



ARTS ACCESS VICTORIA

"People with a disability creating art, experiencing art and working in the arts" Arts Access Victoria's Vision Statement)

Arts Access Victoria is making time for quality



In 1974 Arts Access Victoria began as a small community arts project for people with disabilities. Today the organisation employs 12 staff as well as many contractors and volunteers and has established itself as one of Australia's most experienced and respected arts and disability organisations.

Arts Access Victoria's purpose is to promote creative, vibrant and diverse communities that value the contribution made by people with a disability across all areas of the arts.

Arts Access Victoria has a state-wide focus with programs in metro, outer-metro and regional Victoria. They also contribute to sector development at a national level as the Victorian member of Arts Access Australia, the national network for arts and disability/disadvantage.

"The position of people with disabilities in the Arts sector in Victoria is the key focus for us at Arts Access Victoria" (Arts Access Victoria's Annual Report 2007-08)

Background

Arts Access Victoria's funding contract requires compliance with the following industry standards:

These include:

- Standards for Disability Services in Victoria.
- Home and Community Care (HACC) National Service Standards.
- Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services (PDRSS) Standards.

At this stage Arts Access Victoria does not hold any external accreditation.

Trying not to reinvent the wheel and whilst also making best use of available resources, Arts Access Victoria's quality system was developed using a quality system shared by another service and customised to Arts Access Victoria's needs.

Arts Access Victoria's quality system is designed to meet the compliance requirements of industry standards and includes key elements from ISO 9001 such as document control, record control, continuous improvement and internal auditing.

In 2009 Arts Access Victoria employed the services of quality consultant Cathy D'Alterio. Contracted part time from March 2009 to October 2009, Cathy has been working with managers and staff to develop a robust quality system to support external accreditation.

It's been a big job. When Cathy started there were policies and procedures in place but they needed review and development to update and fill in identified gaps.

Although it has been a challenge developing a quality system that meets all three standards, Art Access Victoria's quality system is now ready for implementation and an organisational self assessment is planned to identify gaps.

Working well

Using an external consultant has worked well at Arts Access Victoria supplying a valued resource to concentrate on the project and an independent eye to introduce much needed change.

Over the years staff in each area of the service developed resources and documentation to meet their own needs. This has created some duplication and inconsistency of documentation.

This has the potential to cause all sorts of problems. One problem is the inefficient allocation of resources. When staff in each area of a service independently develop and review the same issues there is a duplication of effort and a risk of multiple, fragmented responses. A whole of organisation integrated approach is a more efficient use of scarce resources.

Another problem with silos is the increased risk of service quality variation. Different approaches to the same issue in different areas of a service can equal inconsistent service delivery.

Arts Access Victoria acknowledged that a big clean up was needed and that they also needed to move to a more centralised approach to quality. Recognising that they lacked the time to do it themselves Arts Access Victoria sought external assistance.

Staff acknowledged that they needed help and were open to someone else taking the wheel. Cathy was able to focus on the quality system and look at what was needed with fresh eyes. Over the course of 8 months Cathy worked closely with staff to break down the silos, document policies and procedures and develop the quality system.

Challenges

The biggest challenge at Arts Access Victoria has been availability of resources, particularly staff time.

Although all the staff were supportive and keen to contribute, Cathy still had her work cut out for her scheduling time to meet with staff overstretched trying to complete their day to day tasks.

Cathy's preference was to work with staff in groups. Groups have the advantage of allowing the different service areas to share information and negotiate shared solutions. Unfortunately due to work commitments and flexible working hours, groups of staff were difficult to access.

Therefore Cathy conducted most of the staff consultations one to one to accommodate staff lack of availability. This consumed a lot more of Cathy's time than she originally anticipated.

"One to one is great but the group sparks other things. I would have liked more group dynamic" (Cathy D'Alterio, Quality Consultant)

Difficulty accessing groups of staff also meant that it has been challenging to get everyone together for quality training.

That said working one to one produced very good results. Cathy knew that they were already doing what they needed to do, they just needed the evidence.

"I emphasised that staff need evidence by walking around saying 'evidence', 'evidence', 'evidence'" (Cathy D'Alterio, Quality Consultant)



Quality culture

It's too early to see how quality is becoming part of the Arts Access Victoria organisational culture. Cathy says staff are still very busy doing their work and not significantly engaged with quality. The proof will be in the implementation.

However no-one can question Arts Access Victoria's commitment to building a quality culture. It is clearly demonstrated through management and staff willingness to contribute to the new quality system and a willingness to allocate the resources to hire an external consultant. It is also demonstrated through their willingness to seek and act on feedback from service users.

"We encourage feedback so that we can continuously improve our processes and services. All projects include formal processes for obtaining participant feedback and evaluation" (Arts Access Victoria's Service Charter)

Over the next year as the quality system is implemented staff will begin to see the benefits in a very practical way. It's already happening. For example centralising the quality system required a centralisation of the electronic filing system. Initially this was met with resistance as staff adjusted to the new structure and learnt how to find what they were looking for. Now that staff are used to it, the structure is working well.

"It's been good because staff see the positives 'showing you do what you say you do'" (Cathy D'Alterio, Quality Consultant)

Messages

*"Arts Access Victoria is committed to providing high quality services to our members, participants and clients"
(Arts Access Victoria's Service Charter)*

Cathy has the following advice for other organisations working towards developing a quality culture:

- It is essential to get buy-in.
- Getting buy-in takes good will, time and group involvement.
- If you don't have management support, you won't get anywhere.
- Consider employing an external consultant. It will remove the burden from existing staff and means that you will have someone with no competing responsibilities or assumed knowledge asking you to describe what you do and how do you do it.



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