STAND UP SPEAK OUT
27-29 JULY 2026

2026 AUSTRALIAN ELDER ABUSE CONFERENCE

With Our Voices, We Rise:

Restoring Voice. Restoring Dignity. Driving Change.

Sasha Kisrwani and Lynn McLennan

Elder Abuse Service Legal Aid NSW

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What is ‘With our Voices we Rise?

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A client-led initiative restoring agency, dignity and voice through lived experience.

- Restoring agency, dignity and voice
- Reducing shame and isolation
- Encouraging recognition and help-seeking
- Using lived experience to create hope and change.

“Helping older people realise that they are not alone.”

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Where This Began

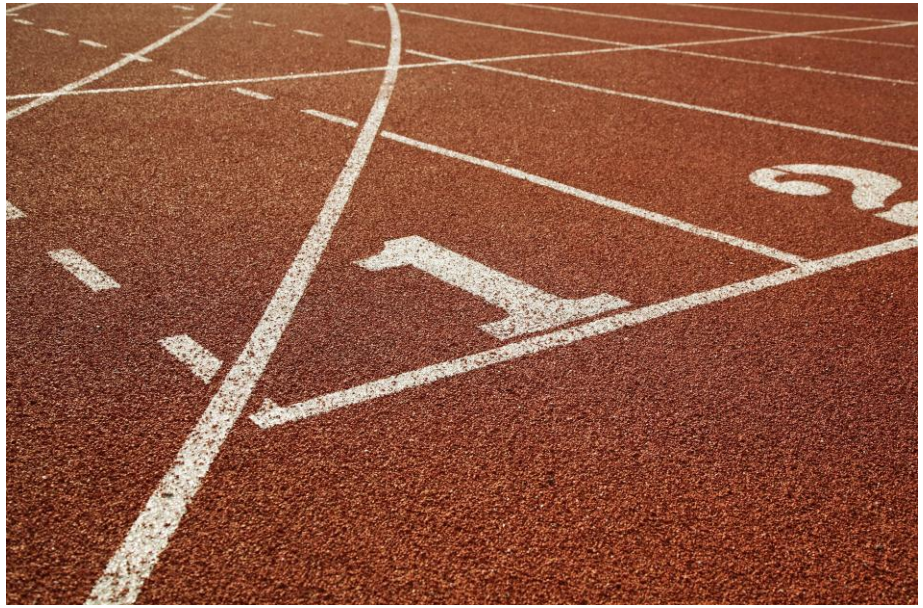
"We found ourselves wishing two of our clients could speak to each other…"

Same Silence

Same Isolation

Same belief: "This is just happening to me"

What if they knew they weren't alone?



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The Reality Of Silence

- Shame
- Love & Loyalty
- Fear of consequences
- Dependency
- Cultural expectations
- Silence = protection

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Client Voices

- “I thought it was just my family.”
- “If I don’t care for them who will?”
- “If I say something I will need to go into care.”
- “They will stop me from seeing my grandchildren.”
- “I will lose my home.”
- “The money will go to them when I’m gone anyway.”
- “It’s not like they are hitting me.”
- “My child has nowhere to go.”

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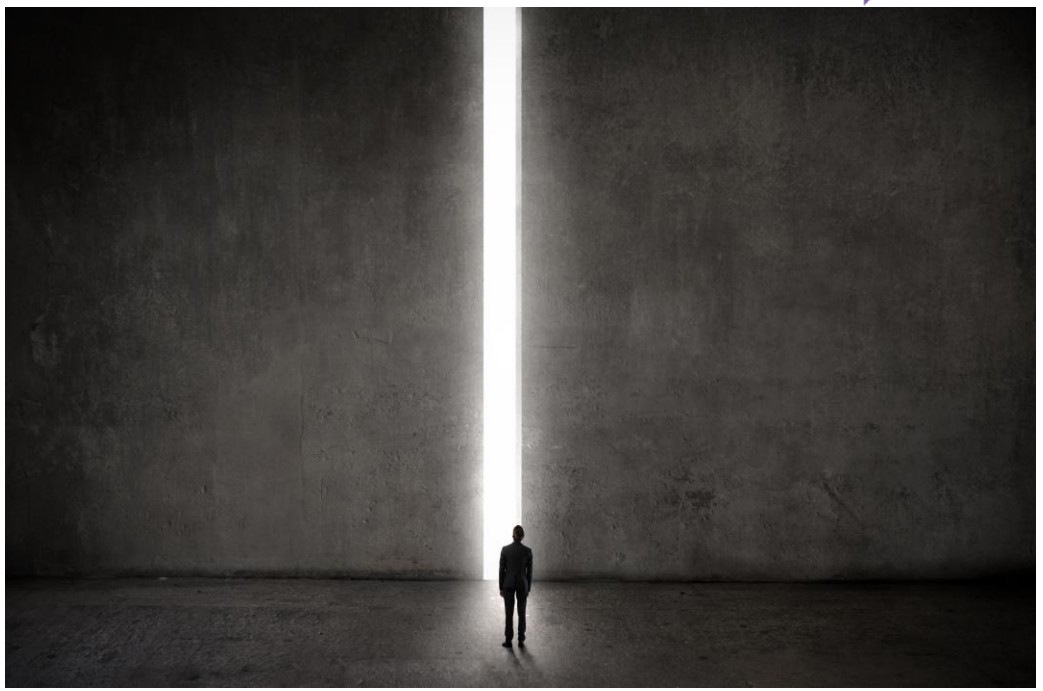
The Gap

People often don't seek help straight away.

Before action comes:

- Recognition
- Safety
- Connection
- Feeling understood

People need to know they are not alone.



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The Shift

What if the most powerful intervention isn't us....

But people hearing each other?

The Project

With Our Voices, We Rise

Letters

Stories

Poems

Artwork

Shared Safely. On their terms.

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What This Project Restores

- Voice
- Dignity
- Agency

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Practice Approach

Connecting people through shared experience:

- Reduces isolation and shame
- Positions people as holders of knowledge
- Creates communities of concern and care
- Helps people move from silence to voice

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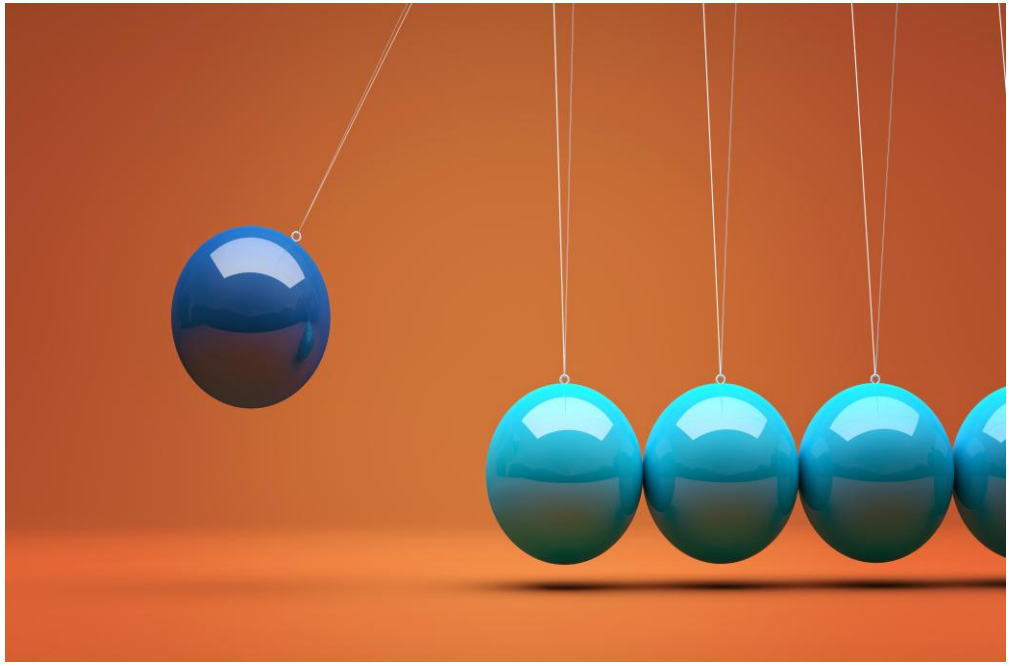
What Made This Different

Our clients were not positioned as:

- "Cases"
- Passive recipients

They became:

- Contributors
- Knowledge holders
- People helping others speak up



Why Stories Matter

Stories can:

- Interrupt shame
- Create recognition
- Help people seek support earlier
- Continue working long after they are shared

Story = ongoing intervention

From Story to Justice

Stories don't just sit.

They become:

- Recognition
- Help-seeking
- Change

Story = intervention

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Outcomes & Learnings

Clients told us they felt:

- Empowered sharing their stories
- Honoured to help someone with a similar experience
- Part of something bigger than themselves
- Less ashamed and less alone

Connection made speaking up feel more possible

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When We Stopped Looking For The Legal Issue

The stories asked us to:

- Listen before analysing
- Hear the person, not just the problem
- Understand the impact, not only the issue
- See strengths, not just risk

Justice begins with listening

What Our Clients Taught Us

As a multidisciplinary team we learned:

- People want to help others even after hardship
- Voices can be restorative
- Connection reduces shame
- Lived experience creates hope

Our clients became our teachers

Systemic Change

Early intervention

Prevention

Cultural change

This is justice work

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Closing

With our voices, we rise.

With connection, we reduce shame.

With shared truth, we create change.

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