

REPORT

of the

**Western Sydney
Community Forum
Supervision Project**

June 2001

REPORT ON THE WSCF SUPERVISION PROJECT

Background to the development of the WSCF Supervision Project

The need for supervision for NGO workers emerged at a number of events in western Sydney. Concerns from workers that the lack of supervision was having a direct impact on career development and on service delivery had been expressed. Western Sydney Community Forum applied to the Department of Community Services for funds to research the need for supervision and to develop a response to that need. Subsequently a Steering Committee was established to explore the professional supervision options for Managers/Coordinators of CSGP funded services in the Cumberland Prospect area in western Sydney.

A grant of \$7059 was received for the Department of Community Services

The Steering Committee members were:

Deborah Sharp	Western Sydney Community Forum
Deb Tape	Nepean Food Services
Jackie Wilgress	Family Worker Training and Development
Peter Prants	Holroyd City Council
Christine Gabriel	Holroyd Community Development
Laurence Kerr	Karabi Community and Development Services/WSCF
Barbara Day	Hills Community Aid and Information Services

Methodology

The steering committee decided to:

- Publicise and promote the project throughout Cumberland/Prospect and through broader non government networks such as NCOSS News, LOCAL (LCSA Newsletter)
- Focus the project on co-ordinators of CSGP funded services in the first instance
- Survey the needs for supervision, the current takeup of supervision and availability of those willing to provide supervision amongst CSGP organisations in Cumberland Prospect
- Undertake an initial search for resources
- Engage a project officer to:
 1. Review of the survey of community workers
 2. Clarification of terminology and the sectors needs
 3. Collection and analysis of a range of supervision models from Australia and the USA, (a full list of these is attached as Appendix 1)

4. Presentation of a summary of the research into available models to the Steering Committee to allow a decision about the most appropriate approach
5. Development of a Supervision Guide for the Steering Committees consideration and endorsement
6. Workshop of the Draft Supervision Guide with community workers from the Prospect Cumberland Area and other areas of Western Sydney
7. Finalisation of the WSCF Supervision Guide and agreement that the WSCF will establish a Pilot with up to six supervision pairs
8. Establishment of a data base of workers wanting to be involved as supervisors and supervisees
9. Pilot to be established and evaluated

A final report would be prepared for the Department of Community Services

Background to supervision issues

The need to address workers needs for supervision, performance appraisal and reflection/support have been evident for many years in Western Sydney. Over the last ten years there have been a range of responses to the issues which have included:

- TRI Community Exchange and Ettinger House offering one on one supervision to community workers, group meetings for managers, maintenance of data bases of consultants who provide supervision and training on a paid basis.
- Many workers with a caseload or counseling role use paid supervisors for what is commonly called 'professional supervision'.
- Managers of organisations often pay consultants for support that ranges from skill development to reflection on their practices.
- The Forum and other agencies have arranged workshops and training on performance appraisal and supervision

Researching the sectors needs

WSCF undertook a survey in 2000 of workers in the Cumberland Prospect Area to investigate the supervision needs of workers and their current access to support, management and supervision.

Thirty workers responded to the survey, which showed that more than half wanted supervision and half wanted to be involved in offering supervision. The majority of those who accessed supervision usually did so on a paid basis while the remainder were supervised by their manager.

Clarifying the terminology

The Steering Committee's first task was clarify for their own purposes the terminology currently being used and to make a decision about which term suited the need being expressed by the sector. The Committee considered the following approaches and terminology:

Supervision

Supervision is understood (in the community services sector) as professional supervision for workers with a “caseload”. Most organisations who use supervision in this way pay for an external supervisor or use a skilled counselor in the organisation to supervise less experienced workers. Some workers provide supervision for workers in other organisations.

Supervision is also used as a term to explain a line manager working with a member of staff to supervise their work in a similar way that support/reflection is outlined above.

Supervision is also used to define ongoing support and development provided to a worker by a person contracted by that workers organisation. The supervisor is usually seen as someone more skilled and experienced than the person being supervised

Performance Appraisal

Appraisal is a formal mechanism for assessing the quality and quantity of the workload and the individual strengths and weaknesses of the worker. It can review job descriptions, workloads, staff development, work goals, salary increments (where applicable) and exchange expectations of staff and management. It usually occurs at least annually and results in a written report to be attached, with consultation, to the employee's personnel record. While performance appraisals are used to progress up grades in an award, it has moved away from being linked to increments and focuses more on staff development and training.

Support/Reflection

Support/reflection is usually related to managers supporting staff to achieve their workplans. It is used as a review and planning mechanism, a way of clarifying uncertainties, for the structuring of workloads and establishing priorities. It is often carried out informally but is more effective held formally on a regular basis. Monthly or six weekly usually has the best outcomes.

Mentoring

In the last ten years mentoring has become the concept used to develop models for support and skill development of staff in public service and the private sector. Many of the mentoring programs have been initiated to support women to progress in the public sector. This concept is used extensively in America and is becoming more popular in Australia. Mentoring has developed in Australia in the public sector and large private organisations. The approach involves the pairing of a person with skills to share with another person who is generally called the mentee. This type of concept can be used for skill development or support and reflection on work practice.

Mentoring does not involve payment but operates with the help of a database of mentors and their skills/ strengths, which is provided to a mentee. The mentoring relationship is formalised with an agreement outlining learning goals, meeting times and expectations. Training is provided to the mentor and the mentee on all aspects of the model.

THE WSCF APPROACH

The steering committee, on consideration of the options agreed that supervision, incorporating support, reflection and mentoring was the approach which best met the needs of the community sector who (in a majority of cases) had insufficient resources to pay for external professional support/supervision. Funding needs to be available to allow all managers and solo workers to have access to paid supervision and support around the professional issues relevant to their positions.

The Forum worked with Leigh Cupitt to develop a supervision model, which would best meet the needs of the community sector. Most of the supervision models researched in the initial stages of the project had been developed for large corporate and public sector organisations, which had well-established hierarchies. Therefore the models tend to involve a group of people who have a particular range of qualities and skills nominating themselves to mentor, and a group wanting to learn new skills as mentees.

However the community sector is generally made up of solo workers and small organisations that have different needs to the corporate or public sectors. This model and guide has been developed to accommodate people who have skills to share with other workers, but also have the desire to learn or develop skills in other areas. Therefore, a worker can be a mentor in one relationship and a mentee in another. The model also includes workers who require a broad range of support and development, beyond a specific skills focus.

While the model doesn't at this stage include a group or 'pod' approach there is potential for mentors to work with small groups around a similar issue.

Outcomes of the Workshop

On the 30th April the supervision workshop was held. Those that had responded to the initial survey were invited. The participants were taken through the definitions of supervision/ mentoring and had the opportunity to examine and comment on the draft supervision guide and checklists. Participants were also given the opportunity to formally register their interest in either giving or receiving supervision (or both).

The supervision guide and checklists also attached are the product of the steering committee deliberations and the input from the workshop.

The participants also agreed that Co-ordinators of CSGP funded services needed to be able to access supervision if required and that organisations needed to be able to resource the provision of that supervision.

The next steps

WSCF agreed to conduct a pilot for six months, which would involve up to six supervision pairs. The evaluation of the pilot will be used to develop a submission on the needs of the sector and the resources needed to meet the identified need.

WSCF will maintain a list of supervisors and their skills which will be “matched up” with those skills identified by workers wanting supervision. WSCF will support those matched pairs through the first six months of the process

Once the decision has been made by two people to work together the supervision process would follow the procedure outlined in the attached Supervision Guide

Evaluating the pilot

All aspects of the pilot will be evaluated to form the basis of a submission for ongoing funding. The evaluation will include the following issues:

- Outcomes for those involved
- Appropriateness of all aspects of the model for the community sector
- Issues involved in recruitment of mentors and the keeping of a data base
- Any financial implications to those involved
- Time involved in coordination of the pilot including supporting supervision pairs
- Cultural relevance of the supervision guide

Recommendations

- That the Department of Community Services note the report.
- That the Department of Community services agree to receive the report of the pilot and explore strategies to implement supervision for CSGP workers in Metro West
- That the Metro West take up this issue with central office of Department of Community Services
- That DoCS respond to the recommendations, in particular the recommendations about resourcing the provision of supervision

Bibliography

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Chutes and Ladders: Growing the General Manager, Harvard Business School

An introduction to Social Action Campaigns, 1992, Rubin and Rubin, Community Organizing and

The consultant also reviewed the supervision procedures for the following organisations:

- ◆ Australian Wheat Board
- ◆ Australian Bureau of Statistics
- ◆ Lifeskills Coaching – Personal and Business Coaching