‘And You Think You’re the Expert?’

Episode 2: Domestic Violence Worker

0:00:00.1 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.

0:00:13.1 Amethyst: We would like to begin by acknowledging the Gubbi Gubbi people. They are the Traditional Owners of the land on which we recorded this podcast. We would like to pay our respects to the Elders, past, present, and emerging, we acknowledge the stories, traditions, and the living cultures of all Aboriginal people, and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land, and commit to building a better future together.

0:00:36.8 Abbey: If people believe that we can't make decisions, then they don't believe in us.

0:00:42.1 Minnie: If the poor tells you what to do all the time, you'll never learn.

0:00:45.5 Amethyst: Don't talk to me like I'm a child, but don't also talk to me like your a professor.

0:00:50.6 Luna: Help us when we ask for help.

0:00:53.3 Poppy: To speak up, instead of feeling scared, and afraid.

0:00:57.9 Betty: Listen to us, we know what we need.

0:01:00.9 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.

0:01:13.9 Jane: And my name is Jane, and I'm the other WWILD worker. Your host for each episodes 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. Our experts had a lot to say about DV. In a nutshell, it's really hard. It was hard to work out the courage to call, it was hard trying to communicate on the phone, the workers used really hard words, and it was even hard to find the service. It was hard to work out how to get help, and it was hard to logistically leave the situation. It is always so hard going through DV, so all of this just makes it even harder. But before we jump into it, I would like to introduce our peer worker, Alison.

0:01:55.2 Alison: Hi, I'm Alison, and today we're joined by our fellow co-hosts, Amethyst and Charlie.

0:02:01.0 Jane: Yeah. We have another expert who helped us out with this episode, Selena. She can't be with us today, however, we will be reading out some of her wisdom, and quotes. So today we'll be interviewing Sarah, from the Center Against Domestic Abuse, in Caboolture.

0:02:16.4 Alison: Welcome, Sarah.

0:02:18.0 Jane: Sarah's worked in the sector for about seven years, and has a strong passion for DV work. Thank you for joining us, Sarah. Let's begin.

0:02:25.1 Amethyst: So do you know much about people with intellectual disabilities?

0:02:32.4 Sarah: I know some aspects, so in terms of some areas of a person's life that it might impact, such as functioning, reading, writing, language, memory, other areas like social interactions, inter-personal communication and relationships, that sort of thing, and practical aspects like employment, and managing money. Specifically with DV, having an intellectual disability can kind of increase a person's risk of vulnerability, when it comes to perpetrators of DV, but to be honest, having been asked to do this podcast has definitely pricked up my interest further in learning more about people with an intellectual disability, but learning is definitely a never-ending process.

[chuckle]

0:03:31.2 Amethyst: Not many people actually know much about intellectual disability, and because of this, people perceive us as differently. For example, if we do not look like we have a disability, people think we actually don't have one, and therefore we don't get treated right.

0:03:47.2 Charlie: Do you have training about how to work with people who have intellectual disabilities, or do you just wing it?

0:03:56.0 Sarah: So, um, we don't, unfortunately, undertake any specific training to work with those that have an intellectual disability, but our practice frameworks drive us to always focus on an individual person's unique and specific needs, so we would always try to strive to be unassuming, so we would ask a person some questions, especially toward the start of their engagement, as well as allowing them to tell us their story, and this is how we are sort of best able to identify where specific support needs are required, how to best support that person, based on what they want, need on their functioning, and try and address any access issues that might come up. All of our practitioners hold some level of knowledge and awareness around intellectual disabilities, but of course there will always be those unintentional mistakes, and learning, and growing, like I said is definitely an ongoing and never-ending process, and we learn something new every day in this work. [chuckle]

0:05:07.8 Charlie: Very often you get looked down on, and you get talked to like you don't know what you're on about. I think training should be around how to talk to someone who has a disability like a normal person. People often talk really, really slow. Sometimes I find this frustrating because I can hold a conversation, I can speak and say what is wrong, but I think people should make sure they are using easy words.

0:05:35.9 Sarah: Yeah, that's a really good point, Charlie.

0:05:40.0 Amethyst: So well, personally, I think all DV workers should have training in about any situation they could be put in. I think they should

definitely have training about intellectual disabilities. Um, it would be hard to know everything, obviously, but some basics around how to communicate with people with ID, like how to set a room up so people can feel comfortable, so not so bright lights, not lairy... What would I call it? Paint on the walls, sensory stuff, and those kind of things, so then they can feel comfortable in a situation, and then actually release all the information they need to release.

0:06:27.7 Alison: Do you change how you talk to someone with an intellectual disability? If so, how?

0:06:35.8 Sarah: Okay, that would definitely depend on what I know about that person as to how best it might be to communicate with them. I would first endeavor to find out what their preferred and appropriate communication methods might be and then adjust myself accordingly. For example, some might prefer to talk with or without a support person present, it might be a particular tone of voice that's more comfortable or eye contact, preferred or not preferred, topics they might wish to explore or not explore. In my experience I've worked with some who would actually prefer to speak over the phone, and then others who really struggle to communicate over the phone, where we might always arrange face-to-face sessions.

0:07:24.6 Charlie: Everyone is different. You need to talk to people in a way that will work for them. Maybe asking the person the best way to communicate with them. Some people have more severe disabilities than others.

0:07:41.8 Amethyst: I've just put... In my experience, don't talk to me like I'm a child, but don't also talk to me like you're a professor. I'm not gonna understand either of it, and I'll probably just shut down. Workers should ask us some questions at the start around how we communicate, what is your level of communication, how do you go with big words? Then you're making people feel comfortable before you get into the nitty-gritty, hard stuff, and then you can communicate easier.

0:08:13.6 Sarah: Yeah, that's really great advice.

0:08:16.0 Jane: I'm just gonna read out a quote from Selena, who can't be with us today. She says, "I think you should talk in a way that we can understand, but not in a way that's degrading. Don't talk down to us, talk to us like a normal person. We are normal people, but you might need to explain yourself in a different way." When we talked about this in our groups, many of the experts talked about how workers need to use clear language, and this is really important. Does anyone else have any thoughts about what helps people understand?

0:08:47.1 Amethyst: I'm really big on this one. You have to keep asking, "Do you understand or can I simplify this in a way that you will understand better?" You could ask them to say what you said back to you in their own words to make sure they understand. Some people find it hard to say that they don't understand, maybe because of embarrassment or something, so it is important to work out the relationship so that the person feels comfortable and then I can tell workers I don't understand something if I feel like I know them enough.

0:09:21.4 Jane: That's a really good point, Amethyst. The idea of feeling comfortable came up in nearly every group that we talked to. The experts talked about how if they felt comfortable, it was easier to understand and easier to say if you don't understand. Relationships and safety are very important, which brings us to our next set of questions. We're gonna talk about accessibility. Accessibility is a big word with lots of meanings. Our experts talked about accessibility being more than just using easy words. It was about transfer to the service, to the refuge, it was about walk-in appointments and helping with moving and all those tricky practical tasks that women in DV often face that are made all the more harder if you have an intellectual disability. It was also about equal access to refuge, and women with support needs not missing out on refuge because of their support needs. Charlie, would you like to ask the next question.

0:10:15.9 Charlie: Do you offer walk-in appointments?

0:10:20.6 Sarah: Cool. So, we are a crisis service, and that's if somebody attends in-person who is in immediate risk of harm or danger, we do our

absolute utmost to be able to support that person there and then. However, due to the extremely high volume of work, which often well and truly exceeds our capacity, we are not nearly as available for walk-ins as we would really like to be. If someone does attend as a walk-in, often times our other practitioners are already seeing others, but the best way of connecting with our services to, you can either walk in and make an appointment to chat or call up and make an appointment.

0:11:07.9 Charlie: I think it's easier to talk face-to-face, but it might be hard for the person to get to the service, if they're in a DV relationship. I think DV services should have both walk-in and phone. You should be able to get help when you need it. They should have staff members who are equipped to work with people who have an intellectual disability.

0:11:35.6 Amethyst: What's refuge, and how would you be able to help someone with an intellectual intellectual disability get to refuge?

0:11:44.9 Sarah: Okay, so women's refuge is safe accommodation for those who are fleeing domestic violence. So, we rely on DVConnect, who are the 24/7 fire and crisis service to connect people into refuges and crisis accommodation. They're the organisation that gets the funding to do that. When someone presents at our service as needing to go to refuge, we would talk with them and we would work with DV Connect to try to facilitate that. For someone with an intellectual disability, we would be trying to communicate their specific needs or their support needs to DV Connect so that we can make sure that person is as supported as they can be when they get to refuge. As a DV service, we do have some limited contacts directly with refuges, but most require us to go through DV Connect. The usual process is when a person is assessed by DV Connect as being eligible for refuge, they will usually place them in motel accommodation until a space opens up at a refuge, and their refuges are usually sets of apartments and townhouses that are secured and gated with DV practitioners on-site to offer support. And typically, while there, a person is assisted to try to find longer-term safe accommodation options.

0:13:28.3 Charlie: I think they should offer transport. Living with a disability...

Living with a disability is really hard, having a disability makes it a lot harder to leave. Sometimes it's easier to stay, than leave, it might be easier for people, if someone could be picked up, people might have trouble on public transport if they don't know where they are going.

0:13:53.3 Jane: That's a really good point, Charlie. A lot of people in our groups talked about it being really hard to work out all the getting in to and from places. Amethyst, I know you have some thoughts on this too.

0:14:05.3 Amethyst: So, I think workers might need to understand that people with a disability might need a little bit more help and a bit differently to other people. People may not understand or may find it harder to make decisions. Everyone has trouble with this though, I understand that. They have ways to try and lure you back in. I have a disability, so I have also had trouble with public transport. If a worker told me a lot of steps of how to get to us to a safe place or something like this, I would have trouble remembering what to do, so how would I remember the sequence when they really need to break it down. For example, "be at the train station da da da da da at such a time, at such and such platform, get off train at such and such station, which would be say three stops from the station you got on at', tell the person to call back if they have any trouble and the worker can call them and tell them what to do. When you are leaving, if you feel really scattered or scared, you need to work at a break down of steps, it was also really scared to travel by myself.

0:15:22.1 Sarah: That's a really good point. And leaving a DV relationship is really frightening and really scary in itself, so having to do things like take public transport when you wouldn't normally can be really awful, an awful feeling.

0:15:38.5 Jane: I really like how you put that Amethyst, it can be really useful to break things down. At WWILD we talk about sign posting. So that means saying "I'm going to talk about this now. Stop. Then I'm gonna be talking about this." A lot of people in our workshop said breaking ideas or processes down was really helpful.

0:15:56.6 Amethyst: Yeah well, the instructions get muddled up in our heads.

No, I'm not saying that everybody's heads get muddled up, but me for example? Yeah, I'm not gonna understand that. I've got to get off this this station, and I'll make sure I do this at this time and do this at this time, I'm gonna be so hecking confused. 'Cause I don't do well with stress, I'm not sure if any disability does well with stress. So there's a lot of stress getting out of it, let alone escaping, as well as trying to remember where you're going, what time you need to be there, and what train or taxi or bus, or whatever the transport you need to be on, at what such time.

0:16:46.7 Charlie: That's why you do it on SMS, one, two, three, four, five.

0:16:53.6 Sarah: We're always working toward creative ways of having people flee safely, so... Yes.

0:17:01.2 Jane: Yeah, it can be very difficult to remember all the steps. Some people in our workshop talk about messaging the person the steps one at a time. If it's safe to do so, of course.

0:17:11.0 Alison: Some people in our group said they needed... They really needed help moving things or organising things when they left a DV relationship. Does this service help people with things like this example, do they help like example, a taxi box for storage or do you help find a removalist?

0:17:29.9 Sarah: That's a really important question. The logistics of leaving a DV relationship are really complex, and having a solid and safe escape plan is really necessary. Our service can support clients and conversations around what might need to be organised and what can be done to facilitate the safest exit plan possible. Where us and a lot of DV services are really limited, is that we don't receive any funding to provide monetary assistance in terms of the logistics of moving, so moving costs, rent, removal, sorry, storage facilities, all of those kind of things. So where we can assist is to provide advocacy and referrals for other organisations where we think that they might have some brokerage for assistance or things might be able to be accessed externally. We do work, for example, we work closely with Rise Up who can furnish a new home after you fled DV and you move into a new home, they can furnish it for no cost. We can also do things like provide letters of support to a company, ah,

Victims Assist applications and things like that, so Victims Assist can provide some monetary compensation and/or safety upgrades for a new home when you've left DV, if you've experienced violence and/or sort of psychological harm as a result of the DV. So lots of things that we can kind of discuss with you and try and point you in the right direction, but definitely the logistics around it... I just need the money for the moving truck next week that's... It's simple, but it's so tricky, 'cause we don't get the funding for it, which is... Yeah, that can be very hard, yeah... Yeah.

0:19:29.7 Amethyst: What is brokerage?

0:19:30.1 Sarah: So yeah, when a service is funded to provide certain things, they might have a certain amount of money set to the side, which is for a purpose, so a place might have... So that's what's called brokerage. They might have a specific amount of brokerage for transport, to pay for people's transport or to pay for people's hotel rooms and things like that, so it's like a little pocket of money.

0:20:00.8 Alison: Okay, we might keep moving. Charlie, would you like to ask the next question?

0:20:05.0 Charlie: Some people in our group said they felt that you had to ask the right questions or say the right things to get help from a DV service. How do you make sure you help people with intellectual disabilities who don't know the right things to say?

0:20:23.1 Sarah: Thank you. I'm sorry that so many have had that experience. Our usual practice is to listen to the client's story and ask questions around what their support needs might be or assist them to identify what these might be, based on their identified safety concerns, but we understand that actually lots of clients aren't able to identify what it is that they need or want or what they're meant to ask for and lots of clients aren't aware of the services and supports that are actually available, so often wouldn't actually directly ask for any of these things. So that's why I do think that it's really important for us to work with that person to assist them to identify what it is they actually want, need, not just rely on them asking specific questions.

0:21:21.0 Charlie: I feel like the help I want is never there because people find it hard to understand my situation. People say that they understand when I really don't think that they do. You need to walk in our shoes to understand. I think people need ongoing training to understand, that would help. Also employing people who have a disability, who would understand.

0:21:49.9 Jane: Charlie, a lot of what you just said was shared by a lot of the women we spoke to. Many felt that workers just didn't understand them, so it was difficult to get the help that they needed. Amethyst, what are your thoughts on this one?

0:22:02.0 Amethyst: You also need to... What's the word? You need to know what questions to ask to get the help you need to get 'cause you're stuck if you do not know what questions you need to ask. I was stuck for 18 months.

0:22:19.1 Jane: Amethyst, that's such a great point and something we talked about a lot in our groups. A lot of people talked about not knowing the right questions to ask. We know that a lot of women with intellectual disability haven't any education around healthy relationships or DV, so a lot of people just don't know what to say. However, they know that what's happening doesn't feel right. I might actually read out a quote from another expert who attended our workshops who wasn't able to be with us today. I think she's put it really nicely. She said, "It's important to educate people with an intellectual disability about violence. If people don't have any education, they won't know who to turn to or how to get help."

0:22:58.1 Alison: Other people in our group said that it is important to educate people with disability about violence. If people don't have education, they won't know who to turn to or where to get help. If people are abused their whole life, they might think it is normal. People need to tell people with an ID if they are not being treated right and they might need help to learn what a healthy relationship is.

0:23:27.6 Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. Our crisis counselling team has... That's a huge part of the role actually is to have conversations about DV indicators,

about healthy relationships. It's about how it even feels to be in a relationship like that and boundaries and all those sort of things. Yeah. It's all really important.

0:24:00.0 Alison: Now we're going to talk about myths.

0:24:00.6 Jane: Thank you, Alison. Yes, myths are very important to talk about, especially in the DV space, as we know that perpetrators often use these myths to justify the violence that they're using. So Amethyst, would you like to ask a myth?

0:24:18.8 Amethyst: Of course. So myth one: Some people think that women with intellectual disabilities experience DV less than women who don't actually have intellectual disabilities. Do you think this is true? And if so, then why?

0:24:33.1 Sarah: Sure. So I can pretty much say, definitely this is not true. In fact, women with disabilities of any kind are far more likely to experience DV, but not only are they more likely to experience DV, they're more likely to experience really severe forms of violence and coercive control. And it is a lot more difficult for these women, as you guys have already discussed, to leave and this is especially the case where the perpetrator has set things up so that she relies on him or when he has taken on a carer role as well.

0:25:10.1 Jane: I'd like to read out a quote from Selena. So Selena says, "I believe that women with a disability experience violence more than people who don't have a disability. We feel like we don't belong. Because we are different, we get treated differently. We don't have a place. I feel like we are trying to find a place in the world."

0:25:27.6 Alison: Some people seem to think that people with intellectual disabilities make things up, like abuse. What do you think?

0:25:39.1 Sarah: So I think I sort of started to answer this one in the last question, but I don't believe that any woman would make up abuse. I do believe that having an intellectual disability, the perpetrator, systems, other professionals, even friends and family, may question a person's story, which is

not okay as it can be hard enough to open up and actually have the courage to share what's going on and when a person's story is questioned, it can definitely be further isolating and this usually just enables the perpetrator of abuse to hold more power over her. So at CADA, we always believe the client. And when I say always, I mean always, no matter what.

0:26:30.6 Amethyst: That's good to hear. That's very, very good to hear. [chuckle]

0:26:35.1 Charlie: I don't think that it's true. Everybody is unique, disability or not. It comes down to character rather than disability. Some people are honest, some people are not. It's not about disability, it's about character and the way they hold themselves.

0:26:52.6 Amethyst: That's just silly to try and make up an abuse. Why would you wanna make it up? Why?

0:27:01.6 Alison: Thanks for listening. This is the end of the episode. Check out the other episodes if you haven't. We would like to thank the lovely Sarah from Centre Against Domestic Abuse for being our lovely guest on this podcast.

0:27:19.1 Sarah: Thank you. Thank you for having me. It's been so lovely. Thank you for your words of wisdom and advice.

0:27:26.6 Jane: Thank you for joining us today. This brings us to the end of this episode. I think the big themes that came out of this episode were around breaking information down into easy steps and a call for more flexibility in service delivery, allowing more time face-to-face and assisting with practical tasks such as moving and such. Thanks for joining us.

[music]

0:27:47.0 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 No Choice 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.

0:28:17.0 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 with respect to any action taken in reliance in the contents of this publication.