

SEXUAL LIVES & RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS: A RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

A/Prof Patsie Frawley & Dr Amie O’Shea

Deakin University

The SL&RR model

Sexual Lives and Respectful Relationships (SL&RR) is a community based model of sexuality education, information and activity that brings people with an intellectual disability together with professionals from community organisations to focus on sexuality rights for people with an intellectual disability. There are four parts to the SL&RR model. 1. Peer to peer work on sexuality rights through the peer led sexuality and respectful relationships program; 2. Supporting change in support relationships through learning partnerships 3. Sector development through partnerships with community organisations involved in domestic/family/ sexual violence, women’s and community health and disability advocacy; and 4. Systemic change through research and translation of outcomes.

(See figure 1 SL&RR Model, Frawley, 2011)

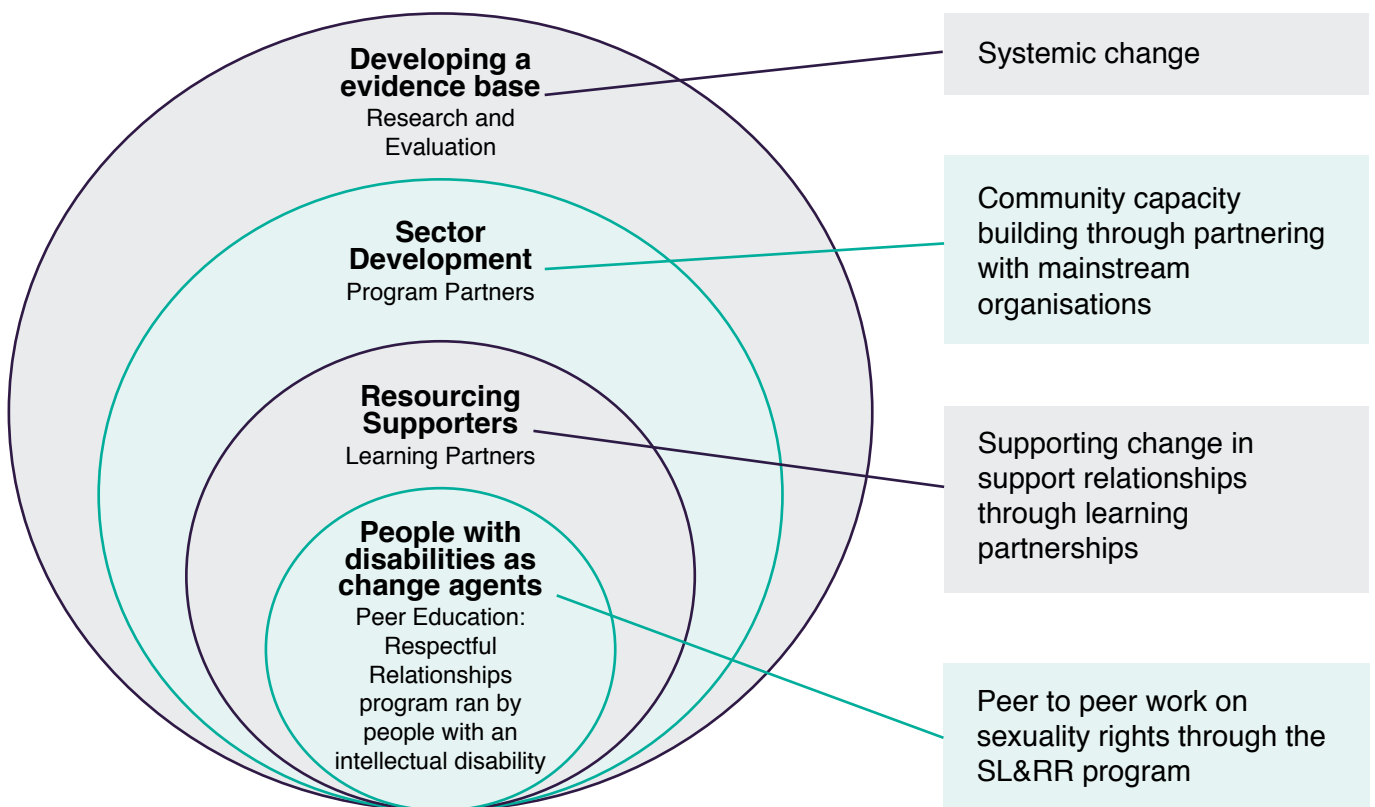


Figure 1: SL & RR Model

SL&RR is a social ecological model for challenging stereotypes, systems, beliefs and behaviours that underpin violence and abuse in relationships including those that are gendered and ableist. The SL&RR model is based on the work of the World Health Organisation which informs domestic policy in Australia including the National Plan to Reduce Violence against women and children (DSS, 2010¹) which SL&RR is also aligned with. It recognizes that work needs to be done at individual, community and system wide levels to prevent violence and abuse in relationships and has at its centre a focus on respectful relationships at all levels including personal and social relationships. Equality is a key principle that underpins these models and dismantling attitudinal, interpersonal and social barriers to equality a focus of the work informed by these approaches.

Research into the SL&RR program has examined how the model works to effectively connect participants with mainstream services and also build the capacity of these services to support people (cohealth, 2016; Frawley & Anderson, 2014; Frawley & O'Shea, 2012).

Peer to peer respectful relationships program

Sexual Lives & Respectful Relationships (SL&RR) is a peer education program for and by people with intellectual disability (Frawley et al., 2017). Based around the real life stories of people with an intellectual disability collected in research (Johnson, Hillier, Harrison, & Frawley, 2000), the program is delivered using adult learning principles (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). The program is co-facilitated by Peer Educators and Program Partners who have completed the train the trainer program delivered by Deakin University and who work together in local community-based sites. There are currently 7 SL&RR sites in operation, with 4 more in development in NSW, Victoria, Sweden and New Zealand. A version of the program is currently being adapted for use with people with acquired brain injury, in partnership with Synapse NSW. The sites, along with all SL&RR activities, follow the dictum of the self-advocacy movement “nothing about us without us”, claiming a rightful place for people with an intellectual disability as experts about their own experiences and as advocates about their sexuality rights.



Image 1 and 2: SL&RR rights cards © Deakin University

¹The peer led and community partnered SL&RR model was piloted from 2009 – 2011 with funding from the first National Plan to Reduce Violence against women and children. An evaluation of this pilot is reported in Frawley, Barret and Dyson (2011).

Importantly, the SL&RR program is strident in its assertion of the rights of people with intellectual disability – in this case focusing particularly on their right to relationships that are respectful. It also recognizes their right to be present in this space, and their expertise, gained through lived experience and a unique connection with program participants that is part of the program's success. Environments which foster such forms of inclusion and visible representation of people with disability have been shown to have positive outcomes (Frawley, Dyson, Robinson, & Dixon, 2015). Rights are a theme throughout the program, and the focus of the SL&RR Rights Cards, an activity using an easy English version of the rights first articulated by researcher Ann Craft (1983).

■ patsie.frawley@deakin.edu.au

References

- cohealth. (2016). *Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships Metropolitan West Evaluation*. Melbourne, Victoria: cohealth.
- Craft, A. (1983). Teaching programmes and training techniques. In M. Craft & A. Craft (Eds.), *Sex Education and Counselling for Mentally Handicapped People*. Tunbridge Wells: Costello.
- Frawley, P., & Anderson, S. (2014). Adopting mainstream approaches: Taking account of and including people with an intellectual disability in violence and abuse prevention. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/adopting-mainstream-approaches>: VicHealth Innovation Research Grant.
- Frawley, P., Dyson, S., Robinson, S., & Dixon, J. (2015). *What does it take? Developing informed and effective tertiary responses to violence and abuse of women and girls with disabilities in Australia: State of Knowledge report*. ANROWS. NSW. Retrieved from <http://www.anrows.org.au/publications/landscapes/what-does-it-take-developing-informed-and-effective-tertiary-responses>
- Frawley, P., & O'Shea, A. (2012). Relationship education by people with an intellectual disability: An Australian peer educator model. Conference presentation. 14th World Congress International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual disabilities, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56(7&8), 726. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2788.2012.01583_7.x
- Frawley, P., O'Shea, A., Stokoe, L., Cini, V., Davie, R., & Wellington, M. (2017). *Sexual Lives and Respectful Relationships training manual*. Geelong: Deakin University.
- Johnson, K., Hillier, L., Harrison, L., & Frawley, P. (2000). *People with intellectual disabilities: Living Safer Sexual Lives*. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society.
- Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2013). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*: John Wiley & Sons.