

Excerpts from:

BUILDING SCAFFOLDS OF SUPPORT: CASE MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

O,Dowd, Ryan, & Broadbent (August, 2001). A Report for the Victorian Full Service Schools Program, Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, Australia.

[\[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/case_mgmt_qt/building_scaffolds_of_support.pdf\]](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/case_mgmt_qt/building_scaffolds_of_support.pdf)

KEY FEATURES OF INDIVIDUAL CASE MANAGEMENT:

The key features of case management were identified initially as mainly welfare related and included:

- A trusting and enabling relationship between the young person and worker,
- A focus on understanding the young person in the context of the social and emotional environment in which the young person is located,
- Ensuring continuing care where there are complex and/or multiple problems, and
- Ameliorating the emotional problems accompanying issues the young person may face (family conflict, homelessness, loss of income or economic support, poverty).

Activities undertaken in case management are wide ranging and include assisting young people with study skills (sometimes this was done individually or at other times collectively). The most common activity through the schools was work placement. At times the worker would meet with the young people's families. Sometimes the worker would meet with the teachers the young person did not get on with, and also meet with those with whom the young person liked to mediate and discuss issues. Workers also connected the young people to youth groups and to counselling.

For some workers, casework embraced mediation between one young person and his/her peers. Some workers acted as advocates on behalf of the young person for housing. Mentoring was provided as an individual approach. Typically this took place in conjunction with outside agencies.

WORKING WITH GROUPS

In addition to work that they undertook with individual young people, many workers also conducted activities for groups of young people who were considered at risk. Through this, workers sought to develop skills in young people and to prepare school, social and work environments to enable them to function more effectively outside of the comfort of the one-on-one sessions in which workers and young people met. This work included:

- Advocating on behalf of the young person to salient other agencies or individuals,
- Assessing the young person's capacity and support network in determining the level of care,
- Supporting the young person in self-determination, conveying to the young person his or her worth and dignity, and taking mutual responsibility in decision making, and,
- Ensuring a coordinated response to the young person's needs through liaising with education, training, employment and other agencies and individuals involved.

(Adapted from Greene, R. (1992). Case management: An agenda for social work practice, p.12. In Vourlekis, B., and Greene, R. (Eds) *Social Work Management*, Aldine de Gruyter, New York)

NETWORKING WITHIN THE SCHOOL

Systemic internal supports in the school included advocacy programs where teachers were linked with set numbers of young people and the teacher met those young people and acted as an advocate when they experienced problems or sought assistance.

Another internal support was formalising a process to identify at risk young people in a school. By developing and using a measure to assess the level of risk in each Year 9 student, the school found it was able to identify systematically those young people who were most at risk of dropping out. They were then invited to join a special program.

A Peer Support Program was another initiative. In this the young people in the school were recruited from every sub-group and had a full day's training on how to support their peers. All students knew who the peer support workers were.

Activities included developing age markers in the school that recognised young people's developing needs for independence. So, for example, in one school, Year 9 students were provided with a program that enabled them to go out and explore the city through undertaking a structured educational activity.

EXTERNAL SYSTEMIC WORK

Parents appreciated being contacted and kept informed about options for the young people. Ways of maintaining this contact included telephone calls, newsletters and letters sent to the parents' home.

Rather than operating on an individual school basis, some schools found it more effective to form coalitions with other schools, and then to discuss and address the young people's needs on a collective basis.

The general observation about networking with outside groups was that this was part of a long-term process, not simply of contacting agencies but developing trust, understanding and knowledge and alternative perspectives on working with young people. Links were established to refer individuals and groups to education, training, employment and other community organizations depending on the young people's needs and the imagination and networks of the referee and referral organizations.

The organizations included local youth services and a whole range of social supports services such as counselling and tutoring, personal development, anger management and self esteem. Training and employment agencies were frequently cited as key agencies.

Some schools, in planning programs to meet the needs of their students, networked with other education providers. These included providers of adult literacy programs. Such courses provided entry points to alternative and more appropriate qualifications for young people with poor literacy, such as the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA).

Schools undertook networking with employers and group training and other agencies to develop work experience programs for young people.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Work experience was presented by workers and by young people as the major pillar in case management. Work experience was a tangible way for workers to assist young people in constructing their education, training and employment pathways. It was something that was meaningful to the young people, something which they usually understood and which they enjoyed. Work experience provided the strongest link between the school and the community and for the young person the strongest link between school and the future.

The aims of work experience programs included:

- facilitating the transition to work
- providing an opportunity to try out an employment goal
- broadening knowledge about the options available
- providing experience in an area of work the students' academic standard would enable them to access on leaving school
- increasing awareness of the qualifications required
- providing experience of employment in a supportive context
- enabling young people to make reasoned choices about leaving school and about employment options, and
- developing young people's commitment.

The following tasks for workers engaged in conducting work experience programs for young people were found to be important:

- Drawing up with young people a set of guidelines and thinking points to draw on during the work experience.
- Preparing with employers a framework for the work experience.
- Liaising with employers regularly.
- Visiting the work sites.
- Ensuring the young people attended.
- Monitoring the young people's performance carefully, for example through a form to be completed every week by employers on the students' progress.
- Addressing any problems with the work placement and assisting the young person with strategies to fix them.
- Promoting the young people's experiences as positive, for example taking their photographs and putting them in the school newsletter.
- Addressing work and gender stereotypes.
- Connecting work experience and school work more closely by either reducing the school work requirements so time missed in work experience was taken into account, or integrating the work experience into the class work requirements.
- De-briefing young people after work experience and fostering reflection of the young people about their work experience, for example, how their goals may have changed.
- Ensuring young people receive certificates for recognition of work experience, and a reference, if possible, from the employer.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING A CASE MANAGEMENT PROCESS IN SCHOOLS

From the investigation of the use of case management processes in the Full Service Schools Program, it is possible to suggest strategies derived from both theory and practice. Taken together these can lead to the development of a school model. The way in which workers in schools understood case management was to see it as a holistic approach incorporating not only individual support, but also curriculum programs and vocational learning experiences. In order to

be focused on the needs of the students, case management must actively involve these young people in negotiating activities to meet their needs.

The implementation of an effective school model of case management should take into account a wide range of considerations, including the following strategies:

Develop a clearly articulated philosophy and theoretical framework:

Critical concepts include:

- recognising that all young people are potentially at risk
- developing engagement (how to involve young people in learning)
- developing membership (developing all young people's sense of being a part of the school)
- developing community (developing a culture of shared concern)
- building effective networks.

Identify a designated person and join a network:

As a first step in building scaffolds of support, there needs to be a designated person in conjunction with a team or network, who plans, coordinates and liaises within and outside the school.

Develop a process to identify the needs of all young people in the school:

This might include developing a formal relationship between each student and a staff member. It could involve developing a more formal assessment process.

Establish a comprehensive work experience program:

The value of strong work experience or vocational learning programs is emphasised in other sections of the report.

Develop a process to identify and address systemic risk factors in the school:

Identify ways of removing barriers which inhibit any young person's opportunity to succeed educationally, socially and interpersonally within the school environment.

Develop a process to identify and respond to risk in the community:

Recognise the risk factors in the local community, for example unemployment, drug issues, violence, racism, family issues and lack of community networking. Establish means within the school of increasing awareness of and building proactive responses in young people to these issues. Establish strong collaborative community networks to provide effective support for young people.

Establish strong school and community networks:

Networks with parents, school and other education providers, and with other agencies and the broader community greatly enhance the education, training and employment opportunities available to all young people.

Evaluation of practice

Ongoing formative and summative evaluation is essential in determining the extent to which the support needs of young people are being met. The focus needs to be on addressing and improving the scaffolds of support for all young people in schools through identification and response to individual employment, education and training needs. The purpose of valuation should be to refine and develop successful initiatives while recognising the lessons from unsuccessful initiatives.