Handout 10: Freedom from Exploitation and Abuse

To be free from abuse is a human and legal right of all people living in our society. People with a disability are too frequently abused, neglected and exploited.

Abuse is the maltreatment of another and includes physical, sexual, emotional abuse, physical restraint and restriction of movement (unlawful confinement).

Neglect is the failure to meet health and welfare needs including the need for physical safety.

Exploitation is taking unfair advantage of a person's vulnerability. People may be exploited financially e.g. their pension is taken from them for other people to spend, they are paid low or no wages for work done, they are overcharged for goods.

Children and adults, men and women, can all be victims of abuse. Abuse is against the law and is covered by legislation in the Crimes Act (1900). Research and anecdotal evidence report that people with a disability experience a higher rate of abuse than people who do not have a disability.

There are a number of reason for this including:

- People with a disability are often dependent on others for many areas of care and so there is increased opportunity for them to be abused. Their vulnerability can be increased if they have no way of telling anyone they are being abused or if they do not know that what is happening to them is abuse.

- They have often been segregated from society e.g. by being institutionalised and so are 'out of sight and out of mind'.

- A stereotype such as thinking that people with a disability do not have feelings has meant that people have discounted their experience of abuse. This has meant that their safety has not been considered when setting up accommodation and other services.

Library Link

www.idrs.org.au is the website of the Intellectual Disability Rights Service, a legal and human rights advocacy and educational service for people with an intellectual disability and staff. It provides information on legal rights, and also abuse and violence including plain English versions. There is a guide to resource material for those working with people with a disability.