

SHine SA Life Out Loud Pilot Project Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The SHine SA Life Out Loud (LOL) pilot project aims to improve the relationships and sexual health of young people with a disability (PWD), to address the gap which had been identified: that *'people with disabilities have the most need and least choice'* around relationships and sexual health. The pilot project was implemented throughout 2011 and early 2012 as a partnership between SHine SA and Orana, to demonstrate the possibilities in using a capacity building approach to address relationships and sexual health. SHine SA provided initial training for key Orana staff and subsequently, both SHine SA and those Orana staff provided training for young people with a disability, other Orana accommodation and workshop staff, and parents/carers.

This report discusses the findings and the implications of the evaluation of Life Out Loud, which was conducted through 2011 and early 2012 by the SA Community Health Research Unit. **The evaluation focused on three key areas:**

1. What worked well, and what could be improved in project implementation
2. Outcomes for young people with a disability and Orana
3. The sustainability of LOL as a model

The evaluation used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, including: secondary SHine SA monitoring data, a stakeholder survey, one focus group with parents of young people, three focus groups and one interview with Orana and SHine SA staff, and an e-survey with key partners. The evaluation examined the process of building the Orana-SHine SA partnership, and various aspects around implementation of the pilot project such as recruitment and engaging young people with a disability, their parents/carers and Orana staff.

The Orana–SHine SA Partnership

LOL uses a capacity building model, whereby the knowledge, skills, awareness and capacity of the partner organisation are built through the partnership with SHine SA. Orana staff are enthusiastic about the project and its impacts, however, being a pilot project, the systems and processes remained undefined in the early stages of project implementation, which inevitably led to some 'on the run' implementation. Certainly, some issues may have been difficult to predict prior to implementation, but SHine SA have since been able to identify areas for improvement. 'Pinning

down' some of those aspects of implementation early in the partnership has been identified as important.

The partnership underpins the outcomes of the project, and the sustainability of the project within the partner organisation. A successful partnership could best be supported through:

- Carefully selecting a partner organisation which demonstrates leadership in the sector.
- Enhancing the sense of ownership for the partner organisation.
- Identifying project non-negotiable course content and project outcomes.
- Clarifying project processes early in the partnership.
- Identifying common ground around relationships and sexual health between
- Recognising that intensive resources and input are required in order to fully develop the partnership before, during and after the project itself.

Engaging Orana staff and parents

Orana staff were involved as either LOL project staff, or as training participants. Staff were overwhelmingly positive about their involvement in LOL - this positive feedback is indicative of the experiences of Orana staff:

It was very beneficial for us, as a start, so we'd know what our clients would be going through. It was quite enlightening and informative for us, and good to interact with other staff. (Netley supervisor)

However, there were mixed perceptions of the role of a project such as LOL:

[LOL] is not a workplace [workshop] related course. (Orana staff member)

I was very aware of the necessity for this within the industry. I was very excited – it's fantastic – that Orana was chosen and went ahead with it. (Accommodation worker)

LOL parents were invited to attend a consultation session. Those who attended appeared to have been comforted, in terms of knowing what LOL involved, despite still being worried about what it might mean for their offspring, as described by this parent:

We came to a pre-session... We went away feeling like maybe we were opening Pandora's box... like condoms and masturbation... but he's 26 and he does need to know about it. And this was in a controlled environment with experts... that session really helped us.

Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of LOL, however parental engagement in LOL was generally much lower than anticipated. Consultation attendance was low, and it was not possible to recruit for parent training which was intended to parallel client training. In future it will be very important to engage parents in constructive ways, so that they can best support their offspring through and beyond LOL.

Outcomes for people with a disability

Our daughter thoroughly enjoyed the group... She felt very important, and she always wanted to discuss with me when she got home, and showed me her folder. (Parent)

The evaluation examined the changes amongst the clients who participated in LOL across areas such as relationships and sexual health knowledge, skills, awareness, attitudes and behaviour. Improvements in practical skills, most commonly around privacy practices and hygiene, were frequently seen, as well as new knowledge about the body, relationships and sexuality. LOL has successfully 'lifted the silence' for PWD, with improved communication seen amongst PWD and also between PWD and Orana staff or parents:

My son can now communicate in an open and frank way. (Parent)

PWD also demonstrated increased understandings of respectful relationships, personal space, privacy and what's acceptable in different situations:

We have participants openly talking in the workplace about private and public behaviours, and what they feel is appropriate or not appropriate. (Netley supervisor)

Outcomes for Orana staff and the agency

Orana staff were able to identify a number of ways in which their knowledge and skills had improved, such as having more confidence to talk with clients, and feeling better equipped to deal with incidents or challenging behaviours. A number of Orana staff members felt better able to support their clients, particularly in the accommodation setting:

Thank you for the chance to best support my clients! (Orana staff member)

Many Orana stakeholders identified that LOL had created a new 'space' for openness on topics around relationships and sexual health:

LOL has set the scene for things to become more open, for things to not be so taboo, and we can talk about it... get rid of some of that stigma. (Accommodation worker)

Project synergies

LOL uses a multi-layered approach, such that parents, workplace supervisors, accommodation support workers, client services coordinators and clients all receive skills development training around relationships and sexual health. There is a perception amongst stakeholders that various aspects of the LOL approach had all contributed to outcomes:

The staff discussions & the parent discussions (and) the LOL young people's groups worked well together and encouraged supportive learning. (SHine SA staff)

The multi-layered approach certainly resulted in better support for clients around relationships and sexual health, although it was suggested that focusing resources on accommodation staff instead of workshop staff may be more efficient due to the more intimate role accommodation staff play in the lives of clients. Again, strengthening the parental involvement in LOL will be important in the future, to support the multi-layer approach which can best support PWD.

Sustainability of the LOL model

The capacity building model employed for LOL has demonstrated clear outcomes for people with a disability and the partner agency, Orana. The model shows promise for SHine SA as an alternative for

the current reactive approach to addressing relationships and sexual health amongst the disability sector, and has made progress in demonstrating 'what's possible' when working with an agency partner. Nevertheless, the model, which as a group based program would ideally offer some efficiencies and opportunities for scaling-up, hinges to a large extent on components which are resource intensive, including:

- Partnership selection and building
- Parental engagement
- A tailored and highly supported group setting approach.

The value of the LOL model lays in the sustainability of both the outcomes and the approach in the organisational partner. Planned and well-resourced investment into the first two of the above factors – the partnership and parental engagement – will go a long way towards securing sustainability within the organisation. Developing organisational 'champions' alongside a broad base of organisational support is a strategy which may successfully promote sustainability. Without organisational sustainability, LOL remains a relatively resource intensive project which created outcomes for a small number of people. The evaluation has revealed a very strong commitment to the LOL model from almost all stakeholders, and the outcomes which have been seen amongst the participants demonstrate the potential to implement an approach to relationships and sexual health which promotes the fundamental human rights of people with a disability.

Looking forward...

For SHine SA, any movement towards the LOL model in the future rests on the new organisational structure to support a capacity building approach. Such an approach will no doubt be well received, and successful, if the successes of the pilot are capitalised upon, and the challenges are addressed. If implemented to its potential, the LOL model offers efficiencies and strong outcomes when compared to the previously reactive approach from SHine SA to relationships and sexual health issues in the disability sector.

The outcomes for the partner organisation and the individuals who participate in LOL are clear. The model is most effective when those outcomes are sustained within, and spread across the partner organisation. This could be achieved through:

- Following up participants to enhance learning and address unresolved issues
- Structures, policies and processes supporting implementation of skills and approaches
- Follow up support from SHine SA to develop the partner organisation

For SHine SA, the LOL model is very promising, and rests upon an organisational commitment and ability to appropriately resource a partnership approach.