

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

NTFC TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP

The Training and Development Working Group is a sub-group of the NTFC Quality Sub-Committee which oversees the development and implementation of policy and strategies to address Quality Assurance issues in Care and Protection.

The Training and Development Working Group is made up of representatives of the Quality and Workforce Development Unit, and Care and Protection operational offices. This submission is made up of proposals from group members, regarding training and professional development.

(NOTE: NTFC is currently in the process of implementing a Supervision Framework and developing a Learning Development Framework aimed at addressing both the supervision needs and learning development needs of staff. The NTFC Workforce Development Unit's submission to the Inquiry includes attachments of each of these Frameworks).

PROPOSALS

1. Implementation of the NTFC Supervision Framework

- Team leaders should not carry case management responsibilities. Action needs to be taken to ensure that Team leaders are relieved of these duties and tasks so as to enable quality support and learning for staff, increased compliance and continuous improvement in service delivery.
- All staff responsible for supervision should receive formal training in providing reflective practice in supervision (including Directors, Senior Management, Managers and Team Leaders etc)
- Offices or Work Units need to close for 4 hours per fortnight to enable quality support and learning for staff, increased compliance and continuous improvement in service delivery.

2. Training/Learning Development

- P2 positions need to be created in all operational offices to focus on: Staff Induction/Staff Mentoring/Staff Reflective Supervision (for 3 months) in conjunction with scheduled supervision, and to act as Practice Advisors (ongoing). They would work with all new staff as soon as they commence in an operational office, after they have completed their induction training (out of office). This role will assist the new workers to link the theory obtained at training to the practice (on the job).
- Senior Practice Advisors at the P3 level should be appointed, one for each region, whose role would be to supervise and support the P2 Practice Advisors in their respective regions. The Senior Practice Advisors would also spend time at the work units to assist the Practice Advisors with their roles/functions. Another function the Senior Practice Advisors (in conjunction with team leaders and managers) would be to review complex cases on a regular basis, make recommendations and for QA purposes.

Line Management for the Practice Advisors would be the Principle Practice Advisor from the Policy and System Support Unit.

- Implementation of the NTFC Learning Development Framework and associated strategies to address training, require appropriate staff resources in the Workforce Development Unit.
- All operational staff should spend some time at Intake and in each of the teams based in their respective operational offices (commencing with the investigation team) as part of the induction. This would need to be a structured, planned process to ensure it adds value to the staff member and has minimal impact on the respective Work Unit.
- Access to conferences, seminars and 'experts in the relevant fields' needs to increase for all staff (including management) because of isolation issues in the NT
- Staff training should consider core competency thresholds for specific arenas of welfare practice. When these competencies are linked to coaching and supervision strategies, skill development in staff will be enhanced
- In-house or on-site training needs to be introduced as part of learning development strategies to enable higher levels of participation in training.
- The frequency of delivery of NTFC core training units needs to be increased and the resources provided to enable this.
- Compulsory comprehensive training needs to be introduced for all foster carers including Departmental, kinship and purchased placements.
- Performance of workers at Team Leader and Management levels needs to be reviewed annually and training provided to meet identified learning needs.
- NTFC Values and Vision Statement sets a tone for respectful, 'power-with' practices. Internal relationships, structures and management practices must reflect these values if we are to attract, retain, support and grow our workforce. Modelling the Values and Vision of the organisation can enhance service delivery. Staff values should be considered at recruitment as these influence practice, outcomes for clients and retention of staff.
- NTFC has adopted a strengths approach to working with clients but does not have a strengths approach to staff matters so management strategies need to change to reflect a strengths perspective with employees.

Policy and Management

- Managers need to be supported to implement team building days/half days on a quarterly basis as a measure to help learning and support and retain staff.
- There needs to be stronger ongoing consultation between Directors/Senior Managers (or representatives) and Operational Staff regarding decision making for client services, and human resource issues.
- There needs to be stronger linkage between policy development and management, and operational management (e.g. policy staff attendance at NT wide managers meetings).

- Work Partnership Plans and other agreements and proposed Practice and Professional Development Plans should be integrated into a single tool for reviewing and planning professional development and addressing performance.
- Energy is currently biased towards servicing the needs of management running a defensive social work system. The Level 4 management tier focuses their efforts upwards and does not sufficiently address operational team matters. An approach which focuses on client based outcomes is likely to have more success. There should be less emphasis on writing a good court report than on keeping families out of the welfare system in the first place.
- Change Level 4 Managers into positions where they focus on specific arenas of welfare practice (eg Parenting Skill development or Family Management Strategies for Adolescents and let the Managers manage their teams without having to service the level 4 Managers.

Staff Resources

- Family Support Workers should be supported and trained to develop their skill base so as to become a valued local resource for NTFC in supporting families. They should not be seen as 'transport workers' but staff employed to help to improve the quality of life in families and reduce the number of notifications and removals.
- Develop Family Support Teams that focus on providing early intervention and prevention strategies; working directly with families re parenting issues, stress management, budgeting, hygiene etc, and advocate for families' access to resources and service provision within the community.
- Increase the number of Therapeutic Services clinicians (x 5) to add value to CPS decision making and increase behavioural support offered to carers who are caring for children exhibiting behavioural problems due to developmental trauma. This increase would allow for expansion of the service into Katherine and Tennant Creek.
- There needs to be an increase in permanent positions in operational offices, in particular Aboriginal Community Workers, Family Support Workers, Youth Workers and Administration positions
- Introduce specialist positions into field teams such as an education officer who works with schools to ensure kids in care remain in the school system or an Early Childhood specialist who provides skills to parents of children under seven, in order to avoid CP intervention.

Suggested Retention Strategies

- Small monetary Christmas bonus for all staff – sliding scale based on years of service if the monetary option is preferred
- Annual monetary bonus for years of service based on a sliding scale
- Fortnightly housing allowances for all staff.
- Bi-annual air ticket to a capital city of choice.
- Introduce annual awards and recognition (eg "Child Protection Worker of the Year").
- 2 or 3 yearly bonus for workers with continuous service
- Specialist allowance for P2 practitioners due to the higher expectations of qualifications and specialist experience.

- At this time the department has few male staff. Gender should be considered when recruiting as many of the children in families receiving interventions from NTFC do not have male role models.

The Non-government Sector

- There needs to be a dramatic increase in the funding provided for basic community supports: culturally appropriate parenting programs, youth programs, family support programs.
- The Non-Government sector needs to mature, grow and expand in NT. Well established NGO's from other jurisdictions need to be encouraged to develop NT offices to further develop the sector (eg Berry St, Brotherhood of St Laurence)
- Local Aboriginal community services such as Balunu need to be encouraged, supported and funded to provide a greater range of services for families and children.

Systems and Legislation

- CCIS needs a comprehensive review to make it less cumbersome.
- Legislative change needs to be considered that allows for a new category of 'child concern'. Registering a 'child concern' would occur when there are considerable and but pressing issues and support needs in the family. It would give NTFC the legal mandate to work with the family (or outsource to NGO) until the 'child concern' is resolved. This would allow for involuntary family support. This could be the result of a substantiated or unsubstantiated report or be raised directly at the intake level when the issues are obvious but unlikely to meet the statutory threshold for abuse and neglect. In this way, early intervention and prevention work could be done with families where there are clear needs. This would reduce the amount of rework done every time a new intake has to be processed and provides a strong opportunity to prevent abuse and neglect.