

'And You Think You're The Expert?'

Episode 1: Sexual Violence Worker

0:00:00.0 Jane: This podcast talks about sexual violence and domestic violence. It might make you feel upset or scared. If you need someone to talk to, there are numbers in the notes for this podcast.

0:00:12.7 Kaitie: We would like to begin as always by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we're meeting, the Turrbal and Jagera people. We would like to pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. We'd like to acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building a better future together.

0:00:36.2 Abbey: If people believe that we can't make decisions, then they don't believe in us.

0:00:41.4 Minnie: If the support worker tells you what to do all the time, you'll never learn.

0:00:44.7 Amethyst: Don't talk to me like I'm a child, but don't also talk to me like you're a professor.

0:00:49.8 Luna: Help us when we ask for help.

0:00:52.6 Poppy: To speak up instead of feeling scared and afraid.

0:00:57.8 Betty: Listen to us, we know what we need.

0:01:00.1 Kaitie: Hello, this is 'And You Think You're The Expert?' podcast, where we talk about intellectual disability, accessibility and violence. Welcome! My name is Kaitie, and I'm one of the workers from WWILD who helps out in each episode.

0:01:13.4 Jane: My name is Jane and I'm the other WWILD worker. Your hosts for each episode are experts in the field. So, they are women with an intellectual disability, or ID for short. Please see our introduction episode, if you would like any more information.

0:01:26.6 Kaitie: When we talked about sexual violence, the theme that came up again and again was fear. Fear of talking about it. Fear of saying the wrong thing. Fear of not saying the right things and not getting any help. Fear of not being understood. Fear of not being believed. Fear of actually physically getting to the services. Fear of all the other systems they may have to go through, like police and court. The question we are ultimately posing today is how can sexual violence workers respond to this fear and help make it easier?

0:02:00.5 Jane: A lot of people in our group found this topic really hard. Many seemed to want to talk more about it, but thought it might be too hard emotionally. Recovery from sexual violence is hard work and even harder if services are unable to meet your needs. However, we have some very brave volunteers who chose to be our hosts today, and they are Rose, Banksia, and Poppy, or the Flower Group.

0:02:23.2 Poppy: Hi, I'm Poppy.

0:02:26.3 Rose: Hi, I'm Rose. And I like movies and hi Susie.

0:02:36.8 Banksia: I'm Banksia. I'm a proud grandmother. And hi Susie.

0:02:38.9 Jane: Suzie is from the Centre Against Sexual Violence at Logan. Thanks for coming, Susie. We also have our fantastic peer worker Cassie with us today.

0:02:47.0 Cassie: Hi.

0:02:49.5 Jane: As always, it's a full recording room. So let's get started with our first question.

0:02:53.0 Banksia: How do you introduce yourself when you start working

with a woman who has an intellectual disability?

0:03:05.8 Suzie: Thanks Banksia. I like to let the woman know who I am and what I do. So she knows my name and, you know, how I work. In that first meeting, we often talk about the person's needs, like their access needs. We talk about how they got to the service, how they're feeling about being at the service. We talk about preferred ways of communicating with each other. We talk about what they would like from counselling. We actually talk a lot about the rights of the person at the service. So their right to be treated with respect, their right to be able to make complaints if they need to. We talk about confidentiality and all of those sorts of things, privacy, a right to privacy.

0:04:31.3 Poppy: I believe there should be confidentiality, and you should feel safe with the worker. Like they should give you a cup of tea to make you feel comfortable or give you a lolly to make your senses feel more safe. Just do small gestures to make you feel safe. Yeah.

0:04:51.5 Rose: Even when you first meet the worker, you could have something like a sense toy or that if they have one to make them feel more comfortable. And if they can't ask maybe... Somehow they could ask, what it is they are after.

0:05:18.6 Jane: Rose, you also talked about when we talked about this question, you also said you feel safe with the worker when they give you the time that you need.

0:05:28.7 Rose: Yeah, and to have to when the worker gets to know you and gives you the time you need to help you, of a different stages because I don't understand a lot of different things.

0:05:53.7 Suzie: I really appreciate you letting me know, Poppy and Rose, what you would find most helpful for you, coming to a service for the first time.

0:06:09.4 Kaitie: The group shared that it's really hard to build relationships with counsellors. Many felt fearful and they didn't know where to start. Similar to what women said about DV services, many felt there was a secret code that

you have to say to get help. Many shared they didn't know the secret code and felt that they were unlikely to receive the support they need. Our experts also shared that it was important for workers to slow down and work at their pace. This means allowing more sessions and understanding that this type of work takes time.

0:06:41.3 Rose: Susie, how do you help people with intellectual disabilities trust you?

0:06:53.7 Suzie: Thanks, Rose. It's really important to me that my clients are able to trust me so that we can work together. I like to be able to take things at the pace that the person is at, so not rushing them through things or making them fill out forms if they're not comfortable doing that. I like to check in a lot to see where people are at, and how they might be feeling about things, sometimes too, sometimes people can't talk to you about stuff, but you can see their bodies have a bit of a reaction when you're talking to them, so I notice those things and then I'll talk to my client about those things like, "You know, I'm noticing that you're turning away" or I try and talk to them about those things. We also like to ask about our clients' previous experiences of counselling, 'cause sometimes people have gone to other counsellors and they have some things that work for them and some things that they really don't like. So we like to get that kind of idea... Those ideas from them about what they think has been most helpful for them, and then maybe what hasn't been helpful for them as well. I think always treating people with respect and being kind and compassionate, and giving them a space where they can talk about the things that are most important to them in their own time and way is really important.

0:08:57.0 Jane: What helps you to trust workers, Cass?

0:09:01.6 Cassie: Listening to what they have to say, always knowing that you understand them, and letting them know that you're there for them, and they're being heard, especially around sexual violence, even if you've walked the same road as them, like letting them know that you've been down that road, so they feel more easier to trust someone that's been down the same road as them. 'Cause I know trust is a big thing for me, 'cause once you've

been hurt more than three times, it is hard to regain someone's trust.

0:09:58.8 Suzie: Thanks for that Cassie, that's um... That's really good to know.

0:10:05.2 Kaitie: A lot of discussion in our workshops is around accessibility, accessibility means that people who have a disability are able to receive the same type of support as those who don't. It means a worker needs to be thinking about their communication and how welcoming their services are, for example, easy-read information and forms. However, much of the conversation about accessibility was around very concrete barriers women with ID face. Many felt that just getting in the door was the hard part, things like public transport and directions are hard to work out, and many of our experts said they don't drive. Some of the people in our group talked about how important it is to have help to work out how they'll get to a service. Accessibility is more than just communicating well, sometimes it's just about getting in the front door.

0:10:52.7 Poppy: How do you make clients understand you?

0:10:56.5 Suzie: Thanks Poppy. I try and check in with my clients regularly in different ways. I like to ask them where they're at, ask them if what I'm saying makes any sense to them, sometimes I also like to pay attention to how they're sitting or responding and talk to them about that 'cause sometimes people can't talk to you, but you can see it in their bodies that they're feeling a bit uncomfortable. Sometimes I'll ask them if it's better rather than saying no or saying that they don't wanna talk about something, if they just put their hand up to tell me that they've had enough, and we'll stop and go somewhere else if we need to. I also like to make sure that we are talking about stuff that's helpful for the client, that I'm actually being helpful to them during the session and making sure that we're on track and that we're talking about things that the client wants to talk about, not things that I wanna talk about. You know, checking in and making sure that we are talking about... That the client is able to tell me what they wanna tell me, not what I think they might wanna tell me, if that makes sense? Yeah.

0:12:24.1 Kaitie: What do we think sexual violence workers need to be doing

to make sure that they're making sense? What kind of things help?

0:12:35.2 Poppy: If they take their time with the client, don't rush the client, and try to use easy words, don't use big words like doctors use and all that sort of thing, and try to just do things slowly, not fast, yeah.

0:13:01.9 Suzie: I feel like that's what all of you are saying, isn't it? To take your time and not rush, and not sort of um... To make it easy to understand, using just regular words, not going on and on with a whole bunch of other stuff.

0:13:19.1 Poppy: Yeah, I find that very true.

0:13:21.0 Kaitie: What should workers do to make sure that you understand?

0:13:30.6 Rose: To help people do with... Like do some different games or drawings, if that could be helpful to them.

0:13:52.7 Suzie: Hmm that's a really good idea, Rose. I think sometimes at CASV, we try and use different ways of doing things. We try and use... We have like different, say, sand trays or drawing or also um, even using little symbols sometimes can be helpful, like different toys. Sometimes I have some card games in my office too, that sometimes it can be good to use if people don't feel like talking is helping.

0:14:25.5 Rose: Thank you. That was a good result.

0:14:30.6 Kaitie: Banksia, is there anything you'd like to say about this one?

0:14:37.0 Banksia: First of all, I wanna thank you because when you talk about how you have sand trays and you might have ornaments and things, I believe that that does help to relax your client. I also believe that breathing techniques might help, and just not actually really talking about the situation, but just being in the present and getting that trust built up with your client. I believe that that would be a great way to start a therapy session or um. Yeah, just getting to, for you getting to know us and we getting to know you to build it

up, and then whatever takes place, drawing, um, doodling. Just having a pen and paper there, or colours there and see how it goes. From my personal experience, my counsellor, it was the first place I'd been to that I felt so comfortable. And she took the time to get to know me as a person. And it was just so peaceful, the deep breathing, and I couldn't say too much, and she offered me the sandbox. And then she was asking, "How do you feel?" And when a client, or well, I, run me hands through it and she's like... And she was asking, "well how do you feel?" and it was like being on the beach and the wind blowing in your hair. And it gave me a new sense of getting help. And like, I felt so overwhelmed because I hadn't experienced that with other agencies before. And it wasn't just the sandbox, it was the whole experience, and I'd like that to continue, if it like... Yeah.

0:17:29.7 Suzie: Thanks, Banksia, yeah.

0:17:31.2 Poppy: Feeling comfortable means like, if you're uncomfortable, it's a bit different to being comfortable. Well, you can think better, you can express yourself better and you can find your words better and you can feel more relaxed. Yeah.

0:17:57.7 Jane: I think that's a really good point, Poppy. And it was something that was talked about in our workshops again and again, was that if the person felt comfortable with their worker or their counsellor, they could say, if they didn't understand something, they could ask questions, and this can be really hard for people, unless they have that relationship with that somewhere they feel safe to say, "Hey, what you just said, I don't understand." What do you think?

0:18:25.5 Banksia: We with intellectual impairments are, it's sad to say, but we're under one umbrella. And then people that have had top educations and they don't have a disability or an intellectual impairment, they get better services than what we do. They're treated a lot different to us. It's like, we're... It hurts. It's like we're second grade to other people, and it shouldn't be because we're all one. So, like if I get hurt and a normal person gets hurt, we're still hurting the same way. But because we have a disability, it doesn't matter what it is, we are looked upon as if, "We're not gonna help you

because you don't have the same feelings as somebody that doesn't have a disability", and so therefore it'll be, "Oh, come in" to them, "Come in and we'll help you" and to us, "Oh, go away, we don't wanna know about it." And people face that every day, like yesterday and today and tomorrow, it'll always be the same, so your organizations need to stay strong and keep working with people with disabilities. When the going gets tough, don't walk away.

0:20:07.0 Jane: Yeah, well said Banksia. A lot of people in the group, they felt this way as well, that they didn't get the same treatment or the same services as other people who don't have a disability, and we know it shouldn't be that way. Alright, so we might keep moving, let's go to the next set of questions. We will ask Susie about how she supports people going to police or court. Our experts have shared that both reporting to police and going to court is really, really difficult. The words used by police, prosecutors and magistrates can feel like a different language. The women in our groups told us that they feel they are more likely to face discrimination because of their disability. Many talked about how important it is to have a trusted worker supporting them at police stations and at court. This is important as a trusted person, like a sexual violence counsellor, are more likely to be able to provide the emotional support that is needed, as well as helping the person to better understand. People have said they are more likely to understand if they're talking to someone they know and trust, as they're not as stressed.

0:21:10.3 Poppy: Do you support people when they go to court?

0:21:13.6 Suzie: Yeah, Poppy, the simple answer to that is a definite yes.

0:21:17.6 Poppy: It's very helpful to have a worker at court because it's easier to talk about things like if you've experienced the violence, you can talk about it properly with them.

0:21:31.5 Rose: To have the worker at a court to help them through the different situations that might come up and that they can be there to make them feel more at ease and answer any questions that they don't understand. How do you explain court to people with disabilities or other people?

0:22:10.1 Suzie: Yeah. So we talk about... It would depend which court we're going to, to start with, and then we'd have a talk about whether it's the Magistrates court, or the District court, or Supreme Court. We talk to them about that, about where they're going. And also, there's different processes going through court, so we talk about what stage the process was at. Sometimes police will give lots of information, well, they'll give some information about what's happening, but not fully explain how it all works. So we would get the information from our clients and from the police, and then we'd sit down and talk about what was gonna happen in court.

0:23:05.5 Rose: To break this down in little words, not like big words.

0:23:15.3 Suzie: So words that are easy to understand. Yeah.

0:23:19.8 Kaitie: Poppy, do you any thoughts about how workers should help someone at court or explain court?

0:23:25.7 Poppy: Well, they should have a counsellor with them when they go to court, because then they'll be able to express themselves better and they'll be able to um... Like, they'll feel more comfortable in themselves to speak up instead of feeling scared and afraid, like they'll feel a little bit more at ease. Yeah.

0:23:48.5 Suzie: Yeah. It sounds like you'd like to have somebody with you at the time, that's there just for you to support you through the whole process.

0:23:58.8 Poppy: Yeah. I find that very important.

0:24:02.2 Banksia: They use words that we don't know, we don't understand, and we don't get anywhere, and the judges they don't listen to us because we'll go around in circles as you probably have already gathered with me. So, I believe that there should be more support or like, somewhere where we can go like, say we might have to go and see duty solicitor or our solicitor and they're not speaking to what we understand and they don't wanna give us the time to explain it. So a support person would be really good in a court, like more support people in the system or in the court houses would be a lot

better to help anybody that's got a intellectual impairment or any disability, it would be really, really great because there's not a lot out there. Um, yeah.

0:25:16.2 Jane: I was just thinking, Banksia you also talked about the importance of understanding the court process, and you thought workers could be helpful to explain it in steps. Did you wanna talk to that a bit?

0:25:29.2 Banksia: Like, it'd be good for us to learn or to know step by in service, "Okay, we've gotta do it all", it's... "Okay, so this is what we need to do first". To break it down. Instead of, "Okay. Bang. It's done." It needs to be, "Okay, we're gonna do this." And then from there we'll just um... Then we can look at the next step sort of things instead of all in one hit because we're just never gonna get it, do you know I mean?

0:26:10.2 Suzie: I do know what you mean, Banksia, because I agree with you. Going to court can be a really scary process for anybody, even people without intellectual disability, 'cause it's like you say, it's like they're speaking in another language. So it can be really important to have somebody with you that can help you to understand exactly what it is that they're talking about, because ultimately you're the person who's most affected by what's going on, you know. And it's part of our job too, to make sure that the court and the police and the criminal justice system is respecting your right to be heard, your right to be able to make a complaint, and your right to be heard in that situation. So that's part of the work that we do as well, um, helping our clients to be able to navigate that system or to get through that system, that can be really important.

0:27:11.4 Kaitie: Next, we have a question about rights. This question is an important one. Many of the experts we've spoken to along the way had never had an opportunity to learn and talk about their rights, some didn't know what a right was. Women shared that rights can be tricky to understand, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't have an opportunity to learn. In fact, our experts told us that learning about rights and relationships is one way to prevent violence against women who have an intellectual disability.

0:27:39.7 Rose: How do you help people with disability, people work for their

rights?

0:27:50.5 Suzie: Thanks, Rose. Well, the first thing that we do is that we talk about rights, we talk about the rights that people have when they come to our service. So, you have a right to be treated with respect, you have a right to be believed, and I wanna make it really clear that we believe all of the survivors that come to our service, you have a right to safety, you have rights to being treated with dignity. When it comes to our systems and when it comes to courts and police, you have a right to make a complaint. If someone has hurt you or committed an offence against you, done the wrong thing to you, you have a right to make a complaint about that, and for that complaint to be investigated.

0:28:43.9 Jane: I was just thinking, I know Poppy, you and I had a chat a little while ago when we were driving to the train station actually, about how important it was the right to learn about what a good relationship looks like and what a bad relationship can look like, and why that's important. What do you think? Why is it important to learn that stuff?

0:29:04.4 Poppy: It's good to learn good and bad relationships because it's healthier if you learn those things early, when you're a teenager or an adult, it's good for you to know these things, because then you can help others as well.

0:29:24.0 Suzie: Yeah. I agree, Poppy. I think it's also really important to learn about ourselves and our own bodies and what feels okay and what doesn't feel okay, and be able to work that out 'cause sometimes that can be tricky. Sometimes there can be people in your life that tell you that things are okay when you know that they're not.

0:29:45.9 Poppy: And sometimes you just have to go with your gut.

0:29:48.4 Suzie: You're absolutely right! That's a talk that I have with lots of my clients that they can trust their gut. It's always looking out for you.

0:29:57.1 Poppy: I believe that's true.

0:29:58.5 Suzie: I do too.

0:30:00.7 Cassie: Now we're gonna talk about our favorite section, myths.

0:30:04.1 Kaitie: Thanks, Cassie. We talk about this every episode, and it is our favorite section because our experts did bring up a lot of myths, and for a lot of different reasons. They thought that community members thought these, that services thought these, and that all of these myths contributed to the discrimination they experienced and the poor experiences they had with services.

0:30:28.1 Cassie: Some people think that people with an intellectual disability can't have a sexual relationship. What do you think about it?

0:30:36.8 Suzie: I think that that myth is absolutely wrong. I think that everyone has the right to a healthy sexual relationship, including people with disability. And I think that it's a form of discrimination in saying that people with intellectual disability can't have healthy sexual relationships. I feel like it's really important for people with intellectual disability to be able to decide who they would like to have sexual relationships with, and what those relationships look like. And sometimes it can be really helpful, I think like we were talking about earlier, to have someone to talk to that you trust about relationships and how you feel about those relationships.

0:31:28.7 Cassie: I know from my experience, I've had workers tell me that I can't have a healthy relationship because of my intellectual disability, but I'm actually in a healthy relationship now. And from my past experience, I've got three beautiful kids out of my healthy relationships that I've had.

0:31:53.9 Poppy: Everyone deserves to have a healthy relationship, no matter who they are.

0:32:00.1 Kaitie: Did everyone here get really good education about healthy relationships when they were younger?

0:32:05.5 Everyone: No, no.

0:32:07.8 Poppy: Definitely no.

0:32:08.6 Suzie: Me neither, to be honest,

[laughter]

0:32:11.6 Kaitie: Do we think there should be good education?

0:32:14.7 Everyone: Yes.

0:32:16.0 Poppy: Definitely.

[background conversation]

0:32:16.3 Banksia: Sex education and it was compulsory. No one said anything growing up about relationships, you just learn from what went on in your household, whether good or bad. Whether we're disabled or not, it's up to us to change that cycle, whether it's partly the same or partly not. But we've all had to learn ourselves.

0:32:47.7 Jane: Do we think it's important for people with a disability to learn about sex-ed, to learn about sex?

0:32:54.1 Poppy: Yes. I believe it's really important, because if you don't know about it, how are you going to make yourself better?

0:33:03.4 Banksia: I actually agree, Pop. If it's not on, it's not on and if you don't feel... If you don't want to be touched, you don't have to be touched in places, and in places are... sex education, and we don't have that.

0:33:19.6 Kaitie: This is a really big theme in our group, a lot of people thought they were not spoken with about sexual education, about healthy relationships, about healthy sexual relationships, because of this myth that people with intellectual disabilities don't have sex or sexual relationships.

Which is ridiculous and absolutely not true. And it kinda ties into another ridiculous myth that people with ID are like children, you know that whole idea of mental age, and it's just crazy that that myth continues. It's all completely untrue, people with ID are adults, they have adult bodies and they often want what lots of adults want.

0:33:57.3 Cassie: Thanks, Susie, for coming today and sharing with us a little bit more information and answering our questions for us.

0:34:05.1 Suzie: Thank you so much, Cassie. Thank you, I wanna say thank you to all of you. To you, Cassie and to Poppy and Banksia and Rose. It's such a privilege to be invited along to talk about what's a, you know, really, really important topic. So thank you so much for having me, and I really value hearing from all of you about how we can do things differently, and how we can do things a little bit better to support you all in the way that you deserve.

0:34:45.3 Jane: And that ends our sexual violence worker episode. Thank you for joining us today. I think the big themes that came out of this discussion is slow down and break things into smaller chunks of information. Slowing down and going at the person's pace, this might mean booking more sessions, it might mean discussing things that seem irrelevant to recovery, it might even mean sharing a little bit about yourself. Talk about your dog or your favorite show, focus on building a strong foundation of trust.

0:35:16.1 Alison: We have made a booklet with information about the Listen Up! project, this is information about our host, how we did the project and some other stuff that may help workers. You can find it on our website, see the notes for this podcast for more information. If you find some of the things we spoke about today upsetting, you can find numbers for support, if you live in Australia, in the notes for this podcast.

0:35:47.0 Jane: This podcast was created as part of the Listen Up! project at WWILD. We were kindly funded for this project by the Department of Social Services as part of their community-led project to prevent violence against women and their children. What we talk about in this podcast is not advice, WWILD expressly disclaims any liability, howsoever, caused to any persons

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