

“I needed that help, that time, when they took her away.”

Supporting mothers with intellectual disability after a permanent care order



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## Identity development

- Understanding identity
  - An interactional approach (Shakespeare 2006)
  - 'Master status' identity (Beart et al 2005)
- Influences on identity development
  - "...identity for women with intellectual disability develops in the context of a community, through the affirmation of those around her." (Mayes et al 2011 p118)
  - The role of service providers (Antaki et al 2007, Craig et al 2002)
- Multiple identities (Seale 2001)
  - What identities do you have? What about someone else?



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## Mothers with intellectual disability

- History:
  - Segregation, sterilisation, fear, taboo (Burgen 2007, May 2003)
- Currently:
  - 1-2% of Australian families and increasing (AIFS)
  - Disproportionately involved in child protection (Booth & Booth 2005, Mayes & Llewellyn 2009)
  - No proof that IQ = parenting ability (Mayes & Llewellyn 2009, Strike & McConnell 2002)
- Child protection system
  - 30-40% permanently removed (Booth & Booth 2005, Mayes & Llewellyn 2009)
  - Based on prejudicial views rather than evidence of neglect or maltreatment (Mayes & Llewellyn 2009)



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## Developing a 'mother' identity

- The desirability of motherhood
- Developing a 'mother' identity (Mayes et al 2011)
  - The mothering role
  - Other influences (Traustadóttir & Sigurjónsdóttir 2008)

*"The women with intellectual disabilities in this study had both legal and biological ties to their child, yet they still experienced a significant threat to their mother identity."* (Mayes et al 2011, p118)



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## Women's experiences

- Needing to understand and access information

*Amie: So you don't spend time with Kyle on your own?*

*June: no. (pauses) We've gotta have someone with us.*

*Amie: do you know why that is?*

*June: I don't know.*

- Apportioning responsibility

"Their anger was reserved for those who had contrived to bring them to court in the first place on the basis of what they believed were distorted assessments of their family history and circumstances that placed excessive weight on their failings (however minor) and gave no credit for their strengths (however great)."<sup>9</sup> (Booth & Booth 2005, p123)

- Grief and loss



## "I needed that help"

- What sort of help do women need?

(Booth & Booth 2005, Traustadóttir & Sigurjónsdóttir 2008, White & Spencer 2009)

- Readiness to listen
- Not being bossy
- Being helpful
  
- Listen
- Have respect
- Be honest and straight
- Trust and believe in our ability
- Work with us. Don't take over

*June: I've had her helping me since I had my son. She helped me through stages when they, when DHS took him off me. They helped me and my husband Rick goes with me and we both go see her together*

*Amie: OK. So what does she do that is helpful?*

*June: she just talks to me ... And she writes out things for us to do, like it would help our relationship. ... She's helped us this far. And we're still together - still.*



## Maintaining motherhood

- Being called 'Mum'

*"He calls us 'Mum' and 'Dad' and he calls them that too. One day he'll have to stop calling them 'Mum' and 'Dad' though cos really that's our names."*

- Telling the story

*"Amie: look at you, you were blonde*

*June: yep, and my brother in law and my sister in law said I look like Kyle when I was younger"*

- Mother role

Clothes, pets, talk

- In the future

*"One day he might want to come back home, when he gets older. I'd like that."*



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→ [www.healthystart.net.au](http://www.healthystart.net.au) – Healthy Start Network (University of Sydney)

→ [www.cfecfw.asn.au](http://www.cfecfw.asn.au) – Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare ←

