

## **Submission from Family Planning Queensland**

### **About Family Planning Queensland (FPQ)**

FPQ has been working with young people and adults with disability for over 40 years. FPQ is a best practice provider of relationships and reproductive health education and support. FPQ works closely with numerous organisations across Australia in the disability sector with the provision of professional development, creation of resources, policy, the facilitation of groups and other types of individualised support for people with disability. FPQ works closely with parents and carers to support them in their role as the primary and relationships and sexuality educators of their children and as key supporters in the lives of their adult children with disability.

FPQ is an award winning provider of relationships and sexuality education and support to people with disability and those that are in either in caring or service provider roles. Please see appendix A

### **People with disability**

People with disability are sexual beings just like everyone else and have the right to be able to enjoy healthy relationships and express their sexuality. Many people with disability have not had access to education or support that enables them to develop healthy relationships or express their sexuality safely.

There is clear evidence that demonstrates that people with disability experience social isolation and poorer relationship and sexual health outcomes in adulthood, are more likely to experience poverty, homelessness, involvement with statutory authorities such as child protection and corrective services and are much more vulnerable to experiencing sexual abuse than the general population. Studies suggest that people with disability are 4 to 10 times more likely to experience sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> Adults with disability who have experienced institutionalisation have also experienced high rates of sexual violence.

As stated in Quarterly report to COAG Disability Reform Council in December 2014<sup>2i</sup> 55% of all participants in current NDIS sites have either a diagnosis of Autism and related disorders or intellectual disability. This presents a significant opportunity to take steps to ensure that these participants in particular are supported to enhance and develop skills in experiencing healthy and safe relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Petersilia JR. Crime victims with developmental disabilities: a review essay. *Criminal Justice & Behaviour* 2001;28(6):655-94.

<sup>2</sup> 6th Quarterly Report to COAG Disability Reform Council 31 December 2014,  
[http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Report\\_to\\_the\\_Disability\\_Reform\\_Council\\_2014-15\\_Q2\\_Q2.pdf](http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Report_to_the_Disability_Reform_Council_2014-15_Q2_Q2.pdf) pg 27

FPQ sees healthy relationships as the key underpinning of the safeguarding and quality framework and would strongly advocate that supporting those that are most vulnerable (or at risk) to develop skills in relationship development, identifying unhealthy or unsafe relationships and understanding what to do when not safe, are all protective factors and significantly reduce risk.

If the Quality and Safeguarding framework endeavours to promote the rights and dignity of people with disability it is imperative that supporting healthy relationships and sexuality form a key part the developmental, preventative and corrective domains of the framework.

The quality and safeguarding framework should:



- Increase the quality of life for people with disability
- Increase skills and knowledge of people with disability to engage in healthy relationships, identify unsafe situations and access support services
- Increase natural supports and staff confidence and skill to respond to sexual behaviours and support healthy relationships



- Decrease complex and challenging sexual behaviours and use of restrictive practices
- Decrease sexual exploitation and abuse of people with disability
- Decrease carer and staff anxiety and confusion when responding to sexual behaviours and supporting people to experience healthy relationships

### **Developmental domain**

The development of relationship skills for participants enables natural safeguards to be more easily established and maintained. Provision of support to families and those who play the role of a natural safeguard can also ensure that participants can be supported to maintain healthy relationships at this level.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

That the NDIA fund the development and delivery of specific training for families and natural safeguards to help them to respond to relationships and sexuality issues (including sexual behaviours). Content to include:

- Supporting healthy relationships
- Puberty (social, emotional and physical changes)
- Understanding sexual behaviours for children and young people with disability

- Using resources to support healthy relationships and sexuality for young people and adults with disability

**Recommendation 2:**

That the NDIA fund the development and delivery of ‘relationships and sexuality’ individualised and /or group training for participants with a diagnosis of Autism and related disorders and intellectual disability. Content to include:

- Body parts/functions
- Healthy relationships
- Decisions about sexual relationships
- Sexual activities/safer sex
- Personal safety

**Preventative domain:**

The workforce that supports people with disability plays a significant role in facilitating the development and maintenance of friendships and other intimate relationships, as well as developing skills to identify healthy / unhealthy situations or relationships and take the appropriate actions. Many people with disability have fewer opportunities to engage in ‘learning moments’ and formal education about healthy relationships and sexuality. Some examples of this include:

- Less opportunity to engage spontaneously with peers and limited social opportunities
- Challenges in accessing and processing information independently
- Negative attitudes from the community about sexuality and disability
- Low self esteem, impacting on learning or willingness to learn
- Learned compliance resulting in reduced assertiveness and decision making opportunities

All of this increases an individual’s vulnerability and risk. Professionals regularly report feeling ill equipped to have conversations about relationships, intimacy and to respond to sexual behaviours of concern, however they are often best placed to be doing so. Having a workforce that is able to have conversations about such a fundamental part of a quality and safeguarding framework is absolutely essential.

With Local Area Coordinators (LACs) predicted to comprise approximately 50% of the NDIS workforce by the third year of the scheme and Planners approximately 20% - these two groups are significant given their level of interaction with participants, families and natural safeguards, community and providers.

Recommendation 3:

That the NDIA fund the development and delivery of 'supporting healthy relationships, sexual behaviours, preventing and reporting sexual violence' training for LACs, Planners and Providers of medium to high risk level support. Content to include:

- Supporting healthy relationships – responding to individual needs
- Identifying, understanding and responding to sexual behaviours
- Personal and professional values and attitudes
- Strategies for supporting access to information and education about sexual health
- Reporting and disclosure of abuse responses
- Using resources to support healthy relationships and sexuality for young people and adults with disability

FPQ believes that all professionals involved in the delivery of services for people with disability require access to specific evidence based training to help them to ensure safe and healthy relationships are experienced by participants. Specifically those with Autism and related disorders and intellectual disability.

Undertaking coordinated action on a nation wide level would enable an integrated approach to addressing relationship needs, sexual behaviour and connection to community for participants of the NDIS. FPQ is well positioned to draw on our nation wide affiliations with Family Planning organisations across Australia to provide a comprehensive and consistent service delivery model to support NDIA to ensure that people with disability receive relevant, timely support in the development of their relationships and now and into the future.

## Appendix A

### Awards and recognition

2003



Queensland  
Government

**Queensland Showcase Award for Excellence** to FPQ and Lockyer District Special Education Unit Secondary for the Health and Relationships Education Program in recognition of the significant contribution to improving student educational outcomes.

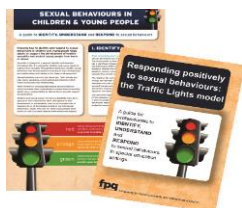
2007



CHILD PROTECTION WEEK

FPQ received the **Queensland Child Protection Award** in the **Education Initiative Category** for publishing the Everyone's got a bottom storybook, written by Tess Rowley and illustrated by Jodi Edwards, in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the prevention of child harm.

2008



FPQ received the **Disability Action Week Education and the Arts Award** for the production of a DVD resource responding positively to sexual behaviours: The Traffic Lights Model for professional to support positive responses to sexual behaviours for young people with a disability.

2012



FPQ received the **National Disability Award for Excellence in Improving Health Outcomes** for a commitment to ensuring people with disability have access to the information and resources they need to make informed choices about their sexuality and reproductive health.



FPQ was awarded the 2012 **Child Protection Week Education Initiative Award** for the Creating Conversations Project that was implemented in Central Queensland. The project worked with parents/carers to provide information, education and support to develop confidence in having conversations about relationships, puberty, sex and personal safety with young people with a disability.

