FORUM DISCUSSION - INTENSIVE SUPPORT PRACTICE

ABSTRACT

Following on from the earlier presentation was a panel discussion.

The panel comprised of the following people; Desley Hargreaves (National Manager of Social Work Services at Centrelink); Greg Mc Manus (Business Manager of Social Work Services in Area South West); Bill Anscombe (Lecturer Charles Sturt University) and Therese Jones-Mutton (Social Worker, Department of Human Services - Centrelink).

Included in this section is a summary of the issues that were raised.
Q. What is the difference between case management and intensive support in the Department of Human Services (DHS) - Centrelink Context?

Panel Response: Case Management and Intensive Support are not the same concepts and this has been the centre of much discussion for social workers. At DHS - Centrelink, Intensive Support literally means working more closely and more often with a young person that has been identified as being in need of such assistance, such as identified in the White Paper on Homelessness1. Intensive Support could be seen as one stage in the Case Management process, and there are skills that a case manager has that are relevant to the Intensive Support role, such as advocacy. However with the demands currently for social work services, in DHS - Centrelink, social workers are not in a position to provide any ongoing case management services. Furthermore with Case Co ordination becoming a model of practice it is about contracting with the customer about the support that DHS - Centrelink social workers can provide and then linking them in or reconnecting the customer with identified services. In addition, intensive support allows the social worker to engage with other relevant persons in the young person’s life, such as their parents or significant others.

Q. How is the impact of Intensive Support likely to be measured?

Panel Response: There are a number of ways that the effectiveness of this intervention will be considered. Firstly, through your immediate supervisor in your case discussions and analysis. Secondly through social work information systems (SWIS) where actual data is recorded. Thirdly through the Service Delivery Reform, which are outcome focused model and finally through the collaboration of relevant parties to conduct research into this area.

Q. As social workers at DHS-Centrelink, how can we go about lobbying on behalf of customers, about their needs.

Panel Response: This is always a challenging area, and as social workers we do become aware of needs in the community, through our direct social work practice with customers. Working collaboratively with other agencies and stakeholders is an important way to have local needs and issues addressed. This keeps the focus and ownership on the community. Desley Hargreaves in her role as National Manager, often has requests from the Minister to provide background information on issues impacting on customers. It is important that staff provide information, about needs or trends that they have identified, through to their managers for their quarterly report. Case Studies in particular are most helpful in illustrating need and in the past has been an effective way to bring about change on behalf of our customers.

1 Peasley, H & Wickens, C (2009) Family Focused Discussion Paper 3 Case Management Concept process and description. [In house document DHS – Centrelink]
Q. As social workers at DHS-Centrelink the demand for our services continue to increase. What strategies can be put in place to address this issue?

Panel Response: Social Work Reforms are about streamlining social work services to ensure that social workers are available to provide the best possible service to the most vulnerable and at risk members of the community. Utilising intake systems, changing the appointment profiles and having specialised units to conduct work are just three of the strategies currently being rolled out nationally to address this issue. Social workers are increasingly playing a significant role in case consultation and also in the education of customer service staff, increasing their skills and capacity to respond to customer needs. In addition early intervention becomes a key focus when prioritising workloads, in order to avoid future paths of disadvantage and welfare dependency in the customers accessing the service.

Community engagement is also a vital tool, in managing workloads. This is demonstrated through the establishment of referral pathways for customers to access and to work collaboratively with community stakeholders so that people do not fall through any gaps. Team work is paramount and this involves not just the DHS - Centrelink team, but community team members also. At all times the focus must be on the customer and responding to the issues that have been identified to facilitate the customer becoming reengaged with the community. Addressing such issues as homelessness is not within the capacity of a single agency to solve, nor is it appropriate. Instead by taking an Assets Based Community Development Approach, strengths in the community can be capitalised on resulting in a more sustainable community response to the issue identified.

Finally it is important to prioritise and triage all incoming work. Sometimes the urgent can replace the important but assessing all incoming work in terms of priorities is helpful. In addition, working as a team and employing practical time management strategies, are all useful ways to address the stress that demanding workloads can place on individual workers.