



*the spastic centre*

# SEXUALITY AND HUMAN RELATIONS PROJECT

February 2001 to April 2002

Prepared for the Spastic Centre of NSW Sexuality Working Party by Paul Kelly, Project Worker.

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## SUMMARY

This report outlines the strategies and findings of the Sexuality and Human Relations Project by the Project Worker.

**This role** was specifically designed to facilitate and support Service Users to engage legally in safe, informed and appropriate expression of their sexuality, and assist Service Users to speak up about their rights concerning sexuality and human relations.

**The service delivery area** was initially piloted in the South West region. The Project Worker reports to the South West regional Adult Resource Program Manager and Spastic Centre Sexuality Working Party.

**The project increased** from one to two then three days per week, and its delivery area expanded to include Service Users located in the North East Region. The Project Worker will now also be reporting on activities in the expanded service delivery area to the Training and Development Manager.

**The Policy commits the organisation** to provide information, opportunity and advocacy for Service Users in the expression of their sexual and relational needs. It also clearly states that staff cannot assist a Service User in any sexual activity.

**It is hoped** that this report will further the reach, effectiveness and influence of the Spastic Centre in relation to its Sexuality and Human Relations Policy.

# POLICY STATEMENT

The Organisation's Sexuality and Human Relations Policy Statement identifies five areas that it has committed itself to address:

## **INFORMED CHOICE**

*"The Spastic Centre is committed to actively upholding the right of all adult service users to have access to sufficient knowledge and information regarding sex, sexuality and human relations so he or she may make informed choices regarding their sexual and relational lifestyle."*

## **HEALTH PROMOTION**

*"The Spastic Centre is committed to actively assisting adult service users to access healthcare and information aimed at maintaining and promoting safe/healthy sexual activity."*

## **PRIVACY AND RESPECT**

*"The Spastic Centre is committed to maintaining the privacy of its service users and exercising respect in relation to sexuality and human relations."*

## **CREATING OPPORTUNITY**

*"The Spastic Centre is committed to continue to develop legitimate and lawful means by which opportunity for sexual development and expression is provided."*

## **INFLUENCE CHANGE**

*"The Spastic Centre recognises that the right of service users to freedom of sexual expression is not easily exercised within the current framework of community attitude and law. The Spastic Centre also understands that those same issues hinder aspects of its service provision around sex and sexuality."*

*The Spastic Centre is committed to supporting the lawful activities of persons with a disability to influence political and community groups to:*

- a) Influence community beliefs and attitudes through an awareness of these issues for persons with a disability*
- b) Influence law-making bodies to bring changes to laws that needlessly infringe on the rights of persons with a disability-*

# POLICY IN ACTION

## Commitment to Informed Choice

*"The Spastic Centre is committed to actively upholding the right of all adult service users to have access to sufficient knowledge and information regarding sex, sexuality and human relations so he or she may make informed choices regarding their sexual and relational life style. "*

(Spastic Centre (NSW) Sexual and Human Relations Policy Statement, paragraph 1)

## Strategy

Service User meetings were held to discuss sexuality and disability and in particular to galvanise support to lobby for change in State government law that prohibit the Spastic Centre assisting Service Users accessing sexual services. Service Users were made aware that it is unlawful to make a phone call and arrange for a person with a disability to access the services of a prostitute.

Service Users were met in organised meetings, individual consultations and at their work sites, day programs, accommodation services and private homes.

## Findings

From these meetings the following findings were made:

1. Some Service Users have incorrect sexual knowledge and education.
2. Service Users require support in communicating sexuality and sexual health issues to family, staff and the community.
3. Service Users require support establishing and maintaining social relationships with their community.
4. Some Service Users may require professional counselling about issues relating to sexuality and disability.
5. A support base is needed for friends and family of Service Users to discuss in private the issues relating to sexuality and disability. A group of interested parents is organising to meet.

## Initiatives

The Project Worker carried out the following initiatives:

1. Personal support and advocacy in accessing professional sexual health services.
2. A new education initiative - Internet Access Training is being developed. Internet classes will be held to explain how to access sites on relationship and disability.
3. Service Users provided with advocacy and support in relating issues regarding sexuality to family and friends
4. A parent's group is being formed for them to discuss difficulties faced by their adult children and themselves regarding their children's sexuality and disability.
5. Links are being fostered with available community/social networks for Service Users to meet others with the intention of forming relationships.

## Commitment to Health Promotion

*"The Spastic Centre is committed to actively assisting adult service users to access healthcare and information aimed at maintaining and promoting safe/healthy sexual activity. "*

(Spastic Centre (NSW) Sexual and Human Relations Policy Statement, paragraph 1)

Service Users were provided with individual advocacy and support in accessing sexual health services.

A group of Service Users were supported to man a stand in the health information area of Sexpo (July, Sydney 2001). Links to community sexual and sexual health services were made during the Expo by Service Users.

Female Service Users requested a sex education class. A Family Planning & Health professional provided this.

From November 2001 to March 2002 a training program by FPA Health, Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP), Spastic Centre Training and Development Dept, and concerned Service User parents designed a training program to educate Sex Workers on disability.

## Findings

It was discovered that many Service User sexual health concerns had not been addressed by their medical practitioners.

Many Service Users had inadequate or incorrect sexual knowledge, highlighting the need for an appropriate tool to assess sexual knowledge.

Service Users often have difficulties in obtaining information from health professionals without the assistance of an attendant carer or staff member.

## Commitment to Privacy and Respect

*"The Spastic Centre is committed to maintaining the privacy of its service users and exercising respect in relation to sexuality and human relations."*

(Spastic Centre (NSW) Sexual and Human Relations Policy Statement, paragraph 1)

Although the policy anticipated that requests for all services will initially be made to a Pathways Coordinator, the majority of Service Users have made service requests in the area of sexuality and human relations direct to the Project Worker. This may be explained by the sensitive nature of the subject.

To maintain Service User confidence, information discussed with Service Users privately is treated as personal and confidential.

## Commitment to Creating Opportunity

*"The Spastic Centre is committed to continue to develop legitimate and lawful means by which opportunity for sexual development and expression is provided"*.

(Spastic Centre (NSW) Sexual and Human Relations Policy Statement, paragraph 1)

With the understanding that present laws needlessly discriminate against people with disability and that many sexual services do also, strategies were put in place to circumvent these barriers.

Service Users with a clear comprehension of the law and Spastic Centre policy have volunteered to assist other Service Users to access sexual services. The Project Worker has supported all initiatives by Service Users to access services that their service provider is unable to whilst not contravening Spastic Centre policy.

**A major hurdle** facing many Service Users is deciding who is to perform all attendant care prior to the sexual service provided by the sex worker? Who can provide the personal care that is directly assisting a Service User accessing a sexual service?

Two opportunities have been proposed:

- The role of Sexuality Lifestyle Assistant, which was originally conceived at the inaugural Touching Base Forum. It entailed providing means to fund a position to enable Service Users to access sexual services yet not to provide sex work.
- The Attendant Care model of the Yoralla Society of Victoria could be adapted to the New South Wales situation. This model includes attendants from an external agency providing transport, dressing, undressing, personal hygiene, transferring positioning etc, but does not include assisting with any sexual activity.

**Some Local governments** discriminate needlessly by not providing street level access to sex venues. Further more sex venues almost never provide disabled access and adequate disabled facilities.

The South West Regional Occupational Therapy team provided assistance to a new brothel to ensure accessibility and provide expertise and information on equipment and modifications needed for disabled access.

**The cost of sexual services** is prohibitive for many Service Users especially the time required in attendant care preparation. The possibility of reduced rate, or longer time allocation could be negotiated with sex workers. There is also a possibility of accessing charity funds through organisations such as Eros Foundation, or other?

**It is difficult** for Service Users to find sex services that are accessible.

Through networking with various sexual and sex services, a register is being compiled of sex venues that have disabled access and sex workers with training and/or knowledge of the particular challenges faced by people with disability.

## Commitment to Influence Change

*"The Spastic Centre recognises that the right of service users to freedom of sexual expression is not easily exercised within the current framework of community attitude and law. The Spastic Centre also understands that those same issues hinder aspects of its service provision around sex and sexuality.*

*The Spastic Centre is committed to supporting the lawful activities of persons with a disability to influence political and community groups to:*

- a) *Influence community beliefs and attitudes through an awareness of these issues for persons with a disability,*
- b) *Influence law-making bodies to bring changes to laws that needlessly infringe*

*on the rights of persons with a disability."*

(Spastic Centre (NSW) Sexual and Human Relations Policy Statement, paragraph 1)

In order to influence change in community beliefs and law making bodies, the Project Worker has fostered community links in the disability sector through committee participation and through enlisting the support of ACROD to publish our work on sexuality and human relations to the disability community.

Below is a list of **various activities** participated in to support Service Users to influence political and community groups.

### **March 2001**

Attend Touching Base meeting of Sex Workers, People with a Disability and their Carers. Ongoing committee participation

### **April 2001**

Attend ACCSEX conference (Melbourne April 2001), accompanying attending Service user of the Spastic Centre of NSW

### **July 2001**

Sexpo stall was coordinated with Service User participation

### **October 2001**

Adult Resource Program Manager delivered a paper at disability conference in Melbourne, Addressing the Issues of Sexuality and Disability in the Spastic Centre of NSW

### **February 2002**

Mardi Gras participation by Service Users facilitated with Spastic Centre coordination, cooperation and resources.

### **March 2002**

Sex Worker Training with FPA and SWOP supported by Spastic Centre training and development staff

### **March 2002**

Local Councils have building regulations that prohibit street level access to brothels. This has the effect of prohibiting access for many people with disability from accessing sexual services. Lobby Marrickville Council at Meeting to vote on amendments to regulations.

### **April 2002**

Deliver report on Sex and Disability to South West Disability Network