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CASE MANAGEMENT & INTENSIVE SUPPORT PRACTICE

The Department of Human Services Centrelink Context

ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of 2010, social workers, at The Department of Human Services (DHS) Centrelink, have been directed to work more intensively with young people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. This was in response to a number of inquiries such as The Road Home – A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness, that found that DHS Centrelink social workers were in a key position as a “first to know” agency with a capacity to engage with groups of marginalised people to begin to effect change (Peasely and Wickens 2009). This was a departure from traditional social work interventions at DHS Centrelink, where assessment has primarily been around income support. Social Work at DHS Centrelink commenced on a process of consultation that saw a model of practice developed from a family focussed case management perspective to one that has transitioned to become Intensive Support and Intervention. My understanding of this intervention is what I will be sharing with you today, in particular I will be considering the relevant principles and processes of case management and how aspects of this model, can be utilised in providing Intensive Support Intervention at Centrelink.

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For the purpose of this presentation, I understand case management to be an

“Essential function of any service delivery system as it gives focus to a definable
order of a program of events and staff responsibilities (Boserup and Gouge, 1980,
p1 cited in Weil & Karls, 1985)

Case Management is an approach to practice that is utilised by a range of helping
professionals and is also implemented into diverse settings. According to Moxely
(1989) a case manager

“organises, coordinates and sustains a network of formal and informal
supports and activities designed to optimise the functioning and wellbeing
of people with multiple needs (cited in Miley, O’Melia & Du bois,
2004).”

Intensive Support and Intervention, a model of practice utilised at Department of
Human Services – Centrelink (DHS), involves repeated contact with a young
person and/or their family and/or a member of the young person’s social support
network beyond the assessment and review processes involved in granting or
rejecting Youth Allowance –Unreasonable To Live At Home (Humphries, 2009)\footnote{DHS – In house resource from the Intensive Support Reference Group.}

When considering Intensive Support and Intervention, the six phased functions of
case management, as outlined by Randal and Barton’s chapter in Moore’s (ed)
book Case Management for Community Practice, provides a useful framework
for intervening with clients. Within the DHS Centrelink environment the
opportunity to provide good intensive case management services is limited. Despite
this many of the tasks included in these functions are relevant to the Intensive
Support Intervention.

In illustrating this intervention, I will be utilising the case study, which is attached.
This approach demonstrates community engagement, client centeredness, a social
ecology viewpoint, strengths focus, empowerment and advocacy and is best
described as a mainstream or conventional approach to practice (Moore et al,
2003).

The phased functions, as outlined are: assessment, service planning and resource
identification; linking the client with services brokerage; service implementation
and coordination, monitoring and evaluation and finally termination or closure

1. Assessment - this is defined as “the appraisal of a situation and the people
involved in it” (Brill 1998 cited in Woodside & McClam, 2003) it is also
about determining their needs and identifying their strengths. In assessing
Sophie’s situation it is clear that securing accommodation is a priority for her at present. Her friend’s family have assisted her in the short term, but alternative arrangements need to be implemented. Income support to access suitable accommodation also needs to be investigated. Other considerations are Sophie’s age the living skills that she possesses, the support and resources that she currently has. Sophie’s well-being also needs to be considered in terms of her physical and mental health and also particularly relevant here is her safety. The use of genograms or eco maps are worthwhile tools to utilise as part of the intervention. Another tool that works effectively with young people is Strength Based Cards, a collection of cards listing different types of qualities that people possess depicted in cartoon and single word form. Utilising these with Sophie the following strengths were derived; honesty, loyalty capacity to survive and belief in self. These qualities have been including in the case management planning process.

2. **Service Planning and resource identification** – this matches the needs assessment and outreach function to the issues that have been identified in the assessment (Moore et al, 2009). Corcoran highlights the importance of exploring strengths as a means to find solutions across the life domains. Goals developed from the assessment process should be client driven and mutually agreed on (Moore et al, 2003). Thrasher and Moxley (1994) outline that an environmentaly responsive case management model must address at a minimum those needs required for survival such as safety, housing, nutrition, clothing, income and transportation. Taking this into account in this case study, and operating from an Intensive Support Perspective, the following goals have been identified; they have been listed here in order of priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Needs</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Strengths Used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Hardship</td>
<td>To secure income support from DHS</td>
<td>Undergo UTLAH assessment through DHS Centrelink</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centrelink</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Need for a home</td>
<td>To seek accommodation in the private rental market</td>
<td>Social worker to assist Sophie in utilising resources available through NSW Housing and through Community</td>
<td>Survivor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issues/trauma issues related to the abuse</td>
<td>To seek assistance for current legal proceedings and to assist with the trauma related to the sexual abuse.</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No family support</td>
<td>To work with extended family to provide ongoing support to Sophie.</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophie to meet with her maternal grandmother when she next visits town.</td>
<td>Belief in self.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Upon identification of these goals it will be necessary for the social worker to support Sophie in making contact with services that have been identified or advocating on her behalf around such services.

3. **Linking the client with services brokerage** – according to Moore et al (2009) this concept draws on system theory and is akin to making connections between systems that were previously unconnected. Rothman and Sager (1998) note that linkage is important for some clients because of their lack of knowledge of resources and services or their inexperience in accessing and using them (cited in Moore et al, 2009) Referral to services is one example of linkages, but connecting Sophie to informal systems are also important, such as church groups, or other extended family to enrich and support formal support services.

4. **Service Implementation and Coordination** – this involves ensuring that services are delivered to promote achievement of the client’s goals and are in line with the service plan (Moore et al 2009). This is a significant task for the social worker and effective collaboration with service providers does contribute to the success of the intervention. With funding being limited in the service system it may be necessary to bring services together to pool their resources. For example in Sophie’s situation, the Department of Housing can only offer one week’s paid emergency accommodation, however the flat that has been negotiated through private rental will not be available for another three days after the emergency accommodation expires. By working collaboratively with services, another service such as St Vincent de Paul may be able to cover the cost of the additional two night accommodation. The DHS Centrelink social worker may be able to negotiate funding for household items through
funding programs available through Community Services and the Mission Australia Youth Worker, will assist with the purchase and delivery of those items to Sophie’s new home. With such a number of services involved regular meetings are necessary to share information and to coordinate the efforts of various parties involved.

5. **Monitoring and evaluation** – this refers to methods designed to judge whether a program is being implemented as designed. It is an ongoing process while the client is engaged with the service and maintains the contact between the service provider and the client (Moore et al, 2009). Thrasher and Moxley (1994) stress the importance of taking a long term view in regard to homelessness, encouraging services to move beyond the immediate crisis and emergency needs. In taking this view, regular monitoring is required to ensure that progress continues on the goals and that these goals are reviewed and revised accordingly as needs change. Evaluation of the intervention can also provide an empowerment strategy so that consumers can reflect on the effectiveness of services (Thrasher & Moxley 1994). Also important to consider is how often evaluation methods incorporate those values important to the system-level decision makers and fails to incorporate those directly relevant or meaningful to consumers themselves. This is highlighted in the table below:

**TABLE 4: Identified outcomes of case management intervention from various perspectives.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DHS Centrelink – Organisations Perspective</th>
<th>Social Workers perspective</th>
<th>Sophie’s perspective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Securing accommodation and meeting her participation requirements of attending school.</td>
<td>Securing accommodation with income support to live independently. Increase linkages in eco map</td>
<td>Finding a home and having contact with family again through her maternal grandmother.</td>
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6. **Termination or closure** – when to terminate is difficult to determine, as it is not always about the achievement of the client goals. Other factors such as legal considerations, resources available that place pressure on workload, relevant legislative requirements do impact on the decision to terminate the relationship (Moore et al, 2003). Case Management from a strength based perspective is about connecting clients to resources and focuses on their assets and acknowledges that the client does have the
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capacity to solve their own problems (Whitely et al, 1999). With this in mind the social worker working with Sophie, from an intensive support and intervention perspective, would look at educating her about resources and services available, drawing her attention to the skills that she possesses and providing counselling around improving her confidence to speak about her needs. Termination would occur then at a mutually agreeable time, when the goals of case management have been met and when it is agreed that Sophie could act on her own behalf around her needs.

Theoretical framework

When focusing on the client it is a Strength Based Perspective that provides the framework for assessing and intervening with the client Sophie. Consistent with Thrasher and Moxley’s (1994) views strength based practice compels the social worker to acknowledge the whole person and not to focus on just the problem (Whitely et al, 1999). Furthermore strength based practice strives to move beyond the limits of a deficit perspective to bring to light the individuals positive attributes and resources as the means for resolving problems (Whitely et al, 1999).

It is understood that there are five principles that underpin the strength based perspective. These are: all clients have strengths; adversity can be a source of challenge and opportunity; case managers do not possess all the power to move the clients to a state in which they are capable of bringing about change in their lives; support processes must be collaborative and acknowledges partnerships between parties and finally strengths can be found in any environment (Whitely et al, 1999).

Utilising this framework with Sophie provides many points for intervening. Whilst exploring strengths the social worker is developing a relationship with Sophie and working alongside her, discovering the resources or assets that she possesses but that she may not be aware of. While the circumstances around Sophie’s situation have been quite traumatic, and she is clearly affected by her experiences, there are qualities present that the social worked can amplify. For example Wolin and Wolin (1993) illustrates that children in chaotic, disorganised or violent families often learn interpersonal skills and develop intrapsychic habits of mind that help them survive such as a sense of humour or survivors pride (cited in Saleebby, 2005). This is certainly the case with Sophie, along with other attributes; such as being very mature and wise, not holding to bitterness and her need to understand and make sense of al that has happened to her. These strengths will be utilised throughout the case management relationship as building blocks for growth.

Conclusion

Working from a case management perspective involves a range of skills, assessing, coordinating services, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation and many of these
skills are utilised when working intensively with young people at DHS - Centrelink. Drawing on a strength based perspective this ensures that the focus is client centred and responsive to the needs of the client. Impacting on the intensive support and intervention relationship at DHS - Centrelink are organisational issues and legislative requirements that all shape and influence the workers interaction with the customer. It is important that the social worker works collaboratively with the customer, and other stakeholders in the community to achieve the goals that Sophie has identified. It is the social workers role at DHS - Centrelink to work in accordance with the legislative requirements but it is also important to operate as a social worker and utilise professional training and knowledge to inform them around these tensions and to develop a framework of practice to engage the client effectively.
REFERENCES


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<th><strong>Client profile</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Name:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Income:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Housing:</strong></td>
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**Referral Information**

Sophie, upon the advice of her friend’s mother, initiated contact with DHS Centrelink to see whether she may be eligible for any income support.

Additional information supplied by the centre staff to the social worker, outlined that Sophie had moved out of her mother’s home approximately three months earlier. Since then she had been staying with her best friend and her family. However this arrangement was unable to continue as the family were moving interstate in the next month for work. Sophie was uncertain about where she would live but was hoping that by obtaining some money from DHS Centrelink she may be able to get into her own accommodation.

**Client Information**

Sophie is a sixteen year old adolescent female, who is currently enrolled in Year Ten at the local high school. Sophie reported that she left her mother and stepfather’s home, due to ongoing sexual and emotional abuse that she experienced from her stepfather. Since leaving the family home, and disclosing the sexual abuse, Sophie’s mother had become very angry and abusive towards her, accusing her of telling lies and trying to break up the couple’s relationship. Due to the nature of the abuse and the threats made to Sophie, since she had left, Sophie’s friend’s family had reported the matter to the police. As a consequence the “alleged abuse” was now the subject of an investigation and an apprehended violence order (AVO) had also been put into place. The order prevented Sophie’s mother or her husband from having any contact with her.

Sophie was an only child and she advised that her parents separated when she was six years of age. Her mother had moved from Queensland to Wagga Wagga seven years earlier, to be with her new husband who she had met over the internet. As a result of the move, Sophie had lost regular contact with her father, who remained
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living in Queensland. Furthermore, the relationship between her mother and father was volatile and contact with him had been discouraged and it had been over two years since she had had any contact with him.

At the interview Sophie described symptoms consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This manifested itself in problems with sleeping, hypervigilence, suicidal ideation, and severe anxiety around leaving the home. She had found it increasingly more difficult to attend school and had been experiencing significant absences.

Sophie's strengths are that she is a highly intelligent young woman who excels at school and despite her absences is maintaining her grades. She enjoys reading and watching dvd's and would like to be a primary school teacher when she leaves school. Sophie has also been able to maintain a part time job at a local boarding kennels.

DISCLAIMER:
The attached case study is not based on any one client that the author has had contact with, but instead is an amalgam of some of the many clients, male and female, that have been seen throughout the author's time at DHS Centrelink. It is acknowledged that young people who present for assistance at DHS Centrelink do have many similarities such as step families and sexual assault, by a family member. Any resemblance to an actual person is a coincidence and not the intention of the author.