

# **MEETING THE REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH NEEDS OF VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR SUPPORT WORKERS: DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM (PMP).**

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## **Background/Purpose:**

Low health literacy is common amongst young people residing in out-of-home care. Many have missed out on basic reproductive and sexual health (RSH) education as they have been in and out of care, disengaged with mainstream schooling, and/or have not had the benefit of positive modelling of respectful relationships. It is critical that professionals working with these young people are well-equipped to address their RSH needs.

## **Approach:**

In this session we will explore gaps in these young peoples' knowledge and understanding of RSH, and the learning needs of professionals who work with them. We will describe the development of a new professional mentoring program (PMP) which draws on principals of modelling, observation, reflection and feedback to increase support workers' capacity to provide RSH education.

## **Outcomes/Impact:**

Our observations of the information needs of young people and support workers during program delivery highlight the gaps in RSH education for young people in out-of-home care settings. Many young people in these circumstances lack access to information about puberty, hygiene, respectful relationships and skills to negotiate safer sex. This puts them at increased risk of sexual and reproductive coercion, exploitative relationships, STIs/BBVs and unintended pregnancy.

Support workers play an important role in responding to the RSH needs of these young people. Our newly developed PMP program is designed to promote the knowledge, skills and confidence of support workers to provide RSH education in a way that meets the specific needs of this at-risk group.

## **Innovation and Significance:**

It is critical that our most vulnerable young people in government care have access to relevant RSH information throughout their young adult life. The PMP seeks to address this gap. This important piece of work will inform others working with vulnerable young people to develop best practice care and policy that addresses this unmet need.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement (example):**

The program detailed in this abstract is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services.