

## **Date-Ability – a project to empower people on the NDIS to date safely.**

### **Authors:**

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### **Background/Purpose:**

Regardless of the Convention on the rights of persons with disability, people with a disability continue to struggle to express their sexual rights.

There have been many reasons for this: lack of education, lack of support, access to funds, discouragement by supports, lack of services, and social/community stigma.

The NDIA struggled with this gap in its early years, reluctant to fund services, and with very limited disability specific sexual health education services available.

NDIS participants engaging in financial literacy training were often victims of scams; There was a lack of knowledge about safe & healthy relationships, including online dating, sexual boundaries, and consent.

The Date-Ability Project was designed and developed by a team of folk with specific knowledge in the areas of psychology, sexology, and community services to help facilitate this gap.

### **Approach:**

Date-Ability is delivered holistically in a small group setting.

Each session practises skills and education on important elements for building relationships:

- Self-awareness & advocacy
- Interpersonal skills
- Boundaries & consent
- Staying safe online
- Sexuality & sexual wellbeing

The program has been designed to be delivered in a safe, fun, and interactive format.

The Date-Ability program is by design and intent an adaptable program.

When the consent legislation changed in some states to become affirmative consent, the program adapted.

When clients see a need for additional information to be included, we try and adapt.

### **Outcomes/Impact:**

In the last 3 years Date-Ability has been presented 267 times, in 21 locations across 5 states to over 1,075 clients.

Of those 1,075 clients, a large percentage attended further sessions in one-on-one counselling.

### **Innovation and Significance:**

- Targeted to a specific needs group

- Contextualised sexual health education, in a dating framework
- Education to avoid trauma and gaps in education.
- A constant work in progress guided by client contribution.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement (example):**

First Step Solutions and all of its programs are funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme and attended to by people with disabilities who have goals relating to creating & maintaining safe and healthy relationships/social connections. Ebony Swan is employed by First Step Solutions as the Operations Manager. Deborah G Vanderwerp is employed by First Step Solutions as Counsellor.