

Case Study



*"Consumer controlled services for all people with disabilities in Victoria"
(HR&SS Vision Statement)*

Empowered consumers at Housing Resource & Support Service

Operating since 1986, the Housing Resource & Support Service (HR&SS) supports people of all abilities who wish to live independently in the community. Services include case management, brokerage of care, support, housing and other services

HR&SS is a recognised leader in high quality service provision, consumer empowerment and consumer participation and promotes self determination and the greatest range of choice for the consumer.



HR&SS has a strong focus on supporting women with disabilities and people with disabilities from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and in 2007 HR&SS won Diversity at Work's esteemed National Diversity Award.

HR&SS consumers direct the focus and development of HR&SS at all levels. A key example of consumer control is the Committee of Management which consists of eight people with disabilities and operates on a governance model.

"Since its inception HR&SS has been governed by a group of people with disabilities" (HR&SS Annual Report 2007 - 2008)

Background

HR&SS' funding contract requires compliance with the Standards for Disability Services in Victoria.

At this stage HR&SS does not hold any external accreditation.

"HR&SS's expertise in the field and extensive local knowledge places it in an ideal position to assist people with disabilities to live as they choose in the community" (HR&SS Annual Report 2007 - 2008)

HR&SS has been involved in quality improvements for more than 20 years. Examples of HR&SS quality related activities include:

- Annual consumer surveys.
- Developing and reviewing policies and procedures.
- Developing clear HR processes.
- Including feedback forms in consumer newsletters.
- Annual contract reviews with agency partners.

HR&SS is participating in a collaborative working group focussing on quality. The group comprises four, small, not for profit, disability services that share quality related information, contacts and consultants. The group has been running for 18 months.

Marija Groen, Chief Executive Officer, was responsible for quality compliance at HR&SS until recently.

Today that responsibility is delegated to the newly created and permanent position of Operations Manager held by Anne-Maree Culvenor. Anne-Maree allocates approximately 6 hours per week to quality matters.

"We are always asking 'how can we improve?' " (Marija Groen, Chief Executive Officer)

Working well

Consistent with their commitment to consumer empowerment and participation, HR&SS has established processes in place for listening to consumers and acting on their feedback to continuously improve service delivery.

"HR&SS will use all feedback to improve the service" (HR&SS Newsletter September 2009)

Annually HR&SS conducts an independent consumer survey. This survey is developed and implemented by an independent consultant with a significant sample of the HR&SS consumers.

"The consumer survey gives consumers an opportunity to have a say" (Marija Groen, Chief Executive Officer)



Consumers are invited to respond anonymously in as much detail as possible. All 72 survey questions relate to the consumer's general impression of the way HR&SS provides a service to them, in line with the nine Standards for Disability Services in Victoria. In 2009 the survey was answered by 65 out of 260, or 25% of consumers.

Tertiary students assist with the analysis of the survey responses and the results help HR&SS to identify areas of improvement, as well as indicate what the service is doing well.

"Consumers have given HR&SS a satisfactory or more than satisfactory rating to all the questions" (HR&SS Newsletter September 2009)

Challenges

Developing and implementing quality and continuous improvement requires an investment in time and effort. It demands new skills, time for reflection and evaluation and enough freedom to try new ways of working that may or may not work.

Like many other services, HR&SS' limited funds are already stretched delivering day to day services and the decision to self fund the new Operations Manager's position at HR&SS was a difficult decision that demonstrates their commitment to quality.

"The issue is where to get the funds to pay for this level of professionalism" (Marija Groen, Chief Executive Officer)

Limited people and time resources are also impacting on the organisation's capacity to effectively address risk management, in particular documenting and monitoring risk assessment. An ongoing challenge, Marija anticipates that with training and support this is an area that will be addressed over time with the help of the new Operations Manager.

Working out the best way in which to reach consumers to obtain their feedback was another challenge. In the past HR&SS tried to implement consumer focus groups but they had a low RSVP rate and an even lower attendance rate. Today HR&SS has abandoned focus groups and staff visit people in their homes or use email to gather their feedback.

"Focus groups didn't work, people just don't turn up" (Marija Groen, Chief Executive Officer)

Quality culture

Quality has been a part of HR&SS' culture for many years.

"We want to be sure that we "are" providing a high quality service, and need to know we can improve ourselves" (HR&SS web site)

Ways in which HR&SS has fostered this culture of quality include:

- Being careful to ensure that staff, already stretched, don't fear and resist quality improvements.
- Helping staff to adjust to change in small increments as well as big increments.
- Helping staff to make the shift in intellectual understanding that quality results in smarter work, not more work.
- Making it clear that at all levels, clients are empowered to ask questions or give feedback.
- Having the quality message clearly stated and consistently presented in all documentation.

"Our commitment to quality is written in the recruitment ad" (Marija Groen, Chief Executive Officer)

- Making sure that the quality system is meaningful to staff and consumers so that they can see the value and experience the benefits.

Messages

Marija has the following advice for other organisations also trying to develop a quality culture:

- Listen to feedback and be willing to implement change.

"Be prepared to give things a go – not just lip service" (Marija Groen, Chief Executive Officer)

- Seek broad and independent input and be open to new perspectives and fresh insights. The more people involved, the better you can improve.

"Outside people come in with different ears and eyes" (Marija Groen, Chief Executive Officer)

- Ensure that quality is a key thread throughout the organisation. Make it a part of everyday discussions, supervision, reports and service planning, delivery and review.
- Be open to different ways and don't fear change.
- Incorporate quality and improvement from first point of contact for consumers and staff – it flows out.
- Be seriously committed to show and promote leadership in quality and continuous improvement.
- Adopt a reflective practice and don't accept "she'll be right mate".



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