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.