



Lotus Place Participants Focus Group Report

Brisbane group two held on 18 April 2018

Report written by Ann Porcino

A brief review of services at Lotus Place is being undertaken to inform plans for the future of Lotus Place, following the conclusion of the Royal Commission and the likely reduction in funding for Lotus Place as a result.

The review began in April with four focus groups with Lotus Place Participants; two in Brisbane and one each in Rockhampton and Townsville. People who could not attend the groups were invited to send written submissions (four were received) or to be interviewed by telephone by either the consultant or Micah Projects staff member (seven telephone interviews were conducted). A meeting was also held with the Historical Abuse Network, which focused on the future of advocacy through Lotus Place. Staff of Lotus Place were given a verbal report of the themes arising from the above and met for a day and a half to discuss future directions of Lotus Place.

Ann Porcino is the consultant working with Micah Projects on this project. She facilitated the meetings and focus groups above and wrote this report of the findings of the focus group in Brisbane held from 9.30am – 12pm on Wednesday 18 April, 2018. Seventeen Lotus Place Participants attended this session.

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Lotus Place

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Our hope is to create justice and respond to injustice at the personal, social and structural levels in society.

We work collaboratively with people who experienced abuse and neglect in institutions, foster care and detention centres.

We acknowledge their courage as they move from adversity to hope in seeking public recognition, justice and redress.

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1. Most valued services now

Participants used 'talking paper' notes to individually identify the top three services and supports they most appreciated from Lotus Place. The themes arising from this discussion are reported here. Areas listed were mentioned by at least one participant, though often by a number or all of those present.

- Being able to **connect with the community**. Lotus Place is a social centre and people find camaraderie and companionship there, with others who understand and respect the shared history.
- **Activities**, which provide connection and someone to talk with, including Tuesday lunches and events such as Remembrance Day.
- **One to one help** to access services and supports and develop life skills.
- Support with **reunions and reconnection** including with historical research.
- The **information** made available by Lotus Place for people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care, such as through the Lily Pad.
- **Counselling** support.
- Being able to be part of **advocacy and discrimination work** and inter-governmental communication.
- Use of facilities such as the photocopier and computers.

2. Future support needs

Participants next identified their most important future support needs. There was a suggestion that the role of Lotus Place in the future be defined, including what it needs from government to provide services, so that it can go strongly ahead.

The needs identified by one or more members of the group are as follows:

Group activities

- There was support for continued delivery of **group activities** such as a Saturday BBQ, aqua aerobics classes, other group outings (Lotus Place could hire a bus to get people there), potentially a group weekend camp away (Stradbroke Island?) or men's and women's groups.
- People want **support for local support groups** or to start a Lotus Place in Caboolture or other locations. There is a continued need to spread the word of mouth about Lotus Place particularly to people who are isolated and to help them to come along to events.

Practical assistance

- Practical supports such as help with **computer and technical skills**, including spelling and reading. There was also support for cooking classes to support

the lunches, as previously.

- **Help with transport.** It was suggested that Lotus Place could have a bus or otherwise have a policy that is consistently applied to help people to get to Lotus Place events and to appointments.

Support to access mainstream services

- People want **caseworker support** to continue. They value assistance with accessing hospitals, Centrelink and specialists health and support services. Outreach support will continue to be necessary in the future, particularly for people living alone or not able to come in for services.
- Of particular note was the request for assistance to be provided so people can find **secure and safe housing**, including access to rental assistance.

Supports relevant to ageing and health

- Many people are concerned about aging. The group wanted Lotus Place in the future to provide **aged care supports** such as:
 - assistance with nursing homes – avoiding them if at all possible but where this is not possible, ensuring there are nursing homes that understand the history and needs of people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care
 - assistance in accessing age care packages to suit the individual
 - access to funding for transitions that people may need to make into aged care facilities.
- **Healthcare assistance.** There was a request for more support with going to appointments and for more assistance helping hospitals understand the triggers for people who experienced childhood abuse when accessing services (for example the impact of putting a person who experienced childhood abuse into a mixed room).
- **Free medical card.** The cost of health care is a key concern to this group. People strongly advocated the need for a free medical card for people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care that will give them access to dental and medical care as well as mental health services.

Help in getting justice

Participants want legal support and help with the aftermath of the Royal Commission, including help to read and understand Commission reports.

Counselling support

- Some people indicated that they would like to be able to see **counsellors at Lotus Place.**

- Some people suggested that there needs to be an **after hours phone line** (not necessarily run through Lotus Place) that people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care can access which is not a church run line.

Other

- For people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care to be able to get **more assistance from the Forde Foundation**, as financial needs are greater as people age than they were previously. It was suggested that resources to support people should come from the Churches, who should pay or be taxed for the harm caused.
- To be able **to join the Reference Group (RG)** and to be part of advocacy. One advocacy issue that the RG might take on is to ensure that family inherits redress on the death of a person who experienced childhood abuse.
- **Connect people who experienced childhood abuse** as appropriate to Link Up, reconciliation groups and appropriate cultural services.
- For the **memorial** (Wall of Remembrance) to be on display all the time.