



KEEPING YOURSELF SAFE AND CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IN A COMMUNITY ORGANISATION



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EXAMINE WHY PEOPLE ARE USING YOUR PARTICULAR SERVICE

Why are people coming into your service?
What are they looking for?
Why this organisation and not another?
Have a look at your organisation. What does it Offer?
Is it the most visible service; does it have a reputation for taking time and listening, do you offer a unique service in your area?
Has this person been every where else and you are next?

WHEN PEOPLE COME IN TO YOUR SERVICE

People come into our services for the diverse range of reasons you will have identified above. When confronted by something or someone out of the ordinary, sometimes our first reactions are negative. This next section examines potential outcomes.

What is the worst that could happen? - This is what people have said:

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 do you think is the worst thing that could happen?

What is the best that could happen? - This is what people have said:

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

What do you think is the best that could happen? - This is what people have said:

Trust you

To feel accepted

Feel they have been heard and respected

Unthreatening 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 to understand people's needs rather than imposing your own values.

What do you think is the best thing that could happen?

WHY DO I DO THIS WORK?

There are many reasons people work in the community. People have said it is; because I work with the Community and for the Community.

For the satisfaction of helping people gain or improve a vital skill for functioning in life today.

To see the beginnings of the opening up and coping with every day life eg.

Confidence, Attitude, Having a go, A big smile!

Challenging Variety Interesting.

Like working with families.

Like people.

Like working with all age groups.

Feeling of giving something back - helping.

I like the scope and creativity the job offers me.

Meet a variety of people with different perspectives, life-styles.

Enjoy helping older people to feel they have control and power over their own lives.

Love the historical angle, the stories of people's lives and the changes that take place during their lives.

What are the reasons you do your job?

It is understandable to have some concerns and even fears about the people you may encounter in your community work. Often, however, we put these thoughts out of our mind as unworthy. I believe it is important to acknowledge our less positive feelings, so that they can be more realistically assessed and addressed.

How do I feel about 'difficult' clients, what are my deepest darkest thoughts and feelings?

Other people have said:

Do we have enough knowledge?

Being in a situation on your own.

Sexual harassment.

Sexually attack me.

What does this tell you about your boundaries?

Now think about:

In a difficult or challenging situation

What do I want to do

What is realistic for me to do

What are the service boundaries of my organisation

What are my boundaries.

These are important issues to consider for your own well-being. You may decide that you want to be all things to all people, despite the restrictions of your job or resources. There is still another aspect to consider. When we are assessing what actions to take to result in the best possible outcome for the client, we need to consider (in the light of the answers to the section above)

What helps?

What doesn't?

When thinking about this there are some questions you can ask yourself.

Am I creating unrealistic expectations and/or rescuing this person?

Is this the most constructive long term action to take?

Is this an empowering decision/action?

Empowering for whom?

Who decided what the best solution was?

Why do we do this. Whose needs are being met?

Are we just making ourselves feel better because we have been seen to respond and care?

Are you the person who is most suitable to respond to this person and their issue or are there services which are more appropriate?

If you have decided that you want to refer on and there is no one available, or is you want to help and don't know what to do, how do you feel?

How do I stop myself taking responsibility emotionally for nor being able to access services?

Is it my problem?

What to do when the situation has stressed you out?

Identify what the feelings are.

Clarify -what you have control over- what you don't

Ask yourself what your motives are

Ask yourself what you can realistically do

Do you want to do these things **if yes, go for it, if no, don't**

Use some stress reduction techniques

Leave guilt behind

Understand that solving a problem today, doesn't mean it will be solved tomorrow.

There are some people who come into community facilities because they do not have adequate social networks to meet their needs for social interaction and attention.

These people will manufacture problems for you to solve and dramas they need rescuing from, in order to fulfil their needs for attention and social interaction.

Guilt may be used by these people to ensure that they will have and hold your attention. There are many emotionally needy and manipulative people.

These people move from agency to agency, using up all of your energy and care and when you are burnt out, going on to someone else.

You do not have to take responsibility meeting all the needs of these people.

Be especially alert is all suggestions as to what might help are responded to with "yes but".

You do not have to solve all problems.

ACCEPTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

If there are people who are constantly presenting with issues of wanting attention and just generally taking up time and you don't want to tell the person to go away, you can ask for and reward positive behaviours. For example you could explain that you only want to hear about the positive things which have happened, or that you will support positive changes that people make, but don't want to hear about why they still haven't done things.

Remember.

There are a lot of things you do not have control over.

There are some things which you can't change.

There comes a time when you have to let things go (or go into politics).

It is important for your well-being not to accept responsibility or blame when a situation is outside your control or sphere of influence

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

One of the things which often gets put to the end of the list by people working in community is looking after themselves. It is very important that we take care of ourselves, both to be a good role model who practices what they preach and also to ensure we are in top form to support others.

What doesn't help? People have said:

If you don't know your boundaries.

Going beyond your abilities.

Unreal agency expectations of workers.

Forced/compulsory referrals bring attitude problems.

Frustration - agency too specialised - passed from person to person - client loses faith.

Privacy act - prevents co-ordination between groups.

Not having enough time.

People needing appointments.

What things stop you looking after yourself?

numbers.

What does Help? People have said:

Days off.

More networking for everyone in this area.

Unlisted phone Supervision - quality.

Needed to be a counsellor or have more information.

Having a job description.

Setting boundaries and priorities.

Delegation.

Sitting and listening may be all people need.

Knowing where and when to pass on.

Good communication with other agencies.

Referring people on - then hearing that all is not well - but feeling that we've done our best.

Getting follow up reports.

Checking out the people you are referring to.

Knowing what you want to do
 what it is realistic for me to do
 what the service boundaries of my organisation are
 what my personal boundaries are

Assertive - set boundaries

Being prepared.

What helps for you?

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:

Warm

Friendly

Explain what's going to happen

Give an out

Ground rules

Expectations on both sides

Clarity

Be realistic

Defining the responsibility - working together

Careful to remember its people we're talking about – individuals

WHAT DO YOU THINK HELPS TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT?

Being aware of what could happen - Worker safety

What can go wrong?

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 really 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.

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 preferable 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.

POLICY IN ORGANISATIONS

What sorts of policies are in place to ensure worker safety? - Some suggestions we have heard are:

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

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

Sending both parties in a dispute away to calm down.

Banning people for various lengths of time ie. 1,2 days a month.

Always have two people when going into some ones' home.

Phone in when you arrive at some ones' home and indicate when you will be back at work/ at home.

Carry a mobile phone if going into unfamiliar surrounding.

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 harm

It is important that every one knows the safety procedures and understands the necessity of using them consistently. If you are hesitant or inconsistent with your response to trouble or potential trouble, people will learn this and take advantage of you. This could result in some one getting injured or very frightened.

Strategies

Be clear about your own boundaries;
how much time you can give
what you are prepared to do
what behaviour you will, will not tolerate
what your service is for.

Ask questions to ascertain needs.
Refer as appropriate.
Be prepared to be firm about your boundaries.
Be prepared to ring 111.

TRAINING NEEDS

What skills would it be useful for workers in your service to have, in order to more successfully handle difficult situations which arise?

Some suggestions are;

Assertiveness

Self Defence

Active Listening

Understanding - racism

addiction

mental illness

the effects of poverty

the effects of persecution, prejudice and powerlessness

WHAT ARE YOUR TRAINING NEEDS IN THIS AREA?

What networks do you have in the community?

It is useful to have the local numbers for:

Phone

Your Community Constable

Community Mental Health Centres

Support and Counselling Service

Adolescent Mental Health Services

Crisis Help

24 Hour emergency support and assessment for people who are clearly unwell, who won't leave, or who you think may harm themselves or be harmed if they leave.

Counselling serves that you feel are sensitive to particular issues such as abuse, violence, youth, older people, relational problems, adolescent issues etc.

Sexual Abuse and Rape Services	.....
Anger Management	.....
Age Concern and other organisations for older people	.....
Family Planning, Sexual Health and Abortion Services	.....
Various support groups eg. Domestic Violence	.....
Gay/Lesbian	.....
Miscarriage	.....
Grief and Loss	.....
Disability Support Service	.....
Physical	.....
Intellectual	.....
Mental Health Consumer Organisations	.....

These people may not be able to help you directly, but may be able to help you to identify where appropriate help can be found.

For any situation where there is a real threat of violence

Police 111

Visit the Mental Health Foundation website for a full list of publications and resources.

www.mentalhealth.org.nz

Publications

The Mental Health Foundation produces information in a variety of formats on mental health related topics. They can be read online or printed for individual use.

- brief factsheets in English and Te Reo Maori
- a series of more detailed booklets on specific conditions and their treatment such as depression, phobia, and alcohol problems
- pamphlets on a number of mental health subjects
- information packs on community mental health topics such as school closures, floods and war
- Mindful Schools, an information pack on school mental health promotion

A to Z of Mental Health Information

Publications produced by the Mental Health Foundation and associated organisations listed alphabetically by subject

Links

This page has links to many groups and organisations related to mental health and mental illness

Glossary

Click here for a useful glossary of terms, acronyms, abbreviations and jargon used in mental health