

Power to Kids

Strengthening prevention and responses to sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviours and dating violence for young people in residential care.



Why we need Power to Kids

Many children and young people living in out of home care have experienced repeated family violence and trauma, making them highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviours and dating violence.

This risk is even greater for children and young people in residential care. They are the subject of 80% of sexual exploitation reports for all children in care, despite only comprising 6% of this cohort (Victoria, October 2018 – August 2021).

Prevention and early intervention is key to protecting children in care and reducing this risk. However, many carers are not equipped with skills to identify and respond to these risks, or to have necessary, but difficult conversations about sexual safety.

About the program

Power to Kids is a program that upskills carers, building their knowledge and confidence to have 'brave conversations' about sexual safety and providing them with strategies to intervene early when they see indicators of abuse.

By upskilling carers, Power to Kids aims to increase young people's understanding about healthy relationships and sexual safety. We can strengthen the young person's safety by teaching carers about respectful relationships, grooming behaviour and sexual exploitation.



"Six weeks ago, I don't think he would have come forward...Now he knows that this actually isn't okay... I think that the project has definitely had an influence on him and made him feel comfortable to talk to the staff around what has happened."

– Case Manager referring to a young man disclosing an act of harmful sexual behaviour



"One striking thing that came out of (the program) was that the girls mentioned to the carers that they should be talking to one of the other girls in the house, because they think she's being groomed by her uncle... the girls seemed concerned about this relationship...and mentioned that to the carers..."

– Sexual Health Nurse



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How the program works

Power to Kids was designed and implemented by MacKillop Family Services in partnership with the University of Melbourne, after a review of prevention strategies used across the world. The program has been implemented and evaluated in MacKillop residential homes and is now being offered, through The MacKillop Institute, to residential care providers across Australia.

The program implements three prevention strategies:

Strategy 1

Whole-of-house respectful relationships and sexuality education.

Training and coaching workers and carers in a whole-of-house approach, including recognising and responding to harmful sexual behaviours, child sexual exploitation and dating violence; and educating children about respectful relationships and sexual health and safety.

Strategy 2

Missing from home strategy.

Establishing practice partnerships between each child or young person and their residential carers to counter grooming; assertively engaging young people using safety planning and social media or phones to stay in touch especially when missing from home; and working collaboratively with external agencies to disrupt child sexual exploitation.

Strategy 3

Sexual safety response.

Early identification, safety planning, advocacy and therapeutic treatment for harmful sexual behaviours and dating violence and proactively supporting exit strategies for child sexual exploitation (including strengthening relationships with family of origin); and joining-up of residential care workers, local professionals and frontline police. Key to this response is the reconnection of the young person to family, culture and education.

How we can help you

We are committed to reducing child sexual exploitation for ALL children and young people in residential care in Australia.

This is why we are excited to offer Power to Kids training to every residential care provider in Australia.

We also have an opt-in suite of tools and consultation services available. These are designed to support local implementation and engagement with stakeholders and personalise the approach to suit your local context.

We are offering FREE Power to Kids training to all Australian residential care providers in 2022, funded by Westpac.

We look forward to talking with your organisation about training and implementation opportunities and to partnering with you to reduce the risks of child sexual exploitation for all children and young people in residential care.

Find out more, attend our introductory events or register your interest at:
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