

## SEXUALITY & DISABILITY: REALISING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

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**Issues:** People with intellectual disabilities experience significant disparities in sexual and reproductive health. This includes inequitable access to health services, higher prevalence of abuse and violence, and lack of information and education<sup>1</sup>. Those supporting them are often ill-equipped to have conversations which will empower them to realise their sexual and reproductive health rights.

**Description:** Family Planning engages with support workers, teachers and whānau, and delivers workshops and training. This focuses on building knowledge around sexual and reproductive health and rights, developing skills to have supportive conversations, and exploring attitudes and values. Through this, professionals are equipped to provide effective support to their clients.

Family Planning also works directly with people with intellectual disabilities, empowering them to realise their rights, to communicate and to have safe and enjoyable experiences and relationships.

**Lessons learned:** Evaluations show that following training, professionals felt more confident and equipped to provide support around sexuality and relationships. Professionals adapted their language and had more open, positive conversations. Individuals with intellectual disabilities expressed their enjoyment of having open and honest discussions. With a deeper understanding of positive sexuality, many sought out health and support services and initiated conversations with their partners and whānau.

**Next steps:** On-going support is required for all professionals and others supporting people with intellectual disabilities to ensure access to accurate, comprehensive information that meets their diverse needs. Additional funding and training is needed for all professionals working with vulnerable individuals to ensure information is strengths based rather than solely focused on harm reduction.

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<sup>1</sup> Greenwood, N. W., & Wilkinson, J. (2013). Sexual and reproductive health care for women with intellectual disabilities: a primary care perspective. *International journal of family medicine*, 2013.