Handout 1: The Skilled Communicator

Have you seen those signs on the backs of trucks? The ones that say: 'My conduct as a professional driver is on display'
The equivalent sign on the back of welfare worker would be: 'My conduct as a professional communicator is on display'. When you think about it, nearly all of what a welfare worker does is to do with exchanging information with other people. We drive, set up rooms, clean up messes and fix stuff, but most of our work that causes change in people and society as a whole is about communication. The communication skills we gain as welfare workers we can use in everyday life with our friends, families, and people we meet. In fact it's hard to a think of a job whose skills transfer so readily to life outside of work. So, what characteristics make a professional communicator the finest in the business..?

The skilled communicator:

- Is assertive - willing to make their own needs known, but not in a pushy or aggressive way; willing to make requests; willing to disagree; willing to go with others, rather than against or away from; able to make a reasoned response rather than an emotional one; able to stand up for their own rights, able to put integrity before alliances.
- Is sensitive - to cultural factors; to others' needs and emotional states; to the context and situation in which the interaction takes place.
- Is responsive - can communicate sensitivity to the needs of others; can communicate their own opinions and wishes in a way that does not arouse undue discomfort or hostility; can respond with acknowledgement to the feedback of others.
- Is versatile - can be flexible and adapt to the demands of the situation and context; possesses a range of communication strategies and is able to select one appropriate to the situation.
- Is willing to explore - all aspects of the situation/problem; all sides of the story; to the degree of depth required before becoming solution focused.
- Is able to convey - opinions, information, attitudes, goals - clearly and in the style appropriate to the situation.
- Is able to self-monitor and evaluate one's own communication competence.
- Is appreciated and perceived by others as possessing and using appropriately the skills outlined above.

More specifically, in this job (Job 2) you will learn techniques for:
- Engaging with clients
- Negotiating mutual priorities
- Giving feedback
- Presenting information
- Interviewing people
• Negotiating
• Maintaining networks, and friendships
• Responding to enquiries
• Running meetings
• Running groups
• Dealing with people who aren't such great communicators

Start noticing what works and what doesn't work with your own communications. Watch the techniques of good communicators and observe what skills they use to communicate with.

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**Handout 2: First Contact**

If first impressions are usually important, this is doubly true in the community services field. At work we often meet people at their most vulnerable times, and they are particularly sensitive to the way we greet and treat them. Each client who attends the centre is unique and it is important that they are receive as valued and important people.

**Beware of assumptions**

You may have some idea of who you are meeting from their appearance or background information already obtained. This is useful, and may help you to communicate in a culturally appropriate way, or to anticipate their needs more readily. Be careful, however, not to 'pigeonhole', or quickly categorise a person on the strength of assumptions based on a stereotype. Rather than assume that you know what the person needs and the best way to behave toward them, stop - so that you can observe and listen to their story.

**Attend to emotional needs first**

You may have your own style of dealing with people in various emotional states. Whatever the emotion - sad, anxious, angry, fearful - be sensitive enough to detect it and respond to it appropriately. Don't rush the person - their emotion will propel the interaction more powerfully than any procedure you might want to whisk them through. Slow things down. Try and sense what the best course of action is. It might be timely to acknowledge their feelings - "You look a bit down", or "You seem pretty annoyed about something". This will communicate that you: a) have given them your attention and are attempting to understand how they are feeling; and b) that you are ready to listen.

There is no ready made formula to make engaging with emotionally affected people an easy thing. It requires compassion and a heartfelt sense of what you can offer the person at this moment. It may be a warm greeting, it may be a cup of tea, or an understanding smile, or a kind
word to an anxious child of theirs. Whatever you do or say, if it happens at a critical moment it will probably be remembered for a long time.

**Rapport**

Rapport facilitates clear, two-way communication. At its best it means to 'click' with somebody - to quickly be able to talk in a frank but friendly way. Both people feel a willingness to discuss matters.

Context will often dictate the correct way to go about establishing rapport. You don't start sharing intimacies with somebody you've just met at a meeting. Nor should you try your bone-crushing handshake on young children. Clumsy mimicking of cultural stereotypes are also best avoided. Again it is important to feel for, as well as think about, the best thing to do at the time.

Rapport is present where there exists a willingness to co-operate to achieve shared goals. You can practice 'rapport spotting' anywhere where there are people. Watch for people smiling and nodding in a relaxed way, whose body postures often mirror each other, and whose gestures and degree of energy or animation appear to match during the course of a conversation.

If you seem to be missing the mark in trying to establish rapport with somebody - don't despair. The fallback position is to maintain a polite and friendly manner. Be patient, and you may eventually achieve rapport anyway.

**Get their story**

Besides helping you to establish rapport, and the other person to order their thoughts, 'getting the story' is necessary before you can offer help. To see if your service is suitable, to assess the person's needs, to make some plan of action - all require an exploration of the circumstances that led to the person coming to see you. Let them know about the limitations of confidentiality (your duty to warn and protect, to notify of abuse and neglect, to report serious crimes). Don't pepper them with questions if you can elicit the story with active listening techniques.

**Tell them what happens next**

Once you know their story it's your turn to offer some useful information. In easily-digestible chunks let them know what you can do to help. Let them know what your service can offer, and what assistance would need to be accessed through other services.

**Some Points on Entry/screening**

- Create a non-threatening, comfortable environment to put the client at ease and to assist with the exchange of information. If
possible have another staff member look after any accompanying children during the interview
• If you are unable to provide the service requested, let the client know as quickly as possible. Explain why you are unable to assist and refer the client onto a service that will be able to help
• If people are to be declined a service on the basis of their previous history with the Carmen Poldis Community Centre, this should be checked with the program coordinator
• If the person is not happy that you are unable to assist, provide them with information about the service complaint procedures
• Do not overload the client with information, especially if they are under stress. Provide the information in manageable bits

Handout 3: The Crisis Interview

Interviewing a person who is in crisis requires sensitivity and empathy. The person who is probably experiencing emotional turmoil. Put the person's feelings first - you can't do a good job of assessing somebody if they are too upset to tell their story properly.

The interview needs some structure, such as a series of steps, but not too much as you will need to explore avenues of inquiry as they come to light. It takes a skilled interviewer to adapt their enquiries during the course of the interview to explore the issues they want to know about. Consider carefully in choosing the degree of structure appropriate for your interview - what information must you obtain (for example name, age, prior circumstances). Often some structure is a useful guide as it helps focus the interaction. Be prepared to digress from it if key issues are being disclosed.

The process of exploration contains a wealth of subtleties that if overlooked may result in key pieces of information remaining uncovered. The following format applies to a semi-structured (or even unstructured) interview.

At all times you need to:
• identify and evaluate what is occurring in a non-judgmental way
• make decisions about appropriate words, behaviour, and posture
• use responses that are culturally appropriate
• use active listening
• use paraphrasing
• demonstrate empathy

For an initial or a one-off interview there a number of additional considerations, such as declaring the purpose of the interview, and what consequences may follow if certain types of information are disclosed (for
example the requirement to report abuse of children and young people). In an initial interview you may need to do all of the following:

To begin:

- establish rapport
- inform the interviewee of the purpose and format of the interview
- outline confidentiality and its limits
- outline your role and the role of the service

Then, elicit information by using:

- some closed, specific questions (eg. what are your children's names and ages?)
- some open, exploratory questions (eg. tell me about what's happened today)
- probing questions to seek elaboration on certain issues (eg. how did your boyfriend react to that?)
- hypothetical questions that refer to a future or imaginary scenario (eg. if you lived in that suburb how would your children get to school?)
- silence, which allows the interviewee time for reflection and to prepare their response
- clarifying and summarising questions

At this point Problem Solving and Action Planning may be applicable. These approaches are outlined in Handout 4.

Finally, conclude the interview by:

- summarising your understanding of the content of the interview
- thanking the interviewee, and giving encouragement if appropriate
- acknowledge areas of agreement and disagreement
- explaining 'what happens next' - how the interview will be followed up, or the next step in the process
Handout 4: Problem Solving and Action Planning

Facilitate resolution of issues

Once the client and worker have explored the situation together it is time to work out what happens next.

As a quick problem solving guide these steps may be followed, but please spend ample time on steps one and two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Calm and reassure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Explore the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Discuss and map the issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Prioritise the issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Brainstorm possible solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Evaluate possible solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Make decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Set SMART goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Develop action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Monitor and adjust as required.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Develop action plans

Following on from setting SMART goals the action plan includes goals, strategies, timeframes, and sometimes names a person responsible for the action. A brief example follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Who does</th>
<th>Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pick up belongings from house | 1. Ask Jill for van  
2. Ring house and arrange  
3. Pick up Dave to help | By tonight | Worker   |          |
| Arrange pension payments    | 1. Gather documents  
2. Make an appointment with social worker at Centrelink | By 19/9   | Client   |          |

Points to remember

Be careful not to leap into problem solving before the issues have been fully explored. You might set up a client with legal aid, find them a new place to live, and then find they wanted to move interstate all along.

Giving advice is a common reaction when people talk about a problem. Resist giving advice, but if invited you could help generate options. Remember also that what works for you may not be so useful for someone else. Simply talking about a problem is likely to give rise to the person finding their own solutions.

If advice is truly being sought, and you have enough knowledge to give it reliably, offer choices, make sure they are clear, and check that they are understood, agreed with, and feasible. There's not much point advising a mother of three children to move back to her parent's house if they have a two bedroom appointment.

Giving feedback is another delicate area where communication may have the result of being useless or destructive if not done properly. Where there is some negative feedback to be given (that is feedback designed to
reduce a particular behaviour of the subject), use the 'criticism sandwich'. This is where constructive negative feedback is preceded and followed by positive feedback. Avoid using transparent formulas however: if somebody thinks you are using some trite carrot and stick method to change their behaviour they may feel patronised and resentful.

Beware of creating resistance by confronting and challenging in an untimely way. If a person is not ready to change you can't action-plan or bully them into it! You will only force them defend themselves and in doing so they will come up with more reasons not to change.

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**Handout 5: Establishing Priorities**

Workers are limited in the assistance that they can offer by the guidelines of the organisation that employs them. At times the client may not have ranked their priorities in a way that enables the organisation to assist. It may be necessary to establish which of the client's priorities the worker can assist with.

**Clarify the position of the other person**

Check that you understand their desire or opinion. Say it back to them, and state the reason they have given for feeling this way. For example "I understand that you're feeling stressed, and would really like a cigarette." If they think you've got it wrong, keep talking about their position until they are confident you understand it. Demonstrate empathy if it is at all appropriate.

**Don't put them on the defensive**

It would be unwise at this point to 'hit them with everything you've got'. This will only arouse resistance and thus reinforce their position as they come up with arguments to defend it. So, don't say: "One in four smokers die from their filthy habit you know. Plus it's the worst possible role-modelling for your children".

If you sound judgmental and disapproving you are likely to trigger feelings of shame or anger in your client. They may withdraw or become aggressive, but either way rapport will suffer immediately.

**State your position clearly**

Preface this with another indication that you understand their feelings. "I know you're really stressed and would like a smoke. I'm not able to buy you cigarettes though. Workers here can't do that."
Clients usually understand this, and the above is actually a fairly simple example. More difficult is the situation where the client can argue that you are able to assist them as they wish, and should. "Look, you said you'd spend $20 on food for the kids, so buy them what they like - cola and lollies and cheeze-puffs. It will shut them up so I can have some peace! Don't you want me to have any peace?"

**If their position is a long way from yours - go and fetch them!**

Rather than polarising your positions by emphasising the gulf between the two of you, go over to the other side for a bit. Agree with their viewpoint as much as you can, then introduce elements of your position:

"I know children love sweets - I certainly did when I was a kid. They'd be delighted if we spent twenty dollars on sweets. And you'd have a break for a while, I really think you deserve a rest after a day like today." Let that sink in. You have shown that you appreciate their position. They might come up with a compromise - you've left them room by pausing, but haven't agreed that theirs is the best or only idea. If they don't have any suggestions, it's time to offer your preferred alternative:

"I really think though that your children would be happy with a meal from House de la Pizza. It would take them a while to eat it, and they'd be really full afterwards. There's a deal for $19.95 that includes pizza, a drink, and iceblocks. Do you think that would be okay?"

Note you are not challenging the underlying reasons - your client's priority is for the children to be happy and for a bit of peace and quiet. You haven't provoked hostility by mentioning the unhealthy aspects of sugar, or that it may only make the children more difficult later on. Nor have you made any bossy declarations - you have left the decision in your client's hands.

**And if they still disagree**

Chances are your clear and assertive approach will be accepted by your client. If it is not you will need to weigh up the costs of persisting. If you have promised $20 for food, you need to consider if changing the children's diet for one day is worth the battle. A client in crisis is not somebody to have a nutrition debate with. Perhaps you can address this issue another day. As long as the guidelines of the agency have not been breached you have not acted improperly.
Handout 5b: The Crisis Referral

Especially after-hours, harried and under-resourced workers may sometimes be less than direct in order to refer - or avoid the referral of - a client. It's a shame to have to include a handout like this, but the problem is too common to ignore. Besides, it illustrates well the delicate touch sometimes required when negotiating for services.

When trying to place a client we mind find some agencies, especially accommodation services, reluctant to accept a client. This may be because they know the person and have had difficulty with them in the past. Or it could be because they are coping with some crisis at their own workplace, and do not need a further complication.

On the other hand another worker may be trying to refer a client to you. They may reluctant (or unable) to reveal all the relevant details, which may include a history of violence, crime, or current drug dependency. But, as they are keen to place the client, they will not wish to dwell on these matters, preferring instead to hurry things along.

The meat in the sandwich

Stuck in the middle, of course, is the client. In this unfortunate situation of workers being mistrustful and cagey it is risky to be totally honest. The only advantage to being open is that you can build a reputation for being honest and straightforward. As long as workers don't have faith in eachother's word, clients will get the runaround. It's a vicious circle - referring workers dare not reveal the true problems of the clients they are referring and the lack of real support they can offer; agencies screening referrals become doubly suspicious as they have been burnt before. Any refuge will have had the experience of being referred a violent or severely drug dependant client with the promise of 'full support, and only need a bed until Monday'. Come Monday the worker who made referral is mysteriously uncontactable.

The way ahead

So what to do? Use every trick in the book to get your clients past the gatekeepers? Knock back any referrals that don't have gold-plated references?

An effective strategy, and one that maintains integrity, is to be honest and open - about your client, your service, and the level of support you can realistically offer. People appreciate such honesty and can become surprisingly cooperative in meeting the needs of even the most challenging clients. In the long run you will gain the reputation of being trustworthy and straightforward.
If you are being thwarted

If you feel you're being stymied or blocked from accessing a service for your client remember the principles of skilled communication. Don't attempt to bully, threaten, or complain about the injustice of it all. Be clear about what you are asking for and the level of support you can realistically offer. If you think it is worthwhile then agree to try elsewhere but extract a commitment for reconsideration if you have no luck. Remain friendly and polite - it can only help your chances in the future.

Handout 6: Recording Information

There are a number of advantages that written forms have over spoken ones, as they:

- can be read by several people at different times
- do not suffer from 'Chinese Whispers', where spoken messages become distorted as they circulate
- can ensure messages do get through (both physically and psychologically)
- can be copied, stored, retrieved, checked, quoted, and referred to in the future
- form a 'paper trail', so a sequence of events can be reconstructed
- are more official than speech, and more likely to get a considered reply

Caution: Literacy cannot always be assumed. When dealing with young, disadvantaged, or people from linguistically diverse backgrounds, there is no guarantee that the written word will be understood. Without immediate feedback - and some people won't admit to not being able to read well - there is no way of knowing this. Also, some people just don't like reading, and simply will not bother with a substantial amount of text. Tactfully check the person's literacy level if you are in doubt, and avoid overloading them with unnecessary documents.

Objective vs. Subjective Language

To use subjective language is to give opinions. We do it all the time when we talk to people. In the more formal types of written communication - letters, reports, daily logbooks, case notes- we must be careful when using subjective language. Unlike facts (used in objective language), opinions can't really be proven. Opinions should be prefaced by "I feel that...", or "My opinion is that...". Not only is this 'safer' in that you are not purporting to be making statements of fact, but it is less likely to arouse hostility when others contest your statements.
Objective language presents observation but avoids interpretation. "He threw a chair toward me" is an objective statement. "He tried to kill me with a chair" is a subjective one. Objectivity removes emotion and interpretation from the message. Objective statements can are more able to be verified, particularly if there are witnesses present.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Subjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is 33 degrees outside</td>
<td>It's a stinking hot day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She looked at the floor most of the time</td>
<td>She was acting guiltily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The children appear healthy</td>
<td>She is a good mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He said he drinks a bottle of vodka each day</td>
<td>He is an alcoholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If his marks do not improve he will fail the course</td>
<td>He'd be better off in another course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank statement</td>
<td>Valentine's Day Card</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keep facts and opinions separate in your writing. The more formal the document the more objective it should be. Beware of using subjective statements that could come across as being judgement or biased.

**Handout 7: Written Communication Tools - what to use and when to use it**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document type</th>
<th>When used</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Daily log book (Also called Communications book, Day book) | To record all information that other workers need to be aware of | • Assume there will be no chance to talk about what is written, therefore be clear and detailed  
• Be clear on any action to be taken  
• Entries should have the date, time, and writer's name beside them  
• Be concise - people may have to read a few days worth, and shouldn't have to wade through pages of unnecessary detail |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Diary               | To record appointments and room bookings | - Duplicate appropriate information from Day-log  
- Clearly indicate if entries need to be confirmed |
| Memo (or circulated notice) | To inform and/or persuade people within the organisation | - Concise, normally no more than a page  
- Contains 'To:' 'From:' and is dated  
- May need signature sheet to show all have read it  
- Increasingly being replaced by email |
| Email               |  
1. As an electronic memo  
2. When a reply is needed  
3. As an alternative to leaving an answering machine message  
4. When attachments are provided for review or comment | - A receipt can be requested to show it has been read  
- Email overload can use a lot of time  
- Like any written communication extra care should be taken not to offend  
- May be viewed by others, such as system administrator |
| Online Chat         | For online group discussion | - Requires chatting skills  
- Can intimidate new users  
- Slower than spoken discussion  
- Very convenient alternative to meetings |
| Letter              | For more official communication | - Tend to be taken seriously  
- Form a legal record  
- Usually sent to people outside the organisation  
- Uses more formal language |
| Instruction         | Often displayed near what it refers to ('How to fix a paper jam in this photocopier') | - Uses precise, objective language  
- Should not be issued about controversial matters without group discussion  
- May be permanent, but |
Handout 8: Preparing for Group Discussions (these points are applicable for most group and meeting situations)

Groups should be well prepared for. Consider the following as you plan a group.

1. Is the issue appropriate for group discussion?

Consider: the importance of a quality decision, and the time it will take for the group to arrive at it; the benefits of obtaining multiple viewpoints; whether acceptance by group members of the decision is necessary for it to be implemented; whether it could cause undue embarrassment to an individual who could be spoken with in private.

2. What is the purpose of the group?

Is it to share information and viewpoints? Ventilate emotions and process issues that are upsetting people? Contribute to a revision of policy or procedure? Be aware that different members may have different agendas. Having an idea of the overall purpose should help you decide how to go about tackling the points below.

3. Research your topic(s), and provide information.

Use publications, policies, other workers, and the internet. Let's say you are running a discussion group for staff on improving a certain procedure in your organisation. Even though this may be a consultative process where you are gathering opinions it is still necessary to at least find out:

What is normal/best practice in other organisations, and why these practices work.
What are practices that are undesirable and why? For example they may have implications for legal liability, or may have been shown to alienate people for some reason (too authoritarian, culturally biased, inequitable).

What else do you already know? Perhaps you have some background knowledge from talking to other workers. Provide the group with relevant knowledge as appropriate to facilitate outcomes.

4. How much controversy and conflict is there likely to be in the group?

This will not only influence your thinking about group agreements, but may also demand that extra time is spent on exploring and defining the problem. Some people may have already arrived resentful at having to attend a 'waste of time' group about a 'non-issue'. How can you safely allow people to ventilate their emotions? If they do not get the opportunity to say how they feel about certain issues they may not participate in - or may sabotage - the group's functioning.

5. What ground rules, or group agreements would be useful to establish before the group begins?

Consider confidentiality, respecting opinions, how decisions are made and recorded, participation requirements, swearing and name calling, interrupting, speaking order, relative importance of task (what is done) and process (how it is done).

6. What setting is appropriate? Should the group held in a formal or informal setting?

Think about the implications for the following settings: Public hall, classroom, office, meeting room, cafe, boardroom, private home, outdoors. Consider factors such as noise, size, privacy, interruptions, tables and papers. Consider both sorts of climates: temperature and communication - warm, formal, serious, fun, businesslike, creative. What sort of tone do you want to set - formal, informal, or somewhere in between.

7. What equipment is necessary, and does it work?

Consider: butcher's paper, whiteboard, overhead or computer projector, TV/video, speech amplification/recording/translating. Test it!

8. What seating is best?

Usually a circular arrangement promotes equal status and encourages people to speak. A square is preferable to a rectangle or oblong, which suggests there is a 'head of the table'. What numbers are there? More than eight or so means people are less likely to contribute equally, and it will be difficult to obtain cohesion and consensus. Do you need small,
'satellite' tables or spaces so a large group can break up into smaller ones?

9. How much time do you need?

Try and get an idea of the total hours required. Does the group need time to form and become cohesive? Does it need to time to absorb a lot of information before commencing discussion and making decisions? Would it make sense to do it all in one day, or have shorter sessions over a number of weeks?

10. What structure is necessary?

Too much or too little structure will diminish the effectiveness of the group. A group of workmates will only get irritated with introductory games, but a group of strangers will need to be introduced to each other. You may wish to spend time introducing the purpose and scope of the group, or you may prefer the group to set its own agenda.

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**Handout 9: Running a One-off Meeting**

**Meeting or group discussion**

Where any sort of outcome is anticipated it is usually beneficial to frame the discussion as a meeting. This tends to add a little formality and structure to the discussion, which helps people focus and keep things on track.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before you start...</th>
<th>Allow 15 minutes for networking/socialising, caffeine and nicotine consumption. Greet people as they arrive and let them know how long they have until you start.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convene the meeting</td>
<td>Welcome and thank people. State the purpose of the meeting. Get volunteers to take minutes and keep time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Present &amp; Introductions</td>
<td>Names of attendees are recorded, and they introduce themselves if they haven't already.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Apologies</td>
<td>Record the names of people who have let the meeting know they can't make it (but haven't dropped out and would still like minutes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explore and map the issues</td>
<td>General discussion about the issue for a set period. Ensure everyone gets to speak. Use whiteboard or get the minute-taker to read a summary when done.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Prioritise the issues

It may be necessary for participants to rank the issues using a numbering system and then calculate the overall priorities.

5. Brainstorm some solutions

Each of the issues above needs a number of solutions or approaches generated for it.

6. Evaluate the solutions

More discussion and ranking so the group can agree on which are the preferred solutions.

7. Make decisions

Record any important points, dissenting views, and record any decisions made. Not all meetings have the 'moved, seconded, all in favour' procedure, so check that the agreed decision making procedure has been followed (consensus or democratic).

If your role is that of Chairperson (also known as the Chair or Facilitator), you are there to facilitate discussion, not dominate it. Don't adopt an autocratic (bossy) style unless you can do it in a light-hearted way to quieten the chatterboxes having conversations on the side. You might like to allocate times to each item. It's a balancing act to keep the meeting moving and allow adequate discussion at the same time. While keeping track of the time you also need to monitor:

- The contribution of all participants to the discussion. Watch for people losing interest, or deciding not to participate in a resentful way.
- The 'emotional temperature' - things heating up can cause engagement and arouse passions, but don't let things get so hot that aggression erupts and people storm out. On the other hand if things cool down too much people will get bored and sleepy.
- The confusion level. Keep an eye out for puzzled, or 'I give up, this is all beyond me' expressions. Seek clarification, check that understanding of an issue is shared, and not from five different viewpoints. Check the minute taker understands if they appear confused.
- Decision making:
  - Consensus is reached by discussion, and is reached when all agree with the decision, or at least agree to go along with it
  - Democratic decision making uses voting. It is quicker than consensus, but may not allow for exploration of all the issues

Use techniques to facilitate discussion and contributions. Brainstorming, going around the room, and making people express another viewpoint to the one they hold are examples of techniques. As the meeting draws to a close summarise the decisions made and thank everyone for coming.
Handout 10: Behaviours that Disrupt Group Functioning

Keeping the discussion on track

A good structure - say, a series of steps in problem solving - is not enough on its own to produce useful outcomes from group discussion. There should be commitment from group members to stay focussed, and to be respectful of each others' values and right to be heard. Unfortunately this is not always the case, so it is up to the facilitator and all group members to monitor each others' behaviours and keep the discussion moving forward. Here are some non-functional behaviours to watch out for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joking around</td>
<td>This is normal at the start of a meeting and helps relax people. As the conversation becomes more focussed and serious however, joking can be disruptive. With a lack of sensitivity it can also be deflating, disrespectful, and offensive. Such joking should be confronted and addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crusading</td>
<td>Where a person has a particular issue or cause that they are forever promoting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Reading, chatting, wandering around, even snoozing. While this may be caused by frustration at behaviours like those above it does not excuse disengagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sniping</td>
<td>Making disparaging comments intended to highlight perceive weaknesses in others; using sarcasm, laughter, or sceptical expressions to devalue others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention seeking</td>
<td>Any 'look at me' behaviour that does not facilitate the resolution of issues. Often breaks the flow of discussion, sapping the energy of the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martyrdom</td>
<td>Bemoaning one's workload, seeking sympathy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverting</td>
<td>Bringing up irrelevant issues, sidetracking, derailing the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing</td>
<td>Engaging in 'ego-battles', arguing loudly, pushing a point for the sake of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulldozing (or steamrolling!)</td>
<td>Declaring opinions as if they were facts, shouting others down, bullying others to accept a viewpoint.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two approaches to take toward these behaviours, one of prevention, one of treatment.
Prevention - the Group Agreement

The group discusses which behaviours are acceptable and which are not (the types of behaviours listed above). For a group of people who have just met and are discussing controversial issues the group agreement is an effective tool. It serves as a reminder as to what is appropriate, and can be referred to if things do start to fall apart. For a group that meets regularly it would seem somewhat contrived to try and introduce a group agreement. This does not mean that it may not be a good thing anyway!

Treatment - naming the behaviour

This is an effective technique if done well, but it has its dangers. To halt proceedings and draw attention to a person's pattern of behaviour is to risk their public humiliation. It may be best to wait for a break and have a word in private. If this does not work, an authentic, assertive statement that has the support of the group should do the job..."When you bring up the issue of the bad coffee we have here I feel frustrated because the topic for discussion is funding. Could we make coffee an agenda item for next week?"

Handout 11: Responses to Conflict

Conflict occurs when there exists a gap between two parties' perceived needs and wants. The existence of the gap causes the relationship between the two parties to sour. The parties may respond in a variety of ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoidance</th>
<th>Pretending there is no problem; avoiding the discomfort of confrontation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Trying to bully or otherwise force the other party to change their position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Trying to outdo the other party so they abandon their position; point-scoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>Giving in to the needs of the other party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Giving up on trying to change the situation, but not necessarily submitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromise</td>
<td>Agreeing to concessions so as to reach a solution that is inferior to that initially desired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation</td>
<td>Trying to trick, or outmaneuver the other party so they are unable to get their needs met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>Actively seeking to satisfy the needs of both parties and minimise conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Signs of Conflict

- Arguments, shouting, protests, tantrums, storming out, threats, abuse, physical aggression.

Other indicators are a bit more subtle, and reflect different styles people use when faced with conflict:

- Absence, complaining, joking, flippancy, moralising, pedantic logical argument, jumping to quick or extreme solutions, deception, undermining, snide remarks, loud declarations of opinion as if they were fact.

Causes of conflict

Conflict is almost always caused by people holding different opinions about a situation. The fact that opinions are tightly bound to our values and emotional states is what gives conflict its 'heat'. If it were only facts that cause conflicts we might easily investigate, find out the truth, and get agreement. Opinions, on the other hand, are about what people believe should happen.

Conflict resolution strategies include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>By simply talking about the problem two sides may be able to get their needs met, or find there wasn't such a gap after all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Using a series of steps parties to explore the causes of the conflict, and seek a solution, in a structured way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>A neutral third party facilitates discussion, taking care to explore participants' emotional issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>A neutral third party assists parties to reach an agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>A back-and-forth problem solving approach, often using a third party, which can also be used to prevent open conflict arising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbitration</td>
<td>A neutral third party considers the parties' positions and makes a judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Management</td>
<td>Not resolution, but making arrangements so unresolved conflict does not flare up destructively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategies further down the table tend to have increasing formality and control over proceedings by the facilitator. Further up the table the strategies are more collaborative and generally result in more satisfied participants.
Handout 12: Planning a Presentation

Step 1: Write the goal statement.
Step 2: Research the topic
Step 3: 'Chunk' the material into sections
Step 4: Analyse the audience
Step 5: Structure the presentation

**Step 1: Write the goal statement.**

In this step you decide the purpose of the presentation. The goal should be outcome based, so could begin with the words:

"Following this presentation participants will: (some examples)

- Be able to do a basic internet search."
- Be able to describe five benefits of regular exercise."
- Demonstrate a commitment to making this service run under budget."
- Be able to describe three possible solutions to the problem of having adequate staff at all times"

You can see that these goal statements are outcome based. They do not describe a process (Participants will learn how to....)

These goals are primarily either to inform or persuade. Some presentations are primarily to entertain, and although we won't focus on this it is important to realise that most presentations should be designed with all three in mind.

At some point in designing your presentation you should decide whether you are there to inform, or to persuade. If you are having difficulty deciding, consider the attitude of the audience toward the topic. If they are negative, you will need to persuade; if positive, to inform.

**Step 2: Research the topic**

You will usually be presenting a combination of theory and practical application. You might explain, for example, how a bubble-jet printer works, then show how to change the ink cartridge. You will be expected to know what you're talking about! You might need statistics, examples of how a problem has been approached elsewhere, case-studies, novel or extreme examples (which create interest).

**Step 3: 'Chunk' the material into sections**

This is where you begin to organise the body of the presentation. You order your material so all the 'bones' are in place - you can flesh it out later.
Decide on five things that the audience must know by the end of the presentation.

**Step 4: Analyse the audience**

This is the next 'filter' your material should pass through. Think carefully about their attitude - will they be curious, indifferent, positive, or negative? Are the concepts, language, complexity, and degree of formality appropriate to the occasion and the audience?

Consider now how to establish with your audience:

- **credibility** ("I have worked here for 3 years and have dealt with many aggressive clients")
- **rapport** (Connect with audience, get their attention and engage them. Make eye contact as you speak.)
- **interest** (You can start with a surprise: "The other day I felt like quitting this job forever")
- **motivation to stay attentive** (Most people do not easily concentrate for more than twenty minutes)
- **understanding** (Define key terms, build on what the audience already knows, explain and clarify as required)

**Step 5: Structure the presentation**

Think about your material, and your audience and what they would best respond to. To what degree do they need to be persuaded/informed/entertained?

After considering your information, audience, and intent, choose a structure for your presentation. It could be:

- **Narrative, or story structure.** People love stories, and a basic plot will keep them interested. You can map your presentation onto a plot structure:

  1. Background - We often have only one worker here at closing time.
  2. Disturbance - The other day, as often happens, I got stuck with a family in crisis until 7pm.
  3. Plan - We had a meeting to discuss ways of avoiding this happening again.
  4. Surprise! - There was disagreement among staff about the best way to do this.
  5. Complication/Solution - Some thought we could roster on workers, but any worker is vulnerable to being called away elsewhere.
  6. Complication/Solution - Another idea was to pay somebody to be on-call all evening, but this is costly.
  7. Complication/Solution - Volunteers said they could do the job, but they’re not supposed to be here unsupervised.
8. Climax - We decided you should decide!

- Topical, where the material is divided into sections by topic. 'Today will we look at the systems of the human body: the digestive, the nervous, the immune...'
- Chronological, or time sequenced structure. 'I will cover the historical development of the Centre, what we do at present, and our plans for the future'.
- Compare & Contrast, in which one state of affairs is compared to another. 'Under the old award, you were paid holiday loading as well as shift penalties. Under the new award you get paid one or the other, but not both'.

Problem solving, which is an approach you should be getting used to by now! This could be used to persuade by showing the process of how a way of doing something was selected. See Handout for a reminder of how to do this.

Whichever way you structure it, divide the time up equally between sections and stick to it. Time will fly by, so make sure you don't run out of it. On the other hand don't make a total meal out of a presentation that should only take five or ten minutes.

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**Handout 13: Delivering a Presentation**

The conservative approach is to use introduction/body/conclusion to: say what you're going to say/say it/and say that you have said it. Combined with a computer projection of everything you cover this can make for a very boring presentation indeed. If your audience is guaranteed to be fascinated anyway (perhaps you're outlining their redundancy package) this might not matter, but it's best to assume that they will have no inherent interest in the material - so you will have to create that interest!

1. Introduction

(Only plan your introduction when the body is nearly complete).

Most of the structure types above have some built-in interest-arousing aspects. Probably the potentially most bland one is the Topical structure, where there exists no inherent tension or interest-building devices in the form alone. A good introduction however, can grab the audience by quickly arousing interest and the desire to find out more. Here are some ideas for engaging people quickly:

- Be in the room as it fills, acknowledge people as they arrive, and generally take an interest - they will be more likely to take an interest in return.
• An observation, anecdote, or an 'On the way here a funny thing happened...' story, all add a human dimension to the interaction between presenter and audience.

• Announce your topic, and make it a snappy title. Which sounds better: 'Five considerations when buying a printer', or 'Problem: To purchase the perfect printer'?

• Make it personal. 'Have you ever gone to print out the final copy of an important report only to have your printer die? Or waited for an age, only to find the pages weren't aligned properly? Or had your printer grab ten sheets of paper at once and messed up the whole job?'

• Make it timely. 'As most of you know, in three weeks we are sending you out to do state-wide training. Today we'll let you know about travel arrangements, and what to do should your aircraft suddenly lose power'. (Yes, humour is a good way to start too).

• Bring it close. 'Imagine the person sitting next to you is epileptic. If they had a seizure right now, would you know what to do?'

• Don't spoil the ending. The above question could 'hang' until towards the end. Like some movies, you can lose all the tension and impact if some spoilsport gives you too much information.

• Startle them with a novel demonstration. 'Here's a book on curing drug addiction. As you all work with young people I'm now going to drop it in the garbage bin'.

2. Body

You may have noticed that the flow of the whole presentation will largely be dictated by the structure type you have chosen. A narrative approach will have twists and turns, complications and climaxes. The problem solving and topical approaches work through one section at a time. Whatever structure you use, the following points apply to the body of your presentation, which is about 80% of the total.

• Remember you want to make about five main points overall. When you make a main point, make about 3 sub-points, and give some detail, an example, or an exception. Map out this structure, and know your topic well enough so that a glance at the headings will prompt you to talk freely about them.

• You may wish to list the five main points quickly, then work through them in detail. This can work well, depending on the chosen structure. For the topical approach it would give a useful overview. On the other hand, if the narrative approach is being used, it would ruin the emotional impact of the tension, surprises, and obstacles overcome.

• The detail of sub-points could be statistics, diagrams, photographs, facts, evidence, quotations.

• That said, statistics and diagrams can be a turnoff. Don't say 'one in three people will suffer from dementia', say 'four of you in the front row will suffer from dementia. That's one in every three'. Only use a few, preferably startling and important statistics and diagrams.
• Emphasise the relevance and importance of each point. Don't assume that just making the point and adding detail is enough. Give an application: 'Not only will this troubleshooting approach help you in a work team, it will also come in handy with your family, sports team, or anywhere a group needs to function in harmony.'

• It can be effective to start with the detail, and link back to the sub-point and main point. 'Once you're safely bobbing around in the dark ocean you may wish to attract the attention of a passing oil tanker. Here's a whistle you can blow. It's attached to your lifejacket.'

• Link sections with each other 'Ever wondered why your heart beats faster when you're afraid? That's because the nervous system is intimately linked to the circulatory system. Some of those nerves we were talking about go directly to the heart.' With a little thought you can make an elegant transition between sections while showing their interconnectedness.

• Flip out a few questions. The point is to engage the audience, not test them, or show them how you have all the answers. 'Who uses a pressure cooker at home?' Every person that answers will at least wake up the person next to them! Stick with one person for a minute or two if you can, even a mini conversation is all right. Don't, however, get into protracted debate and try to prove the person wrong.

• Use analogy and metaphor. 'The relationship is like a pressure cooker. The therapist is like the regulator that sits on top. The couple is helped to safely let off some steam, but the temperature is kept high enough that things are still cooking'. To explain how something works, refer to a thing that people already understand.

• Remember there are three learner types: visual, verbal, and tactile. The visual people like to see - charts, films, diagrams, anything they can feast their eyes on - except acres of text. The verbal like to listen - which is not to say that they're content to have someone drone on at them, but they do absorb the spoken word better than the others. They like stories, questions, discussion, and cope with verbal explanations. The tactile are 'hands-on' people. Ideally they are actively involved, physically doing something. In a normal presentation it is not easy to involve the audience in demonstrations, so having them see you moving about may have to do. You can also use tactile language: 'Once you jump in you'll quickly get a feel for how this printer works - you might hit the wrong button a couple of times but will soon know your way around and get to grips with it'.

• Put time limits on each point. You will surprise how quickly this daunting task can fly by. Scrambling to finish on time makes your presentation appear rushed and incomplete.

• Balance fun with form. A strong structure and logical sequence is necessary if you want some freewheeling spontaneity. Otherwise you'll have a chaotic shambles. Don't think you can just 'wing it' with a vague idea of what you're going to say. Plan and rehearse the body so you know it backwards. Then, and only then, will you be able to 'funk it up on the night'
3. Finale

Finale is used to mean the combination of both climax and conclusion, a climactic conclusion if you like. It is used in preference to simply 'conclusion' as the end of your presentation should carry some impact. In fact, it should usually motivate the audience to do something. Have you ever left a presentation or performance feeling exhilarated and inspired? Perhaps making some resolution - even if it's just to tell someone else to go and see what you just did. As with a movie, or a sports game, it can kind of spoil the effect if you already know the ending. So keep something back from your audience. They may know what's coming anyway (as we often do with a movie), but that needn't make the experience any less satisfying. So, to make your finale a grand one:

- As you summarise start to build momentum, not fade down. You are like a racehorse coming into the final straight. Reinforce the main points but keep an air of expectation - you're about to deliver each individual in the room a personal message about what they can do with this information.
- Paint a word picture, present a vision. Perhaps you can get your audience to imagine a future where young people and old appreciate each other; or where everyone uses the printer of their dreams, or where the world is free of HIV.
- Be upbeat and positive. Go out with a bang. Don't trail off with some apologetic muttering like 'Well that's about it I guess'. You want them buzzing when they leave, rushing up with requests for you to email them your notes.
- By the end the focus should be off the personality of the presenter and onto the ideas being presented. They're not waiting to see if you're going to be interesting anymore, they want the central idea reinforced with some oomph! So give it to them with feeling: 'The next time you walk by a young person just hanging out, don't shy away in fear - stop and say hello'; or, 'So if you can reach that level of honesty in the pressure cooker of your own relationship, then and only then will you be able to stand the heat of the therapeutic relationship'; or, 'Now go forth into the world, and select the printer that's right for you!'

Handout 14: Writing a Report

There are various types of reports used in Community Services, ranging from the short and informal, to bound, long and detailed reports that may have hundreds of copies printed. An example of a short report is an Incident Report that is typically written up after an accident or incident involving a client. An example of a long and detailed one is the Annual Report of the National Data Collection Agency on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. Reports of all types usually share the following characteristics:
1. They are written using formal, objective language
2. There is a requirement that they are written, to satisfy some regulation or criteria
3. They are official, legal documents, and as such should be signed and dated
4. They have a summary, body, and conclusion or recommendations for action

A report of substantial length should include:

- A title page, stating the name of the report, by whom and when it was written by, the organisation represented, and who it is for
- A summary, which in a paragraph or two describes the entire report
- A table of contents, for a report of over a few pages, to assist navigation of the document
- An introduction, which outlines the circumstances giving rise to the report, and any background information
- The body, which includes how the report was researched and compiled, the methods and analysis used, the findings, and some discussion and evaluation of the ideas presented
- The conclusion, which summarises the body and findings
- Recommendations, which suggest a course of action to be taken on the basis of the findings
- Attachments, including references, graphs, tables, and any supporting documentation

Like presentations there are various ways of structuring a report, such as chronological, topical, or by geographical area. Consider the needs of the user when deciding on the structure. Use plain language, and resist being overly academic or verbose simply because the format is somewhat more formal than the usual written communication in the workplace. Use case-studies, illustrations, and arresting graphics to spice up what is traditionally a somewhat bland format.