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knowhow

Client Feedback

Developed from the Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare's new format for knowledge exchange *Knowhow*, this resource on Client Feedback captures the knowledge, insight and information shared amongst child, youth and family service professionals in Victoria, Australia.

Clients want to help us improve what we do.

The *Knowhow* session on Client Feedback was held on the 24th November 2011, in Melbourne, Australia. Attended by over 30 child, youth and family service professionals, the organisations represented include:

- Anchor Inc.
- Anglicare Victoria
- Australian Community Support Organisation
- Baptcare Family Services
- Berry Street
- Bethany Community Support
- Carlton Family Resource Centre
- City of Yarra
- Colac Area Health
- Connections Uniting Care
- Department of Human Services
- Eastern Access Community Health
- Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service
- Lisa Lodge
- OzChild
- St Luke's
- The Salvation Army
- Uniting Care Victoria and Tasmania
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- Wesley Youth Services
- Wimmera Uniting Care
- Windermere Child & Family Services Inc.

The session explored the knowledge base and challenges of client feedback through facilitated discussion.

PROGRAM LOGIC

The Program Logic Model clarifies the logic that underpins a program. This includes the original aims and goals, how they link to the activities performed by staff, and how the activities link to the intended outcomes of the program. Understanding the program logic of your work is fundamental to an effective monitoring or evaluation process both of which would be informed by client feedback data. For more information on program logic including a guide on how to do it, go to www.cfecfw.asn.au/act/projects/sharing-innovative-practice/toolkit.

1. The journey of client feedback...

Client feedback is part of a broader context of client participation, supporting children, young people and their families to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

To develop an effective client feedback system, start by asking yourself why client feedback is important to your work. Begin by defining the organisation's objectives in terms of client outcomes. Consider the vision of the organisation and the change that is expected to be experienced by clients from the service that is provided. This can be identified through various perspectives; what is important to funders, auditors, the organisation, staff and of course clients. Perspectives can and may conflict, however a commitment to quality services can unite all involved. As identified by St Luke's in their Client Feedback paper shared at the *Knowhow* session, 'when collecting client feedback (as) a process to satisfy accreditation auditors then the danger is we lose sight of why it is seen as good practice, and why auditors use it as a measure of quality'. (Neylon 2011)

In the process of defining objectives, broader elements may also need to be addressed. A key element identified was the culture of an organisation. If for example, the culture does not value the process or benefits of client feedback then implementation of such a system would be difficult.

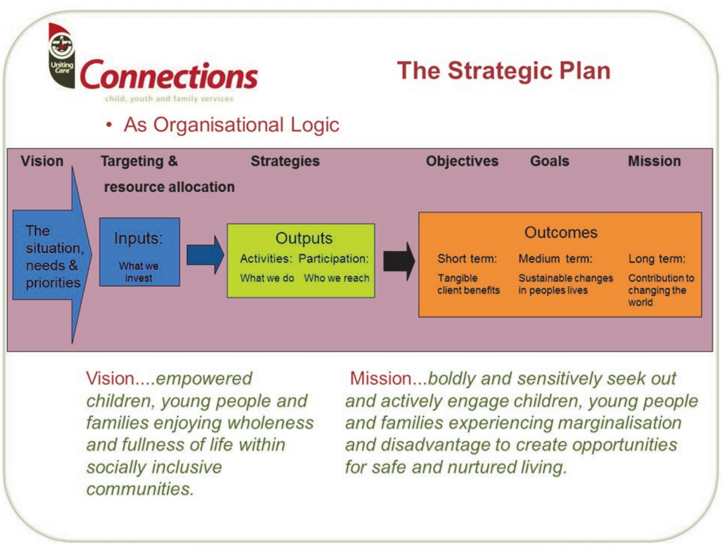
The key to implementation is best described as collaboration demonstrated by a of a staff culture of simply 'talking to each other'. Exploring the importance of client feedback through team discussions and a commitment to 'at least start the process' was considered a critical first step. Collaborating with staff was identified as vital. If staff are interested in understanding the outcomes of their work through client feedback, then they will be more inclined to be involved in retrieving feedback that is accurate and meaningful.

Although each organisation will vary in service areas and strategic priorities, as a sector we can describe our client feedback journey as 'developing a system that allows us to develop our services in line with client expectations' (Neylon 2011).

St Luke's have identified the essential processes required to support this development:

- gathering information from clients so we understand their experiences, hopes and dreams;
- supporting staff to hear and understand what clients are saying about services, and helping them develop their individual practices in response; and
- using the information to develop, or redevelop , organisational systems that support sustainable growth in quality practice and quality design in our services.

Overall, the development of a client feedback system is considered a step-by-step process: one that takes careful consideration, a collaborative effort and a whole-of-organisation commitment to the time involved. As illustrated (below) by Uniting Care Connections, the overall goal of a client feedback system is to track the outcomes of our clients in terms of; the short term benefits experienced from the service provided, the medium term changes that occur in a clients' life and the long term contribution our organisations make to a changing world.



'Hear the voices of our clients in our work'

UNITING CARE CONNECTIONS

2010—2015 STRATEGIC PLAN

A COMMITMENT TO QUALITY SERVICES

Uniting Care Connections have embedded the process of client feedback into their organisation through their 2010 –2015 Strategic Plan.

This approach is designed to:

- ensure clients have the opportunity to say what they think about their experience
- meet the requirements of the "Evidence Guide for Registered Community Service Organisations – Family & out of home care services, DHS 2008" and other standards
- meet the basic criteria for Outcome Evaluation and Quality Improvement within the Connections agency, and
- reflect the Agency values

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Neylon, E. Client Feedback: A summary of reflections on our Children Youth and Family client feedback system trialed over the last two years. St Luke's, November 2011

2. How to get there through planning & cultural change

A client feedback system can be built using a planned approach and a commitment to change.

When planning a client feedback system, one must plan for change.

A systematic approach to client feedback would demonstrate:

- the daily practices that truly listen to clients;
- an organisational capability to respond and grow from the feedback and;
- a way to embed this information into future strategic directions of the organisation.

Much of this depends on an organisation's culture. That is, how all staff members work with each other and how each member takes responsibility to contribute to the culture. As described at the *Knowhow* session '*Staff are it!*'

Prepare the organisation for cultural change by talking about client feedback: what is it, what's worked well and what else can we do? Hear any concerns that staff might have and take them into account throughout the implementation process. Staff reactions to client feedback are important. Remember that the feedback is not personal. For more information on staff cooperation go to section *3.How to do it: tips & tools*.

Planning

Consider the planning stage as an opportunity to explore the possibilities and move away from what is not working.

A Program Logic process can help you do this by identifying the logic that underpins the program. It starts by clarifying the original aim/s and how they link to the activities that are currently being performed. A program logic process is considered fundamental to an effective review process. For more information on program logic go to the introduction *Clients want to help us improve what we do*.

Considerations

- Consider what type of information you need from clients: what are the complex needs being addressed and how satisfied are clients with the service they have received and why?

- Plan how to get useful feedback on the difference your service has made to a clients' life / behavior/ wellbeing e.g. What family or friend relationships have changed since beginning the program? Avoid information that only demonstrates how busy you are e.g. How many clients have I seen this week? However, you can use this data with qualitative information to tell a story e.g. How many clients have I seen this week showing signs of depression?

- Vary the methodologies you use to:
  a. increase the rate of response;
  b. allow different feedback opportunities and;
  c. help substantiate findings through various data sources.

As identified by a researcher attending the *Knowhow* session, a good rule of thumb is to aim for five different feedback methods.

- When conducting phone interviews it was noted that Mondays and Tuesdays are the most likely days to reach people. Also, consider using someone 'independent' to receive the feedback. This will support anonymity and increase the response rate.

- A longitudinal study can be achieved by re sampling feedback participants at a later stage. Prepare participants for this from the onset, for example ask for consent to contact them in 12 months time.

- As clients change from receiving a service so too will their feedback. Track all their feedback along the way particularly pre program so that a 'before and after' story can be told.

- Use triggers to flag when feedback happens and to lock it into a system. For example, an intake process can capture pre program feedback as a case closure/referral process can capture end of program feedback.

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IN A NON-PROFIT SECTOR, COST IS AN ONGOING CONCERN. HOWEVER, COST NEED NOT HINDER AN EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK SYSTEM.

One example ,might be to change existing forms to include an opportunity for narratives.

Consider what options are applicable for your budget. As identified by Uniting Care Connections+ costs will vary depending on your approach. Each response can cost:
$6 = paper based (reply paid)
$26 = above + $20 incentive
$58 = phone interview

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+ Statement by Greg Brady from Uniting Care Connections at Client Feedback *Knowhow* session held on the 24th November 2011, in Melbourne, Australia

Ethics: balancing privacy rights with a responsibility to empower clients.

It is essential to face ethical challenges and see them as just that, issues that can be solved and built into feedback processes rather than stumbling blocks.

The topic of ethics often raises questions about what ethical approach is required if client feedback data is used for either research or evaluation purposes. Essentially, the difference between the two purposes is that research aims 'to prove' whilst evaluation aims 'to improve'. However, the processes involved are generally the same in design, method and data collection. Therefore, when collecting and using data from clients the same ethical considerations apply.

Ethical considerations have been outlined into four areas for discussion:

- Privacy and Consent
- Power Imbalance
- Protection versus the right to participate
- The challenge of applying ethical processes

Privacy and consent

Legislative requirements mandate privacy and confidentiality for all individuals particularly in relation to children in protective and family services. Where data is collected directly from clients then the process is bound by the Australian's Government National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines. The guidelines outline that data collection from humans must be submitted to ethical processes (Australian Health Ethics Committee/ National Health and Medical research Council, 2003).

As a general rule, you can only use data if the owner of the data fully understands the ways in which it will be used. Informed consent is necessary when retrieving data from clients. In the case of children, consent must be obtained also from a parent or legal guardian. Consider using positive consent strategies that allow the opportunity to say yes rather than no. Provisional consent may also apply where a person can agree to continue or withdraw at any stage. The challenge is to implement a consent process which assures requirements are met and implemented.

Power imbalance

One must acknowledge that even with the best of intentions, clients will be, or may well perceive themselves to be, in an inferior position to the service providers with whom they are interacting. Studies[*] have found that feedback processes that explicitly recognise power imbalances can, to a significant extent, redress the imbalance. Ethical practice in service delivery and evaluation must critically review its assumptions and the power imbalances that might exist in data collection processes to ensure clients a real voice in the services that affect them.

Protection versus the right to participate

It is an ethical requirement to put in place processes that promote inclusion. Denial of access has been an issue abrogating quality data and robust research outcomes in several out-of-home care studies[+]. Attempts to protect clients from participating in evaluation can be ethically inappropriate. If we do not promote inclusion of all we risk the client's right to be heard. The usefulness of any findings could also be questioned as should the evaluation process aimed at improving client outcomes. However, inclusion strategies should not come at a cost. Clients can be protected from further harm and trauma and from an invasion of privacy and confidentiality whilst participating.

The challenge of applying ethical processes

Evaluation processes ask for new skills from workers. Ethical considerations ask practitioners to operate in reflective ways that constantly question processes to ensure the integrity of the voice that is heard whilst balancing the need to provide understanding and personal protection to clients. This challenge raises questions we must consider as a sector.

How do we:

- balance individual outcomes with program outcomes?
- ensure a balance between protection of the vulnerable and achieving a voice for all, or at least a representative sample of all?
- devise strategies which do not promote the engagement of some clients but not others?
- ensure a authentic voice while attending to compliance and process issues?

Most critically, how do we provide evidence to our clients that their views have been heard and changes have been made and that their input was respected and valued. Is there a case for ethics and ethics committees to go beyond current evaluation to deal more specifically with qualitative processes for research, evaluation and participation?

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* Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, *Their voice: involving children and young people in decisions, services and systems*. Monograph no. 23 ISBN 978-1-921110-30-6, page 13

+ page 14

3. How to do it: tips & tools

A client feedback process can be creative, rewarding and informative. It is a reflective time to be shared.

Technology

Young people, children and their families use social media everyday.

The ability of technology to engage children and young people in a feedback process should not be underestimated.

Social media such as Twitter and Facebook provides an effective marketing tool for feedback activities. Be aware that a Facebook user's minimum age is 13. For more information on legislation and cyber safety strategies go to… www.cybersmart.gov.au.

Online survey formats with a reporting capacity increase the efficiency of a feedback process as well as minimize cost and time. Have a look at these free and easy-to-use resources.

- www.surveymonkey.com
- freeonlinesurveys.com
- www.esurveyspro.com

Feedback interviews can also be conducted using free, user-friendly technology that can reach isolated clients. Visit…

- www.skype.com
- www.anymeeting.com

To help collate and present videos or photos for free visit..

- www.smilebox.com

Client Feedback can be obtained in a variety of ways limited only by the imagination.

A common choice is the use of surveys. Although they can be useful, it is important to offer other avenues for feedback to:

a) ensure a fair and equitable opportunity for clients of all language, literacy and cultural abilities and;

b) to strengthen your findings through multiple data sources.

Data collection methods applicable to age, developmental maturity and cultural reality are considered best practice. It is recommended that before a process is implemented that it is reviewed by the target audience to ensure that it works as intended.

Creativity is encouraged particularly when receiving feedback from children and young people, who are more likely to participate in a process that is enjoyable rather than administrative. Alternative methods could include:

- Video interviews
- Photographic feedback
- The Outcomes Star*
- Visual Art
- Poetry
- A phone call
- 20 words or less

Recognise what is unique for each client group and acknowledge that some people do not have the words to describe their experiences. Remember that a client's right to privacy means that anonymity should be an option in any process that is used.

Staff cooperation

During the Knowhow session it was agreed that the key to meaningful, useful client feedback is communication that is based on trust. It is critical to recognise that the agency and client relationship is built by staff members.

The cooperation of staff throughout the planning and delivery of a client feedback process is fundamental. Staff will help ensure that client feedback is an honest reflection of the clients experience based on the ability to tell both the good and bad.

Feedback from practitioners themselves will provide essential information on client behaviors, level of change and outcomes: information that can go unrecognised by clients. For practitioners the opportunity to stop and reflect on their work can prove to be rewarding. As identified by St Luke's if staff are 'supported to reflect and respond to it, then there is also a reduced need for organisational interventions as feedback is addressed immediately and directly. The opportunity for learning of the staff member is enhanced if they are supported to reflect on the information and what it means for their own work practice.' (Neylon 2011)

Viewpoint

www.vptorg.co.uk

VIEWPOINT IS AN ONLINE SURVEY TOOL DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. IT USES ENGAGING DIALOGUE AND ANIMATION TO ENCOURAGE RESPONSES FROM CLIENTS. A FEE IS APPLICABLE.

Technology Explained

abc.net.au/techexplained

KEEP UP WITH CHANGING TECHNOLOGY AND TRENDS. FROM DATA PLANS AND SOCIAL MEDIA TO DIGITAL RADIO AND CATCH UP TV.

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* www.outcomesstarsystem.org.uk

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