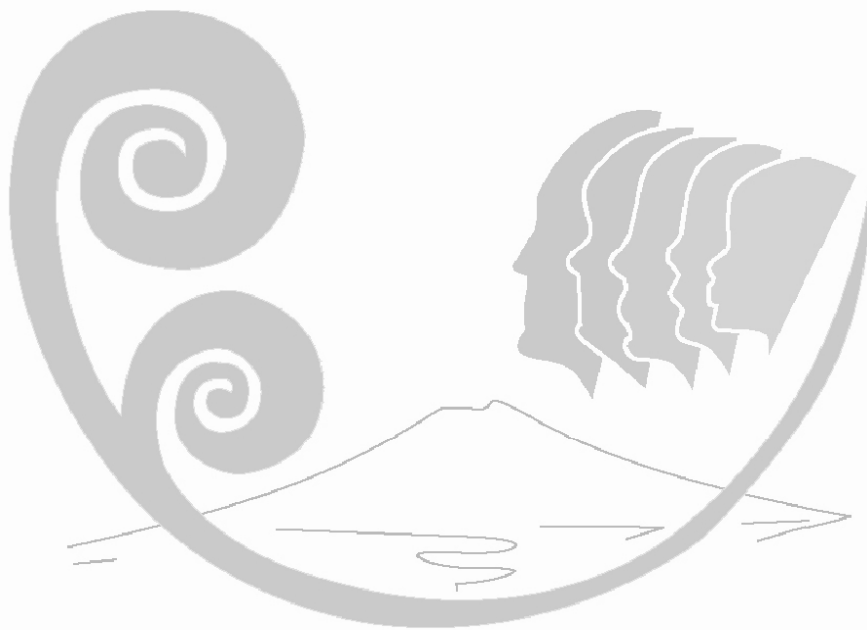


ASSISTING MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMERS



Another Community Resource for the Not for Profit Sector

INTRODUCTION

This resource has been prepared with the assistance of mental health consumers. We hope the information will be used in staff training and workshops and organisations will examine their policies to ensure they are fair and protect both clients and staff.

Often your client has no choice of service. Mental Health Consumers have the right to be treated the same as any other client that is with dignity and respect.

The following Code of Rights set by the Health and Disability Commissioner means that a person with a mental illness should have:

- 1. Respect and Privacy**
- 2. Fair Treatment**
- 3. Dignity and Independence**
- 4. Proper Standards**
- 5. Effective Communication**
- 6. Information**
- 7. Choices and decisions**
- 8. Support**
- 9. Rights during teaching and research**
- 10. Complaints taken seriously**

Sometimes our reactions to people's behaviour is negative and there are many reasons for that. We need to try to understand why we have a negative reaction and understand how vulnerable our client is. Despite mental health problems being so extensive in the community many people still do not understand mental illness. Many people react negatively through fear, ignorance or a loss of power base because the "client" is reacting or presenting differently to their usual clients. It is important that both the service provider and the client feel in control of their lives and there is a balance in any relationship.

Many people working in the area of social change talk about attitudes and the need to change them. The assumption is that if you change attitudes you will change behaviour. On the other hand, some people believe that if you change behaviour you will change attitudes. Both these statements are true according to the Mental Health Commission, Attitudes shape behaviour and behaviour shapes attitudes. It is a circular problem because attitudes reinforce behaviour and behaviour reinforces attitudes. Thinking badly about people allows you to put them down and putting them down reinforces your opinion that they are not as good as you

PEOPLE USING YOUR SERVICE want to :

- be accepted by others
- be respected
- be viewed as a person
- have their strengths recognised
- receive appropriate help when needed and asked for
- be in charge of their own life
- have opportunities to improve their position such as:
 - ✓ housing
 - ✓ friends and networks
 - ✓ leisure activities
 - ✓ training for better work opportunities
 - ✓ Opportunities to work and gain experience
 - ✓ opportunity to contribute to others
 - ✓ freedom from discrimination based on a “diagnosis”.

Four main ingredients are needed to provide the best possible service for clients – those four ingredients are:

1. Face your fears
2. Create a safe and positive environment
3. Outcomes
4. Self care

FACING OUR FEARS

Before we can really understand and help people we need to understand ourselves and ensure we are secure in our environment and have confidence in our abilities.

What are your deepest darkest fears?

Take them out and have a look at them. They are very real and very valid. What we have to do as community workers is learn how to manage fear and to structure our work so as to minimise the risk of harm.

Some common fears are:

- ❖ Do we have enough knowledge?
- ❖ Being in a situation on your own such as a person’s home.
- ❖ Sexual harassment.
- ❖ Sexual or physical attack.
- ❖ Not knowing what to do.
- ❖ Not being able to communicate or help the person in need.
- ❖ Violent behaviour - to themselves and other people.
- ❖ Drain me of the little energy I have.
- ❖ Will we make a mistake that has drastic effects in another person, a mistake that could cause emotional, spiritual or mental harm.

It is very important that you acknowledge how you truly feel and deal with that fear.

CREATING A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

It is important for all of us that we create a warm and welcoming environment for the people who come into our service. How can we ensure that we are creating an environment which enhances peoples well being, without compromising our safety and the safety of others?

What helps create a positive environment? - People have said:

Warmth

Friendly atmosphere

Explain what's going to happen

Give an out

Ground rules set

Expectations on both sides

Clarity

Being realistic

Defining the responsibility - working together

OUTCOMES

Outcomes mean different things to different people. The following worst and best scenarios demonstrate that people can feel accepted even though the outcome may not be what they had hoped. People with many differing mental illnesses provided the following best and worst outcomes.

What is the worst that could happen?

- ✘ Walking away with no help given
- ✘ Destroy their self esteem
- ✘ Treated as if they are someone different
- ✘ Undervaluing
- ✘ Being patronised
- ✘ People are controlled - not given choices, spoken to loudly and slowly
- ✘ Not having needs understood - what you want - not what they want
- ✘ Labelling
- ✘ Disrespect
- ✘ The situation becomes a problem - an issue

What is the best that could happen?

- ✓ Trust you
- ✓ To feel accepted
- ✓ Feel they have been heard and respected
- ✓ Entertaining environment and support person to be with them
- ✓ Letting people choose their own pace
- ✓ To get practical advice or referral
- ✓ Person is given choices
- ✓ Try and understand peoples needs rather than imposing your own values

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICIES

Have expected standards of behaviour clearly visible in the centre, and explained to new comers.

Have a policy on what to do if these standards are contravened and being very consistent about this

Always have two people when visiting a client at their home

Phone in when you arrive at a home and indicate when you will be back at work/home.

Carry a mobile phone if going into unfamiliar surroundings

Have a panic button in the office

Use the telecom system which calls up a predetermined number when you knock the receiver off the hook.

Don't hesitate to phone 111 if there is a risk of hame.

It is important that clients as well as staff know these policies and standards and that they are supported when used.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

Public organisations must ensure their service has measures which provides

1. Respect for people with mental illness
2. Recognition of the rights of people with mental illness
3. Understanding of the effects of discrimination against people with mental illness.

Some ways to achieve these are:

1. To provide people with the expertise to train others
2. Give people working within an organisation the opportunity to understand what it is like for people with mental illness to experience the 'service' offered.
3. Identify and promote existing initiatives
4. Develop networks, partnerships, and accessible resources and advice.

The motto "be prepared" is very relevant and if we are prepared we can be proactive rather than reactive.

WORKER SAFETY

Sometimes people will come in to the centre, or you will go into the homes of people who are potentially verbally or physically violent. Do you need to worry about this? Yes. However it doesn't need to prevent you carrying on with your work. First of all remember basic self defence. In a potentially dangerous situation be assertive, calm and clear in your information and actions.

- ❖ Don't be afraid to take the initiative, it is rarely you the person is upset with, you are a convenient target.
- ❖ Tell the person that their behaviour is inappropriate. Ask them to leave, or if you are in their space, tell them you will leave.
- ❖ If you are concerned never let the client be between you and the door.
- ❖ Do not leave your car keys where they could be taken. Keep them on your person.
- ❖ Move towards the door, hold it open for them.
- ❖ Remind them of the behaviour rules which have been agreed on for the organisation.
- ❖ If they don't respond, or continue to be aggressive, explain that you are calling for help, the police or enacting the safety procedures or your organisation.
- ❖ If there is another person available, clearly tell them what to do.
- ❖ DO NOT step into a fight or a situation where you may be hurt.
- ❖ Do what you have said you will do.
- ❖ If the person tries to prevent you getting help, activate your emergency procedure, (panic alarm, phone, shouting etc.)
- ❖ If there are other people in the room, instruct them to seek help but primarily to get out of the way and stay safe.
- ❖ Very often in these situations you have to be seen to have the most power. It's one situation where power sharing isn't the best option!
- ❖ However, leave a space for the person to come back without losing face.

It is important that the behaviour rules for the organisation are just and appropriate and preferably are developed with client input. If these rules are consistently implemented without bias and people are accepted without judgement when they choose to conform, then people will feel safe in your environment.

When telling another person to get help, be very clear in your instructions. The person you are talking to could be in shock and not responding in their usual way.

For example you would say:

Go and phone 111. Ask for the police. Tell them to come here immediately because there is a person here who is going to hurt someone. Come back and tell me when you have rung. Keep out of danger yourself.

SELF CARE

Just as being aware of your fears is important so is self care. Employers have a responsibility to ensure workers have a framework within which they operate and policies and guidelines which are adhered to. Some of the responsibilities of employers are the provision of:

- ❖ Quality external supervision
- ❖ A job description reflecting the position
- ❖ Policies and boundaries
- ❖ The opportunity to debrief and talk through issues of concern
- ❖ Confidence that agencies you refer to will be able to provide a quality service

Employees may benefit from:

Networking with others working in the same field

Unlisted phone numbers.

Training in:

- ❖ Listening and assertiveness
- ❖ Ability to know when to refer on
- ❖ Identifying personal and professional boundaries

FURTHER READING

Numerous resources and pamphlets are available from the Mental Health Foundation,
PO Box 10051 Dominion Rd Auckland.
Ph (09) 630 8573 Fax (09) 630 7190.