PROTECTING CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

DEVELOPMENT OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR DISABILITY SERVICES PROVIDERS

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PROBLEM TO BE ADDRESSSED

People with disability who rely on support services are at risk of neglect and abuse. While there have been efforts undertaken to manage this risk, service providers continue to struggle to ensure a safe environment for their clients; and people continue to be harmed, physically and psychologically.
PROJECT OVERVIEW

**Phase 1**
- Systematic Lit Review
- Development of a searchable online database (www.cesoc.asn.au)

**Phase 2**
- Obtaining the opinion of practitioners
- Delphi Survey to be completed by Service Provider Staff (round 1 n=>180).

**Phase 3**
- Action Research involving service provider staff and managers to combine research evidence and practice to formulate policies and procedures
DELPHI ROUND 1

Round 1 generated a large amount of data:

1. Which are the most important safeguards to have in place (around 120 items synthesised into 13 subdomains)
2. Key obstacles to the implementation of safe environments (around 170 items synthesised into 24 subdomains)
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

External Factors:
• Compliance with external policy environment (Standards, Disability Act 2006, etc.).
• Societal Institutions (e.g. protective services) more enabled to deal with people with disabilities.

Organisational Context:
• A client-centred Empowering Service Environment.
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Management Practice (1):

• Regular management contact with clients.
• Observation and contact with direct care staff.
• Open discussion with staff about reporting any mistreatment witnessed.
• Quality supervision.
• Immediate investigation and response, involving Police
• Ensuring debriefing of staff.
• Reinforcement of a culture that supports human rights by means of ‘walking the talk’, where good practice is modelled by managers.
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Management Practice (2):

• Implement a continuous quality improvement process.

• Clearly communicate that the best safeguard is to report, then it is up to managers/appropriate people to investigate and respond appropriately.

• Enforce accountability.

• Enforce policies & procedures of the service.
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Organisational Structure:

• Being a small service where all staff and clients know each other and issues can be identified early and rectified.

• Transparency and accountability ideally through adapting and giving power to an external panel of experts.
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Procedures:
Proper and clear procedures for staff to follow regarding ... how to work with people and how to respond to situations how to report abuse/neglect

Recommended Paperwork:
Incident recording system which is numbered from the point of incident Separate abuse complaints processes Medication administration
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Recruitment:

• Checks on hiring staff –
  – criminal history,
  – working with children check,
  – References

• Hiring caring protective people.
• High standards when recruiting staff
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Internal Culture:

• Vigilance by staff for signs of neglect and abuse
• A strong positive culture where staff feel safe and are both encouraged and supported to report issues
• Organisational openness to deal with abuse/neglect.
• Culture that promotes and supports consumer participation in order to receive both positive and negative feedback.
• Reinforcing that, although wrong, neglect/abuse is not always deliberate and planned.
• A culture of zero tolerance
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Staff Education (1)

- Comprehensive reliability testing of staff knowledge on an ongoing basis.
- Clear understanding of role of staff regarding abuse/neglect
- Staff training on:
  - Understanding risk factors and indicators, such as grooming behaviours
  - Self-awareness and emotional competence (recognising when things don’t feel right)
  - Response to abuse/neglect
  - Responsibly to act and empowered and encouraged to speak up if there is a concern.
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Staff Education (2)

Staff Training on:

‘Safe and appropriate touch’, especially around personal care activities
Environmental contributors and early warning signs.
Understanding and recognising the signs from non-verbal clients.
How to have discussions with clients about abuse and neglect.
Regular refreshers in recognising and responding to abuse and neglect.
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Direct Care Staff:

• Not allowing the individual to be left with strangers or with people you know are untrustworthy.
• More than one care worker on shift at any one time.
• Continuity of staff to encourage a positive relationship with clients so that changes in behaviour/personality can be recognised.
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Circles of Support, Networks, Community Visitors Advocates (1):

• Community inclusion is the most valuable safeguard. If others, aside from workers, are involved in a person’s life in a meaningful, ongoing and genuine way, then their interest, their concern, their engagement can be an effective safeguard against abuse.

• Every person should be supported to develop a relationship with someone who can advocate on their behalf. It is important that people have someone in their life who is not a service provider and who is free to advocate and able to make complaints as required.
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Circles of Support, Networks, Community Visitors, Advocates (2):

• Services are open to families and advocates.

• Inviting Regular feedback from clients, families and stakeholders and informing them of their responsibility to care and speak up and look out for one another.

• Creating Networks around clients of people that monitor and care about the person
RESULTS ROUND 1: SAFEGUARDS

Client Education

• Educating the individual (person with disability) on how to report instances of abuse and neglect
• Raising clients’ capacity to speak up if they have been mistreated or feel unsafe
• Ensuring people have (are trained in the use of) communication supports available to enable them to voice their concerns
• Training of people with disabilities in self-awareness (when they feel things are not right) and protective behaviours.
• Empowering people with a disability to know their human rights and legal rights, and how to exercise them.
• Raising clients’ awareness of what is appropriate behaviour towards them and what not.
SUMMING UP

Safeguarding is not easy:
- Reporting has profound social and cultural consequences
- Allegations can often not be substantiated
- This can lead to ‘Problem Shifting’

Safeguarding has a cost:
- Hiring quality staff
- Staff education
- Client education
- Fostering networks and circles of support
THANK YOU

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