



**Submission
to the
Royal Commission
into
Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

**Response to Consultation Paper:
*Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
in Out-Of-Home Care***

**By True Relationships and Reproductive Health
April 2016**

True Relationships and Reproductive Health
PO Box 215 Fortitude Valley Q 4006
230 Lutwyche Rd Windsor Q 4030
Phone: 07 3250 0240
Email: info@true.org.au
Web: www.true.org.au

About True Relationships and Reproductive Health

True Relationships and Reproductive Health (True), formally known as Family Planning Queensland (FPQ), is the leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services and respectful relationships and sexuality education in Queensland. True offers a comprehensive range of clinical, counselling, education and training services in 9 metropolitan and regional locations throughout Queensland.

True's services include:

- Education and Community Services
- Cairns Sexual Assault Service
- Reproductive and sexual health clinical and education services.

True has gained practice knowledge through service provision to a broad cross section of the community, including people at intersections of Aboriginality, ethnicity, migration status, age, ability, sexual diversity, gender and gender diversity. Our education and community service provision includes resource development and professional development for staff who work in settings such as:

- government and non-government organisations working in child protection and child safety, including foster and kinship carers, Community Visitors, Child Safety Officers and other OOHC professionals
- child and youth support and empowerment services
- domestic, family and sexual violence prevention and response services
- disability and sexual violence
- ability and disability services
- domestic and family violence prevention
- multi-cultural wellbeing and health
- education materials for same sex attracted, gender diverse and intersex people
- social workers and case managers, psychologists and mental health services
- educators, early learning teachers, primary, secondary and tertiary teachers
- judicial and enforcement professionals such as lawyers and police in correctional facilities and detention centres
- family support services, parent and carer community groups
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and organisations
- faith-based organisations and groups
- aged care service and support agencies
- medical professionals including doctors and nurses

Through our extensive practice, True have provided a broad range of sexual and reproductive health services to community and professional groups and individuals. True have outstanding expertise in developing and delivering education and resources to support healthy sexual development, respond to sexual behaviours, address sexual abuse and respond to reproductive and sexual health needs. On average, 20 000 plus education participants and 20 000 plus professional participants attend True's training and professional development sessions each year. True have also developed over 45 resources and publications on relationships, sexuality and reproductive health, many of them award winning.

Our submission

True welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper: *Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Out-Of-Home Care*. The primary focus of this submission is focused on *Chapter 7: Prevention of sexual abuse in OOHC*, based on responding to the sexuality and relationships needs of children in care as well as our unique experience of almost 45 years' working within the communities, and specifically within OOHC settings for the health and well-being of children and young people.

True supports that a national strategy to prevent child sexual abuse in OOHC and that it should include a comprehensive, whole of community response to supporting healthy and safe sexual development of children and young people. It also encourages positive and protective responses to both the healthy, concerning and problematic sexual behaviors exhibited by young people.

Responses to Consultation Paper: Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Out-of-Home Care Chapter 7: A National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse in Out-Of-Home-Care

7.2a An education prevention program targeted to children, carers and practitioners in OOHC, which identifies the necessary elements, drawing on those covered in school based programs

True has extensive experience in developing and delivering relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programs in schools and community groups throughout Queensland and is across the national curriculum requirements, best practice delivery methods, including creating a safe and engaging environment and policies for responding to disclosures of abuse and the developmental needs of children and young people. In 2014-2015, True worked with approximately 2500 education professionals in Queensland to deliver training to support them to identify and respond to sexual behaviours of children and young people in school settings.

Children in care are less likely to access school sexuality education programs and are less likely to have the same sexuality knowledge of their peers, therefore have a high need for specialized sexuality education (Brennan, 2008). True has experience tailoring RSE programs for children and young people in OOHC as well as developing and delivering customised training to carers and professionals in OOHC settings. Please see response to 5c and 5f for more details.

Research indicates that effective sexual abuse prevention education programs are enhanced when they are taught alongside a broader RSE program. True's vision is 'Sexual and reproductive health and safe, respectful relationships for all.' Our relationship and sexuality education resources and programs are inclusive of, and promote sexual abuse prevention. Studies have shown that children who receive comprehensive relationships and sexuality education (inclusive of sexual abuse prevention and respectful relationships education) from an early age are more likely to:

- feel good about themselves
- understand and accept changes
- appreciate and accept individual differences
- are more likely to make informed and responsible sexual decisions later in life
- are less vulnerable to sexual abuse
- understand appropriate and inappropriate behaviours
- talk about their feelings and experiences.

There is clear evidence for supporting the need for access to comprehensive sexuality education and sexual health services to meet the holistic needs of all children and young people. Compared to other young people, children and young people in care experience:

- higher rates of earlier onset of sexual activity
- higher rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's), unintended pregnancy, young pregnancy and young parenting/caregiving roles
- higher rates of sexual violence and abuse, including participation in online and offline

- commercial child sexual exploitation and sex work
- higher rates of problem sexual behaviours and sexual behaviours that cause concern
- less recorded access and increased barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services, education and information

7.2b An education prevention program targeted to children, carers and practitioners in OOHC, which covers how children can make a disclosure

Evidence shows that children and young people who have received ongoing and effective personal safety, relationships and sexuality education are less vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. They are less likely to feel guilty or shameful about their bodies and feelings. Children are more likely to disclose instances of abuse when they have participated in a program which provides guidance for them on how to do so.

Comprehensive RSE and sexual abuse prevention education helps to reduce barriers to disclosing abuse by providing:

- awareness raising of rights and responsibilities in relation to bodies and relationships
- providing communication tools such as terminology for private body parts, symbols, images and signs relating to bodies and relationships so that communication is clear and understood
- modelling of communication around these topics
- skills practice
- an awareness that it is “OK” to talk to identified safe adults about bodies and relationships
- culturally inclusive resources and responses
- improved skills and confidence building of carers and professionals to identify and respond indicators of harm and respond to disclosures appropriately
- increased in health literacy and the ability to seek information about sexual health from reputable and trusted services.

True’s programs and resources are designed to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all and include the elements above to reduce the barriers to disclosing. True’s staff have experience in responding to disclosures of abuse and respond in accordance to True’s disclosure policy.

7.2e An education prevention program targeted to children, carers and practitioners in OOHC, which is flexible and tailored to meet the individual needs of a child and their history

7.2f An education prevention program targeted to children, carers and practitioners in OOHC, which is delivered in a variety of formats, such as supportive group formats or on an individual basis

7.3 development and distribution of resources that are culturally sensitive and suitable for young people with a range of special needs including learning problems and/or disability

7.4 development and distribution of resources that include material for same sex attracted and gender questioning young people

Children and young people in OOHC and with specific needs and particular vulnerabilities, include children:

- with a disability

- those with an experience of statutory care
- with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background
- with English as a second language
- who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex
- from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- with problem sexual behaviours
- those who have experienced sexual abuse
- with mental health issues.

These children and young people often miss out on education and support that assists in the development of personal safety skills, healthy sexual development, safe and healthy decision making and a safe learning environment. Due to their vulnerabilities and specific needs, some children and young people have fewer opportunities to engage in 'learning moments' and formal education about healthy sexuality and relationships and being safe. Some examples of this include:

- less opportunity to engage spontaneously with peers and limited social opportunities
- challenges in accessing and processing information independently
- negative attitudes from the community about sexuality and sexual identity
- low self-esteem, impacting on learning or willingness to learn
- learned compliance resulting in reduced assertiveness and decision making opportunities
- less consistency in schooling and home environments.

True's programs and resources are designed to be inclusive and to meet the needs of particular groups or individuals. Some examples include:

- *Every body needs to know – A sexuality and relationships education resource for teaching people with a disability* (True, 2001), is an example of how information can be modified to assist with individual learning needs by using symbols and pictures.
- The *Every body needs to know special education project* True has worked across Queensland to support students with a disability to receive sexuality and relationships education (RSE) thanks to funding provided by the Non School Organisations (NSO) program, Department of Education, Training and Employment. The *Every body needs to know special education project* implements a whole school approach to RSE through curriculum based resources, teacher training and student engagement.
- *Looking after me* program uses visual resources and interactive activities to support individuals with a disability to understand bodies, enjoy healthy relationships and be safe.
- *Safe is...* Award winning *Safe is...* (True, 2012) is an example of a tailored sexual abuse prevention program that was developed with a school community whose students and staff were predominantly Aboriginal and Islander peoples.
- *The Sunshine Coast Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People's Sexual Health Project* is also a tailored program praised for its consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, community groups and organisations.
- *Safe Schools Coalition Australia* True is the lead delivery organisation of Safe Schools Coalition Queensland. The Coalition provides professional development of teachers and resources to increase safety for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, school staff and families. This project uses a whole school approach to provide support in policy development, community education, and teacher professional development with a mandate to enhance student safety. True provides support to a number of schools with students at risk of abuse who present with Autism Spectrum Disorder, are in OHCC and who identify as gender diverse.

True is working with the University of Western Sydney to evaluate the project and look forward to sharing crucial findings to enhance institution led support and safety for same sex attracted, gender diverse and intersex children and young people.

While many different strategies are required to increase children's safety, sexual abuse prevention programs play an important role in teaching children foundation skills that are protective against sexual abuse. Prevention lessons and professional development training around this issue also builds the capacity of adults to help prevent and respond to disclosures and indicators child sexual abuse. Ultimately it is all adult's responsibility to keep children safe and educational institutions have legislative requirements and duty of care to ensure this imperative.

7.5a Role clarity, processes and recording practices as set out in OOHC policies and procedures

There is a clear demand for consistent evidence based responses to assist child safety professionals and carers to support children and young people's healthy and safe sexual development, and identify and prevent sexual abuse through promotion of respectful relationships and supporting healthy and safe sexual behaviours.

Knowing how to identify and respond to sexual behaviours in children and young people helps adults to support the development of healthy sexuality and protect young people from harm or abuse. A significant tool to assist is the Traffic Lights framework developed by True in 2006. This provides both an evidence-based conceptual framework, in addition to practical and specific intervention strategies. It has the potential to resource both professionals and community carers with skills and knowledge in better responding to the needs of children and young people, and identify, understand and respond to sexual behaviours in children and young people in at risk situations, as well as those in the care system. It has a proven track record in helping professionals and community carers to better respond to the needs of children and young people. A number of policy documents for various out of home care organisations have referred to the Traffic Lights framework as a way to equip teachers with skills and confidence to respond to sexual behaviours of concern.

True recommend that RSE education and services delivered to children and young people in OOHC provide:

- improved skills and confidence building of carers and professionals to identify and respond indicators of harm and respond to disclosures appropriately
- health literacy skills development
- support for children and young people to seek information about sexual health from reputable and trusted services
- comprehensive, safe, correct and age appropriate RSE
- customised services and education to meet the needs of the child or young person.

5c Developing skills and knowledge about how to talk to children about healthy relationships and sexuality education

5f Ongoing coaching and supervision of staff and carers, building on their initial education and training as outlined above, to develop their knowledge of and skills in using the resources

True delivers a range of customised training and education services and resources to professionals in foster and kinship care organisations. True partnered with the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Complex Case Advice and Practice Support team to deliver a training and mentoring project for professionals working in foster and kinship care organisations in Queensland called *Shared Understandings – Relationships and Sexuality Project*. Using a strengths and solutions approach, *Shared Understandings– Relationships and Sexuality Project* is designed to increase the confidence and competence of professionals to support carers to communicate about relationships and sexuality and respond to the sexual health and behaviour needs of the children and young people in their care. The content included:

- an overview of the relationships and sexuality needs of children and young people in care
- sexuality and social learning
- values and attitudes
- healthy sexual development
- identifying, understanding and responding to sexual behaviours using the Traffic Lights framework
- strategies for communicating with children and young people in care about sexuality and relationships

True has also worked in partnership with the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian to deliver customised RSE training including:

- 2007 – Senior Officer, Research and Policy, Complaints and Child Death Review Staff Training (Brisbane)
 - To demonstrate that sexuality, sexual development and sexual health are interrelated to other aspects of health and wellbeing and emphasise that all children and young people have both needs and rights to access information and support
 - For staff to be familiar with current trends in HIV, hepatitis C, sexually transmissible infections (STI) and risk behaviour for young Australians.
- 2007- 2011 - Community Visitor Training (Statewide)
 - For CVs to be able to identify when a child, young person or carer would benefit from sexuality-related information, advocacy or referral
 - For CVs to be familiar with current trends in HIV, hepatitis C, STI and risk behaviours in young Australians

Conclusion

There is clear evidence supporting the need for access to comprehensive sexuality education and sexual health services to meet the sexuality needs of all children and young people in OOHC. There is extensive evidence to indicate that children and young people in care, due to the very reason they are in care and their experience of care, have additional needs and require support to have their needs met. They are consistently represented throughout the literature as enormously at risk.

There is a substantial evidence base that underpins the implementation of effective strategies to meet the sexuality and relationships education and information needs of children and young people in care. Specifically an effective response requires the development and implementation of policy and guidelines, training and RSE programs for young people and their carers.

It is recommended that The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse make requirements assisting OOHC providers in Australia to implement strategies to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all in regards to the sexuality and sexual health of children and young people. An effective response requires leadership and calls for a commitment to the development and implementation of policy, training and supervision and education programs for OOHC institutions and the systems which they are located within.

References

- Australian Childhood Foundation. (2005). Children who engage in problem sexual behaviours: Context, characteristics and treatment: A review of the literature. ACF: Deakon.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2008). Child protection Australia 2006-07. Child Welfare Series, No. 43. Canberra: AIHW.
- Becker, M.G. & Barth, R.P. (2000). Power through choices: The development of a sexuality education curriculum for youth in out-of-home care. *Child Welfare*, 79 (3), 269-282.
- Bilaver, L.A. & Courtney, M.E. (2006). Science says: foster care youth. *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*, 27, 1-7.
- Brennan, H. and Graham, J. (2012) *Is this normal? Understanding your child's sexual behaviour*. Brisbane: True.
- Brennan, H (2008). *Settings and Solutions: Supporting access to sexuality and relationship information for children in care*. Brisbane: True.
- Brick, P. (1989). *Fostering Positive Sexuality* (1st ed.). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_199109_brick.pdf
- Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. (2007). *Snapshot 2007: Children and young people in Queensland*. Brisbane: CCYPCG.
- Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. (2006). *Child Guardian: Views of children and young people in care Queensland 2006*. Brisbane: CCYPCG.
- Craig-Oldsen, H., Craig J.A. and Morton. T. (2006). Issues of shared parenting of LGBTQ children and youth in foster care: Preparing foster parents for new roles. *Child Welfare*, 85 (2), 267 – 280.
- Crime and Misconduct Commission. (2004). *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*. Brisbane: Crime and Misconduct Commission.
- Finkelhor, D. (2007). Prevention of sexual abuse through educational programs directed towards children. *American academy of pediatrics*, 120, 640 –645.
- Fitzgerald, P. (1997). *Bridging the gap: Commercial sexual exploitation of young people in metropolitan Melbourne*. Melbourne: ECPAT Australia Incorporated.
- Gallagher, B., Brannan, C., Jones, R. & Westwood, S. (2004). Good in practice in the education of children in residential care. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34, 1133- 1160.
- Jones, R., Ownbey, M., Everidge, J., Judkins, B. & Timbers, G. (2006). Focused foster care for children with serious sexual behaviour problems. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 23 (3), 278 –297
- Mayden, B. (1995). Access to sexuality information for out-of-home youth. *SIECUS Report*, 24 (1), 13-15.
- Mueller, T., Gavin, L. & Kulkarni, A. (2008). The association between sex education and youth's engagement in sexual intercourse, age first intercourse, and birth control use at first sex. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 42, 89-96.
- Queensland Crime Commission and Queensland Police Service. (2000). *Project Axis: Child abuse in Queensland: The nature and extent*. Brisbane: QCC.
- Ragg, D.M., Patrick, D. & Zeifert, M. (2006). Slamming the closet door: Working with gay and lesbian youth in care. *Child Welfare*. 85. 2. 243-265.
- Risley-Curtis, C. (1997). Sexual activity and contraceptive use among children entering out- of-home care. *Journal of Child Welfare*. 76.4. 475-499. 32.
- Sanderson, J. (2004). *Child-focused sexual abuse prevention programs – How effective are they in preventing child abuse? Research and Issues Paper Series*. Brisbane: Crime and Misconduct Commission.
- True. (2001). *Every Body Needs to Know*. Brisbane: True.
- True. (2006). *Sexual behaviours in children and adolescents: A guide to identify, assess and respond to sexual behaviours that cause concern*. Brisbane: True.
- True. (2012). *Safe Is...* Brisbane: True.
- True. (2015). *Communicating about sexuality with children*. Retrieved April 26 2016. from <http://www.true.org.au/Resources/shop#!/Communicating-about-sexuality/p/62799436/category=18243048>