The experiences of children and young people with disability: A key informant of policy and practice
About CYDA

• National representative organisation for children and young people with disability, aged 0 to 25 years
• Work to ensure the direct experiences of children and young people with disability informs policy and practice
• 5500+ members nationally
Children and young people with disability - Background

- 7.3% of all children and young people in Australia (0 to 24) have a disability
- Highly diverse cohort
- Most children with disability 0 to 14 (99.7%) live with their families
- Contact with a range of mainstream and disability specific service systems
Experience of abuse - Statistics

• Problems with the research – lack of quality prevalence data in Australia

• International research suggests children and young people with disability 3 times more vulnerable to abuse than their peers

• Children and young people with communication and behavior support needs, intellectual disability and sensory disability experience higher rates of abuse

• Abuse often on multiple occasions
Direct experiences

- Disadvantage and discrimination common for children and young people with disability in the community
- Frequently informed of experiences of abuse of children and young people with disability in institutional settings
- Experiences of abuse are typical and have long term consequences
- Entrenches isolation of children and young people with disability
- Many reports of abuse made to CYDA concern education settings – key concern is lack of recognition and response
Direct experiences

I get bullied about my disability and the way I work. At lunch time I go to the library to avoid this. I wish people would accept me – Student aged 10 years.

My son has been sprayed with water to 'stop' a behaviour. He had his face held by an aide to teach him to look him in the eye. He was locked in a room alone with a ceiling fan going for most of the day, when I collected him he was on the floor asleep in his own vomit – Parent.

Over a number of months, our son’s lunchbox would come home from school virtually untouched. His teacher then told me in a meeting that she won’t let him eat his food unless he goes and gets his lunchbox with the other students. His disability means he finds this hard to do – Parent.
Direct experiences

“They said I would be safe”

Drawing by a high school student about her school experience
What increases vulnerability?

**ATTITUDES**

- Common attitudes in the community position children and young people with disability as incapable, a burden, inferior, helpless or objects of pity
- Abuse is not recognised and different standards apply – it is ‘acceptable’ because the child or young person has a disability
- Abuse is justified and renamed as ‘behaviour management,’ OH&S, ‘an incident’
- Abuse is denied
What increases vulnerability?

**ATTITUDES**

- Assumption that children and young people with disability don’t understand and are not affected
- Communication support needs often mean the child or young person is not listened to
- Responses to abuse are inadequate
- Chronic devaluing and exclusion – abuse becomes the norm
Barriers to reporting abuse

• Abuse not recognised or effects minimised
• Segregation and isolation
• Dependency on others
• Accountability of organisations – actively encourage
• Access to justice and equality before the law
Barriers to reporting abuse

- Children and young people with communication and behaviour support needs:
  - difficulty articulating what happened
  - behaviour is wrongly attributed as manifestation of disability
- Minimal or no access to protective behaviours and sexuality education
Linking direct experience to policy and practice

- Organisational culture and attitudes are critical:
  - value and respect children and young people with disability
  - value diversity
  - inclusion
  - the rights of the child are paramount (and come before the rights of the organisation)
  - accountability
- Asking children and young people about what is needed to be safe
- Child safe practice critical due to additional vulnerability of children and young people with disability
Enabling and Protecting — Issues paper

- Available in hard copy from CYDA
- Electronic version available at CYDA website