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Best Practice, Accreditation And Mental Health

QMS has been specifically focused on working with the NGO sector since 1999 through the support of a grant from NSW Health. The NGO Quality Program is an exciting and very rewarding blend of contributions and collaboration between NSW Health, QMS and a range of NGO peak bodies, and services.

This presentation will outline the structure and components of the Quality Program, including training and development, modification of standards and resources, organisational reviews and benchmarking for best practice.

For example; a survey of 82 organisations; (diverse in size, structure and service type) scoped the familiarity of providers with existing standards and identified areas for the development of sector appropriate standards. A representative Reference Group was established to guide the process with wider participation through consultation mechanisms and focus group discussions. The resulting standards that have been developed are: Individual, Group, Systems and Media Advocacy plus Self help Groups, Conducting and Using Research, Working with Volunteers, External Education, Training and Promotional Campaigns, Telephone Helplines and Websites, Fundraising and Records.

These standards known as the Community Based Organisations Module of Standards are now available in final draft ready for use as a quality service development tool.

Partnership and a focus on consumers are included in the guiding principles of QMS and this collaboration has ensured that the standards reflect and measure NGO philosophies, principles and activities. This includes the adaptation of the National Mental Health Standards into a module that will incorporate the NSW Disability standards.

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QMS offers low cost, often free, training as part of the Quality Program. This training of an initial one day and follow up two days is to provide an overview of the quality principles and the review cycle as well as specific training in techniques for conducting reviews. Feedback from participants is that they have enjoyed the workshops and found them beneficial.

In addition a self-assessment and external review process has been developed for small (less than 5 fulltime workers) or sole practitioner services. NSW Health has endorsed this model as equivalent to the usual accreditation process.

There are a number of components in the review cycle, which is a three-year cycle. Services use the standards to reflect on their current work practices and organisation, this can take from six to twelve or eighteen months. Then QMS will put together a review team or peers that matches the service in their work experience. This team visits the organisation, conducts interviews with staff and volunteers, service users, the governing body and stakeholders, reads the relevant documents and assesses the facilities.

The team prepare a report based on this visit that highlights strengths, achievements and areas for development. The service then develops the recommendations for improvement into a Quality Workplan and implements them. QMS offers ongoing support through six monthly assessments of the Quality Workplan progress reports.

Evaluations from the NGO services who have undertaken the process are positive and encouraging. Yes it is work and yes it does take time, even time away from service delivery, however, they have all commented that it was worth doing and that it is 'a great way to reflect on what we're doing' and 'without this program I wouldn't have made the time and we've gained so much'.

So is this a promotion of the program – absolutely. I'd like to urge you to get involved and not only see how the standards and review can be of value but also consider undertaking the training to become one of our reviewers. I can honestly say personally and professionally that there has been a distinct synergy evident in the program since its inception which has made it a pleasure to be involved.