Children and Young People with Disability Australia

Supporting Children and Young People with Disability Experiencing Family Violence

Learnings from the Safety Beyond Barriers Research Project

About CYDA

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) are the peak organisation representing the rights and interests of children and young people with disability (aged 0-25) in Australia.

We are a not for profit organisation who consult young people with disability, their families and caregivers about the issues that matter to them.

We do this by:

- **Listening** to young people with disability, families and caregivers about the issues that matter to them
- **Building** leadership and connections through youth programs and events.
- **Developing** practical resources that promote rights and wellbeing.
- **Advocating** for change by working with government and decision-makers.
- **Building** the evidence base through research with academic partners.
- **Influencing** policy through submissions and advice to government.

About the Project

Project Title: Safety Beyond Barriers: Diverse Family Perspectives on Violence and Disability

In 2025, CYDA received funding from the National Disability Research Partnership's Safety of People with Disability Research Fund ($60, 000)

Project duration – 9 months

Children and young people with disability experience family violence at higher rates, yet their experiences are often overlooked or poorly understood. Support systems for disability and for family violence are frequently separate, making it harder for victim-survivors to get the help they need.

Through lived experience co-design, and active participation of an advisory group of disability and family violence experts, the project generated practical, evidence-based recommendations to improve family violence prevention and response systems.

Project Partners

Research Partner:

- Australian Institute of Family Studies (Research Partner)
- **Co-designers – 4 people with lived experience of FDV, and/or disability**

Advisory Panel:

- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS)
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- First Peoples Disability Network
- National Ethnic Disability Alliance
- Women With Disabilities Australia
- Inclusive Rainbow Voices, and
- Regional Disability Advocacy Service.

Project overview

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The issue we explored

- This project examined how children and young people with disability from diverse backgrounds experience family and domestic violence (FDV) in Australia

Why this issue matters

- Children and young people with disability experience higher rates of violence (FDV) than their peers without disability, yet their experiences are often overlooked in research, policy and practices. This means children and young people with disability are often not recognised as **victim-survivors in their own right**.
- There are also challenges accessing the right support. Disability and FDV services often operate separately, making it difficult to receive coordinated, holistic care. These challenges are intensified for those experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage, including First Nations children, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ communities, those living in regional areas, or experiencing poverty. Without better research and coordination, these gaps will continue.

Project Lessons Learned

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- Co-designers with lived experience of disability, FDV and diverse life experiences shaped a research proposal for future study, providing insight into the priorities and opportunities identified by this key cohort.
- Co-designers participated in a preparatory information session, three co-design sessions over six months and had final review/approval.

This approach ensured the research reflects what matters most to people with lived experience and is grounded in real-world perspectives.

What worked well

- Early and ongoing involvement of co-designers supported genuine collaboration, trust and inclusion. Providing a preparatory information session helped build shared understanding of research, ethics and FDV, supporting meaningful participation.
- Clear roles, shared decision making and accessible materials created a strong foundation for engagement. Co-designers had final decision-making power, ensuring the research priorities were shaped by lived experience. Dedicated roles, including a lived experience facilitator and a Safety and Wellbeing Officer, were critical in creating a safe and respectful environment.

Project Lessons Learned

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What was challenging and what could be improved

- It was difficult to fully represent the diversity of experiences, particularly for people who are less often heard, such as those who are non-verbal or have intellectual disability. Some participants also held dual roles within the project, which created challenges around workload, boundaries and privacy.

- Co-designers recognised that no single project can capture all experiences. This work provides a strong foundation, but future research will need more time and resources to broaden participation and continue strengthening safe, inclusive approaches.

Autonomy and Accessibility for victim/survivors who are Children and Young People with Disability

Autonomy

It is crucial that victim/survivors are given autonomy.

Not only is this a right, but it will also support recovery and wellbeing.

Children and young people with disability face consistent disempowerment due to ableism and infantilisation, making this particularly important.

- Offer the child or young person meaningful choices and creating opportunities for the young person to try new things.
- Use a mentoring/Socratic questioning approach. Children and young people have the capability to find answers for themselves.
- Support dignity of risk by explaining your obligations and potential impacts of a decision while trusting the young person to make the decision.

Restoring connection and belonging through taking a holistic, person-centred approach to choices offered and opportunities explored.

Accessibility

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Begin any new client relationship by acknowledging the person's wellbeing and comfort as being important. Then ask:

- Is there anything I can do to make this easier or more accessible?
- Provide examples, such as; taking breaks, different ways to communicate, going for a walk while talking, using sensory items to help regulate.

To support communication, you may want to use multiple choice questions. This will particularly support people who use alternative communication methods such as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices. It will also support decision making in telehealth environments.

Young people with disability are often not listened too, and not being given the opportunity to contribute. Frequently repeat back the language used, ask questions, and give them the opportunity to expand or clarify what they meant.

Want to know more about the SBB project?

Check out our website where you can review the evidence scan and project resources.

[Safety Beyond Barriers - CYDA]

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