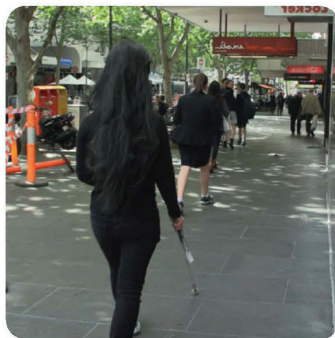


Project Report

HEAR US:
OUR STORIES MATTER



A DVD to help people with a cognitive disability seek help if they have been hurt



Published by Merri Community Health Services Ltd
Hear Us: Our Stories Matter—Project Report

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Accessible formats

This document is available for downloading from the following websites, **www.mchs.org.au** and **www.yarracity.vic.gov.au** in PDF and RTF. There is also a Plain English version available.

Disclaimer

This information in this report is intended as a guide only. It is not a substitute for legal advice.

Contact us

Merri Community Health Services
Northern Metro Region Victims Assistance and Counselling Program
Ph: (03) 9480 6166

Yarra City Council message

Yarra City Council is pleased to support Hear Us: Our Stories Matter through our Investing in Community Grants Program.

These grants give Council the opportunity to provide long-term funding for projects that make a positive difference in the community.

This DVD plays an important role in promoting community access and inclusion by bringing together stories of people with a disability who have been victims of crime and have accessed the justice system. These stories encourage people with a disability to feel confident about approaching Victoria Police, community legal centres and other organisations that provide vital victim support services.

Council's support for this project is part of our strong commitment to break down the barriers to social inclusion for people with a disability. Through our active Disability Advisory Committee, which I am proud to Chair, we are well aware of the issues that impact upon people with a disability and their vulnerability to negative treatment in the community, including violence.

Hear Us: Our Stories Matter shares compelling stories of these experiences and the opportunity for our community to listen and support their fellow citizens.

Cr Jackie Fristacky
Mayor, City of Yarra

Merri Community Health Services message

Merri Community Health Services (MCHS) is proud to have produced Hear Us: Our Stories Matter, providing the opportunity for people with a disability who have been the victim of a violent crime, to share their experience with the broader community.

MCHS is committed to providing accessible and appropriate services to the community, including the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program. Hear Us: Our Stories Matter was developed because people with disabilities who are victims of violent crime are less likely to access support. This resource will hopefully encourage more people to access support, share their story and report crime to Victoria Police. The four stories shared in the DVD highlight that experiencing violent crime is traumatic and that everyone, regardless of their background or ability, has the right to seek support. The DVD gives information on how to get help and illustrates the positive outcomes for the participants once they received services.

MCHS thanks the four people who were brave enough to share their story in the hope that more people will feel that their story matters and come forward to get help.

Mr Nigel Fidgeon
Chief Executive Officer,
Merri Community Health Services

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“Australians with disabilities are among our nation’s forgotten people. But it is time for their stories to be heard—and acted upon”

SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia. National Disability Strategy Consultation Report prepared by the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, 2009

Objective of the project

Hear Us: Our Stories Matter is a DVD that tells the stories of four people with a disability who were victims of a violent crime. When we (Merri Community Health Services) made the DVD we wanted to hear from a number of people with a disability about being hurt and what things helped them get better. We wanted to make it clear that people with disabilities have the same rights. We also wanted to think about how to make the process of talking about it easier. We wanted to know the best way we can tell people about services that can help them if they have been hurt.

Background to the project

For this project we read many reports and previous studies. The main thing we found is that people with disabilities do get hurt by other people a lot. We also found that people with disabilities don’t always get a fair chance when getting help.

We found out that we need to do more things to make the system better for people who have been hurt. There are two documents we used a lot. One was the Victims Charter for Disability written by the Victorian Victim Support

Agency in 2009. The other one was the Convention of the Rights for People with Disabilities. Both of these documents focus on making it easier for people with disabilities to be a part of their community. This also means being listened to and getting the help they need if they have been hurt.

We found out that it is hard for you to know about the law if it isn’t shown to you in a way you understand. We found that it is a good idea to make many different kinds of flyers, brochures and booklets.

We also found that the best way to help a person get better was to put them in the centre of the planning and ask what they want to happen. We need to listen to people’s stories.

People with disabilities should always be treated as a person first and we should not guess anything about the disability. Everyone is different.

“Impairments are not what disable people. What disables people is society’s attitude towards the impairment.” Hon Bill Shorten MP (4)

Merri Community Health Services think it is very important to help people in meeting their own needs. They call this “Doing it With Us Not for Us”.

Scope of Project

To start with, we decided to describe the meaning of 'disability' to cover the many types of intellectual, mental, sensory and physical disabilities. We didn't want to talk about how many people get hurt or why not everyone listens to people with disabilities. We believe in the rights of people with disabilities, especially dignity, respect and equality and we wanted to look at:

- How do people with disabilities find the help they need?
- How can we tell others about the needs of people with disabilities who need help?

We wanted to talk to four people using the idea of 'Living Stories'.

All people had to be 18 or older and we wanted both females and males. We also wanted different types of disabilities.

- The people had to understand about the project.
- They all had to give informed consent, which meant they knew what they were agreeing to and that they were happy to tell their story.

The stories would tell us on how we should be responding to their needs.

With this project, we asked some people with a disability tell their stories about being hurt to show other people with disabilities. We wanted people to know where they can get help.

The people who told us their stories wanted to help others. They liked telling their story.

Why living stories?

A Living Story is a great way to share the story of a person. It means we watch the person tell the story rather than read it in a book.

It is different from an interview. An interview has a lot of questions.

Sometimes we feel we understand more when we watch someone tell their story.

Sometimes it sounds like we are hearing our own story. This can make us feel good. Sometimes it can make us feel sad.

How did we go?

Stage One: Collect & Connect

During this stage we:

- Got people together who wanted to make the DVD.
- Made sure we were doing things the right way.
- Set up rules to follow.
- Worked out what questions should be asked for the stories.
- Worked out who we would ask to tell their story.
- Found some money to make the DVD.
- Worked out which company we would use to make the DVD.
- Filmed the four participants telling their story.
- Filmed around the City of Yarra.
- Filmed an actor with a disability for the How To Seek Help part.
- Wrote the stories down for the report.
- Asked an Auslan interpreter to be filmed for the DVD.
- Put audio description on the DVD.
- Made a cover for the DVD with a booklet. This booklet also had phone numbers of where you can call if you need help in Victoria.

Stage Two: Gather Together

During this stage we:

- Sent out many messages by mail and email about the project.
- Met people who wanted to tell their story and made sure they knew everything about the project.
- Set up a counselling plan.
- Got informed consent from each person to use their stories and their faces in the DVD and in this report.
- Met with Disability Media Australia and set up the rules. We also wanted to employ people with a disability to do the music and acting on the DVD.

Stage Three: Living Stories

During this stage we:

How did we go?

We started this project in 2010. There was not much information around then. The National Disability Insurance Scheme had not started yet. Lots of studies have started since then. This project is one of them.

There were lots of good bits and some hard bits during the project. We met lots of wonderful people too.

This is our story.

Strengths

Seeking funding

We got some money from the Yarra City Council 'Investing in Community' grants program at the end of 2011.

Meeting with the Production Company

We got Disability Media Australia to make the DVD. They have a lot of experience doing filming with people with disabilities.

They also knew people with disabilities who were actors and music artists.

Meeting the four participants

The four people who told their stories were very happy to be involved.

They all had different experiences and were very brave telling their story on film. They did not use their real names in the stories.

The interviews

Each person had an interview first to make sure they knew what the project was about. Then they practiced telling their story into a video camera.

The next time they told their story there was a lot more setting up, with lights and sound checks and a few cameras and other people. One day we had an Auslan interpreter with us. Another person brought a support person with them.

The stories were then written down and shown (or read out) to each person so they could agree to what words we used. They all got to see and hear the first draft of the DVD to make sure they agreed to the words we used.

The DVD

We filmed a lot of places. We didn't

use all of it for the DVD. Everyone who was part of the filming was very nice and was happy to be part of the project.

Catch phrase

We asked lots of people about an easy phrase to use through the DVD. We wanted something that could be used by all people with a disability. We wanted something that could be recognised by all support services.

This is the catch-phrase:

I have been
hurt,
I need help

Access to this DVD and Report

Once we have made the DVD, it will be on the websites of Yarra City Council and Merri Community Health Services.

This means more people with disabilities can watch the DVD. They can change the way they watch or listen to it on their own computers.

This report will also be put on the websites. This means more people with disabilities can read it. They can change the way they watch or listen to it on their own computers.

Challenges

Setting up the advisory group

It took a long time to get people together to talk about the project.

Ethics Approval

The project got ethics approval from the Department of Justice Ethics Committee in February 2013. It took a long time to get this. They wanted to make sure that people with disabilities would be safe telling their stories on a DVD.

We had to follow certain rules to be able to make this DVD.

Marketing and attracting participants

We spent a long time telling people about the project.

We spent a long time trying to find people who wanted to tell their story.

We were hoping we would have got more people who wanted to tell their story.

Small selection of participants

Four people agreed to be involved in this project. All four had been able to get help about when they were hurt.

We did not get to talk to anyone who had no help. We wanted to.

Delays

It took a long time to get everything ready for the stories.

There was also lots of talking about some of the stories. We had to make



sure no one would be hurt more if they told their story.

We wanted to include Braille on the DVD cover but there was not enough time after the delays.

Stories are
our gifts to
a world that
doesn't see
us

Sarah Black, author 17

“When it comes to victims of crimes, a person with an intellectual disability is twice as likely as other people to have a crime committed against them. The majority of women with an intellectual disability have been taken advantage of sexually by the time they reach adulthood.” ¹⁸

DAIS Executive Officer, Mr Martin Butcher - Disability Advocacy and Information Service (DAIS)
Media Release: 7 October 2013

What did the project find out?

Procedure

The questions asked were open and easy. We wanted the stories to be in the person's own words or signs.

We wanted to know what happened after the person was hurt. We did not need to know how they got hurt. If the person wanted to tell us more, that was OK.

We did not need to know about the person's disability. We wanted to know what they felt and what they did.

They did not have to answer any of the questions. They could tell us their story how they wanted to.

We started off each story by saying:

- We will now ask you the questions written on this page and the next page.
- Your responses will be recorded on this digital video camera.
- You can skip any questions that you do not want to answer.
- You can end the interview at any time you want.
- You can ask for a break at any time

Question One

We asked: Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

We asked this question so we can get to know a bit about the person. We found out that people with

disabilities went about their usual lives just like everyone else.

They went to appointments, made friends and learned things.

They like doing the same things as everyone else, such as playing ball games, walking, listening to music, reading, knitting, singing and swimming.

Question Two

We asked: Can you tell me about the time you were hurt by someone else?

There were four people who told us their stories. They were willing to talk about the time they were hurt and were clear about how they felt when it happened.

Fred had made a new friend at the place where he lives and when he heard she had been kicked out of the flat by her boyfriend, he offered to help her out. He gave her a small amount of money and walked with her down the street. At this point, she hurt him and took his keys. He felt scared and in danger and wondered why this was happening to him.

Sylvia was asked by a man, who lived close by, to his place for a coffee. While she was there, he sexually assaulted her.

“I felt awful after it happened, embarrassed and ashamed.”

Paul was a young child when he witnessed family violence and experienced mental abuse by his father. He does not know why this happened but he still thinks about it.

Anuque was on a tram when a person boarded who was using loud coarse language.

“It made me very uncomfortable as vision impaired to listen to, and I would think, for a sighted person to be able to see, his behaviour”.

When Anuque spoke up and mentioned she was going to call the police, the person physically hurt her.

Question Three

We asked: Can you tell me what happened next?

All the stories told to us happened at different times.

Some happened many years ago, some happened not long ago.

In the stories that happened recently, they told us that they got the help they needed. We were very happy to hear this.

Having some mates close by, Fred was able to run to their shop. They helped Fred call the police. Fred reports that the police came quickly and helped take his statement.

Anuque was helped by other people on the tram. They helped her leave the tram and stayed with her while

she called the police. She felt very scared, disorientated and upset by the experience and was glad that there were other people around to help her. She was worried the person who had hurt her would hurt her further.

The police attended the scene and told her they would follow it up. Anuque is worried about using public transport since she was hurt. While she still uses some trams, she will not use that tram line anymore.

Paul lived with his hurt for around five years before his mother asked for an intervention order. He says that he did not get any support until the year later, once the divorce was granted. Paul talked a lot about how his dyslexia affected him, how he felt about what was happening at the time and how he had to deal with it.

“I was dealing with depression, anxiety, fear from my family environment, dealing with a dad that didn’t know, understand what it was like to be me”.

He still does not like to talk about it that much as he finds it rather confronting, even at his current age.

Sylvia did not tell anyone at first. The man who sexually hurt her had told her not to tell anyone and she was frightened. At the time, Sylvia was too frightened to tell the police or anyone else. She was too ashamed of what had happened to her.

Then when she thought that she should tell someone, she told her

doctor. Unfortunately, her doctor told her to stay away from the man. Sylvia felt that she could not do this but she did not know what else to do.

It took her many years before she told someone else about being sexually hurt and they helped her to go to the police. Sylvia had to live with the memories, the fear and the shame for a long time.

Question Four:

We asked: I am interested in knowing a bit about what types of support services you used.

Anuque told us that she had some initial difficulties contacting the police officer in charge of her case. She had to speak to a few other officers first. Once she had set up a time to make her statement at the police station, Anuque was given an Independent Third Person from the Office of the Public Advocate. She was also helped with other support services such as counselling.

“The services allowed me to tell my story about what happened, without being judged and without having other people’s opinions.”

Although Paul and his family received some initial help from a psychologist, he did not receive any other help to deal with his reactions.

“The emotions, the phenomena of abuse, a vicious circle of where you are trying to deal with the abuse and the ramifications of that, within that environment”

Independent Third Persons (ITPs) are volunteers who assist people with a cognitive disability or mental illness during interviews, or when giving formal statements to Victoria Police. ITPs are trained by the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA)

Paul believes the hurt from the yelling and the family violence has made him feel sad and he thinks he isn’t as good as other people.

Fred’s experience with support services have been very good. The police helped Fred and his family get some support services. Through this, Fred had some counselling, and got some legal advice from a lawyer. Fred stated that the counselling was fantastic.

“It has helped having the counselling, someone to talk to about it, as the counsellor made it easier to get right deep down to the point.”

Sylvia told us that she did not know of any other services that were around then but would have liked some help.

She is aware that not telling anyone at the time was a reason she did not have access to services.

It was not until many years later, when she became upset when she and her companion dog could not get on a bus, that she was helped with support services. She started to receive counselling.

Question Five:

We asked: What would have been helpful to you at the time?

Both Fred and Anuque told us they were happy with the services provided to them.

Anuque felt that she would have liked more assistance from the tram driver on the day, although understood he may not have been able to help.

Sylvia was quite upset by her doctor's advice at the time and would have liked more help. She might have gone to the police earlier if this had been offered.

Paul spoke more about needing support with his dyslexia but also said that it would have helped if people he knew had asked how they could help. He would have liked some help with the dyslexia. He felt very alone. He also said that he and his mum did not ask for help. He feels he should have.

We didn't hear any stories about the Court System. We would have liked to.

A person with dyslexia is equal to everyone else who is experiencing domestic violence, or psychological violence. Paul believes he should have had the same rights to receiving the same assistance and compassion but have this provided in an alternative fashion.

Question Six

We asked: Can you tell me what we could do to be more helpful in the future?

Paul talked about helping people with dyslexia when they felt scared or sad from being hurt. He believes that it is important to show patience and understanding. He spoke a lot about being flexible in allowing a person to tell their story.

He said that the best way to help that person (with a disability) is by being open and patient. He found it difficult to trust other people.

Sylvia responded to the prompt question "What advice would you give to somebody if they told you the same story as yours?" with,

"I'd say I'm sorry and I'd say I'm sorry for you. I'd say move away, move away. I don't know why it happened to me. If that happened again I would go to the police."

Fred talked about wanting to feel safe and have something like how 'Crime Stoppers' operates. He also said that he would like to feel safe if he had to go to court. He did not have to go.

Anuque was happy with the services offered to her.

I'm glad that I've had these services because, because if I didn't, I either would have been in a state of depression, I would have like, either been on drugs and I would have just been a broken person.

Fred

Summary

What can be learnt from these stories?

Each person who told their story was different. We learnt that:

- Each person felt scared, frightened and worried about what had happened to them.
- Those who were offered counselling said it was great.
- The more recent events did involve reports to the police.
- These four people were very brave to be involved in this project. Their decision will help others know they can also come and tell their stories.

It was great to hear some had help without needing to go to court. It was great to see that the Independent Third Person program was used.

These stories can be shared with those who provide community services and victim support services to raise awareness about people with disabilities. Sharing these stories is a way we can help make services better in the future.

The catch phrase “I have been hurt, I need help” has been chosen as the

message to tell to all services, so that they can think about how to help the person.

The service may then know they need to use a different type of communication to help that person.

Conclusion

It is hard to make a conclusions because we only talked to four people.

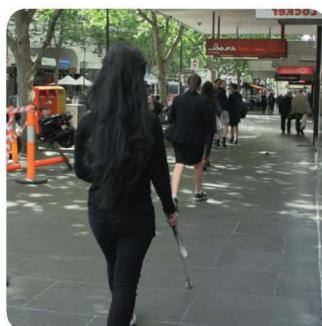
We would like to hear more stories.

We want to know more about why some people don't get help. We want to know why people with disabilities find it hard to get help.

Those that did told their stories felt that they were helping others. Everyone should be able to tell their stories.

It is hoped that this project and the DVD will be helpful for people with disabilities to have a voice and be heard. We would like others to tell their stories.

The DVD will also be used to raise awareness in the community of how to recognise a request for help.



The case studies

Fred's Story

Fred is a young adult who works at a large supermarket and wants to complete a VCAL Certificate II in marketing and sales. He loves hanging out with his family, watching films, listening to classic tunes and playing soccer.

A couple of years ago, Fred experienced an act of violence. He had made a new friend at the place where he lives and believed her story about her boyfriend kicking her out of the flat. He offered to help her out by giving her a very small amount of money. While going for a walk with her, she started to hit him and took his keys. Fred shouted at her and tried to get her to stop hitting him. He felt scared and in danger and wondered why this was happening to him. His keys were important to him, but he knew he had to run away.

He ran to a nearby shop. They helped him make the call to the police and Fred told them where he was and what had happened. He stated that the police came to have a talk to him very quickly.

They said they would try to find the girl who hit him. The police took a statement from Fred about what happened and when Fred's parents came to get him, the police went through the statement again with him. They checked that everything that had

been written down was true.

Fred spent a bit of time with his family after this to recover from the shock of being hurt and having his keys taken. The police helped link Fred and his family into some support services. Through this, Fred accessed some counselling, and got some legal advice from a lawyer.

Fred stated that the counselling was fantastic. He stated "I'm glad that I've had these services because, because if I didn't, I either would have been in a state of depression, I would have like, either been on drugs and I would have just been a broken person." He also said that it "has helped having the counselling, someone to talk to about it, as the counsellor made it easier to get right deep down to the point."

When we asked him how long he would need these services for, Fred indicated that he would like them "for whenever it takes". When we asked Fred about anything else he would have liked access to, he talked about a service like Crime Stoppers where you could go to if you were a victim like him. He also talked about wanting to feel safe if he ever had to go to court. He stated that he would like to go to court as it "starts making me a better person".

Fred told us also that the police did speak to the girl who hurt him and they got his keys back.

Sylvia's Story

NOTE: We interviewed Sylvia using facilitated communication through two concurrent AUSLAN interpreters. The words used to create this case study are taken from the transcript of the interview, which means we were relying on the verbal translation. Sylvia was then provided with a copy of the transcript to read and her feedback was that it reflected what she had been communicating to us.

Sylvia relies on a Disability Pension, and has to be careful with her money. She shares her life with her companion pet, Bacon. She and Bacon like to go out and about as she gets bored at home. Sylvia also likes to knit, especially jumpers, cardigans and slippers.

A long time ago, Sylvia was living in a block of flats. A man who lived close by invited her to his place for a coffee. While she was there, he had sex with her, repeatedly and used force. Sylvia said 'No' to him when he told her he wanted her to stay in his bedroom.

The next day the man asked her to have sex with him again, and she said 'No'. She did not want to have sex with him again and was angry that he asked. He then threatened he would hurt her and then he had sex with her again. She did not want to, and she was sick of it.

Sylvia kept asking him 'Why me, why me?' She wanted him to leave her alone but he just 'kept going and going all the time'. He would say 'come with me' and she knew why. She did

not want to have sex with him but he wanted to have sex and would have forced her.

"I felt awful after it happened, embarrassed and ashamed."

She wanted to kill herself because he had sex with her. She was frightened that he would hit her. She was frightened of him and frightened because he lived so close.

He told her not to tell anyone. Sylvia thought that she should tell someone, so she told her doctor. Her doctor just told her to stay away from him. Sylvia felt that she could not do this but she didn't know what else to do.

Sylvia was too frightened to tell the police or anyone else at the time. She was too ashamed of herself. She also did not know of any other services that were available, but would have liked some support. She is aware that not telling anyone was a reason she did not have access to services.

A while after this Sylvia had an upsetting experience with a local bus service. The bus driver would not let her take her hearing dog on the bus and drove straight off. Sylvia contacted the 'Hearing Dogs' to tell them about her experience because she was upset and they linked her into a counsellor. Although this counselling was initially about helping Sylvia with her feelings about the bus and her dog, accessing this service eventually led to Sylvia asking for and receiving other support services and then eventually counselling for the sexual assault.

(Authors note: Sylvia did eventually report this assault to the police).

Sylvia ended the interview with her response to the question “What advice would you give to somebody if they told you the same story as yours?” with, “I’d say I’m sorry and I’d say I’m sorry for you. I’d say move away, move away. I don’t know why it happened to me. If that happened again I would go to the police.”

Paul’s Story

Paul is American and grew up in a small town in California. He is one of two children. He likes to write, and watch films and certain sports. He likes taking bike rides. He loves reading, especially about a variety of things as he feels that, as a writer, he needs to know.

When he was a child, Paul experienced mental abuse [sic] from one of his parents and also witnessed physical domestic abuse of his mother.

Although he does not remember exactly when it began, he believes it was around the age of six or seven. Paul was being home-schooled at that time because he has dyslexia.

Paul does not know why the abuse happened but it had an effect on the rest of his life and especially his teen and young adulthood years.

Paul says the hard part of experiencing mental abuse is that you cannot see it. “It happens when someone yells at you, is being confrontational with you and does not understand the effects the dyslexia has upon you.”

He says his father did not understand or maybe did not comprehend that he had dyslexia. He did not know how to deal with it or had the patience to understand Paul’s experiences living with dyslexia.

Paul’s father would yell at him and tell him off for being ignorant, for being difficult. All Paul was trying to do was understand what he was and what he needed to know. Paul often needed to learn things a second time to be able to understand it.

Paul explained how hard it is for someone (with dyslexia) to externalise their feelings, the emotions of being outside of yourself but yet inside of yourself. “It is a weird duality”.

Support for people with dyslexia was non-existent where Paul lived in the mid 1990s. His only support structure was that his mother also had dyslexia and understood what it was like and so she home-schooled him. His parents were both college educated and initially both took responsibility for the home schooling.

When his father used to home school him, he would say to Paul, ‘Oh why don’t you get it, why don’t you get it, why can’t you do your multiplication tables?’ and Paul would shut down.

Some days would leave Paul crying or feeling confused about how his father was treating him. He did not understand how Paul was learning or how he learned best.

Paul witnessed physical domestic abuse of his mother. He still does not like to talk about that much as he

feels it rather confronting, even at his current age. When he was around eleven or twelve, his mother filed for an intervention order and his father was removed from the house. He still lived in the same town and they did initially try to work out their differences. Once his mother realised there was no way of dealing with the issue, they went through a legal divorce. Up until this point they did not receive any real assistance from anyone.

Once the divorce proceedings commenced, a court appointed psychologist was provided to the family, which was about a year after the issue of the intervention order.

Paul did not receive any other assistance to deal with ‘the emotions, the phenomena of abuse, a vicious circle of where you are trying to deal with the abuse and the ramifications of that, within that environment.’ There were not many resources at that time for Paul’s family to ask for in that area.

When asked about what would have helped his family at this time of his life, Paul explained that it would have been beneficial if people they knew personally had approached them and asked how they could help, and how to help with a son with dyslexia. They were feeling very alone.

He also reflected that they also did not approach anyone asking for help so it was a dualistic issue. “If people understood what I was experiencing and had been more open to it they would have understood that I was dealing with very complex emotions

internally.

“I was dealing with depression, anxiety, fear from my family environment, dealing with a dad that didn’t know, understand what it was like to be me”.

Paul believes the ramifications of the mental violence, and witnessing domestic abuse, impacted on his self esteem and lead to an inferiority complex. He felt he was not good enough; he felt stupid, especially when compared to a brother who was a ‘straight A’ student. This was something that affected him for a long time.

In response to the question “Can you tell me what we could do to be more helpful in the future to support people with a disability accessing victim support services,” Paul had a lot to say. He believes that it is important to approach people in this situation with patience and compassion as there are varied issues happening.

He talked about people not being able to externalise what they are feeling and experiencing and that they need to have an outlet. He suggested they be provided with opportunities to act out what has happened to them in a role-play, write it down, or ask other people around them who are personally involved, to explore what that person has experienced.

He reflected that a person providing a much-needed service can understand the best way to assist that person (with a disability) by being open and patient. He believes it is very hard for

people who are experiencing domestic violence or even mental violence or abuse, to open up and it is very difficult for them to trust others. It was very difficult for him in his situation to trust other people, to trust others with those emotions and experiences, even though they knew what was happening. It was very difficult for him.

In a small town environment he was even more frustrated as there was very limited assistance available. He explained that it can be hard for the affected people to be able to approach help services. He talked about judgements, that being judgemental is not a good thing, does not help the process. It does not matter who is involved in that process.

He did not think others understood what was happening in his brain. He understood words and concepts quite well, but when it came to mathematics and numbers, it was very difficult to explain why he did not understand. Often others would jump on him and say, 'Oh no, you've done it wrong, you've done it wrong, you've done it wrong'.

"No. No. No. You don't jump on that person or everything they do incorrectly, you need to say look, you can go about this a different way."

"If I'm confronted with a situation, and a person doesn't understand that I have dyslexia, that's when I shut down, when someone is confrontational with me when I experience what I perceive to be violence, mental violence, or even physical violence, I shut down. And

that's when people who are giving assistance in health services or even mental health services, they need to understand not to be confrontational."

Paul explained the importance of being open and finding what that person's interests are and not exploiting it and building trust upon that before you confront someone about a situation.

"You have to build up that sense of honesty with that person. You have to take it step by step. You can't just dictate this is how it is, you have to understand what that person is experiencing. If I had the compassion and the patience from other people who actually understood the situation it would have ended up differently."

When offering help services, it is important to acknowledge that even if it does not register from the very beginning, that with constant assistance and constant diligence, that person will eventually get there.

Paul explained further, that an important concept when you have someone with dyslexia is acknowledging they are different and are equal. A person with dyslexia is equal to everyone else who is experiencing domestic violence or psychological violence. He believes he should have had the same rights to the assistance and the same rights to receiving the same compassion but have this provided in an alternative fashion.

Paul had some experience dealing with a psychologist when he was

a teenager. He explained that at first it did not work until she finally identified the dyslexia. He talked about developing a trusting environment for people with dyslexia or autism, to have them “relate those experiences in an honest, open platform, where you won’t jump on the person (laughs). That doesn’t help.”

The violence that he experienced and saw for many years affected him but he feels that externalising it is important.

“You must be able to provide that person with an outlet, be it non-verbal or verbal. You have to be able to provide a situation where that person in time will be able to externalise that and say, “This is what’s happening to me!”

When Paul returned to mainstream school after the home-schooling finished, there was still no assistance for someone with dyslexia in the mainstream school system. However, he did eventually attend a community program that was designed to support disadvantaged students to complete their secondary experience.



Anuque’s Story

Anuque lives with some of her family and has two brothers. She likes to go swimming, play the piano and sing. She has had vision impairment from birth, with only 30 percent vision in one eye and total blindness in the other eye. This makes it tricky to get around.

She uses a white cane (also referred to as a white stick) and Anuque says this enables her a level of protection and allows other people who do not have a vision impairment to notice she may need help.

“Once the person sees the white cane then they know that I need help.”

Anuque accesses a lot of public transport to get around and to catch up with friends.

On the day of her assault, Anuque was on her way home from collecting a letter from a hospital for an upcoming appointment. She was on a tram and was kicked in the leg by a person who was possibly drunk or drugged.

She was sitting on the tram behind the driver’s cabin and had heard the guy board the tram one stop after she had got on and she became worried because he started to say some nasty words to everyone on board.

She began to feel very insecure and told him that she was going to contact police because of the inappropriate words that he was using.

“It made me very uncomfortable as vision impaired to listen to, and I would think for a sighted person to be able to

see, his behaviour”.

She said to no one in particular that she was going to contact police because of the very bad language he was using, as it made her feel uncomfortable and feel threatened and scared. His response was to kick her leg.

Anuque did then call the police and the witnesses were able to describe a description of the attacker to the triple zero call-taker. A lot of her fellow passengers offered to help her and two witnesses were able to help her off the tram and accompany her while she waited for the police to attend. She would have liked to get some assistance by the tram driver, however she understands that he may have been unable to leave the drivers cabin.

Anuque felt very scared, disorientated and upset by the experience and was glad that there were other people around to support her. She was worried the person who had hurt her would hurt her further. The police spoke to her briefly and then began looking for the man who hurt her.

Anuque went home after this experience, and did not make a statement to the police straight away.

When she tried to organise a time to go the police station to make her statement, she had to speak to several police officers because the main police officer that was in charge of the investigation was often unavailable. She mentioned that other police officers needed to step in to help her arrange a time to attend the

police station and to organise the Independent Third Person.

Anuque made a statement at the police station with an Independent Third Person accompanying her. She stated that she had used an Independent Third Person at an earlier time, and was still accessing counselling from that previous incident.

The police also linked Anuque into support services and counselling. Anuque says these services were useful and have been helpful.

“The services allowed me to tell my story about what happened, without being judged and without having other people’s opinions.

The services that I have used so far have been very helpful and I can’t think of anything at this stage that needs to be improved, and I’ve been very happy with the services I’m receiving and have received in the past”.

There has been an impact on Anuque using public transport since the assault. While she still uses public transport, she will not be using that particular tram line. She feels that she knows the environment and the area where she was hurt “is very well known for people who are affected by both drugs and alcohol, and therefore I think it’s just sort of a matter of being very aware and I just wouldn’t want to get hurt again.”

If you have been hurt, you can get help.

- Call the Police 000
- Call the Victims of Crime Helpline 1800 819 817
- Call the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria 1800 015 188
- Go to a Police station
- Go to your local Community Service
- Tell your doctor
- Tell a friend or family member

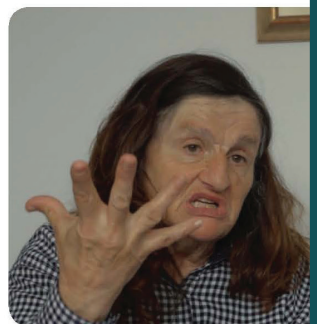
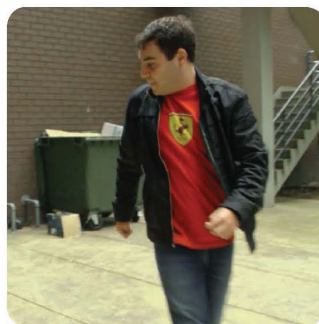
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