Handout 7: Appropriate Communication

The Case Manager's attitudes and characteristics as an interviewer can strongly influence the success or failure of the worker-client relationship.

To be a competent interviewer the Case Manager needs to have spent time over a long period developing self-awareness and learning how to communicate in a caring empathic way. Respect, empathy and cultural sensitivity for the client are also essential. The Case Manager communicates helping attitudes to the client in several ways including:

- Greeting them warmly at the beginning of the interview
- Developing trust by sitting slightly forward
- Listening carefully
- Maintaining eye contact
- Using facial expressions that indicate interest
- Appropriate non verbal language
- Friendly responses
- Being relaxed

The client's perceptions of the Case Manager's feelings are also important in his or her impression of the quality of the interview. Communicating warmth, acceptance, and genuineness promote a climate that facilitates the exchange of information and develop a high level of trust. A sensitive Case Manager recognises other barriers such as racism, sexism and other biases and stereotypic behaviour.

Sensitivity to issues of ethnicity, race, gender and age is important for the Case Manager when conducting interviews. Many clients and families will have backgrounds very different from the Case Manager. The following suggestions may help grow sensitivity:

- Expect clients to be unique individuals. It is easy to stereotype culture, race, gender, or age groups, but clients cannot be understood strictly in terms of their particular culture. During interviews, Case Managers must take special care to get to know each individual client rather than categorise him or her as a member of one particular group.

- Remember that differences in language can be confusing. When clients talk about "partners" or "family" for example, these terms can have various meanings depending on the cultural background and life experiences of the individual being interviewed. For example, in the Aboriginal culture the family is an extended one that includes many members. For gay and lesbian women, the word partner has the special meaning of "significant other."

- Explain to the client the purpose of the intake interview and the Case Manager's role. Clients may turn up for an interview without understanding its
purpose or the role of the interviewer in the helping process. Confidentiality may also be an important issue for them.

- Expect that clients may be different from you. We often begin the interview process wanting to find similarities as a way of building a bridge to them. When clients prove to be very different, or we cannot understand them, we often want them to change so that they will be easier to "manage".