Disclosure of Interest:

*Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships* is a program developed by Dr. Patsie Frawley and a project team including women with an intellectual disability at LaTrobe University (Frawley, Slattery, Stokoe, Houghton & O’Shea, 2011)

Golden City Support Services has sponsored the implementation of this program in Bendigo.

The other partners in the Bendigo delivery of the program include: Bendigo Community Health, Women’s Health Loddon Mallee, Centre Against Sexual Assault Loddon Campaspe, Country Awareness Network, Victoria Police.
**Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships** (Frawley, et al, 2011) is a relationships program for people with an intellectual disability.

- **Living Safer Sexual Lives** was a study about sexuality and relationships in the lives of people with an intellectual disability (Johnson, Hillier, Harrison & Frawley, 2001). It developed people’s stories - They were used to advocate for changes to policy, support and services
- They formed the basis of a training manual for staff, families and people with an intellectual disability about relationships and sexuality using a rights framework (Frawley, Johnson, Hillier & Harrison, 2003)

- **LSSL:RR – is the second phase of this work**
  - The stories were used to develop a program with people with an intellectual disability that includes people with an intellectual disability as peer educators and focuses on abuse prevention
  - The program is part of a community development model that involves mainstream community sexuality and relationship services in local planning for the program and in delivery as co-facilitators

- **Evaluation of the model found that this approach was effective in developing links with community supports and services, in shifting the position of people with an intellectual disability in relationship education, and more broadly in violence and abuse prevention work** (Frawley, Barrett & Dyson, 2012)
LSSL:RR model

Research and Evaluation – Social change

Learning Partners – Resourcing natural supports

Co-Facilitation Sector Development

Peer Education
Respectful Relationships program run by and for people with an intellectual disability
The model is informed by approaches that aim to prevent gender based violence and abuse.

The program uses four stories about sexuality and relationships in the lives of people with an intellectual disability to talk about:

• sexuality and relationships - Molly’s story
• having rights and being safe - Angela’s story
• respectful relationships - Hannah’s story
• men and respectful relationships - Kevin’s story

There are four sessions that are run by peer educators and co-facilitators who have been trained by the LaTrobe University project team
**Presenters and roles in the program**

- **Peer Educators** - individuals with disability from the local area who are trained to deliver the program. Peer Educators are paid for their work in delivering the program.

- **Co-facilitators** - professionals from a range of local services such as Community Health, Centre Against Sexual Assault and Women’s Health. The Co-facilitators provide specific information and skills as they are required during the program sessions. The cross-sectoral partnering that this involves strengthens the capacity of services to work in this area.

- **Learning Partner** - a person who is trusted by the program participant and can have conversations between sessions, helping integrate the knowledge.
The Stories:

The stories are told from a first person perspective – they are read or the DVD shown and the peer educators and co-facilitators facilitate discussions about them and their key messages.

They describe a number of aspects of each person’s life including their relationships and sexual life.
# Themes from the Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Molly’s Story – My dream is to get married</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Families</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being a person with a disability</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being a woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Relationships and sex</td>
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<tr>
<th>Angela’s Story – I like to go on trains</th>
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<td>• Having a boyfriend/girlfriend</td>
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<td>• Sex and being a woman</td>
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<td>• Relationships with parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Religion</td>
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<td>• Sexual assault</td>
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<th>Hannah’s story – It’s hard to get privacy</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Privacy and confidentiality</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Having babies/sterilisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sexual relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alcohol and drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sexual assault</td>
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<th>Kevin’s story – I’ll spend the rest of my life with her</th>
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<td>• Being a man</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Friends and other relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sexual health and safe sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sex and sexual relationships</td>
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Some of the ideas that participants take away from the program:

• Everyone’s family is different
• Everyone needs to find someone who is supportive
• People with disabilities want to be respected as adults.
• People’s attitudes are important – particularly staff and family
• Everyone needs to have a safe place to talk about important things
• Everyone needs to have their privacy respected
• Everyone has the right to be treated as an equal, to feel safe and to have information they can understand and use
• People with disabilities keep trying, they have guts
What has been successful about the program?

• Being able to talk about things that are important. Sometimes people do not have that opportunity in other places.
• Knowing about other services that can help. For example Women’s Health Services, the Centre Against Sexual Assault, Sexual Health Services
• Being able to talk in a safe space and given permission to talk about things that can be embarrassing (particularly for men)
• Meeting other people and enjoying the social aspect of the program
• Having messages reinforced by using a variety of formats – dvds, pictures, activities and talking
• Recognising that many things in the program are connected: social activities, education, self advocacy, contributing to group discussions all work together to make it successful
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why people got involved – motivation to be peer educator</th>
<th>Personal experience of relationships – good basis for being a peer educator</th>
<th>Already have skills – program good opportunity to develop these further</th>
<th>Self advocacy – link for peer educators to program; place where they have learned to ‘speak up’ and share experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How they saw their role – aims</td>
<td>Helping peers so they can have better experiences in relationships</td>
<td>To share own experiences, help people talk about relationships through the stories and own experiences</td>
<td>Can be an educator because I am “in their shoes” Being a role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What people got out of it - benefits</td>
<td>Helping others and self</td>
<td>More confidence and being respected</td>
<td>New knowledge and skills – about relationships, support services and being a facilitator</td>
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What participants report they gain from the program (program evaluations)

• Being connected is an effective way to prevent abuse and to have messages of safety reinforced

• Access to information and to people who can help

• Speaking up for yourself – making positive choices

• Being out in the community and feeling safe – able to use public transport

• Problem solving together rather than unsafe, uninformed or impulsive decisions

• Being respected and treated as responsible adults
**Issues for services:**

The program is a beginning of conversations rather than an event that is expected to solve the issues.

An agency wide, top to bottom, approach recognising the need to be inclusive of disability and recognising sexuality as an important issue for people with disability.

Access to information

Family and service provider attitudes
Where to for relationship and sexuality education with people with an intellectual disability?

• Based on lived experiences – acknowledges reality of people’s lives – “same as me”

• Make clear the disabling nature of attitudes and practices that do not acknowledge the sexuality of people with an intellectual disability – identify these and focus for change

• Gendered understanding of relationships, sexuality and disability

• Inclusion of people with an intellectual disability in shaping policy, education and practice
Working in the regional and rural context:

Relationships in rural and regional communities influence the choices people make. Other people in the community reinforce the choice that individuals make, either in a positive or a negative way.

Making connections with individuals from services works particularly in smaller communities because they are people you are likely to bump into in a variety of places (benefits in feeling familiar and comfortable but may also work against if there is embarrassment or awkwardness)

Services tend to find it easier to work together and share information in regional and rural centres (smaller and more flexible organisations?)

The peer educator/co-facilitator model introduces services to people with an intellectual disability in a collegial relationship – together they then introduce themselves to groups of people with an intellectual disability who learn about supports and services that are available and see that people with an intellectual disability can have power and control in their lives – through the stories and through the peer educators
Project Partners in Bendigo:

• Golden City Support Services
• Bendigo Community Health Services
• Women’s Health Loddon Mallee
• Centre Against Sexual Assault Loddon Campaspe (CASALC)
• Victoria Police
• Country Awareness Network (CAN)