

Case Study



"To be the acknowledged leader in the provision of high quality services for people with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders" (SASI Vision Statement)

A long term commitment to quality at Statewide Autistic Services



Statewide Autistic Services Incorporated (SASI), originated in 1966 when a small group of concerned parents came together to develop appropriate educational services for their autistic children.

Today SASI employs 140 staff and delivers a range of services to people with Autism Spectrum Disorders, their families, and the community. Services include adult day programs, children's respite care, full-time accommodation, community education, recreation programs and carer support groups.

SASI's long term commitment to quality is supported by the following objectives:

- To provide services that clients need and enjoy.
- To achieve consistency of operations so that staff have access to the same documents no matter where they are working.
- To continuously improve client services.

Background

SASI's funding contract requires compliance with the Standards for Disability Services in Victoria.

Aware that a quality management system was needed, SASI initially explored becoming accredited to ISO 9001 Quality management systems. However after careful consideration they then decided to adopt the quality management controls from ISO 9001 without the accreditation. These controls are the foundation of SASI's quality system and include document control, record control, continuous improvement and internal quality auditing.

"A quality system based on the Victorian Standards for Disability Services and many of the controls found in an ISO system supports quality service delivery" (SASI Annual Report 2007-2008)

Pre-dating contractual standards compliance requirements, SASI's commitment to quality management can be traced back to the mid 1990s when Brian Forsyth was first appointed to the newly created position of Quality Manager.

In the last couple of years Brian has been keeping busy implementing the Standards for Disability Services in Victoria and preparing for accreditation. This has included a complete management review of all policies, procedures and forms against the standards and the implementation of client, staff and partnership feedback mechanisms such as satisfaction surveys and forms. Today SASI has the evidence to prove that they deliver a quality service to clients.

"Formal staff and client surveys along with observations and informal discussions indicate overall satisfaction with the quality and appropriateness of services and supports" (SASI Annual Report 2007-2008)

Working well

Preparing for Standards for Disability Services in Victoria accreditation has been an organisational wide endeavour. Formal quality committees were established at Board level to review governance level policies and within the Operations Committee to review policies at an operations level. To ensure that a wide range of feedback is considered prior to implementation of new and revised policies, managers and staff also provide feedback through email and the intranet.

"Setting up of quality committees to oversee implementation has helped keep the quality momentum" (Brian Forsyth, Quality and Training Manager)

Key strengths of SASI's quality system include:

- An effective document control process. Any staff member at any site has electronic access to current and controlled documents.
"The intranet system will allow staff to access electronic copies of procedures and forms which will assist in ensuring all staff are looking at the same up to date versions of documents" (SASI Annual Report 2007-2008)
- An emphasis on keeping it simple. Transitioning to the standards involved modifying what they already had, rather than creating a new system from scratch. This ensured that the process was not overwhelming.
- Checklists linking documentation to outcome standards and industry standards highlighting and reminding staff of the relationship between the standards and work practice.

Challenges

SASI's Strategic Purpose clearly states the organisational commitment to excellence in service quality.

"We are a team of high performing professionals committed to supporting people with a disability, their families and carers in environments that help realize the full potential of each individual. With commitment to our values we strive for excellence in service delivery. We encourage and promote community participation and inclusion while at the same time respecting clients choice of activities. We collaborate with all our stakeholders with the aim of improving the life chances of people with a disability" (SASI Strategic Purpose)

This commitment is solid and reflected at all levels of the organisation.

The main challenge at SASI was maintaining the momentum during implementation.

For example the quality system was kicked off with introductory quality training that raised awareness and expectations. Unfortunately a delay between these introductory sessions and subsequent more advanced sessions meant that the initial staff enthusiasm was lost. This was difficult to make up.

Another challenge was finding time for staff to get together to talk about quality and review policies and procedures, particularly as some staff work part time. This was overcome by adopting a flexible approach to scheduling meetings to fit in with staff availability.

Quality culture

SASI has made quality an integral part of the organisation's culture by working closely with staff to help them embrace the quality system and the standards.

A significant level of acceptance was cultivated by examining with staff the areas of best practice in relation to their practical application to the job. This highlighted for staff the relevance of the standards in a way that they could easily relate to.

Staff are also reminded that the quality system is about supporting and improving service delivery not creating more work. For example staff were relieved to find that existing progress notes and communication books were evidence of quality service delivery and further evidence could be provided through simple mechanisms such as photos and observations.

SASI also ensures that clients and carers are kept informed of quality related matters.

Clients are regularly informed through newsletters and client committees and recently SASI arranged for VALID to run a Disability Act awareness raising session with clients.

Carers are also kept up to date through the newsletter and carer forums.

"A section dedicated to quality is included in SASI's newsletter to keep readers up to date on quality issues" (SASI Annual Report 2007-2008)

Finally all stakeholders are encouraged to use SASI's feedback forms to suggest ways to improve service delivery.



Messages

Improvement does not stop with a report and SASI's quality system will move ahead with:

- Internal audits scheduled through to February with an ongoing audit plan.
- Certification planned for the later half of 2010.
- Benchmarking.
- Use of established networks for information sharing and mutual support.

Over the years Brian has developed a wealth of experience when it comes to quality and quality systems. He has the following advice to offer:

- Much of what you need is already available within the organisation. Be smart and make the most of what you have.
- A robust quality system requires input from all stakeholders at all levels. This takes time. Make sure that you give yourself sufficient time.
- Remember when it seems overwhelming that it will result in benefits to the service and clients.
- Keep the momentum going by reminding staff and clients continuously that quality is part of the way that you do things.
- Try to keep as many people involved as possible and keep encouraging people to talk and think about quality through newsletters, meetings, forums and informal conversations.

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