellectual disability as peer educators?

Research design

- In-depth semi-structured interviews with 16 people with an intellectual disability who were trained as peer educators in the LSSL:RR program; post training and post running sessions
- Observation of peer educator and co-facilitator training (5 sites) and program sessions (3 sites)
- Thematic analysis – Nvivo coding of interview transcripts; reflective group work



Challenging resistance to peer education

- Interviews with 25 people from the five sites – formative evaluation
- Questioned
- capacity of people with an intellectual disability to be peer educators – not the rights skills knowledge – too complex, people not in respectful relationships themselves – precludes them?
- "...it's difficult to be a peer educator about something that you are really not doing so well yourself. If you are not in respectful relationships...is that something you can do?..The people that work in disability sector know if you are in a respectful relationship"*
- Capacity of 'sector' to support people to be peer educators
- "It's a good idea but...everybody backs off...it's not our area..we are funded to do advocacy"*



Peer Educators perspective

Hearing from a group of peer educators who have been trained to run the program and have been organising and running programs in Gippsland.

- How people got involved and why?
- What they have learned/achieved?
- What it is like running programs.
- Why peer education is important in this program




Outcomes for peer educators			
Why people got involved	Personal experience of relationships – good basis for being a peer educator	Already have skills –program good opportunity to develop these further	Self advocacy – link for peer educators to program; place where they have learned to 'speak up' and share experiences
How they saw their role	Helping peers so they can have better experiences in relationships	To share own experiences , help people talk about relationships through the stories and own experiences	Can be an educator because I am "in their shoes" Being a role model
What people got out of it	Helping others and self	More confidence and being respected	New knowledge and skills – about relationships, support services and being a facilitator

"I am in their shoes"

Many people with an intellectual disability already have the skills and experience – what is needed for peer education to be used effectively?

- a model that supports people to use experiences and skills – co-facilitator role
- programs developed collaboratively; semi-structured, meaningful – stories a very good tool for peer education
- commitment – from funders, services (across sectors) to resource peer education models – time, expertise and finances
- shift in power in education – recognition that using adult learning principles with adults with an intellectual disability is needed/ challenge the developmental approach



References

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