

Department of Social Services Community Grants Program

Evaluation summary report: Listen Up! Project

Funded Organisation: WWILD Sexual Violence Prevention Association Inc. (WWILD)
Funded Project: Listen Up! – Women with intellectual and cognitive disabilities creating safer communities and institutions in Queensland
Funding stream: Community-led projects for preventing violence against women

Introduction

Women with intellectual disability are significantly overrepresented as victims/survivors of sexual violence, domestic and family violence, and other forms of disability-related violence (such as neglect or abuse from carers). While rates of violence are driven by and contribute to gender inequality and ableism, we know that “violence against women and girls with disabilities is preventable, not inevitable” (Our Watch, Changing the landscape, 2022).

Due to prevailing stereotypes that infantilise women with intellectual disabilities, these women rarely receive appropriate education on relationships and are inadequately informed about their rights. This increases their likelihood of experiencing diverse forms of violence from a range of perpetrators, who sometimes target them based on this lack of knowledge.

While women with disability are disproportionately affected by domestic family and/or sexual violence (DFSV), most DFSV services are not accessible for this population. Disability services are not well-equipped to respond to DFSV, leaving a significant service gap for women with intellectual disabilities impacted by violence.

WWILD Sexual Violence Prevention Association Inc. (WWILD), is a grassroots community service with over 20 years’ experience supporting women with intellectual, learning and cognitive disabilities. Based in South-east Queensland, WWILD’s work seeks to eliminate all forms of violence perpetrated against people with intellectual and learning disabilities through community education, therapeutic services, and professional development.

Out of the need for women with disability to have access to appropriate supports for DFSV, WWILD developed Listen Up! – a community-based primary prevention project delivered between June 2020 and June 2022. This project challenged assumptions and negative stereotypes about women with an intellectual disability across Queensland, as well as supported and empowered women with intellectual disability. It did this by:

- Increasing women with intellectual disability’s understanding of violence, and building on their strengths and confidence in self-advocacy through psychoeducation
- Facilitating leadership opportunities through co-designing resources that improve the safety and accessibility of community services

- Challenging assumptions and negative stereotypes within services and the community, and
- Strengthening the disability and violence service sectors' capacity for safe and accessible service delivery.

This report draws on WWILD's project evaluation conducted in partnership with Our Watch and provides an overview of the project approach, implementation, evaluation approach, outcomes and impact of the project. The report is concluded by a brief discussion and some final remarks.

Project approach

The Listen Up! project took a community-led codesign approach and employed two lived experience project workers to lead resource development. Project workers designed and delivered workshops to create resources across Brisbane, Logan, Caboolture, Rockhampton and the Gold Coast. After the initial workshops, 31 women with intellectual disability and experience of DFSV participated in psychoeducation and codesign workshops. Participants were aged between 20 to 56, four identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and three identified as LGBTIQ+.

Workshops explored indicators of DFSV, women's rights within relationships and services, what makes services safe and accessible and which methods would be most effective to communicate the key messages developed within workshops. Workshops resulted in a podcast being developed by project workers and workshop participants to communicate key messages to several services and institutions who address DFSV and mental health. The podcast episodes contain advice from workshop participants on how to create safe, accessible services for those who have an intellectual disability impacted by violence.

Drawing on an intersectional feminist approach, this project focused on addressing the ableist drivers of violence while simultaneously applying a gendered lens.

Alignment to the national frameworks

WWILD's three-step approach to delivering a community-led and co-designed project aligned with Changing the landscape. The project aligned with the national framework in the following ways:

1. Through the first step, which involved education and awareness-raising for women with intellectual disability through the psycho-education workshop, the ableist driver of controlling people with disabilities' decision-making was addressed through the key action of promoting the independence, agency and participation of women and girls with disabilities in leadership and decision making.
2. The second step of actively engaging women with intellectual disability in project design and implementation addressed the ableist driver of violence of social segregation and exclusion of people with disability through the action of promoting the inclusion of women and girls with disability in all aspects of life.
3. The third step focused on ensuring the voices of women with intellectual disability are centred in mainstream conversations about prevention and addressed the ableist driver of violence of negative stereotypes about people with disability and accepting or normalising violence, disrespect and discrimination against people with disabilities. This was achieved through the actions of improving attitudes towards women and girls with disabilities by challenging ableist and sexist stereotypes and challenging the acceptance and normalisation of violence against women and girls with disabilities.

*A more detailed description the three-step process of how the project used co-design to align with the Changing the landscape framework can be found in table 4, appendix 4.

Project implementation

The project was delivered from June 2020-June 2022 and involved three phases:

- The **engagement phase**, which involved delivering 6 information sessions and 1 community consultation, distributing promotional flyers in easy-read format, and developing 1 peer worker induction booklet, and 9 organisational policies.
- The **development phase**, which involved recruiting 2 peer workers, delivering 12 workshops to 31 participants, and undertaking 28 community consultations.
- The **production phase**, where 7 podcast episodes were recorded, and an accompanying information booklet, 2 posters, and a website were developed.

*For more detailed information on project implementation see Table , in Appendix 1.

Evaluation approach

WWILD conducted an evaluation of the Listen Up! Project in partnership with Our Watch to assess the project outcomes. The evaluation used interview, survey and focus groups to gather data. Seventeen project participants were interviewed, 33 participants were surveyed, 19 workers from community services participated in focus groups and 5 guest speakers completed surveys.

*More detailed information can be found on data sources and methods in Table , Appendix 2.

Project outcomes

Evaluation findings demonstrate positive outcomes for both women with intellectual disabilities as well as workers from community, health and public services. A number of key outcome areas were identified through analysis of evaluation findings.

The first two outcome areas related to women with disabilities who engaged with the project as either peer workers or workshop participants. The first outcome area related to participants' understanding of their rights. For example, findings indicated that participants:

- Had an increased understanding of DFSV
- Were more aware of their rights in relationships, and
- Were better able to identify signs that a relationship might be unsafe (e.g., *controlling behaviours*, was a common example cited by participants).

The evaluation also found that their participation in the project led to:

- An increased knowledge of where to get support for issues relating to unsafe relationships and/or DFSV, and
- A better understanding of their rights when accessing these support services.

Despite these positive outcomes, many participants also indicated an enduring hesitance around accessing certain services – particularly mainstream services – due to previous negative experiences.

The second outcome area emphasised participation in the codesign process itself, which many participants described as empowering. For example, the evaluation found that the opportunity to lead and influence

resource development led to an increased sense of voice, agency and empowerment for women with disabilities. One participant described this in the following way:

I did feel powerful during the podcast. I find it very powerful. Because then we don't feel so alone in the world. Our voices get heard.

Building on this theme, peer workers described how learning to handle the everyday challenges of leading the project increased their confidence and self-esteem. They also reported that connecting with other women with similar experiences strengthened their sense of belonging.

The final outcome area relates to the impact of the project on workers from community, health and public services. Findings in this area demonstrate how engagement in the project increased the capacity of community service workers to identify their own stigmatising beliefs and ableist assumptions. For example, through listening to the podcast, workers reported an increased ability to both:

- Identify their own ableist myths and assumptions, and
- Challenge tendencies and practices in their work that are based on ableist myths and stereotypes, for example – tendencies to homogenise women with intellectual disabilities, make decisions on their behalf, or assume to understand their experiences.

Findings also indicated that workers had a better understanding of the importance of independent decision making for women with intellectual disabilities and identified strategies for rapport building. One community service worker reflected on this in the following way:

It does make me stop and think about the impact I can have in a positive or negative way in things that are quite small for me. Like...not making choices 'for' someone.

Increased service accessibility was also a theme, with workers reporting that listening to the podcasts prompted them to improve their organisational processes and procedures to increase accessibility for women with intellectual disability.

The evaluation also found that workers had an increased understanding of:

- The importance of creating a comfortable and welcoming environment in services for women with intellectual disabilities; and
- The need to provide individualised support services tailored to the specific needs of each woman.

* For more detailed information on the project outcomes refer to Table 1, Appendix 3.

Discussion and conclusion

The Listen Up! Project provides a promising example of effective community-led prevention practice. The Project approach drew heavily on community participation and sets a good precedent for the efficacy of the codesign method in developing intersectional prevention initiatives. The project's commitment to placing women with lived experience at the forefront of project and resource design also underscores the importance of ensuring the full and direct participation of community members in community-led prevention. While longer-term impacts are still emerging, it is clear that resources developed through the project are already increasing the capacity of staff in community service organisations to challenge ableist assumptions and better address the issue of violence against women with intellectual disability.

The evaluation also surfaced a number of important enabling factors that played a key role in the overall success of the project. Such factors may prove useful when it comes to the design and delivery of future intersectional prevention work. These include:

- Taking a flexible approach to delivery. This enabled the project team to respond to emergent challenges and keep the project on track.
- Focusing on fostering meaningful and productive relationships with stakeholders. This included setting the right tone to have open and honest conversations about difficult subjects.
- Meaningfully centering women with lived experience in all stages of design and delivery. Creating paid positions for women with intellectual disabilities to lead the codesign process and shape the direction and outcome of the work was an integral part of this.

Overall, the project has made a valuable contribution to the prevention infrastructure and has laid important groundwork for future primary prevention initiatives with women with intellectual disability.

Appendix 1. Summary of project delivery

Table 1. Summary of project delivery

Phase	Activity	Description	Number of participants	Output produced
ENGAGEMENT	Delivered 6 information sessions	Information sessions designed to share information and promote the 'Listen Up!' project with workers in the sector. This time was used to ask for referrals for upcoming workshops and took place on the Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Logan and online.	<i>Not recorded</i>	n/a
	Developed & distributed 2 promotional flyers	Flyers developed and distributed to engage women with intellectual disabilities in the workshop series: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 X easy read flyer aimed at women with intellectual disabilities • 1 X flyer aimed at community workers to refer women they work with to the workshops 	n/a	2 promotional flyers
	Delivered 1 community consultation (group) and individual consultation.	Group/individual consultation with First Nations people to ensure workshops were culturally safe.	3	n/a
	Developed peer worker induction resources	Several WWILD organisational policies developed in easy read booklet format. These were used for induction of the peer workers and will be used for induction of future employees with an intellectual, learning or cognitive disability.	n/a	9 organisational policies 1 induction booklet
DEVELOPMENT	Inducted 2 peer workers	Hired two women with intellectual disability as peer workers to lead the design and facilitation of the workshops, engage in resource design and assist with general project delivery.	2	n/a
	Delivered a series of 12 workshops	Delivered a series of psychoeducation and consultation workshops to a group of women with intellectual disability. The workshops aimed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase participant's understanding of domestic and sexual violence and their rights, and 	31	n/a

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage participants in the development of project resources, such as the podcast series. 		
	Undertook 28 community consultations (individual)	Individual consultations with community members, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women with intellectual disability, to inform relevance and appropriateness of podcast content, and First Nations people, to ensure the cultural appropriateness and cultural safety of workshops & podcast episodes. 	28	n/a
PRODUCTION	Produced 1 podcast series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved 7 days of recording with service providers and workshop participants. Informed by codesign process, podcast episodes focus on how services can be more accessible to women with intellectual disabilities who are at-risk of, or who have experienced violence. Women with intellectual disabilities host the podcast and interview a different service worker each episode. An informational booklet was also developed to accompany the podcast. 		7 podcast episodes 1 informational booklet

Appendix 2. Data sources and methods

Table 2. Overview of data sources and methods

Outcome area	Method	Detail	Participants	
			Who?	How many?
<i>Outcomes for project participants</i>	Interview	Three rounds of interviews with peer workers during project delivery	Peer workers	2
		Interviews conducted with workshop participants after they engaged in the development of the podcast	Workshop participants	15
	Survey	Post-workshop participant feedback survey	Workshop participants	31
<i>Workforce development</i>	Focus group	Four focus groups held with workers from a range of community, health, and public service organisations	Workers from a range of community service organisations, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 X disability service • 1 X domestic violence service • 2 X sexual violence services 	19
	Survey	Feedback survey	Guest speakers on the podcast from a range of workforces, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • police • mental health • disability support • sexual and domestic violence 	5

Appendix 3. Project outcomes

Table 1. Project outcomes

<i>Outcomes for women with disabilities</i>		
<i>Theme 1: Rights and relationships</i>		
Outcome	Supporting evidence from evaluation data	Qualitative exemplar
<p><i>Participants had an increased understanding of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>domestic, family and sexual violence</i> <i>their rights in relationships, and</i> <i>how to identify an unsafe relationship</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most participants were able to name at least one right they had a relationship. Some were able to name specific actions they had the right to do. Most participants were able to name at least one sign that a relationship may be unsafe. ‘Controlling behaviours’ were the most commonly identified forms of violence cited by participants during the evaluation interviews. Participants largely recalled actions of violence that they had experienced as victim-survivors in previous relationships. 	<p><i>“There shouldn’t be a dominant person, things should be equal. You have the right to go where you want and do what you want and see who you want. You shouldn’t be controlled by the other person. You have the right to be in a safe environment.”</i></p>
<p><i>Participants had an increased understanding of their rights when engaging with services.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most participants were able to name at least one right they had when engaging with a service. The ‘right to confidentiality’ and ‘being treated with respect’ were the most common rights recounted by participants. 	<p><i>“You have the right to be respected and not judged. It should be easy for you to understand what they are talking about. They should have easy English things to read and look at.”</i></p>
<p><i>Most participants could recall where to get help if they are at risk of, or experiencing, violence.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many participants were able to name places discussed during the workshops, however, some indicated that they were hesitant to contact certain services, namely mainstream services, due to previous negative experiences. Some participants found it difficult to recall where to seek help, indicating that further development may be required when it comes to this area of the project. 	<p><i>“There is places where you can get help but hard to get help when people treat you wrong. You can ring up mental health, hospital, and all that. But all them I have a bad connection, so I don’t go back to them. You ring up WWILD too. Yeah, 1800 RESPECT.”</i></p>

Theme 2: Voice and agency		
Outcome	Supporting evidence from evaluation data	Qualitative exemplar
Participants are empowered to lead the development of project content and resource development as experts; content and resources developed reflect the experiences of women with intellectual disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants reported feeling “heard and believed” in the workshops • Participants reported having increased confidence in their role as ‘experts’ • Participants expressed feeling supported to “have their say” in designing the podcast and booklet. 	<i>“I want workers to know what they say about intellectual disability isn’t always right. I want them to know they are not expert, we are!”</i>
Participants have an increased sense of belonging, community connectedness, and purpose.	<p>Participants shared that the podcast project,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helped them feel valued, understood, and respected by others • Gave them a voice and space to contribute their own unique experiences <p>They also observed that the podcast was making a tangible contribution to changing broader community attitudes and beliefs and was increasing respect for people with intellectual disability.</p>	<i>“I did feel powerful during the podcast. I find it very powerful. Because then we don’t feel so alone in the world. Our voices get heard, instead of getting shut away from everyone. People are acknowledging the smart side of us. They will go ‘hmm I didn’t know people with a disability knew stuff about this’. It will help workers a lot – they can use our advice in their jobs”</i>
Peer workers have developed a greater sense of self-esteem and self-confidence to handle challenges and problems that arise in their day-to-day life.	Peer workers indicated that as their professional confidence grew, so too did their ability to self-advocate for their rights, engage in effective problem-solving and ensure they were involved in decisions that affected them in their life outside of work.	<i>“I am not the scared person to go out in public I was before I started being a peer worker. Now I am more confident. I am able to handle day to day problems more better than before”</i>
Outcomes for community service workers		
Theme 3: Identifying and challenging ableist assumptions		
Outcome	Supporting evidence from evaluation data	Qualitative exemplar
Community service workers have an increased ability to identify common ableist ‘myths’ about people with intellectual disability.	Service workers reported an increased ability to identify common ‘myths’ about people with intellectual disability. For many participants, this learning process involved ‘looking inwards’ and interrogating their own ableist beliefs and assumptions. For example, participants recognised how the incorrect assumption that people with disability ‘make stuff up’ can contribute to harmful stereotypes about women with intellectual disability being ‘unreliable witnesses to their own lives’.	<i>“I liked how you addressed myths at the end. That example of people with disability making things up. I think sometimes that idea can connect to someone’s unconscious bias. So, to hear that being discussed, might help a person shift that and instead think ‘Oh okay, that’s a myth’.</i>

<p>Service workers could challenge their tendency to make decisions on behalf of women with intellectual disability</p>	<p>A number of participants reflected that their tendency to make decisions on behalf of women with intellectual disability stemmed from stereotypes that people with intellectual disability are not able to make ‘good’ and autonomous decisions. Several participants were also able to identify how this stereotype works to control and limit the independence of women with disability and therefore perpetuate various forms of violence.</p>	<p><i>“It does make me stop and think about the impact I can have in a positive or negative way in things that are quite small for me. Like for choices – not making choices ‘for’ someone. Like it’s quicker if I do it but it doesn’t help the person and you’re actually doing what people do when they’re [being] abusive – taking choices away”.</i></p>
<p>Theme 4: Increasing service accessibility</p>		
<p>Outcome</p>	<p>Supporting evidence from evaluation data</p>	<p>Qualitative exemplar</p>
<p>Community service workers could identify how to make their organisational processes/procedures more accessible for women with intellectual disability</p>	<p>Service workers indicated that the podcasts prompted them to reconsider the accessibility of their current organisational processes and procedures. In outlining practical steps that could assist in improving the accessibility of their service, one participant discussed establishing procedures that asked clients for their unique ‘accessibility needs’.</p>	<p><i>“The referral form talks about medical conditions. It talks about intellectual disability and impairment. I would go back to the referrer now if I say it and asked them to tell me a little bit more about it. Ask that when someone calls, they client, can they check the person’s accessibility needs. It is so broad, so we need to ask, ‘what does it look like for you?’</i></p>
<p>Service workers were able to identify practical steps towards recognising client’s “unique experiences of disability” and acknowledged the dangers of homogenising the experiences of women with intellectual disability.</p>	<p>Service workers indicated that the podcast prompted them to recognise the need for women with intellectual disability to be “heard as individuals” and acknowledge that “not one size fits all” when it comes to responding to the requirements of clients with disability.</p> <p>Service workers emphasised that listening to women with disability and “being specific” when discussing a woman’s needs was key towards understanding their unique experiences whilst also supporting independent decision-making.</p>	<p><i>“Instead of just asking ‘what do you find difficult?’ – they may not be able to articulate that. Instead using, ‘how do you find big words?’ – Being specific”.</i></p>

Theme 5: Creating a comfortable and welcoming environment		
Outcome	Supporting evidence from evaluation data	Qualitative exemplar
Community service workers recognised the importance of independent decision-making in ensuring a client’s comfort.	Service workers indicated that the podcast helped them to recognise the importance of ensuring women with intellectual disability feel comfortable when accessing a service. After listening to the podcast, service workers recognised that this process involved asking clients what would make them feel comfortable, rather than making assumptions about their needs.	<i>“The advice of meeting people in a place where they feel comfortable. We try to make our space feel comfortable but it’s what we think is comfortable, not them”.</i>
Community service workers could identify ways of building rapport with women with intellectual disability as a way of increasing their comfort.	Other participants were able to recognise that increasing their client’s comfortability involved ‘building rapport’. After listening to the podcast, the service workers understood that building rapport takes time and often requires service workers to employ techniques that are tailored to the unique requirements of the individual. Supporting this, one participant stated:	<i>“I liked the suggestion around the resources – I think that’s good for starting to build rapport too. If you can have different things to do, different cards to talk about how you could be feeling. These are less confronting ways or building rapport for people with learning and intellectual disability”.</i>

Appendix 4. Three-step project approach

Table 4: Three-step community-led, codesign project approach for addressing the ableist drivers of violence against women with disability

Step 1: Education and awareness-raising for women with intellectual disability through the psycho-education workshops	
Ableist driver of violence being addressed:	<i>Controlling people with disabilities' decision-making and limiting independence</i>
Key action being addressed:	<i>Promote women and girls with disabilities' independence, agency, and participation in leadership and decision-making</i>
Discussion and supporting evidence:	
<p>Women with intellectual disability are continuously excluded from decision-making processes that directly affect them. Without access to this education (or with other people controlling women's access to this education), women with intellectual disability are removed from their right to make informed and independent decisions about their lives and relationships, ultimately placing this group at higher risk of violence.</p> <p>The evidence outlined in Table 3 suggests that the psychoeducation workshops contributed to increasing participant's understanding their rights, both within intimate relationships and when engaging with services and strengthened participant's sense of self-esteem accompanying their positions as 'experts'. Based on these findings, the psychoeducation workshops demonstrate promise as a technique for equipping women with intellectual disability with the skills and knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about healthy relationships and independently advocate for their rights when engaging with services.</p>	
Step 2: Actively engaging women with intellectual disability in the design and implementation of the project	
Ableist driver of violence being addressed:	<i>Social segregation and exclusion of people with disability</i>
Key action being addressed:	<i>Promote the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all aspects of life</i>
Discussion and supporting evidence:	
<p>Exclusion and social segregation of women with disability occurs because of widespread environmental, communication, attitudinal and systemic barriers that exclude people with disabilities from valued forms of social life. These systems of segregation can compound isolation, reduce people with disability's independence and fuel ableist and sexist stereotypes that lead to the condoning of violence against women with disability.</p> <p>Data in Table 3 demonstrates that in adopting a community-led, co-design approach, almost all participants reported increased confidence alongside positive feelings about being able to 'have a say' and be included in the development of the project. Evidence also suggests the project produced a greater sense of belonging and community for participants, ultimately reducing the sense of isolation that accompanies the social segregation of women with disability. Through 'promoting the inclusion of women with disability' in the development of the project and its resources, the Listen Up! project shows promise for bolstering the voices of women with intellectual disability and their ability to challenge their exclusion in public and private life.</p>	

Step 3: Ensuring the voices of women with intellectual disability are centred in mainstream conversations about prevention	
Ableist drivers of violence being addressed:	<i>Negative stereotypes about people with disability</i>
	<i>Accepting or normalising violence, disrespect, and discrimination against people with disabilities</i>
Key actions being addressed:	<i>Improve attitudes towards women and girls with disabilities by challenging ableist and sexist stereotypes</i>
	<i>Challenge the acceptance and normalisation of violence against women and girls with disabilities</i>
Discussion and supporting evidence:	
<p>Ableist stereotypes and stigma can depict people with disabilities in a variety of sometimes contradictory ways. These stereotypes lead to incorrect assumptions about the lives, needs and desires of people with disabilities and can directly contribute to the acceptance and/or normalisation of violence, disrespect, and discrimination against people with disabilities.</p> <p>In designing the resources, women with intellectual disability were able to draw on their lived experience (particularly regarding the stereotypes and barriers they faced when reporting violence/accessing support) to devise solutions for strengthening service accessibility and inclusivity. The evidence in Table 3 suggests that this approach has contributed to increasing service worker’s ability to identify negative sexist and ableist stereotypes about people with intellectual disability, with many workers reporting improved attitudes towards women with intellectual disability and increased confidence to challenge the normalisation of violence against women within their work.</p>	