



Less Silence More Safety (LSMS)  
launch of the  
Testimonies project  
1 December 2016



On Thursday 1 December 2016 Less Silence More Safety (LSMS) launched the Testimonies project at The Parks Theatre.

Thank you to Uncle Frank Wanganeen for his generous Welcome to Country and thoughtful conversations.

The Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner, Steve Tully, shared with the assembled group his belief that every person is important and has the right to be treated with dignity and respect when using South Australian health and community services. He spoke of the heightened vulnerability of people who live with a disability and his heartfelt commitment to building strong and right relationships between the office of the Commissioner and folk with disability and the people who love and support them, and to continue to build that trust.

Truffy Maginnis, the LSMS project worker, talked about the background to the collaboration with No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability.

“Thank you to Steve Tully and Sandy Edwards, the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, for their strong support for the LSMS project and deep insight into what it takes to build trusting relationships with people with disability and to all my colleagues at HCSCC. From No Strings Attached, thank you to Jill Gael and Kari Seeley, the actors in the Testimonies - Anton, Corey, June, Kathryn, Kym, Michaela, Nick, Rachel, Ryan and Shiloh. To the filmmaker, Danika Krieg and sound recordist, Mitre Khamdash. Danika sent a message for the launch:- ‘I feel very privileged to have been involved in such an important project, very personal and humbling. Thanks for the opportunity and all the very best for the launch!’

“My biggest thank yous and respect for their generosity are to the folk who told their stories to us.”

“What do these stories mean? A UN special report on disabled persons asserted that ‘the treatment given to disabled persons defines the innermost characteristics of a society and highlights the cultural values that sustain it.’

“Not everything in the stories we heard come under the scrutiny of the Commissioner’s office but people’s lives aren’t compartmentalised, so clarity and understanding about what may have come before in someone’s life is needed when looking at when violence happens. We look at the cumulative effect of abuse over a lifetime and where the acts of resistance stand out and how hope is sustained. So in the films we hear about school and life and work as well as health and community experiences. I was struck by what happens in schools setting the template for later experiences.

“Abuse of people with disabilities, people kept on the margins, may be hidden from public view but NOT to those who live with disability or those who love them – they know. They know of the day to day lacerations of the spirit, the effects of violence and abuse from the subtle humiliations all the way through to the shocking violence, abuse and denials of personhood. The reality of these abuses are starting to emerge through investigations and reports but the extent is not clearly recognised.

“Abuse can start from the beginning and doesn’t always look the same - pressure to terminate pregnancies, bullying and exclusion in schools, loss of parental rights, sexual, emotional and physical violence, segregated and hidden lives in services – support, accommodation, employment and on and on – not having your voice heard by government and community service providers in your family and neighbourhood, or worse - going against what a person with disability wants, with desperate attempts to convey a story seen as attention seeking behaviour and on and on.

“I heard Michael Sullivan, Chair of NSW Council on Intellectual Disability, speak powerfully last week in Sydney of people with disabilities being safe, supported and valued, and with rights respected. Valued as good, ordinary groups of people but he knows there is no quick fix. Michael reminded us that if you’ve spent your life being told what to do it is very difficult to speak up but he exhorted the gathering to be open and take a new approach. He reiterated that there must be nothing about us without us. 'Don't just ask, find out'.

“It is the continuing challenge for organisations like HCSCC and all of us as individuals – how do we hear and honour the stories from people with disabilities and act ethically on them, what relationship building do we need to do and maintain. LSMS is a start in the HCSCC.

“I hope these Testimonies show respect for the stories of the participants whilst not betraying their privacy and remind us all of what it means to look out for each other, recognising the stands that people with disability take for themselves against violence – the acts of resistance - and being alongside them in this on their terms. And to always hold to the clarion call from people who live with a disability - Nothing about us without us – as our guiding principle. Thank you”

Truffy Maginnis

**Less Silence More Safety Project Officer**

**Office of the Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner**