

National Disability Workforce Project

Pilot Site Report

The effects of systematic performance support and development on Team Leader and Direct Support Worker retention

Yooralla

Workforce issues targeted:

Yooralla is a multi-faceted community based disability service provider. We operate out of professionally managed service centres, administrative centres, kindergartens, schools, and other public facilities in community locations across Victoria. We provide practical solutions for around 30 000 Victorians with disabilities including therapy, equipment, accommodation, respite, employment, recreation and independent living skills. The organisation employs over 1,400 staff and faces a number of different challenges.

Agreeing to become part of the pilot for the National Workforce Project gave us several options as potential projects. The two main reasons for choosing to look at a new Performance Support and Development Review approach are as follows:

- Staff were unhappy with the level of performance feedback. We had received firm evidence of this in our 2007 staff climate survey
- Team Leaders said that they were aware of the need to hold performance reviews however they were prevented from doing so due to time constraints and skills limitations

Our assumptions:

As part of the project we sought to establish:

- whether this approach has an effect (positive, negative or no effect) on staff feeling valued and supported in their work
- whether staff feeling valued and supported in their work has an impact on retention

Strategies trialled:

Following a number of month's consultation with a lively and involved working group of members from across the organisation, a new Performance Support and Development Review system was developed. As well as having the usual elements, such as performance objectives using key accountabilities, the new system introduced more regular feedback and discussion about how people worked. Specifically, new areas included in this system were:

- regular documented informal catch-ups (monthly or bi-monthly) and six monthly formal performance reviews

- values and associated behaviours were included in performance objectives and recorded, discussed and evaluated.

After discussion, five sites in North West Region of ISS (Individualised Support Services) were involved in the pilot. This included five Team Leaders and all permanent direct support staff (approximately 26). We also involved a comparison group in another ISS region in relation to a staff survey undertaken in both areas.

The following actions were taken as part of the pilot:

- Position descriptions of Area Managers and Team Leaders were changed to include provision of regular feedback
- Team Leaders were given extra funded time to implement regular documented informal catch ups and six monthly formal performance reviews - two hours per week
- Staff were asked to complete a brief survey prior to the commencement of the pilot and then again five to six months later
- Staff in the comparison group were also asked to complete survey
- The Area Manager and the five Team Leaders were given accredited training and on going support to develop:
 - knowledge of new Performance Support and Development Review system
 - further knowledge and skills around giving and receiving feedback and coaching
 - the skills required for courageous conversations

How we measured the impact of our strategies:

Measures were looked at to see what effect the pilot may be having. These included:

- Staff turnover - this was initially found to be very low in pilot area and increased rather than decreased during the pilot period
- Exit interviews (these are optional and none were received during the pilot)
- Staff Survey (comparative results due to be collated at the end of June 09)
- Absenteeism rates (comparative results due to be collated at the end of June 09)

Conclusions:

As with all projects, there were unexpected events during the progression of the project. The following are some of the issues and conclusions:

- The training offered by the external Registered Training Organisation spent significant time during training on theoretical issues and ran out of time to sufficiently cover skills practice. This meant that the RTO had to come back and coach Team Leaders individually on site.
- This consequently delayed the start of the system.
- Introducing values and associated behaviours as measures of performance as part of the new Performance Support and Development Review system revealed longstanding problems within some teams that now need addressing
- For other teams, evaluating values and associated behaviours were welcomed
- Turnover of Team Leaders occurred during the pilot, although it was not clear whether this was specifically related to the pilot or not
- Because the system was so well received, Yooralla agreed to roll it out during the pilot period. This meant all services within Yooralla were using the new system and there was

no longer a true comparison group who were not using the system with which to compare.

Implications:

The delay in starting the system, due to the necessity to coach team leaders individually on site, meant that at the time of writing the project has not yet been completed. However the implications so far are:

- New system enthusiastically welcomed by Team Leaders
- System supported so well that we rolled it out to the rest of the organisation during the pilot time
- The accuracy of initial assumptions are yet to be clarified as we are uncertain of the Direct Support Workers response to regular documented informal catch ups and six monthly formal performance reviews
- The measures are yet to be collected to verify whether staff are feeling more valued and whether this has had an impact on retention
- One interesting implication is that there may be longer term rather than short term positive effect. The initial discussions within groups, particularly related to values and associated behaviours, have lead to higher rather than lower turnover.