

Summary of improving front line services

A Framework for Supporting Front Line Staff

When staff feel valued and supported they are more easily retained and are off sick less; they will show greater motivation, commitment and flexibility; they will go 'the extra mile' to give of their best to service users; they will be a powerful force for promoting a positive image of services and service providers.

Introduction

This document, produced by ADSW (Association of Directors of Social Work) and the Scottish Executive (2005), provides a framework that is invaluable in enabling organisations to provide the support needed by front line staff. Although originally written with local authorities in mind, the content is equally relevant to voluntary organisations. ADSW has now allocated some resources to promote the content in the voluntary sector. In order to gain optimum value the document should be read in its entirety. It presents a holistic approach to staff support and people management, and is full of sound, practical guidance that can really make a difference to the ability of staff to provide optimum support to service users and carers. Useful references and links are included to enhance the value of the framework. Each chapter ends with a 'Just a Minute' section which gives you points upon which to reflect. The summary below will hopefully give a flavour of the main messages.

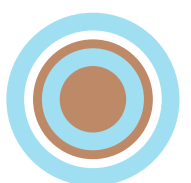
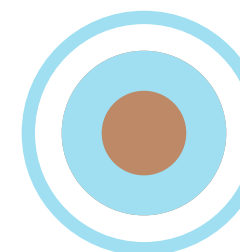
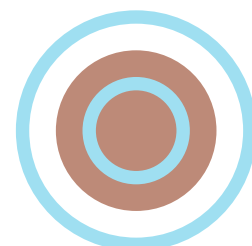
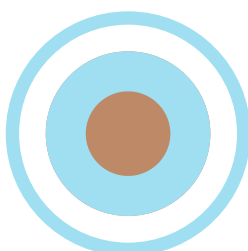
Underpinning all support is the statement that good people management is a necessity, not an option. Good people management is a process that requires attention to be given to 4 key components:

- Competent and confident workforce
- Enabled and empowered workforce
- Safe and healthy workforce
- Flexible and diverse workforce

Competent and confident workforce

This section emphasises the importance of continuing professional development, individual learning plans, performance management, creating and sustaining learning organisations, management and leadership and workforce planning. Some quotations will help to clarify the content:

- Individual Learning Plans should be created through the performance review process (p13)
- A learning organisation not only promotes and supports learning, but also seeks to learn from mistakes and successes alike.
- Workforce planning: ...getting the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time. Pages 18 – 19 provide guidance on how to plan the workforce and an example of categories for analysing the workforce.



Enabled and empowered workforce

Enabling and empowering are seen as two sides of the same coin. To enable is defined as to provide the means for a member of staff to do the job. To empower is defined as to give staff the freedom and authority to use their skills, knowledge and experience to find the best way to achieve a particular task. Emphasis is given to good beginnings, including induction, good and safe recruitment practices, supervision, reward, workload management, management and leadership, performance management and work-life balance. There is some detailed examination of flexible working as a way of managing people, not just a set of policies.

Flexible working practices enable and empower staff to give of their best; in return they will perform well and be responsive to the need for flexible services. (p.43)

Safe and healthy workforce: wellbeing at work

Emphasis is given to taking a proactive approach to developing wellbeing at work and joint responsibility of employer and employee in this process. Factors examined range from lifestyle to job design, with four main areas receiving attention: emotional well-being, physical wellbeing, a healthy environment and safety and protection. The example of Dundee City Council's health and well-being initiative is given, which gives staff at every level access to a confidential counselling service, health promotion and information, health fayres and stress management training, and back-care initiatives and team development programmes.

Flexible and diverse workforce

Promoting diversity recognises the benefits to be gained from differences. More flexible services and work patterns reflect the value of diversity. Investing in the workforce in all of the areas covered in the rest of the framework will enable a flexible and diverse workforce to flourish and go the extra mile for the service and its users. (p.58)

Communication, Consultation, Participation and Making it Happen

The final sections of the document are devoted to important underpinning considerations that affect the implementation of the framework. Both the internal and external communications of an organisation are vital, with emphasis on sharing, creativity and responsibility. Suggestions are provided to improve consultation and participation, with questions to enable organisations to change the ways in which staff are supported and recognised.

This framework is about putting people at the heart of public service reform ... this includes people who use the services and people who provide them.

The full document is available on the Scottish Executive website: www.scotland.gov.uk
Also from Blackwell's bookshop, Edinburgh or from the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit (email: vswu.admin@ccpscotland.org)

