

Issue #21, March 2009

Evaluation of the Outcomes of Women with Disabilities Family Violence Learning Program

This Issue

1. Evaluation of the Outcomes of Women with Disabilities Family Violence Learning Program
2. LDC Group survey to disability support providers on service user participation and reporting on individual service user outcomes

In 2005/2006 the Victorian Government launched an important state wide policy to address family violence. Two reports, Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria (2005) and Changing Lives: A New Approach to Family Violence in Victoria (2005) set out the new approach. This aimed to provide a more integrated cross- sectoral response to family violence by the development of regional and local partnerships to improve the safety of women and children and increase the accountability of men who use violence against family members.

In recognition of the dire situation of women with a disability who experience domestic violence and abuse the Disability Services Workforce Development Branch of DHS acted to establish a cross program and cross-sectoral learning program to provide workers in both the disability and family violence sectors with the skills to support women with a disability experiencing family violence.

The Family Violence Learning Program began in 2007 across all 8 regions of Victoria. It aimed to adopt a community of practice approach and consisted of two days of training and four half day practice forums per region. The training program was developed and delivered by Swinburne University of Technology and the Domestic Violence and Resource Centre.

LDC Group was engaged to evaluate the outcomes, development and

implementation of the Learning Program in early 2008.

The evaluation sought to answer the following questions within one DHS metropolitan and one DHS rural region to assess its efficacy in improving the level of support provided to women with a disability experiencing family violence by:

- Changing the awareness, confidence and capacity of workers
- Changing the practice of workers
- Developing improved regional processes and stronger relationships and referral pathways across the disability and family violence sectors,
- Finding out whether the strategy (i.e. capacity building of disability workers and creation of communities of practice) is sustainable and resulted in positive outcomes for women with a disability who experience family violence
- Determining if the learning was program appropriately targeted
- Suggesting strategies to sustain benefits in the longer term

A report of the evaluation findings and recommendations has been provided to DHS.

Since the commencement of the evaluation the much broader provisions of the Family Violence and Protection Act 2008 are now in operation and will:

- Broaden the definition of family violence so that it includes economic and emotional abuse
- Expand the definition of 'family' to cover a range of family and family type relationships

- Give police more powers to respond quickly and effectively to family violence
- Make it easier for victims of family violence to change tenancy arrangements to enable them to stay in their own homes if they wish

It follows that there is a continuing need for joint training and learning opportunities for practitioners working in this area if the rights and protection of women with a disability experiencing domestic violence are to be fully upheld.

By Dymphna Laurie

Supporting organisations to implement the Quality Framework for Victorian Disability Services

The LDC Group team has worked in and with disability service providers over many years and so we understand and appreciate the practical day-to-day issues that impact service delivery, including the current challenges that services may face in implementing the Quality Framework. From our experience we recognise that the implementation of the Quality Framework may present some additional challenges for some service providers, whilst also generating new opportunities for achieving important outcomes for individual service users.

In order to identify what problems or concerns disability service providers may experience in implementing the Quality Framework LDC Group circulated a short survey via the DISTSS/Field email list.

Sixteen responses to the survey were received from service providers. Over half the responses came from service providers in regional Victoria.



An important component of the quality framework, reflected in the Industry and Outcome Indicators, is ensuring that service users have opportunities to convey their experiences, thoughts and feelings about the support they are receiving. The responses to the survey have provided us with a snapshot of how some disability service providers are providing opportunities for their service users to communicate their experiences about the support they receive, what the main challenges are in providing those opportunities and what help they might need to improve their processes.

In response to the first question **‘Does your organisation ensure opportunities for service users to convey their needs, aspirations and level of satisfaction with the supports they receive?’** all respondents indicated they were providing opportunities to their service users. The primary means of engaging service users are listed below.

Type of engagement	Most Common Response
Surveys	↑
Complaints/feedback procedure	
Individual case management	
Residents meetings	
Facilitate & training re advocacy and feedback	↓
Education resources and programs	
Evaluation process re activities/program	
	Least Common Response



As the diagram above shows, surveys and complaints/feedback procedures were the most common means of engaging with service users. The types of opportunities and the number of different opportunities provided to service users varied depending on the level of involvement that service users had with the organisation. As well as organising surveys and complaints procedures organisations with onsite service users indicated they were able to utilise individual case management and residents meetings as a means of gauging service user’s level of satisfaction. They also indicated they are in the position of providing education and training to service users to ensure they are able to fully participate in gauging their level of satisfaction in the types of supports they received. Other organisations who had limited regular contact with service users indicated they were more reliant on surveys and program evaluation activities to determine level of satisfaction.

The second question of the survey asked **‘Has it been challenging for your organisation to involve service users in discussions about their needs, aspirations and satisfaction with their supports?’** Most respondents indicated that it was challenging to engage service users in these discussions. The main challenges identified are listed below.

Challenges	
Lack of resources (suitable means of communication, training for staff, staff time required)	<div style="text-align: center;"> Most Common Response   Least Common Response </div>
Client capacity to communicate due to mental health, intellectual disability, communication issues	
Client interest in and willingness to engage	
Lack of day to day contact with service users	
Lack of connection between when activities are undertaken and when support services are available	
Lack of consistency in how clients are involved across different services	
Challenge is in evaluating level of satisfaction	

Lack of resources was identified as a major challenge in engaging with service users in gauging their level of satisfaction with the support they received. The resources required include appropriate means of communicating with service users, particularly those with communication difficulties. There was also perceived to be a lack of appropriate training for staff and having the staff time to engage effectively with service users. The capacity of clients to communicate their views effectively and their interest in engaging in the review process were also seen as major challenges for disability service providers.

The third question asked ‘**Do you require assistance in creating opportunities for service users to convey their needs and aspirations?**’ Approximately half of the respondents felt they needed such assistance. The main areas of assistance required are listed below.

Assistance Required	
Suggestions, ideas, best practice examples, guidelines, tools based on other organisation’s experience	<div style="text-align: center;"> Most Common Response   Least Common Response </div>
Better links between development of individual plans and service providers/programs	
Training for staff in communication techniques	
Speakers to provide information	
Suitable display resources	

Disability service providers indicated they would like assistance to share ideas, best practice and tools with other similar organisations in developing their capacity to engage with service users. They also indicated that it would be helpful if there were better links between the development of service users’ individual plans and the programs they provide to ensure they are meeting the identified needs of service users. There was also a need for staff training in communication techniques to facilitate engagement with service users who have communication difficulties.

The fourth question asked ‘**Does your organisation have tools and systems in place to report on outcomes achieved for individual service users?**’ The majority of respondents indicated they already have systems in place to engage with service users.

In response to the fifth question asked ‘**Do you require assistance with developing tools and systems to report on outcomes achieved for individual service users?**’ most respondents indicated they would like assistance to improve the tools and systems they currently use. The table below lists the main areas of assistance required identified by disability service providers

who indicated they would require assistance.

Assistance Required	
Need to improve effectiveness of current systems re standards	Most Common Response ↑ ↓ Least Common Response
Need to learn about what tools etc are available	
Require assistance with developing tools that enable outcome measurement and benchmarking with other service providers	
Cooperation between services to develop tools and systems	

The majority of respondents who indicated they would like some assistance felt they needed to improve their current systems and in particular to ensure they complied with the new standards and the Quality Framework. They would like to work with other disability service providers to develop tools and systems that enable them to measure outcomes and benchmark the level of support provided.

LDC Group would like to thank all the disability service providers who responded to the survey.

By Judith Freidin

If you are interested in a particular subject that you would like us to write about, please email us. If we consider that we can competently discuss the subject then we will provide an article in the newsletter. Requests should be emailed to: mark@ldc.net.au

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