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.