Handout 3: Assessment

The Functions of Assessment

- Assessment should revolve around what the client is requesting
- It is not necessarily appropriate for everyone to receive the same assessment
- Gather information on the client and see their life as a whole rather than just a problem
- Interpret this information in the light of treatment, objectives and strategies
- Develop a two-way interaction, which gives the worker and the client time to develop rapport
- Gain information in order to be able to decide on appropriate interventions
- Gain information for appropriate referral

The Process of Assessment

The role of the worker in conducting an assessment is to:

1. Prepare themselves prior to the interview taking place by becoming familiar with the assessment form and procedure of their agency.
2. Prepare the interview room so that it is comfortable for both the client and the worker.
3. Initiate contact and establish a trusting relationship.
4. Explain the parameters to the client e.g. how long an assessment should take, what will follow, confidentiality issues.
5. Listen attentively to feelings communicated both verbally and non-verbally.
6. Acknowledge any discomfort or distress the client may be feeling and recognize that it may be very difficult to ask for help or answer personal questions from a stranger.
7. Invite the person to describe their own needs and explain why they are there by asking open questions.
8. Choose a culturally appropriate way of communicating.
9. Explain the role of the worker and the client and their responsibilities.
10. Clarify questions of confidentiality.

11. Recognize the worker's own emotional reactions to the client, making sure they don't stereotype the person, over-identify with them or de-power them.

**Assessment Phase**

Part of the function of assessment is to gather information on the client and for the worker to get a sense of who they are. The assessment phase is also to:

- Ascertain where the client is now, and where they have been in the past
- Give a context to help the worker understand the client's history, and how their problematic behaviour relates to it
- Identify inner and outer resources
- Use this information to form ongoing strategies and objectives
- Ensure client participation. Make clear that the client will be involved in all phases of the process.

**Social History (Including Family and Personal History)**

- Provides information about the way a client experiences problems
- Provides information about past problem solving behaviours
- Gives insights into interpersonal relationships
- Allows the client to relate their story in their own words
- This phase can help the building of trust.

**Beware**

- Of excessive questioning. It's not an interrogation.
- Of getting bogged down. The client is the main concern, not the paperwork.
- It's not a therapy session.
- Don't overlook possible resources like family and friends.


**Assessment Tools**
Information is recorded using an assessment form and/or using case notes. Separate assessments may be noted for each member of the family.

- The usual tool for assessment is an assessment form, which provides for a number of fixed questions to be completed for clients.

- An assessment checklist can also be used as a prompt for areas to be discussed with the client. When using a checklist assessment information can be written down in the case notes. This provides a more flexible and less prescriptive assessment tool, which can be used with a broad range of clients.

Written Policies and Procedures

The Carmen Poldis Community Centre has written policies and procedures that direct the assessment process. These include:

- Ensuring a confidential, private environment
- Developing opportunities for good communication (including use of bilingual workers, interpreter services and building rapport)
- Use of assessment forms or checklists
- Use of previous assessments
- Assessing the client's strengths as well as needs. A support plan which builds upon strengths is most likely to have success
- Use of assessment information provided by another service
- When the assessment is to commence
- Client access to information
- Confidentiality and privacy of information (including storage of information)
- Who is to do assessments
- Working with another service which has a case management role.

As Workers We Need to Remember

Case management is not compulsory. The client may only want crisis accommodation and/or information, and may not want to participate in a needs assessment or support planning. People have to be in the right frame of mind to be involved in a comprehensive assessment. If the client is distressed, just deal with their immediate crisis needs. It is important to realise that people who have experienced a crisis or traumatic experience may not be capable of making important decisions without resolving or dealing with issues of loss, grief and fear. It may be several days before they are ready to think about longer-term needs.
Where another service has a case management role do not duplicate their role. If the client wishes them to retain that role, contact the service (with the client’s permission) and let them know of the services you can provide.