

### **Less Silence More Safety Project Report – 30 June 2017**

The Less Silence More Safety project (LSMS) is HCSCC's contribution to improving the safety and quality of services provided to people with disability.

LSMS wants to:-

- promote greater knowledge of and vigilance about the violence, abuse and exploitation against people with disability
- support people who are, and have been, badly treated
- give people knowledge and information about HCSCC's role to investigate what happens to people with disability
- build successful and respectful relationships with existing peer and community support networks for people with disability, and
- mobilise the community to speak up on this issue.

### **What has the Project been doing?**

#### **Testimonies**

The project is now in its second and final year. As we foreshadowed in last year's Annual Report, a major initiative of LSMS this year was to work with people with disability as storytellers. In collaboration with No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability, the Testimonies Project was developed - a story recording and performance/video project.

'Testimonies 1, 2, 3 and 4' was launched at the Parks Community Theatre for International Day of People with Disability on 1 December 2016. 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 people with disability and the people who love and support them, and to continue to build that trust.

The Testimonies stories are available from the HCSCC website:

<https://vimeo.com/195380855>

<https://vimeo.com/196358367>

<https://vimeo.com/196360194>

<https://vimeo.com/196360934>

What do these stories mean? A United Nations (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; for example, what can happen in schools may set the template for later experiences. So clarity and understanding about what may have come before in someone's life is needed when looking at later experiences of violence and abuse. We look at the cumulative effect of abuse over a lifetime and where the acts of resistance stand out and how hope is sustained. In the films we hear about school, life and work, as well as health and community 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 realities of these abuses are starting to emerge through investigations and reports but the extent is not widely or clearly recognised.

Abuse can start from the beginning and doesn't always look the same – examples are: pressure to terminate pregnancies where, for example, Down Syndrome is present; bullying and exclusion in schools; loss of parental rights; sexual, emotional and physical violence; segregated and hidden lives in services, including support, accommodation, employment etc. 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.

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.

We 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.

### **'Testimonies' on radio**

As an adjunct to the Testimonies project a series of audio interviews with parents and kinship carers of people with disability have been produced with the support of 5RPH Vision Australia Radio. Thank you to Christine, Rick, Val, Helen and Jill for sharing stories of life experiences and celebrations in their families.

Thanks to Hans Reimer, Manager of 5RPH, for his skilled guidance in the recording of the interviews and Peter Greco for his tips and hints.

Interview recordings are also available from the HCSCC website.

### **'I'm The Boss' resource**

The premise of the 'I'm The Boss' resource is that people with disability are in charge of their lives. We hope this resource will be useful for people negotiating the new National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – with its aim of 'choice and control', as well as dealing with other health and community services in South Australia.

'I'm The Boss' is a series of seven booklets that offer guidance and suggestions for:-

- What are my rights?
- Getting ready to talk to an individual worker or person from a health or community service
- Examples of questions you can ask
- How do I think the talk went?
- What do I do next?
- Examples of questions you can ask a healthcare worker when you are sick
- Important information

The booklets are inside a sturdy plastic cover, easy to open and take the relevant booklet out.

All the booklets are prepared in Easy English. You can contact the HCSCC for free copies of the package. Links to each booklet will also be on the HCSCC website.

The development of this resource was guided by a group of wise and talented people. Thank you to Bridgett McDonald, Kathryn Hall, Kerry Telford, Daniela Stahl, Ellen Fraser-Barbour and Nathan Higginson. Thank you also to Glenda Lee for her insightful comments and suggestions on the final drafts.

LSMS owes a debt of thanks to all the individuals who participated in the Testimonies Project, Testimonies on Radio and in guiding the 'I'm The Boss' resource. The power of the storytelling and wisdom of the contributions have enhanced the project beyond measure.

### **Other activities**

LSMS has continued the work of meeting, talking with and learning from people with disability and the important people in their lives. The project worker has collaborated with the following community groups:

Families4Families peer support group for people with Acquired Brain Injury and their loved ones; Crossing The Bridge community group for African women with disabilities; JFA Purple Orange through their Peer Support Network and Confidence and Capability Peer Group; Our Voice Self Advocacy; Adelaide People First; No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability; the Aboriginal Health Council of SA; Kiwanis Aktion Groups; Independent Advocacy; The Dulwich Centre; Women with Disability South Australia; Holiday Explorers and Dignity SA. We thank them all for their interest in and support for the project.

The LSMS project worker also participated in the International Day of People with Disability events, radio interviews with Access All Areas on Radio Adelaide and with Peter Greco on 5RPH.

The project provided presentations on the issue of violence against people with disability to the Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People, the Aboriginal Health Council's Community Health Workers' Forum and Holiday Explorer's Conference.

The project worker attended the NSW Ombudsman's Forum on 'Addressing the abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability' and the Recognition and Protection of Vulnerable Parties in Practice event organised by the SA Attorney General's department.

A significant involvement for LSMS was as a member of the EveryWoman Everywhere International Coalition to advance a grassroots-up campaign for a new international norm on violence against women and girls. Expert subcommittees are working on specific issues and LSMS is a member of the Women and Girls with Disabilities Subcommittee.

<http://everywomaneverywhere.org/>

### Information

LSMS has a page on the HCSCC Website:

<http://www.hcsccl.sa.gov.au/less-silence-more-safety-project/>

LSMS brochures are accessible through the HCSCC website:

<http://www.hcsccl.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Less-Silence-More-Safety-three-columns2-2015-12-.pdf>

<http://www.hcsccl.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Less-Silence-More-Safety-2016-Easy-Read-2.pdf>

It also has a Facebook page to tap into the current important voices in the disability activist, anti-violence world and share the work of the project:

[https://www.facebook.com/LessSilenceMoreSafety/?ref=aymt\\_homepage\\_panel](https://www.facebook.com/LessSilenceMoreSafety/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel)

