

Introduction

The Mental Health Foundation is a leading service provider and information resource for mental health in the ACT. We are a professional, not-for-profit, community based organisation that provides respite care to people living a mental illness. Our respite care facilities are *Marks's Place*, which provides short-term respite for carers of, and people living with a mental illness and, *Warren I'Anson House* which operates as planned residential rehabilitation program.

The Auditor General's Report, No 3 of 2009, Management of Respite Services in the ACT

As this document deals solely with DHCS respite facilities, and we have had very minimal interaction with these facilities we do not feel qualified to comment on its content.

The needs of care recipients (including children, teenagers and adults with a disability, elderly people, people with mental health issues and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) and their carers.

We understand the need for the collective services in relating to children, teenagers and adults with a disability, elderly people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Unfortunately, the Mental Health Foundation is not contracted to service, nor specializes in these areas. However, we do have two respite houses that service the needs of those with mental health issues. Across these programs we have found that these people often need support across a range of areas.

This can include:

- Day to day living skills, directing consumers toward an independent and healthy lifestyle.

For example:

- Domestic skill building (e.g. cooking, cleaning and washing)
- Healthy living skills (e.g. exercise and diet)

- Support to become involved with education programs.
- The opportunity to be linked with organisations involved in vocational training, and the sharing of general information concerning job skills and etiquette.
- Social support, including help to get involved with interest groups, develop social skills, and interact with others staying in the respite environment.
- An environment which is non discriminatory and sensitive to social and cultural values.
- Ability to access services when required, which is often difficult to manage with the limited number of places available.

The needs of staff who provide respite care, including working conditions and training

Staff who work at respite facilities need a diverse range of skills and support to enable them to support consumers in their recovery journey.

Skills

- An awareness of consumer advocacy and empowerment issues.
- An ability to engage with and establish a rapport based on mutual respect with people living with a mental illness.
- Excellent Listening skills
- Excellent communication skills.
- Computer literacy.
- Training in mental health service provision, preferably a Certificate IV or above in a related field.

Support

- Staff need debriefing options available to them at all times they are at work. This is essential when staff have been involved in a crisis intervention.

- Regular supervision on multiple levels.
 - Regular and informal supervision with their manager for short periods of time.
 - Formal supervision in longer intervals that involves discussion with consumers
 - Extensive supervision session at least once a year.
- An independent supervisor or councillor that staff can talk to about both personal and work issues.
- Opportunities to attend training, to develop and increase skills and knowledge in service provision related to their roles.
- Both the provision of annual leave and the opportunity to take that leave. This decreases staff turnover and burnout.
- Access to a formal complaints process, and a good understanding of that complaints process.
- To work in an environment which is non discriminatory and sensitive to social and cultural values.

The range, availability and suitability of respite care services, including any unmet need

In order to address this question it is important to define a ‘respite service’. We feel that this definition should not include crisis accommodation (*i.e. Samaritan House*), medium term accommodation (*i.e. GROW House*), or the long term mental health care facility (*i.e. Brian Hennessey Rehabilitation Centre*) as they provide a very different service to planned respite. We would define mental health respite as aiming to provide carers and those they care for an opportunity to have a short break from their usual living environment. From this definition there is only very limited places for respite in the ACT, which would include *The Lodge*, *Warren ‘I Anson Respite House*, *Mark’s Place* and *Inanna House* which would only allow approximately 20 respite beds at any given time.

The waiting list fluctuates and is seasonal. The winter there is a greater need. Warren &

Marks Pl. are full in winter. The gender and Mental Health issue mix at times does not allow for full occupancy of beds. Thereby not meeting the need for approx 6 months of the year.

The interaction between government and non-government providers of respite care.

This is an ongoing issue across the mental health sector which is beyond the scope of this submission. It would be sufficient to say that although historically interaction has generally ranged between marginal and non-existent, action is being taken at a policy level from MHACT which has begun to have noticeable effects. We will continue to monitor this through internal satisfaction surveys, but expect that, like all culture change it will take time.

The **model and processes of service delivery** does not support good ongoing interaction which is held together by good will. The following would facilitate improvement:

- The empowering of the consumer being in charge and owning his/her management plan would support the interaction.
- The consumer having a key worker/ advocate, walking beside them, to negotiate service requirements based on the objectives that the consumer agrees to.
- Admission to programs is through a transparent process
- Continue with formal 3 monthly reviews with all the players involved, including the consumer, clinical manager and the support service.

This will improve health outcomes, stop consumer shopping, be more cost effective and efficient.

The experience of service users who utilise government and non-government providers of respite care

The experience reported and seen by those working at the respite houses the Mental Health Foundation is overwhelmingly positive. Service recipients report that our respite programs assist them on a number of levels, including crisis prevention, providing focus, stability, freedom, security and activities to participate in, enabling them to initiate the recovery process, providing

change and enabling them to relax. Additionally, these services allow carers to take a break from their caring role, in which they are able to focus on themselves and prevent themselves from becoming overwhelmed or burnt out. This in turn has long term positive effects on the carer relationship.

Any other related matter

n/a