Final grant report: Making Sense Website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project title</th>
<th>Making Sense Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant recipient</td>
<td>Intellectual Disability Rights Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>Janene Cootes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Justice Foundation awarded amount</td>
<td>$30,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant period</td>
<td>November 2011 – May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of this report</td>
<td>28 May 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of the project

Describe the project in just enough detail so that anyone can understand it. What was the aim of the project, who was the intended audience and what strategies did you implement to achieve the aim?

Parents with intellectual disability are over-represented in child care and protection matters. They are often disadvantaged by ill-based assumptions about their capacity to parent and their difficulty in understanding the system. IDRS is committed to reducing this disadvantage for parents with intellectual disability. The aim of the project has been to develop web based information to equip those assisting parents with intellectual disability involved in the child care and protection system to work more effectively with this disadvantaged group. The website’s three sections are targeted specifically to these audiences:

- Solicitors and magistrates
- Disability workers
- Family supporters

A section to provide easy-read information with illustrations, for parents with intellectual disability themselves, is in development.

The website also features a video called ‘We are a family’ in which parents with intellectual disability speak about their experience heading up their families. This video challenges negative assumptions that people with intellectual disability cannot parent their children.

The website ‘Making Sense’ is at www.idrs.org.au/makingsense
The project – what happened?

How did the project come about?
This project arose as a result of the findings of IDRS’ Parents with Intellectual Disability Project, which commenced in 2009 and is funded by the Public Purpose Fund of NSW. This project employs a part time solicitor and part time disability advocate/consultant and aims to foster justice for parents with intellectual disability involved in care and protection matters. Our experience over the first two years of the project demonstrated widespread poor understanding of intellectual disability and how to work effectively with parents with intellectual disability throughout the Child Care and Protection System – solicitors, Family and Community Services workers, magistrates. Similarly, disability support workers assisting parents with intellectual disability have poor understanding of the operation of the Care and Protection System which limits their ability to effectively advocate for parents in that system.

IDRS believes that both of these factors contribute to discriminatory practices and the extremely poor outcomes for parents with intellectual disability involved in care proceedings. Three-quarters of the time of our disability advocate/consultant at that time was spent responding to individual requests for advice and information from solicitors, magistrates and others about managing cases involving parents with intellectual disability. The Making Sense website project was developed in response to the high demand for information.

Briefly set out the project stages and what happened in each stage.

Planning/Consultation:
- Steering Committee established
- Survey of care and protection solicitors and magistrates completed
- Project officer employed
- Consultations completed
- Expert information collated

Website development
- Website content drafts developed and distributed to relevant stakeholders
- Drafts revised in light of feedback
- Final drafts distributed to ‘experts’
- Web developer/designer engaged
- Website structure and design developed
- Web design completed
- Web content entered to site

User Testing & website design, content completed and proof reading
- User testing invited – 3 solicitors, 3 disability advocates
- Feedback incorporated into website content
• Legal content reviewed by IDRS Principal Solicitor
• Proofreading of the website completed

Website Promotion
• Promotional material, glossy business cards promoting the website designed and printed.
• Cards distributed to Care and Protection solicitors, Children’s Court Magistrates, disability advocacy organisations.
• DVD of ‘We are a family’ distributed to all Children’s Court Magistrates with reference to website.
• Website Launched by Judge Peter Johnstone, President of the Children’s Court at an event on 13 November 2014.
• A promotional Tweet with links to the Making Sense website is automatically sent out via the IDRS Twitter account on a fortnightly basis. At the time of this report IDRS has 602 Twitter followers.
• The website is demonstrated in IDRS education and training to all relevant practitioners.

If grant materials were produced:

How were they distributed?
The materials are available on the Making Sense website www.idrs.org.au/makingsense

If applicable, at the time of this report, what has been the extent of online use of your publication?
From the website launch till May 28 2015, the Making Sense website has been viewed 3,400 times by 2,928 people. When people visit the site they view on average two sections of the website. The IDRS DVD ‘We are a Family’ which is featured on the website has been viewed by 1.638 people since the website launch.

Evaluation

What questions did you ask to evaluate whether you had achieved your aim?
User testing was an important part of this project throughout the development of the website. The relevance, accuracy and usefulness of content of the website was reviewed by representatives of the intended audiences during development of the website.

Once the online test version was completed a user group comprising three solicitors and three disability workers was asked to evaluate and provide final feedback. We asked questions about the user experience – does the navigation make sense and does the information flow? Is the information provided relevant and helpful? What’s missing? And of course we were keen to take advice on any other ways in which the final version could be improved.

What data did you gather to answer your questions?
Data on responses to the above questions was collated. Overall feedback was positive, with some specific suggestions. Changes were made to the website in accordance with the suggestions.
Did you achieve your aim? What did you find out?
IDRS believes it has achieved the aim of providing important, useful and accessible information to solicitors, magistrates and disability advocates working with parents with intellectual disability in care proceedings. The website has raised the profile of issues affecting parents with intellectual disability in the care and protection system and resulted in an increase in referrals to our service for parents with intellectual disability.

Judge Peter Johnstone, the President of the Children’s Court of NSW, has promoted the website and distributed a DVD of the website’s short film ‘We are a Family’, to all Children’s Court magistrates.

The website has meant that IDRS is able to refer solicitors and disability workers who call IDRS for advice on management of care and protection matter to this resource. Ongoing feedback is positive about the usefulness of the website.

The website information has been updated twice with new information since the launch of the site. Also since launching the website IDRS has developed an e-learning module called ‘Working with Parents with Intellectual Disability in Care Proceedings’ at the request of Legal Aid NSW. It is based on the website content. This module is accessed through Legal Aid’s Learning Management System which is accessible and well used by Legal Aid, private and Community Legal Centre solicitors. This is proving to be an important gateway to the website for our intended audience.

Conclusion and recommendations

What is your conclusion?
The Making Sense website project has been a very worthwhile exercise. It has filled a gap in essential practical information to assist solicitors and disability workers to work more effectively with parents who have intellectual disability during care proceedings. It can be easily accessed through the internet when needed. It has also helped to raise the profile of the parents with intellectual disability and their needs when experiencing our care and protection system in NSW.

What are your recommendations for improvements both for the intended audience of your project, and for the strategy you used to achieve your aim? What would you do differently next time?
During development of the website, the steering group recommended that an Easy Read/illustrated section specifically for parents with low literacy and/or learning/intellectual disability be added to the website. This section would include easy read, illustrated fact sheets which provide an easy explanation of difficult concepts that underpin decisions that a parent must consider during care proceedings. These could be used by solicitors to assist in gaining informed instructions from parents. The fact sheets will give clear simple messages about avoiding some of the pitfalls that parents with intellectual disability often encounter in care proceedings. The development of this additional section is underway at the time of writing this report, thanks to a small grant from the Law and Justice Foundation.