



# Building safe and respectful cultures in disability services: results of a pilot project

ASID conference

November 6-8<sup>th</sup> 2019

# Summary



Aim of the project and context



Key results



How did people understand safety and respect



Facilitators, constraints and complexities



What might help

## People with disability at the centre

- The project design
- The research methods
- The results
- Sharing what we have found



## Aim of the project

To learn more about the role of culture in disability services in promoting safety and respect

Improve our understanding of multi-tiered approaches in preventing harm

Identify some practical approaches that might be useful now and in the future

# Context

Increasing recognition of the significance of violence, abuse and neglect

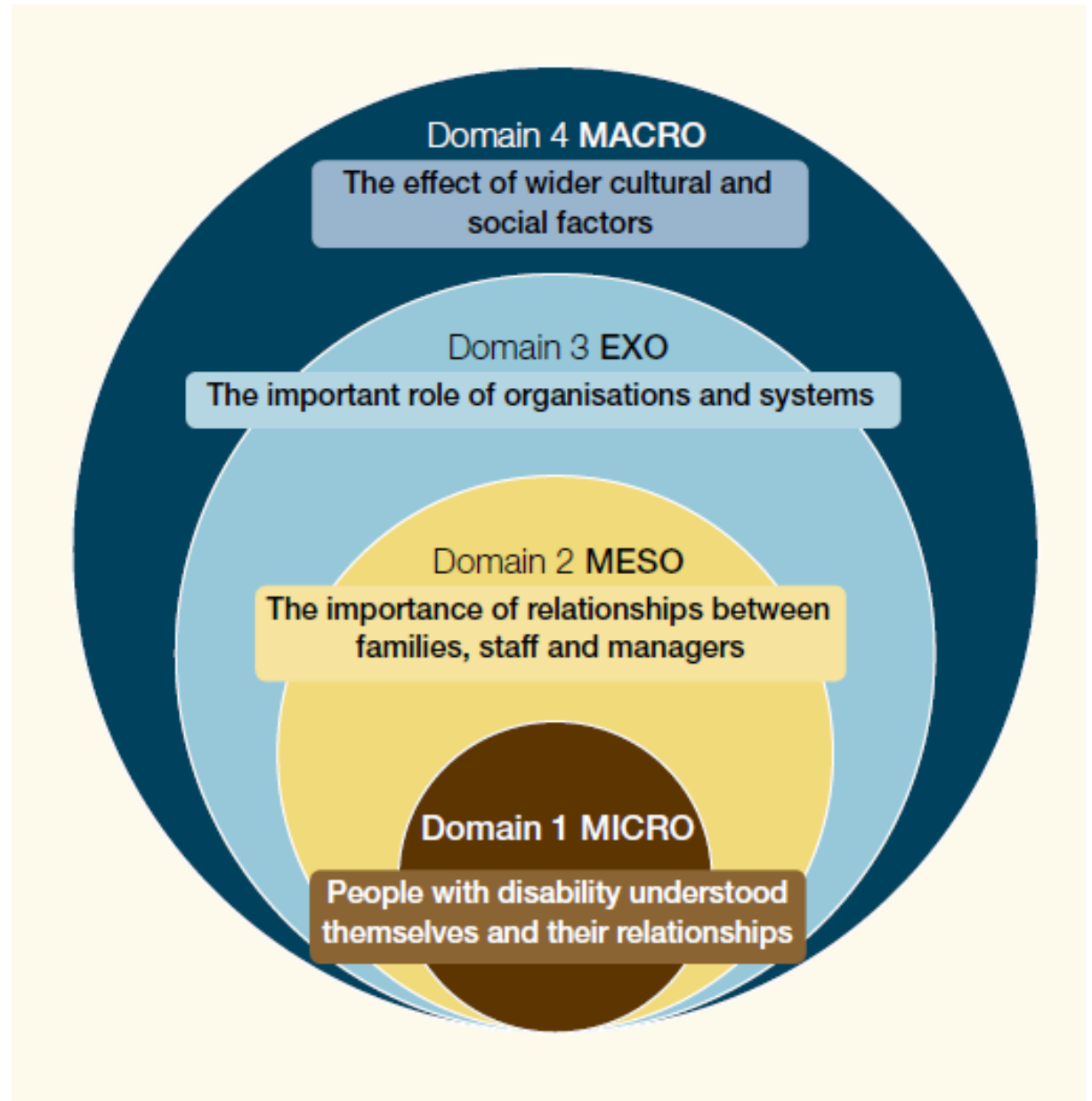
Less emphasis on the conditions that promote safety and respect

Indicators of concern

Shifting policy environment

# Research Design

Social ecological  
framework



# Research Design

Mixed methods approach

3 services & 4 sites

## Interviews

- Workshops
  - Indicators of Concern
  - Music workshops
  - Supervision
- Action Learning Sets
- Surveys
- Observation

# Results

How people understood safety and respect

Care and support – activity and relationship based


Safety - physical and emotional safety, using relationships to build a sense of safety

Choice and decision making – day to day decisions encouraged, speaking up was hard, people with disability weren't given tools and resources

Problem solving – being able to choose a person to speak to, having access to a range of people, differing views about problem solving being a priority for staff

# Facilitators Constraints and Complexities





The way people  
with disability felt  
about themselves  
and their  
relationships

## **Facilitators**

Relationships based on trust and familiarity

Feeling heard

Having multiple ways to express views and feelings

## **Constraints**

Not being taken seriously

Feeling unable to speak up

Peer to peer harm

Disrespect

Lower standards applied to people with disability

Limited agency and power

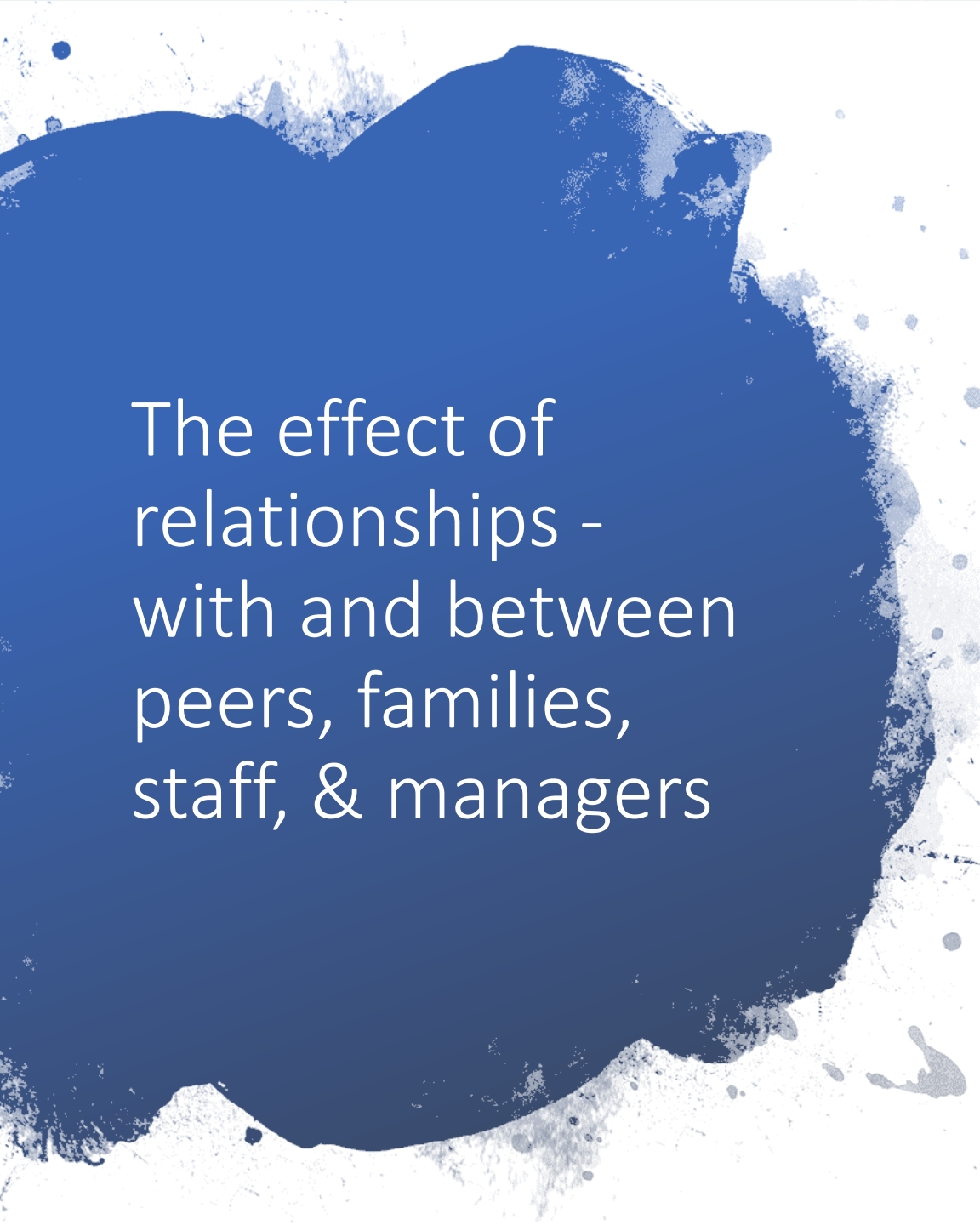
# Complexities

- Speaking up is hard to do
- Problem-solving strategies might not help you become safer
- Safety strategies can be lacking in depth
- The passivity of the 'participant' role
- Impact of the wider world on young people's relationships in services

*"I was so scared to tell Mum ... But then I had to, because I was so stressed out about it. It's really bad ... Mum rang Olive [manager] and got it sorted out then. Once you say something about it, you'll feel much better, trust me, you don't want to be stressed out like I was.*

*I was so stressed."*

*(Grace, person with disability)*



The effect of  
relationships -  
with and between  
peers, families,  
staff, & managers

### **Facilitators**

Relationships that recognise positive qualities and attributes in others

Using multiple ways to support people in difficult time with sensitive issues

### **Constraints**

Impacts of challenging behaviour and interpersonal conflict

Misuse of power by staff

Staff not seeing relational support as a priority

Gratitude and hesitancy to 'make a fuss' by families

# Complexities

The little things are the big things

Balancing competing needs and preferences

Difficult for some to see the perspectives of people with disability

Stress and a sense that other people don't understand

Unresolved conflicts/tensions between the rights of people with disability and the rights of staff

Fragility in staff sense of security and safety in role

## Supporting people's right to speak up

“When it came back to me, my name was also called for investigation and they asked me, “So who helped him fill the form?” I said, “I did.” [The investigators said,] “So, did you feel bad about your name being there?” I said, “Why should I? That’s his opinion. I respect that.” It made me feel good that my job was giving me the right to give someone the empowerment to do something.”

*(Denise, staff member).*



# Organisations & systems

## **Facilitators**

Well organised environments

Policies procedures and guidelines

Practical strategies that bring policies to life for people with disability

Trained and supported staff

Education and opportunities to practice safety-making for people with disability

## **Constraints**

Impact of resource and time constraints on capacity to support people with disability and staff and to effectively problem solve

Staff who are under-skilled or ill-equipped to provide preventive support

Lack of support, supervision, career planning for staff and managers

# Complexities

Differing levels of knowledge about policies, procedures and implementation

Role clarity and boundary setting for staff

Tension between rights of people with disability and the rights of staff

Difficult balance between compliance, risk and rights discourses

*“Do you think there are rules about keeping people safe?”*

*Nup, not really. Oh, when people hit you.*

*So no one’s allowed to hit you?*

*No, they’re not supposed to.*

*Does that ever happen?*

*Sometimes they do, I think.*

*(Cassandra, person with disability)*



## Wider cultural and social factors

### **Facilitators**

Increasing knowledge of human rights

Pride in role, strong values base

### **Constraints**

Activation of rights

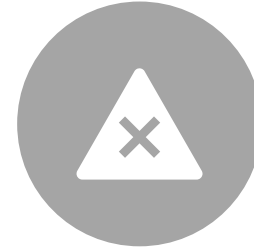
Risk of support relationships fracturing

NDIS dominating practice and structure

What might  
help people  
with disability?



BUILDING  
STRONGER  
RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH AND FOR  
PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITY



KNOWING  
YOUR RIGHTS  
AND  
ACTIVATING  
THEM



TAKING  
ACTION

What might  
help  
relationships  
of support?



BUILDING SKILL IN STAFF TO  
RESPOND TO THE SAFETY  
STRATEGIES THAT PEOPLE  
WITH DISABILITY USE WHEN  
THEY FEEL UNSAFE



FINDING OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR CREATIVE MUTUAL  
CAPACITY BUILDING –  
COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

# What might help organisations and systems?



Consultation around change



Accessible information



Allocate time for relational support



Staff supervision that builds a supportive and accountable relationship



Staff training – regular, evidence-based, responsive to issues

What might help organisations and systems?



Review complaints processes



Prioritise relationships over tasks



Invest in your leaders



Work collaboratively

What might  
help at a  
wider level?

**Funding**

Funding abuse prevention activities as part of the NDIS and more broadly

**Relationships  
are key**

Prioritising relationships so people can get the benefit of more progressive approaches to community inclusion

**Access to  
advocacy**

Ensuring access to independent advocacy, especially for people lacking informal support.

# Want to know more?

Copies of the Executive summary in plain English and the full report [www.odsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.odsc.vic.gov.au)

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