

genU ORAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS

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Background

genU is a Victorian based provider of a range of disability services including shared and respite living for people with a disability (the majority of whom have an intellectual disability). We provide 24 hour per day, 7 day per week support to people in shared group homes. The Oral Health Champions program operates in the Shared and Respite Living division of genU.

The partnership with Dental Health Services Victoria was established

In 2015, Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) sought to partner with a disability service to investigate how to improve oral health outcomes for the people accessing supported living services. genU was chosen from a number of applicants via an Expression of Interest process.

DHSV was working from the point of understanding that people with disability generally have poorer oral health than the general population. This was terrific timing because it had recently been discussed at genU that not all staff were well equipped to provide oral health support.

A dentist from DHSV was invited along with the Health Promotion Project Officer to provide training to a group of approximately 80 residential support workers at an All of Staff Meeting. The training was around how to maintain a healthy mouth, teeth and gums, and included hints for healthy eating and drinking and for proper brushing. Educational materials were provided to each staff member.

Discussions then continued about how we could further promote and embed good practice for our support staff and educate people we supported about healthy mouths and teeth.

We talked about the fact that many people with an intellectual disability are frightened of attending the dentist, and of having their teeth brushed. This led directly to the idea of making a video to assist with the issue. DHSV funded and co-wrote with genU a video, entitled “Sally’s visit to the dentist”. This video was a co-production, filmed with a volunteer genU client and staff member as actors. Because it used real people in real situations, it has had highly positive feedback from people with disability, staff, and others. The video is being used to help other clients understand and feel more comfortable with dentist visits.

[Click here to watch the video](#)



What next – the Oral Health Champion emerged

With the basics understood by current staff who had attended the original training delivered by the dentist, the question was then posed about how other staff and new staff would learn about the importance of

supporting people with their oral health. Just as importantly, how could we help to empower people with disabilities about managing their own oral health. genU came up with the idea for 2016 of having an Oral Health Champion in each house. Staff members were asked to volunteer for the role and lead the rest of the staff in each house around providing excellence in oral health care for residents.

DHSV continued to support genU by providing the attention of a Health Promotion Officer to assist with the running of the program.

The following model was decided upon:

- One team member of staff to volunteer as the Oral Health Champion for each staff team (usually per house)
- The Oral Health Champions would come together for a workshop four times per year, in Geelong home base for genU, and that the staff would be paid to attend each session. The workshop would be convened by the genU Shared and Respite Living Practice Advisor, with support from a DHSV Health Promotion Officer
- The format of the workshops would be roughly divided up into two hour-long sessions – the first using the person centred tool “What’s working?/What’s not working?” regarding oral health and the roll out of information; and the second as an educational workshop
- Healthy eating and drinking to be modelled at the workshops where a fresh fruit platter and no sugar, low salt foods offered, with water, in line with the actions for good oral health which staff had learned about

Outcomes for the first two years

Within the first twelve months of the Oral Health program we had worked together to create:

- An opportunity for the majority of staff to learn about supporting good oral health
- the educational video “Sally’s visit to the dentist”
- a workplace policy for genU about Oral Health
- a teeth-cleaning checklist – for residents or staff to maintain in order to check that teeth/dentures were being cleaned, and toothbrushes replaced regularly.

In the next year we focussed on developing a “How I like to be supported” Duty Statement for each person we support to ensure that staff understand what is required to assist the person with their oral hygiene.

Example

Essential support for Susi to brush her teeth	
<p>Support Tasks/Duties that must be completed by a staff member:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the morning and the evening let Susi know when it is time to brush her teeth in 10 minutes. • Remind her again in 2 minutes. • Do not rush Susi, and if she doesn’t come to her bathroom prompt her with her toothbrush. • Remember that music and fun at tooth brushing time is very important to ensure that Susi will successfully be able to brush • Susi can independently apply toothpaste and brush. She enjoys company in the bathroom and likes to be told she has done her teeth well. • Remind her to brush for at least 2 minutes. 	<p>How I like to be supported:</p> <p>I like plenty of warning that it is time to clean my teeth. Let me know at least 10 minutes before, and then again 2 minutes before.</p> <p>If I don’t come to the bathroom please bring my toothbrush to me to show me and I will understand and come with you.</p> <p>Please support me to turn on my music in the bathroom so that I can listen to a good song whilst I brush. Michael Buble songs are best</p> <p>I can brush my teeth well by myself – the dentist said so, but I like staff to stay with me and let me know that I am doing a good job.</p>

Major findings regarding What's working/What's not working

Anecdotal evidence of progress towards improved oral health outcomes was gathered from the Oral Health Champions at each workshop.

These included, but were not limited to the following:

What's working	What's not working
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● using tick sheet in bathroom● staff prompting to brush twice a day● clients sometimes ask "can you watch me brush?"● tap water at dinner instead of cordial● denture care with soap and water● all duty statements done● all residents dental checks up to date● one resident reminding staff to brush teeth● some full support● one person allowing teeth to be brushed 3 times a week (from once a week)● purchase cordial way down● residents happy to do what the dentist says	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● not all staff consistent or vigilant● staff not cleaning electric toothbrushes and replacing heads● resident back on Diet Coke, possibly staff not discouraging● staff still making bottles of cordial and putting it in the fridge/promoting● tried timers but not well received● resident with dementia is challenging● forget to brush some surfaces of teeth● only sometimes brushing twice a day● not cordial but replaced by cranberry juice.● one client buys Sprite every day● duty statements rushed● families don't take paperwork with them to dental visits● people don't bring oral hygiene tools (to respite)

This feedback formed the basis for future discussions, resources required and approaches to be taken by the Oral Health Champions.

At the end of the first year it was mutually agreed by the Oral Health Champions that the position should be a one year role, handed over to another team member in order that more staff could be educated, and more staff would take responsibility for supporting oral health outcomes. Now, we have had more than four years of Oral Health Champions trained and working within the teams. We have developed the Oral Health Champions agreement to clearly identify and recognise the important role of Oral Health Champions at genU.

Dental Health Services Victoria web resources

At the same time that the Oral Health Champions were growing and flourishing, Dental Health Services Victoria were working on a new website, Supporting Every Smile, developed for anyone who supports a person with a disability to care for their oral health. The Oral Health Champions were able to be consulted as this was developed, and use it since its development.

<https://everysmile.dhsv.org.au/>

The Oral Health Champions program continues to support people towards better oral health outcomes at genu. This paper was presented at The ASID Conference, November 2019, Adelaide.



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Sally Pickering, participant at genU

Matthew Sayle, Team Leader at Sally's home with genU

References and further reading:

<https://everysmile.dhsv.org.au/>

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