SPEAK UP AND BE SAFE

Liz Weston & Naomi Rezzani

COMMUNICATION RESOURCES TO ADDRESS ABUSE AND NEGLECT

People with communication support needs are more vulnerable to abuse or neglect than people who are independent communicators . They may be more vulnerable because perpetrators o are aware of the challengespeople with communication difficulties face when reporting the abuse (Wilczynski & Connolly, 2014). In addition, people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities have restricted vocabulary to talk about sexuality and abuse, limited opportunity to learn about healthy and abusive relationships, and lack of support to respond to abuse (Collier, McGhie-Richmond & Odette, 2006). The Speak up and be Safe from Abuse project produced communication aids and training resources for frontline workers to address the risk of abuse and neglect toward people with communication support needs .

Since the project began in 2015, Scope delivered face-to-face training to over 380 frontline workers, and developed, produced and distributed over 300 toolkits containing communication aids and information about relevant resources and services (Johnson & Yee, 2020) . In the 2019-2020 financial year, the Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse project received additional funding from the Victorian Government to update the resources to respond to consumer feedback, and to adapt the face-to-face training so that it could be more easily accessible and sustainable for the frontline support services who require it.

At the outset, the Speak Up and be Safe communication resources were created to address a lack of available vocabulary in Augmentative and Alternative Communication aids and resources to support communication about abuse and neglect . With further funding from the State Government in Victoria, the original Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse communication aids were updated, in response to feedback from frontline workers in disability. There are now resources appropriate for use by children, their families and carers, and, where possible, the people images are androgynous rather than identifying as male or female.

People with communication support needs not only require the necessary vocabulary to equip them to talk about abuse and neglect, they also need a chance to learn and to have practical experience using the vocabulary. As part of the project, Scope developed communication resources that can be used with a poster and a picture story book to teach this important vocabulary. There is also an instructional video guide and a fact sheet about how to use the resources and how to take advantage of other opportunities to teach this important vocabulary.

Service providers for people with disability have an ongoing need to access education about communication support needs, and how this heightens the risk of abuse and neglect, for people with a disability. The project

produced an online training package designed for those working with people with communication support needs to address this knowledge gap. The package consists of three modules which cover foundation level information about communication support needs, unique risks of abuse and neglect for those with communication support needs, and how to facilitate a conversation about abuse and neglect with a person with communication support needs. Each 30 minute module includes videos, examples and case studies to support users to engage and learn. For the first year of their release, a limited number of licences are available to Victorian providers for free. The package can be purchased online for providers from other states.

In previous years of the Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse project, it was identified that support services required information to guide them towards which resources would be most useful for their situation, and most suitable for the people working with them. There are currently numerous resources available addressing abuse and neglect toward people with disability, however each of the resources differ in terms of their use of visuals, the complexity of their content, and the purpose of the resource. In response to this identified need, an interactive decision-making resource has been developed to help providers to choose the resources that are most appropriate for them. This decision-making making resource has been created as an interactive PDF that can be downloaded from the Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse website, along with a video guide about how to use it.

All of the communication resources in the Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse toolkit with the exception of the multilevel communication book are available for free download from the Speak Up and be Safe website, www.speakupandbesafe.com.au. There is also information about how to register for the online training modules on the website.

REFERENCES:

Collier, B., McGhie-Richmond D; & Odette, F. (2006) Reducing the risk of sexual abuse for people who use augmentative and alternative communication. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 21.62-75.

Johnson, H., & Yee, R. (2020). Perceptions of Frontline Staff to Training and Communication Tools to Support Adults with Intellectual Disabilities to Report Abuse and Neglect: "Something to Work with". *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 7, 75-86, doi:10.1080/23297018.2019.1680312

Wilczynski, S. & Connolly, S. (2014) Assessment, prevention, and intervention for abuse among individuals with disabilities. *Psychology in the Schools* 52. 9-21

Liz Weston

Naomi Rezzani