



## Lotus Place Participants Focus Group Report

**Brisbane group one** held on 17 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 first focus group in Brisbane, held from 5 – 7.30pm on Tuesday 17 April, 2018. Fifteen Lotus Place Participants and a number of Lotus Place and Micah Projects staff 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 identify the top three services and supports they most appreciated from Lotus Place. Here are the themes identified by one or more of the Lotus Place participants:

- The **welcoming staff and the community**; being accepted by peers
- **Activities**, which provide connection, including:
  - lunches and the drop in day
  - classes and activities including art group, Bollywood dancing, music and singing, drama group, mindful movement and creative writing
  - social events like the Christmas party and Moonlight Magic Dinner Dance
- **Help to access services and supports** (such as housing support)
- **Find and Connect** services
- Concrete assistance and emotional **support with the Royal Commission**, including help accessing records and completing submissions
- **Forde Foundation grants**.

Services that were provided and appreciated in the past but are no longer provided were also identified by some participants. These include on-site counsellors, outside activities and cooking classes.

## 2. Future support needs

Participants next identified their most important future support needs. The needs identified by one or more members of the group are as follows:

### Practical assistance

- **Education** – including connecting people to reading and writing supports and training in relationships such as active listening
- **Transport** – as this is getting harder for people as they age (there is strong support for a free or low cost transport card for Lotus Place Participants)
- **Connection to wellness programs** – either at Lotus Place or outside
- **A notice board** where people coming into Lotus Place could share information with one another, like information on where to get free food.

### Supports relevant to ageing and health

- **Aged care supports**, such as:
  - developing plans for what people would like to happen as they age
  - helping people access aged care services, including information about what is available to Lotus Place Participants (cleaning, shopping, home

nursing and having someone to talk with) and help completing forms (this is a high priority for participants, many of whom expressed a desire to never have to go into a nursing home)

- connection to services that can assist in dismantling the house and getting rid of things.

Participants were strongly supportive of the idea, suggested by one participant, that Micah Projects could provide aged care services, even an aged care home, for people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care.

→ **Healthcare assistance**, including help with:

- medications which are confusing
- the cost of healthcare, medication and equipment (“we need a gold card”)
- accessing health care providers who know about and have compassion for people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care.

### **Support to access mainstream services**

Participants want Centrelink, real estate agents, housing commission and other service providers to be aware of their circumstances and to “treat us well”.

This would be facilitated by:

- Lotus Place Participants distributing the explanation card and other explanatory materials to people in the service system they are dealing with
- training Lotus Place Participants about how to speak up with providers
- training of service providers on the needs of Lotus Place Participants.

### **Counselling support**

Access to counsellors should continue to be facilitated by Lotus Place; counsellors who are trauma informed and trained, who know about Lotus Place Participants and who people trust to understand their situation.

There was also a strong call for staff on site at Lotus Place to have skills in trauma support so that they are able to provide immediate, appropriate assistance to Lotus Place Participants who come into the service and are triggered.

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### 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 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:

- Lotus Place could advertise state-wide services
- Lotus Place could prepare a list and connect people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care to services that can assist them
- Lotus Place staff could take occasional 'road trips' on issues of importance.