Task 2

Handout 19: Managing the Interagency Meeting

Regular and interesting meetings are a vital part of building the interagency group. Most interagencies will perform as long as they have a purpose and as long as the group can see that they are succeeding in meeting their goals.

Meetings can occur at both the formal and informal levels. It is important to be aware that besides the agreed agenda there will also be hidden agendas. These are the personal wishes and needs of individual workers and their agencies. The hidden agendas develop because of the dynamics in relationships and conflicts with one another, struggles for power, and differences in beliefs, values and culture are inevitable when people work together.

Listening skills are the keys to good communication. Good meetings exemplify this. In effective meetings instead of looking for what is wrong with others’ ideas, people listen for the positives and build and support ideas. As a consequence everyone feels involved and committed values. The key skill involved in dealing with these aspects in the interagency group is to listen and acknowledge them, and to understand.

Prior to meetings it is important to:

- Clarify purpose and agenda
- Inform and discuss issues with all involved
- Ensure that all members have the opportunity to contribute to the agenda

During meetings it is important to

- Stay on task
- Share information
- Get information using questions
- Support/build on proposals
- Acknowledge others’ ideas by summarising and reflecting
- Use a problem-solving process to aid decision making
- Respect and acknowledge different perspectives don’t condemn or judge
- Be aware of hidden agendas and power-plays
- Remember the context of the meeting, ie:
  - Why are we here?
  - What is the purpose?
  - The options that are available to solve problems
  - Planning for action, not more planning! It is not enough for the group to make a decision. The group must also take action on that decision and a member of the interagency needs to take responsibility for this.