



Lotus Place Participants Focus Group Report

Townsville group held on 19 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 (4 were received) or to be interviewed by telephone by either the consultant or Micah Projects staff member (7 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 1.5 days 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 held in Townsville on Thursday 19 April, from 9.30am – 12pm.

(continued over page)

Lotus Place NQ

382 Sturt Street, Townsville Q 4810

PO Box 2027 Townsville Q 4810

Ph 07 4724 4410 or Find & Connect 1800 16 11 09

lotusnq@micahprojects.org.au

lotusplace.org.au | micahprojects.org.au

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.

Funded by



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 come to the office and just hang out** in the company of others who were in the 'homes' was highly valued by participants. However it was noted that the drop-in centre was no longer available to Lotus Place Participants in the Townsville area. Participants living in Townsville were universally unhappy that they had to make appointments to attend Townsville Lotus Place and were otherwise 'locked out'. Some described how important it is to their mental health and well being to be able to talk to staff and one another informally and want the Townsville Lotus Place drop-in centre restored.
- **Social activities** were highly valued by participants, including the fishing club and sausages sizzles.
- **Support groups** like the Mackay, Cairns and Burdekin support groups are seen as very important, because they give people who experienced childhood abuse in these communities a way to meet together face to face.
- **Information** provided through the newsletters and emails to keep people informed of issues of relevance to people who experienced childhood abuse, such as the Royal Commission, is important to participants.
- Having a **male worker** was valued by some of the men.
- **North Queensland Reference Group** was very valued because it brought people who experienced childhood abuse together from a wide geographic area. The fact that numbers are limited and that participants apply by expression of interest, means that meetings are good and result in useful outcomes, including that people on the Reference Group get great ideas from one another.

2. Future support needs

Participants next identified their most important future support needs. There was a call for Lotus Place to be much clearer about its role and what it can and cannot do, so that Lotus Place Participants know what to expect.

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

Practical assistance

A range of types of practical assistance were suggested. Lotus Place could:

- collect and provide **information** on services and supports that people who

experienced childhood abuse can get in the community (and set up a place for people to share information that they have)

- provide assistance with **writing letters and completing forms**
- provide training on how to use **computers and other technology** and on topics such as household budgeting
- provide assistance with **transport** to get to Lotus Place events.

Supports relevant to ageing and health

'The older I get the lonelier I get'; so began the discussion about the needs of people who experienced childhood abuse as people age. Participants described a mix of things that Lotus Place could facilitate to help people feel less alone:

- **Being able to come to the Lotus Place office** whenever it is open.
- **Supporting people to visit one another**, including coming up with a system so people know when someone is sick or in hospital or other facility (the system must enable quick notification of friends and also ensure that Lotus Place Participants give their permission for information to be shared). Pointing out that 'we are all family to each other', the group described how important it is that Lotus Place Participants visit one another: 'when we visit our friends, we can watch how they are being treated and staff know that they have friends.'
- **Assistance to remain at home**. 'We don't want to be incarcerated again!' was a roundly agreed sentiment expressed by one participant. Participants would appreciate information about alternatives to nursing home and assistance obtaining these supports, such as My Aged Care and NDIS.
- Lotus Place can also provide **information that may help people who have to go to a nursing home** to be less fearful. When people do have to go into a nursing home, they want to know that Lotus Place will still be in touch with them.
- Lotus Place making a real effort to **train nursing home staff** about people who experienced childhood abuse so they know what to do and NOT to do when people are residents, such as that many people who experienced childhood abuse do not want to close the doors or have really difficult nights.

Support to access mainstream services

This includes: educating service providers about people who experienced childhood abuse and their needs; assisting people to write an information letter that they can give to healthcare providers that explains about them and their life circumstances; and development of an insert that people can complete and take with them to be inserted into their files or given to a provider of healthcare.

Counselling support

There is an ongoing need for people who experienced childhood abuse to be referred to trained counsellors or psychologists who can help. Participants also expressed the view that it should be clear to Lotus Place Participants that Lotus Place staff are NOT trained counsellors and are not there to counsel Lotus Place Participants; rather that they are there to listen well to people and, when people need it, to refer.

3. Reaching people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care who are unable to come to Lotus Place

There are many people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care who can't get to Lotus Place, either because of the distance, because they are physically unable to attend or because they do not want to come to a local centre. Participants suggested the following might help to improve access to supports and services for these people:

- Continue with the NQ Reference Group and support groups in various communities.
- Where people cannot access a face-to-face support group invite people to connect to a 'virtual' support group, through using TAFE and other facilities that offer video conferencing.
- Potentially facilitate a buddy system, so that people who experienced childhood abuse can contact one another.
- Staff of Lotus Place can have a list of Lotus Place Participants who would appreciate a regular call and then can check in with these people regularly (such as once per month).