

'And You Think You're The Expert?'

Episode 3: Support 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.

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0:00:13.8 Alison: We would like to begin by acknowledging the Turrbul and Jagera people. They are the Traditional Owners of the land on which we recorded this podcast. We would like to pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging. We 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.

0:00:44.3 Abbey: If people believe that we can't make decisions, then they don't believe in us.

0:00:49.8 Minnie: If the poor tells you what to do all the time, you'll never learn.

0:00:53.2 Amethyst: Don't talk to me like I'm a child, but don't also talk to me like you're a professor.

0:00:58.3 Luna: Help us when we ask for help.

0:01:01.0 Poppy: To speak up instead of feeling scared and afraid.

0:01:05.6 Betty: Listen to us, we know what we need.

0:01:08.0 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.

0:01:21.7 Jane: My name is Jane and I'm the other WWILD worker. Your hosts 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.

0:01:34.6 Kaitie: "This is my home, not a hospital." This quote was shared by one of our experts in our workshops last year. We think it really sums up what our experts have to say about support workers. They felt it was important that support workers understand that even though it was the support worker's workplace, it was still their home. Many experts spoke of the intimacy of having a worker in their home and how important it was to feel safe with that worker.

0:01:57.1 Jane: Support workers can be really important when someone is experiencing violence. They are there for them every day. They may be more likely to witness violence if it is occurring in the home. They also might be more likely to hear disclosures from their clients about experiences of violence. But before we get into it, let me introduce you to our experts. Today we have Minnie, Love, Luna, and Betty.

0:02:21.1 Love: Hi, I'm Love.

0:02:23.9 Betty: Hi, I'm Betty.

0:02:25.7 Luna: Hello, I'm Luna.

0:02:27.6 Minnie: Hi, I'm Minnie.

0:02:28.8 Jane: Alison, our peer worker, will also be sharing her thoughts and wisdom.

0:02:33.6 Alison: Hello, I'm Alison.

0:02:35.6 Kaitie: Today we'll be interviewing the lovely Sam. Sam is a support

worker who has been in the job for about 18 months, Sam worked with one woman who has an intellectual disability, so a big welcome to Sam as she's kindly offered her time to answer our questions, learn more about how support workers should be supporting people who have an intellectual disability. So let's jump into it. Minnie, would you like to start us off?

0:03:01.9 Minnie: How did you work out how to do your job?

0:03:05.7 Sam: I started by asking lots of questions and I told my client that I would be asking lots of questions and that it was necessary for me to ask lots, instead of making assumptions. And I went slowly from there, and there was no guidebook or previous worker before me, so I had to learn everything sort of from the ground up. And often, if you are helping out in someone's home, there won't be any guide, really, so you have to ask lots of questions. And that's how you figure it out. I let my client inform me of things I needed to know, and if I wasn't sure, I would just ask questions and clarify it if I wasn't sure, and I went in really willing and eager to learn, and it was super important to be patient.

0:04:00.5 Minnie: I think it is very important that you have some sort of training, especially if it's not in intellectual disability, and mental disability as well. Where I live, before they get a job they have to have a cert three, cert four education. Do you have one of them, or are you looking at doing it in the future?

0:04:33.8 Sam: Yeah, I don't currently, but I am looking at doing it very soon.

0:04:37.8 Kaitie: Alison, I know this came up in the group, but why was it important that support workers get training?

0:04:42.8 Alison: 'Cause they don't wanna be too bossy.

0:04:45.3 Kaitie: Yeah, I think that was a big theme wasn't it, around support workers kind of taking over or not letting people make decisions, being too bossy.

0:04:54.0 Alison: Yeah, that was a big... That was a big topic and issue about training.

0:04:58.2 Kaitie: Were there other training themes or things that people thought support workers should be trained in?

0:05:04.7 Alison: Listening or learning more about intellectual disability.

0:05:08.8 Kaitie: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Learning more about it. And I think the other theme was around communication. How to communicate. Yeah.

Jane: So we've actually got a quote here from Matilda who can't be with us today, but her quote I think sums it up really nicely what we learned in the workshops. So Matilda said, "I have cancelled so many workers because they are not trained properly and know nothing about intellectual disability. They need to be patient, not bossy, know more about the person's disability, don't make assumptions. Sometimes people need space to think. Give them space. They need to open it up to clients to do what they want. They need patience."

0:05:49.9 Kaitie: It's tricky because we know that it's hard for support workers to get training. Organizations they work for often don't offer it. If you are a support worker looking for some training on how to work better with people with ID, you've already started really by listening to this podcast. So thank you for being here. But if you're after more details, we have training on our website as well. So that's WWILD.org.au and you'll find more information about that in the notes for this podcast.

0:06:22.0 Alison: How do you make sure your client understands?

0:06:25.9 Sam: So when I'm talking to my client, I watch to my client and if they appear confused, then I will explain it again and ask them if they understand. So do you understand... And we'll go from there. And if it's a bit more information than we would normally be using or there's new instructions or things to learn, then we would go through an extra time and have my client repeat it back to me as well.

0:06:54.4 Betty: What would you do if you sat down with a client with an intellectual disability and you ask them to repeat it. And did they understand? And if they say no, what would you do then? Would you persevere with pictures or something like that that can explain how to do it, or would you just give up?

0:07:24.0 Sam: I definitely wouldn't give up, but I would try again, I persevere and ask again and I would explain again and just take time going through it, but I'd like to hear more suggestions from anyone, if there are any on how I could communicate.

0:07:44.5 Love: With the client that you're seeing that doesn't understand, maybe you could go back to one of your supervisors and talk to them about the client that's not understanding what you're saying, and they might have someone to use...

0:08:02.5 Sam: It's a great suggestion Love.

0:08:04.3 Love: Yeah.

0:08:04.3 Kaitie: Betty, you had some thoughts on this. Would you like to share?

0:08:07.9 Betty: Trust is something that's very important. I live in supported living, so I've got my support worker here, just say for instance Sam, that you got a job where I live and you came into the house with my flatmate and myself, I will honestly just say to them, "get out of here, this is my home", and we need to be introduced to our support workers so that we know what we've got ahead of ourselves, and then as far as the trust is concerned, we've got to build that with just communication with you, and if we don't have trust, you'll have a really hard time. You can't sort of do something like say something to a person, a client, and then "ooh that sounds to be a juicy news, let's go and put it over on the, social media or something", that is a big no-no in my book. Completely no-no. And... Yeah. I've got another question about connection and trust and things like that, so I'll get back to it then...

0:09:37.5 Kaitie: Thank you, Betty. Trust definitely came up a lot. It was a really big theme when we talked about support workers... Luna, did you have any thoughts on this?

0:09:45.8 Luna: Some people with a disability, pretend to understand, so they don't be... They don't seem silly. I think support workers should say to a client, "don't ever be embarrassed to ask if you don't understand something"

0:10:01.9 Love: Same with client not understanding what you're saying, you might be able to use easier words and language that they might understand at some point.

0:10:16.9 Sam: Good suggestion Love.

0:10:19.4 Kaitie: Okay, so next we're gonna talk a little bit about the relationship between a client and a support worker, so when we did this in our groups, there tended to be like two ways the discussion went, so either our experts spoke about how support workers had too rigid boundaries or really, really lax boundaries. So during our workshops, it was clear, that the experts often felt like they had a strong connection with their support worker, so it felt like a friendship. Although everyone knew that the relationship was a professional relationship, it can be really difficult to understand the difference, particularly when support workers work so closely with people in their homes, in the community, it is sort of like a friend. So let's hear a little bit more about how workers can maintain these boundaries without losing, as one of our experts called it, "their human side". Betty, would you like to ask the next question.

0:11:09.3 Betty: Hi, my name's Betty. This is a good one for me. It is, do you think of your client as a friend, question? What would you do if they thought of you as a friend?

0:11:23.8 Sam: Okay so even though I really like my client, it is different to a friend relationship, so it's friendly in nature but it is a client and worker relationship. So if my client thought of me as a friend, I would just have a chat with them about the different types of relationships that we have in life and

why boundaries are important for the working relationship for both of us.

0:11:55.3 Betty: And what would you do? Once again, if you had someone that... Like just did not understand that. Yeah, she just thinks of everyone as their friend.

0:12:06.5 Sam: I would just keep explaining it. Just reminders.

0:12:11.3 Betty: Just little reminders?

0:12:13.0 Sam: Little reminders and yeah, it can be tricky sometimes because you have... It's a friendly role, so I think it's important to talk about it and to outline the differences and the boundaries and things and yeah, I think it's good to chat about it.

0:12:34.3 Betty: We have lost four people in our organization, um, that have just got too close to us and we've become really close friends, and the organization just does not want to have it as a friend relationship, it has to be client and carer. And it's difficult, 'cause I really struggle with this one, and yeah, it takes me a long time to get to know people and trust people. And then when you've done that, it's like sometimes the organization will just rip 'em out from underneath you. And you gotta start all over again, and you sort of think, "Well, why bother?" We've lost so many people in our organization lately, and we don't even get goodbyes, we don't even say goodbye. It's just really, straight face, down.

0:13:47.6 Kaitie: Yeah. I can hear how hard that was for you, Betty. A lot of our experts spoke about how important support workers are and how they can really feel like friends. Boundaries are a discussion. You know, many of our experts, not in this group, spoke about how it was also hard when a worker overstepped their boundaries, like when the worker gave them a hug and they didn't want a hug. So overall, I think the advice was to talk about it, what works for them, and what works for the worker, and that discussion is ongoing. Minnie, would you like to ask the next question?

0:14:22.7 Minnie: Are you happy to have a cup of tea with your client if they

ask you to?

0:14:27.7 Sam: Clear boundaries are important, because they can be blurred and it can get a bit confusing. But for me personally, I'm happy to do any social kind of activity with my client, as long as it is within work hours and work time.

0:14:45.6 Luna: I feel having a cup of tea with your client builds that connection.

0:14:54.7 Betty: You also, I also find that in our household anyway, a cup of tea is a time where we sit down and we chat and we get to know people. So there's two things that we really love in our house, and one is that you sit down and have a cup of tea with us and two that you are free and always welcome to sit at the table and have a meal with us. And that we think it's really important. I know that we can't become friends and things like that, and I know that you're carers, but it's just like a family environment, and you sort of... You know, the way I've been brought up, has just made it that people sit at the dinner table to have dinner together and things like that.

0:15:48.8 Love: With sitting down with a client and having a cup of tea, or a drink, or something with them, is very important. It also gives a client that may not see many people, some connection with their support worker as well. And so, as Betty said, it builds a connection.

0:16:19.9 Minnie: I feel disgusted when someone won't sit down and have a cup of tea. I think, "What are they hiding?" It's important, as it helps people relax. They think, "Oh, they are here to help me."

0:16:34.0 Kaitie: So, I think that these themes came up a lot in our workshop, so this idea that staff need to be human before a worker, they need to be able to have a cup of tea, show an interest, shake your hand, have some fun with you, have something in common with you. And this is especially true if they're a support worker. What do you think about this, Alison?

0:16:54.6 Alison: I agree that's true. Me and my support workers often have a cup of coffee, also a game of Uno these days.

0:17:02.8 Kaitie: Yeah, that sounds delightful. I think the overall advice from our experts around this topic, was for workers to have a cup of tea and consider that being personable in this way, being friendly, is part of being a professional. Betty, would you like to ask the next question?

0:17:19.9 Betty: How do you build a connection with your client and how do you get to know them?

0:17:27.0 Sam: So, I ask lots of questions, and I take an interest in their activities and things that make them happy and bring them joy, and all the things they find fun, and I pay attention to, yeah, the things that they like and remember... Remember things, and I don't rush it either. So let the relationship develop slowly. Sometimes it takes a while, and yeah, that's how I build connection with a client, and it's really wonderful also seeing my client happy doing all the things that they love.

0:18:16.4 Luna: When it comes to support workers, I find that having three times, like showing up three times as a chance to get to know them, whether or not I'm gonna connect with them, but I also feel that having that connection that you've got kind of the same interests, so then you know what you can talk about if you're not gonna have a... If you're gonna have a support worker that's not gonna have the same interests, then there's no point.

0:18:50.0 Sam: Yeah, it can be helpful to have things in common, something that's a good starting point when you're chatting.

0:18:57.5 Love: When you're getting to know a new support worker, I think your old support worker should come with you and introduce the new worker at least a couple of times.

0:19:11.1 Alison: That's a really good point.

0:19:12.5 Kaitie: Okay, so next we'll be talking about decision-making, so this came up a lot in our workshops. Our experts thought that decision-making rights were often taken away by workers, so many described this as being

really frustrating, and they thought it was because workers believed that people with an intellectual disability can't make decisions, which is absolutely not true. Um, so we know that people who have a disability have the right to make decisions for themselves if they are able to, and sometimes, they just might need a bit of extra help, so needing help doesn't mean that they can't make a decision. Women who have experienced violence should always be the center of any decision-making process, especially when it comes to finding safety and what needs to happen next, and I think that's particularly concerning in this kind of situation.

0:19:57.8 Jane: Yeah, absolutely. I think that if workers are believing that women with an intellectual disability can't make their own decisions, then they won't be supportive and providing the right information so women can make decisions for themselves around recovery and seeking help.

0:20:12.5 Kaitie: Yeah. Love, would you like to ask the next question?

0:20:15.5 Love: How do you make sure that you are helping your client make their own decisions?

0:20:21.5 Sam: I encourage my client to make decisions all the time. They can be little ones like what seasoning we're gonna be cooking with through the bigger ones and the day-to-day life stuff. It's important that the client is always respected to make their own decisions and to be supported when they do so as well.

0:20:43.8 Love: So, give us an example of how you would do that.

0:20:47.6 Sam: I would ask my client if there was something that needed deciding and present information for what the choices were, and we'd talk through them together and have a little bit of a chat about what we liked or what the client liked and what the outcomes would be, and then I would ask the client what they wanted to do. And an example might even be something like just what we're gonna wear that day, what clothes, what outfit, what the client would like to wear or what activity they wanna do, and it's always up to the client and I'm just there to support and to help.

0:21:33.5 Betty: I had the word listen, and that is very important because sometimes they will just do the absolute opposite and they are off on their own world. But if they just sat and just listen to us, they would have a much better understanding.

0:22:00.0 Kaitie: Ah, that's a really good point, Betty. I think, um, people in our workshops really echoed that idea of not being listened to. I think it's a really, really big theme across all the workers, and it's really dangerous, this idea that people aren't being listened to, especially in regards to disclosing violence. If someone's not believed, not listened to, it can be really problematic.

0:22:22.6 Jane: Yeah, absolutely. I think women are telling us that they have had experiences where they've disclosed violence and they haven't felt like they've been listened to. And of course, if this happens, they are unlikely to give it another go. So really, really important that people are listened to always, but particularly when they're disclosing violence.

0:22:43.6 Kaitie: Luna, would you like to add your thoughts?

0:22:45.7 Luna: I just want to add that when it comes to decision-making for a client that I've had an example that when I can't make my own decisions around my mental health and my support workers can tell when I'm not doing so great, they'll sit down in my room or out on my balcony to have a chat and then they'll direct me and tell me to listen to music or email my own psychologists or book in for an appointment for my own psychologist or if they're really, really concerned, they'll talk to their own boss on the phone.

0:23:33.5 Jane: Thank you, Luna. It's really nice to hear that you do have workers that can pick up when you're not having a great day and can provide the support that you need, but it's making me think. I think it's really important that workers pickup indicators if someone might be experiencing violence or might be in an abusive relationship. And not only should they pick these indicators up but I think having a discussion with the person around what they've noticed and what they're worried about is really important as well.

0:24:00.8 Kaitie: Yeah, so taking that from not just picking up the signs but making sure they're asking the person what they wanna do, I think that kind of links back to the discussion we were just having around decision-making, and it's not just important to pick it up, but it's important to ask, "What do you wanna do with that?" And I think it's a really good example from Luna around how her workers are picking it up and then going off a plan that they've made together.

0:24:24.0 Jane: Yeah, absolutely. It was really clear that this was something they had discussed earlier and Luna had been at the centre of the decision.

0:24:31.0 Kaitie: Yeah, and I know when we went to Rocky, you know, the women there had a lot to say about decision-making. I think they were the group that probably talked about this the most, about feeling that they didn't have decisions. Do you remember that?

0:24:44.3 Alison: Yeah, I do remember very well. I remember they wanted to live with their friends but they got put with people they didn't know to live in accommodation.

0:24:52.8 Kaitie: They talked a lot about living situations, didn't they?

0:24:55.3 Jane: Yeah, they did and a lot of people in the Rocky group... This was really hard. This felt really difficult to... A lot of people were sharing that they just didn't feel like they were being listened to at all.

0:25:06.3 Kaitie: Yeah, and they wanted workers who heard what they requested and they'd acknowledged it, and they felt that they weren't even being acknowledged for what they were talking about. And I think that comes back to the idea that not hearing people can be really dangerous because a lot of the time, people might say, "I don't wanna live with such and such," and if you're not asking that why, you might miss people experiencing violence or people going through something really, really awful. Okay, so next our experts are gonna ask some questions about supporting a woman with an ID going through violence. So this is a really tricky space and as we said at the beginning

of this episode, support workers can be really important when someone's experiencing violence. So they're often the person in someone's home, they're most likely to witness the violence if it's occurring there, and they're most likely to hear some of those disclosures. So a lot of our experts said that when they told someone about what was happening to them, they told their support worker first, it's a really trusted person in people's lives. But support workers often get the least training around violence, that I think hearing some of the responses, I think a lot of the support workers didn't really know what to do next, and I think that's fair enough. It's not in the job description. [laughter] So let's get started with that next lot of questions.

0:26:21.8 Luna: What would you do if your client said their family or their partner was threatening them?

0:26:29.5 Sam: I would offer a supportive role in listening initially and checking that they're okay. But I would encourage them to call more appropriate resources and recognize that it's outside of my personal expertise. And that it would be helpful, if depending on who was involved in the situation, but if there was a family member that could be called or if it was family then to call an organization, or some other resources, to help.

0:27:06.3 Betty: I would be definitely getting onto a helpline, like WWILD or DVConnect, and like if the client was showing signs of abuse on their body, then I would... Yeah, maybe keep an eye on it if it continues. Maybe it needs to be reported to the police.

0:27:37.1 Luna: In the role of a support worker that you should be helping, um, finding services or helping the client to... to encourage them to talk to the police. Or... Yeah.

0:27:55.7 Love: What would you do if your client said that someone was hurting them, like their roommate, their family or their partner?

0:28:05.1 Sam: I would tell them that that was not okay, and that we can contact some outside assistance and resources together.

0:28:16.2 Alison: Now we're going to talk about myths.

0:28:17.9 Katie: Thank you, Alison. So most of our experts have said that myths impacted the way they live their life, they also spoke about how these stereotypes are often employed by offenders to justify abuse and prevent the person from leaving the abusive relationship.

0:28:33.3 Love: Some people believe that people with intellectual disabilities cannot manage their own money. What do you think of that?

0:28:42.4 Sam: I don't think that's true, but managing money can be tricky for anyone. So, it's important not to make assumptions and it depends on the individual.

0:28:55.2 Luna: I believe people can make their own... I believe people can manage their own money, because I can manage my own money. I can pay bills I can do my own shopping for the week or the fortnight. And have that decision, and know that... I know where all my money is going.

0:29:21.6 Betty: One of my friends has a disability. And if you asked her, "Oh, I need \$20." She wouldn't understand you. But if you said, "Have you got an orange?" Or two blue or four pink. Do you understand what I'm saying, Sam?

0:29:43.5 Sam: Yeah, I think that it depends on the individual. Always. So some people do need assistance managing money, and I think it's important to find that out and to ask the question rather than to assume.

0:30:00.8 Betty: Yes.

0:30:00.9 Sam: Somebody does. And get the information first.

0:30:04.2 Love: I'm pretty good at looking after my money too. And when I was younger in high school and stuff, Dad would teach us about budgets and things. We also did it at school, but Dad really help me out a lot. When I hadn't been so well for a while ago now, I had trouble looking after my money. I'd just blow it, but then Dad would put some money in my account every week, my

money, but so I couldn't spend it all in one week. I'd get some every week, so I would have some money every week. That was a while ago. But I look after it much better now.

0:30:56.5 Kaitie: Um, I think that's a really good point, Love. Someone might be able to manage their money alone, but then not at another point. So they may need help to do that. Some people in our group also had the help of public guardians. So I think it kinda brings up that point that a person with intellectual disability's capacity kinda changes over time. So whether they can make decision at one point in time, over another point in time, depends on how their health is going, how their mental health is going. Whether they've just come out of violence, whether they've just gone through something really horrific, and that kind of thing, just like everyone else's capacity changes. Um, so I think sometimes having someone explain things or being taught how to manage things like money can increase someone's capacity. So, I know those beautiful statement from someone in another one of our group who talked about in order to... Actually, I've got her quote right here. She said, "I believe that people can do anything if they get taught, they just need to be taught how before people say they can't do it." I think that's really true that it's often people's capacity is dismissed really quickly instead of people taking the time and really going through things slowly and really helping that person understand. So doing the teaching stuff before people are seen as not having capacity, I think was a really big theme. I think this myth about money is linked to the myth that people with ID can't make decisions for themselves, which is absolutely not true. Believing someone with an ID can't manage their money or cannot make decision generally is really dangerous, so people who believe... Sorry, people who use abuse often tell survivors that they can't manage their own money. But believing this myth backs up what the abuses are saying. So it services as an echoing, this idea. "You can't manage your money. You can't do this". It's really echoing what perpetrators are saying. And I think it makes it feel like that's true, which often isn't. So, it makes women with ID more vulnerable to things like financial abuse.

0:33:00.1 Jane: So that brings us to the end of this episode. Thank you so much for tuning in. I think the big advice from this group was around having a cup of tea and getting to know the person. I think another element of this that

came out really strongly in this episode was around training. So, that's around support workers, learning about intellectual disability, communicating, not taking over. But I think really importantly, learning a little bit more about how to respond if someone discloses experience of violence. Another thing that really came out really strongly was slowing down and building a relationship with the person. Building trust. So thanks so much, and we'll see you on the next episode.

[music]

0:33:40.4 Alison: We have made a booklet with information about the Listen Up! project. This is information about our hosts, 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 the Support if you live in Australia, in the notes for this podcast.

0:34:10.0 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 it expressly disclaims any liability how so ever caused to any person with respect to any action taken in reliance in the content of this publication.