

## Case Study



*"All work requirements are properly defined, accomplished and verified. All people work within the framework for quality outlined in the Reach Out Continuous Improvement System."  
(Reach Out Quality Statement)*

## ***Quality, a normal part of business at Reach Out Mental Health***

Established in 1992, Reach Out Mental Health (Reach Out) is a not-for-profit, non-government, disability support service, providing services in the middle south sector of Melbourne for people with serious psychiatric illness and their carers.

Reach Out's mission is "Engaging with people affected by mental illness" which will assist to achieve its vision "Enabling people to create futures beyond mental illness".



*Reach Out's Administration Coordinator Dianne Rayner and CEO Janet Hopkins*

Employing a team of 35 qualified and experience staff, Reach Out focuses on individuals and their journey of recovery, which is a process of growth and development whereby people can regain control and learn to manage their illness and its impact.

Supporting Reach Out to do this is their quality system.

## Background

Reach Out is well advanced on its quality journey and has an established Quality Management System that is designed to meet the requirements of:

- ISO 9001:2008 Quality management systems — Requirements.
- Commonwealth Disability Services Standards.
- Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).
- Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services (PDRSS) Standards.

Reach Out started developing their quality system in 1997 prior to any contractual obligation to meet industry standards. This meant that they were well advanced once the industry standards were introduced.

In 2003, Reach Out achieved organisation wide accreditation to the ISO 9001. In addition Reach Out's employment service, Reach Out Employment is accredited to the Commonwealth Disability Services Standards and Reach Out's Registered Training Provider, Southern Professional Training, is accredited to the AQTF.

ISO 9001 accreditation is not an industry requirement. A strategic management decision, ISO 9001 provides a robust framework for documenting work practices, continuous improvement and legal and industry standards compliance at Reach Out.

In the future Reach Out is expecting that they will need to comply with either the Standards for Disability Services in Victoria or the Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services (PDRSS) Standards. They are waiting on clarification from the Department of Health but confident that their quality system and work practices can accommodate either standard.

## Working well

Janet Hopkins, Chief Executive Officer, is well acquainted with Reach Out's quality system. Prior to her promotion to the position of CEO, Janet was responsible for document control and implementing the IT systems that support the quality system.

Reach Out's quality manual is electronic and housed within an advanced but very easy to use web based system. The quality manual software is help system based and is easily navigated. Staff simply click on an icon on the desk top to access the quality system, type in a key word and all relevant information comes up.

Document control is achieved through an in-house developed software tool called QA Easy. Staff use QA Easy to raise corrective action notices and identify issues with the quality manual. Management is able to use QA Easy to manage updates, track progress and report against outstanding corrective actions. QA Easy has now been implemented at a number of agencies around Australia. A critical resource for the organisation, Reach Out's quality system clarifies performance expectations and accountabilities and ensures that everything that Reach Out does is done for a reason and is fully documented.

***"The quality system ensures that what you are doing is conscious" (Janet Hopkins, CEO)***

The quality system provides staff with easy access to the information and controlled documents they need to deliver a quality service, freeing up valuable management time that, in the past, was wasted answering questions that are now readily resolved by the quality system.

Reach Out's quality system not only supports consistent current performance but also continuous improvement. All suggestions, problems and internal and external audit findings are logged via QA Easy, actioned and reviewed before they are closed out.

# Challenges

In the beginning there was some resistance from staff in relation to being audited. But once staff realised that it was the system being audited and not their skills or job performance, staff saw that audits are non threatening. Now they take audits in their stride.

Unfortunately the software program Reach Out uses to create its web based quality manual is no longer available and the organisation is looking at alternatives. They have decided to go ahead with a wiki based quality manual.

A wiki is a kind of on line database that allows users who have permission to create and edit pages. Wiki advantages include their ease of access and use, low establishment costs, change tracking and transparency.

The wiki will add even greater transparency and tracking to Reach Out's quality system.

Janet remembers that initially the quality manual was time consuming to set up. It houses over 450 pages of information, a lot more information than is actually needed, and has been increasingly difficult to maintain and keep up to date.

This valuable observation has been added to Reach Out's list of continuous improvement ideas and a complete review will take place as the system is moved across to the wiki.

***"The system makes you painfully aware of things you haven't done"***  
***(Janet Hopkins, CEO)***

# Quality culture

Reach Out's quality system is fully integrated with day to day operations, a significant organisational achievement that many other organisations strive for.

Janet says the organisation has achieved this through:

- Initial and ongoing staff training and support.
- Communicating very clearly to staff that the quality system is part of their everyday work at Reach Out.
- Communicating that continuous improvement and quality control is an important funding requirement.
- Adopting a business approach. A quality system standardises processes, specifies requirements, clarifies responsibilities and accountabilities and improves efficiency by eliminating waste. This means that organisational resources can be better allocated to the things that matter – service delivery.
- Conducting frequent internal audits until everyone was comfortable participating in audits.
- Introducing quality from recruitment onwards. For example Reach Out's position descriptions outline in specific detail staff quality responsibilities and require staff to sign employment contracts that they will comply with the quality system.

***"Quality is normal for us. It's just always there – a normal part of what everyone does"*** (Janet Hopkins, CEO)

# Messages

*"Whatever you do make it easily accessible" (Janet Hopkins, CEO)*

Reach Out has learnt a lot about quality and quality systems over the past 12 years.

Janet has the following advice for other organisations hoping to make quality part of their organisational culture:

- Make the quality system user friendly and accessible
- Make it so that people are comfortable and confident and will raise corrective actions when they come across an issue that needs addressing.
- Make it easy to maintain

*"Managers and staff shall ensure that the quality requirements and processes are documented, implemented and integrated into the regular work practices in their respective areas of responsibility, and that all documents clearly reflect the current work activities and are appropriate to the user application" (Reach Out Quality Statement)*



*Reach Out's internal auditor Pamela Copping with staff member Janette Delacorn*

Reach Out Mental Health

8B Park Road

Cheltenham

Victoria 3192

P. 03 9585 5677

F. 03 9585 5688

E. [enquiries@reachout.org.au](mailto:enquiries@reachout.org.au)

[www.reachout.org.au](http://www.reachout.org.au)

