

# Power to Kids: Respecting Sexual Safety



## About the program

*Power to Kids: Respecting Sexual Safety* is a prevention and early intervention program designed and implemented by MacKillop Family Services in partnership with the University of Melbourne. The program was developed following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which identified that children and young people in out-of-home care are at significant risk of being victimised through harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), child sexual exploitation (CSE) and dating violence (DV).



The program focuses on three key prevention and early intervention strategies:

### Respectful relationships and sexuality education

Coaching residential carers to have “brave conversations” about sexual health and safety with young people

### Missing from home

Building stronger relationships between carers and young people and carers’ skills to assertively outreach when they are missing

### Sexual Safety Response

Training carers to identify early warning signs of sexual abuse, as well as how to access appropriate support

## Why the program is needed

In Australia and globally, child sexual abuse is a problem of significant proportions, particularly in residential out of home care settings.

As at 30 June 2019, there were 44,906 children and young people living in out of home care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). Approximately 6% of those children and young people were living in residential care settings, and yet a disproportionate 33% of child sexual abuse reports to statutory child protection related to those children and young people living in residential care (Royal Commission, 2016).

Children and young people from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and children living with a disability were overrepresented in the data (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020).

## Results

The Power to Kids: Respecting Sexual Safety model was piloted in four MacKillop Family Services Residential Care homes and its effectiveness measured. The data indicated that:

- Children and young people experienced increased protection against HSB, CSE and DV
- Children and young people were observed to be missing from home less often
- Safe relationships between children and young people and their carers were enhanced
- Children and young people's knowledge, skills and attitudes about sexual health and safety improved
- Workers improved at identifying HSB, CSE, DV and ensuring advocacy, exit and treatment
- Workers had increased knowledge about HSB, CSE and DV
- Workers had increased self-efficacy in having sexual health and safety conversations with children and young people

“ One striking thing that came out of (the program) was that the girls mentioned to the carers that they should be talking to one of the other girls in the house, because they think she's being groomed by her uncle... the girls seemed concerned about this relationship...and mentioned that to the carers...”

- Sexual Health Nurse

“ Six weeks ago, I don't think he would have come forward...Now he knows that this actually isn't okay...I think that the project has definitely had an influence on him and made him feel comfortable to talk to the staff around what has happened.”

- Case Manager referring to a young man disclosing an act of harmful sexual behaviour

“ I'm actually seeing our staff ... are making a lot more effort to pay attention to red flags...or signs of sexual exploitation...which has been really awesome because then we've been able to get safety measures put in place a lot quicker than what we would have before the program”

- House Supervisor

## Definitions

**Harmful sexual behaviour** is sexual behaviour carried out by children & young people that is developmentally inappropriate and may be abusive towards self or others (McKibbin, Humphreys & Hamilton, 2017; Hackett, Holmes & Branigan, 2016)

**Child sexual exploitation** is adult-perpetrated sexual abuse that involves a child or young person receiving goods, money, power or attention in exchange for sexual activity (Hackett, Holmes, & Branigan, 2016).

**Dating violence** is intimate partner violence carried out in the context of teen dating relationships. It can involve physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse (WHO, 2012).