



## Lotus Place Participants Focus Group Report

**Rockhampton group** held on 16 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 Rockhampton, held from 2 – 4.30pm on Monday 16 April 2018.

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### Lotus Place CQ

159 Denison Street, Rockhampton Q 4700

PO Box 586 Rockhampton Q 4700

Ph 07 4927 7604 or Find & Connect 1800 16 11 09

lotuscq@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.

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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.

- **Social meetings and get togethers**, which provide company with other people with similar backgrounds. Specifically mentioned were the weekly morning teas, monthly luncheons, and Christmas party.
- Having the **support of Lotus Place staff**. Participants were highly complimentary of the Rockhampton staff, particularly their willingness to provide back up and support to people when they are in periods of high need.
- **Speakers on areas of interest**. Participants appreciated having guest speakers attend some of the get-togethers to speak with them on different topics of interest. They noted with appreciation the readiness of Lotus Place staff to find out the topics of most interest and to organise good speakers.
- **Find and Connect assistance**. Participants highly value the assistance they have received from Lotus Place to find out about their history and past.
- **Assistance with the Royal Commission**. People appreciated having Lotus Place staff help them to make submissions to the Royal Commission.
- **Ford Foundation grants** are highly valued and make it possible for some people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care to purchase services and equipment they need, including dental care, refrigerators, a washing machine.

## 2. Future support needs

Participants next identified their most important future support needs. There was a strong call for Lotus Place to be continued in Rockhampton for many years to come. The needs identified by one or more members of the group are as follows:

### Group activities

Participants were supportive of the continuation and development of activities to keep the mind active, reduce loneliness and build connections, such as luncheons and morning tea groups, reading, games, outings (such as trips to the zoo, shopping, going to the beach, cinema), a men's workshop and craft workshops (such as leather work, painting).

## Practical assistance

Besides the classes and activities mentioned, people want:

- to learn the basics of **technology**, particularly the use of computers and iPhones
- assistance with **transport** so they could get to Lotus Place outings and events, get to shopping and doctors appointments, etc.

## Supports relevant to ageing and health

- **Aged care supports.** Participants made it very clear that they never want to be institutionalised again and saw nursing homes as a last resort. However they want help from Lotus Place to teach them what to expect from aged care services and how to access them. They also want Lotus Place to teach nursing home providers and staff how to work with people who experienced childhood abuse, so if they should need to go into a nursing home, the home understands the past experiences and impacts on people and takes this into account when planning services.
- **Healthcare assistance.** People mentioned a variety of supports they would like, including help to get to the doctor, to settle in when coming out of the hospital and to find someone to look after animals during a hospital stay.
- **Advocacy for a gold card** for people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care is urgently sought, so people can access needed services free of charge.

## Help in getting justice

This includes: help with talking to the police and making complaints; help to access solicitors and understand their language; and support when people are going through a legal process, such as assistance with victim impact statements, sitting in on conferences and help to understand reports.

## Counselling support

Participants expressed a need for longer-term access to counselling without having to go back and re-explain their situation to a GP in order to get a new mental health plan. People asked if it is possible to find another way for them to access long term counselling other than through Medicare, such as having counselling through the redress scheme or funded by past providers. Participants also want to be able to access counsellors who understand their experiences and the impact of trauma.

## Other

- Continuation of **Forde Foundation grants**, which will be needed by people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care for many years to come.
- **Advocacy to prevent other children from being hurt** like people who experienced childhood abuse were.

### 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:

- Having more regular email contact with people, including making sure all people who experienced childhood abuse in an institutional setting or out-of-home care get information on services from Lotus Place.
- Establishment of a buddy system to connect Lotus Place Participants in the region.