



"IMPACT prides itself on being responsive to the diverse needs of the community it services and making a positive contribution to people's lives" (IMPACT's Strategic Plan)

A holistic approach to quality at IMPACT Support Services

Established in 1980 and primarily funded by the Department of Human Services, IMPACT Support Services is a community-based not-for-profit organisation with offices in Oakleigh and Frankston.

IMPACT's mission is to work in partnership with individuals to provide them with opportunities to participate in community life and to assist them to make informed choices.

This is achieved through providing an array of responsive, innovative, flexible and effective, community-based support services in the areas of day programs, home based outreach, independent living support, recreation and leisure, respite and carer support.



Supported by a team of qualified and experienced staff, IMPACT's disability and mental health services are accessed by people with intellectual disabilities, psychiatric disabilities and neurological disorders, and the people who care for them.

IMPACT delivers quality disability and mental health services that encourage and enable participating individuals to live their life, their way.

Background

IMPACT's funding contracts require compliance with the following standards:

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

In 2008 Suzanne Fernandes was appointed to the position of Operations Manager responsible for quality compliance, occupational health and safety, human resources and administration. It is her job to ensure IMPACT has the systems in place to meet compliance requirements.

In 2007, already compliant with the HACC Standards, IMPACT concentrated on PDRSS compliance. Working with the Quality Improvement and Community Services Accreditation (QICSA), IMPACT's management team reviewed and documented IMPACT's evidence to support accreditation using the QICSA Journals. IMPACT found the Journals very helpful, encouraging a team effort and capturing all the necessary information. In August 2008, IMPACT obtained quality accreditation from the Quality Improvement Council (QIC) against the PDRSS Standards and QICSA CORE Standards.

Overwhelmed by the amount of work and not knowing where to start IMPACT then approached external quality consultant, Tina Berghella, with a brief to develop an integrated quality system to encompass all three standards in addition to occupational health and safety human resources and governance requirements. In 2008, over a period of twelve months, that system was developed in collaboration with management, staff and participants.

"In 2008 we built a quality system tailored to our needs. We addressed the quality standards to deliver our services with a robust frame"
(Suzanne Fernandes, Operations Manager)

Working well

The introduction of a quality system is a major change for any organisation and resistance to change from key stakeholders is expected.

However this was not the case at IMPACT. Coinciding events including a change of Board members and senior managers were a catalyst for an organisational restructure that collapsed five programs into three services. This triggered the need for a complete review of all organisational policies and processes. People were open minded and ready to embrace a new quality system.

"The timing was right for us to put our house in order. It was really a big clean up. We faced the changes ahead of us with an open mind and welcomed the assistance / support of Tina Berghella" (Suzanne Fernandes, Operations Manager)

There was full management and board support with no hesitation. Simply put, there was a philosophical match with IMPACT's values and the standards. This high level support has ensured the success of the quality system.

Another key strength in IMPACT's approach to quality is their open door policy where any kind of feedback from all parties is encouraged and welcomed. Everything in the quality system is open for discussion promoting a sense of ownership to all parties.

"It makes sense, it is debated and negotiated and it is done for a reason to acknowledge our values and the standards. It is not someone's wild idea" (Suzanne Fernandes, Operations Manager)

Challenges

Whilst resistance to change was minimised by circumstance, there are still instances of people trying to hold on to the old way of doing things. Even though the new policies and procedures have been negotiated and agreed upon, Suzanne finds staff sometimes do things the old way. For example a new recruitment procedure was negotiated, approved and issued but not followed. Implementation is still a challenge after two years with old habits hard to break.

Implementation issues are consuming more of Suzanne's time and effort than she expected. Her focus in 2009 has been to concentrate on working closely with the Coordinators, organising special meetings to talk through procedures and reflect on practice. This is helping to ensure that what is documented and what is practiced are one and the same, as well as highlighting areas for improvement.

At a recent meeting, Suzanne and the Coordinators worked their way through the Entry Process. The meeting resulted in a number of continuous improvement suggestions and significantly increased buy-in by the Coordinators.

Suzanne's advice to other organisations is to be patient with implementation.

A further challenge is that many support staff work off site and rarely visit IMPACT's offices, limiting the opportunity for formal and informal conversations about quality. By investing her efforts with the Coordinators, Suzanne hopes to create a flow on effect that will have a positive influence on the support staff.

"In 2009 we have worked towards integrating the quality system into the operations of IMPACT and to successfully disseminate this knowledge to our stakeholders"
(Suzanne Fernandes, Operations Manager)

Quality culture

There are many ways in which IMPACT is making quality part of its organisational culture.

These include:

- Promoting quality as not simply a compliance requirement but as an essential way of improving service delivery.
- Presenting a quality topic or activity at every staff planning day. IMPACT holds four staff planning days per year.
- Accessing and disseminating DHS quality information. Suzanne reports that the information sessions, case studies and other resources provided by DHS have been very useful to share the quality message at IMPACT.
- Quality is an agenda item at every meeting ensuring that everyone is prompted to reflect on how IMPACT can do things better.
- Making small changes over time, such as introducing controlled forms and procedures and standardising electronic folders, so that people can see the benefits one step at a time.
- Ensuring that everything is done as part of an evolutionary and upward process of continuous improvement and clearly documented.

Concerned that there is still a perception that the quality system sits outside and separate from day to day operations, Suzanne has decided to change the name of the quality system to the operations system in 2010. Her aim is to dissolve any remaining barriers, ensuring quality is integral to day to day IMPACT operations.

Messages

Finally Suzanne who has travelled the quality journey at IMPACT from the start has the following advice for other organisations facing a similar challenge:

- Don't underestimate implementation – it takes more time and effort than you think.
- Make sure your quality system has a robust structure. What you are doing today will not be the same as what you will be doing in the future. Continuous improvement makes change inevitable and a robust quality system is one that can accommodate those changes.
- Have an open door policy. Make sure everybody has the opportunity to be heard and offer their input.
- Keep it streamlined and simple. A quality system does not have to be complicated or cumbersome.



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