

HOME VISITING FAMILY SUPPORT
PRACTICE GUIDELINES



BASED ON A PRACTICE EXCHANGE
BETWEEN



Breaking the cycle for New Zealand children

AND



TE HUNGA TAUTOKO I TE WHANAU

Family Support Services
WHANGANUI TRUST

2006/2007

Preface

Whakatauki

Kei te watea te Huarahi	The way has been paved
Hei whainga mo te tangata	For us to follow
Panahia ki waho te kino	Push out all that is bad
Puritia kia mau	Hold on tight
Te Whakapono	To faith
Te Tumanako	To Hope
Me te Aroha	And Love
Mauri Tu	Today and always
Mauri Mana	For Peace and Prestige
Mauri Ora	For overall Wellness

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We particularly acknowledge the guidance and leadership provided by the Family Help Trust's Kuia Koka Heeni. Her strong presence, wise words and occasional challenges kept us all well-focused and humble.

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Meaning of terms used

These terms have the following meaning in these guidelines.

Client

An individual, family, whanau or group that agrees to receive home-based social services or to attend programmes provided by the service

Family

Family has a wide range of meanings that vary with each client.

The primary focus in the home visiting social work discussed here is the kin group living together in the same household with responsibilities for raising one or more children. The work is likely also to encompass their wider kin network, especially those with whom they have frequent contact. It may include non-kin who live in the same household and/or who have a family-like relationship.

The Maori concept of *whanau* has particular meanings and carries its own understandings of relationships, responsibilities and reciprocity.

Similarly, the sense of family and the understandings and expectations of family membership vary and are affected by social and cultural identity.

Home visiting

Provision of family social work services predominantly carried out in the client family's own home

Munford & Sanders (1998) note that a definition of home-based services can be wide enough to include

- visits to the client's home
- attending meetings with other professionals with the client
- taking the client to providers of other services
- assisting clients with shopping, recreation and other activities that make up the daily lives of families.

Sheafor and Horejsi (2006, p220) say that home visiting is "an essential component of all outreach services and of critical importance with the hard-to-reach client".

Social worker

Social work is a human service that simultaneously focuses on people, their individual functioning, their family context, their relationships and interactions within family and externally with local community groups and systems (such as neighbours, schools, community groups and services). It also holds in focus the wider societal context and how this impacts on families, communities and individuals.

Home visiting social work focuses on the family and on the safety and wellbeing of the children and other vulnerable members. Other social work settings may have a different starting point, for example, medical social work begins with the individual patient and community social work begins with groups with a common location, life stage or issue.

Executive Summary

This project involved all social work staff from the Family Help Trust, Christchurch, and Family Support Services Whanganui Trust in Wanganui in an exploration of what makes home visiting social work effective. The resulting practice guideline is built on exchange visits to each other's workplaces, paired visits to client families, and a two-day workshop reflecting on each person's example of their best practice experience.

These processes produced rich data that show that best practice requires more than knowledge and technique. Equally important is the social worker's ability to:

- know and use the self, and
- build and sustain effective social work relationships with clients

The guidelines tease out the detail of how the self and the relationship, and social work values, knowledge and skills work together to help families change and the implications for management of providing a service in which the social worker's self and their relationship with the client are primary tools.

The analysis finds that best practice also requires mastery of:

- cycles of assessment, planning and review that connect strongly with a family's own goals and ways of resolving difficulties, and that work to encourage, support and maintain momentum
- values and principles that are well integrated into agency function and individual practice so that the ethical, relationship and safety dilemmas that arise daily can be negotiated with the family in a respectful and effective way

The safety of children and young people is a critical issue that tests whether all the elements of effectiveness are in place. It requires a precise balancing of all elements – knowledge and skills to see and judge the risk, the ability to keep a positive and trusting relationship with the family while still raising issues of abuse and neglect, and the ability to engage the family in finding their own strengths to confront and address the issues of violence and abuse in their family.

Agency systems, structures and processes need to be congruent with best practice and are described in Part II. The emotional demands on social workers and the contradictions and frustrations of their work, mostly occurring in private in the client's home and rarely viewed directly by supervisors, and the difficulty of measuring definitively the impact of the social worker's intervention mean that standard business management is not sufficient. Agency managers and governance boards need to understand social work; provide the policy, procedural and emotional supports needed; and mirror the social work values in the agency's operation and ethos.

The two agencies in this project serve slightly different client groups, one focused entirely on families with extremely high risk and vulnerability; the other offering a more general service with a little under half of their clients in the ultra high risk group. The project has identified a need to look more closely at work with these families so that their children and young people can be safe and well cared for, and the social work support offered is safe, can be sustained over time and is effective.

Introduction

Goal

These guidelines are part of a project to identify the elements of best practice in home-based social work. They were developed from an exploration by workers in two social service agencies that offer home-based family support, and are built on the participants' experience of looking behind the practice slogans and examining their best work to see what works in the live situation with actual clients.

Home Visiting Family Support

Families experiencing significant difficulties present a challenge to the helping professions, especially when the safety or well-being of children and other family members is at risk.

Commonly there are multiple problems that are embedded in the social, emotional and psychological functioning of individual family members and in their patterns of interaction – both with each other and with their wider social networks. Historical and structural factors in society that are beyond their control, such as poverty, racism, sexism, unemployment and shortage of affordable housing, add further layers of difficulty and reduce the family's capacity to thrive.

These difficulties are intertwined and deeply embedded and will not be resolved through a simple programme or therapeutic intervention. Commonly these families do not believe that change is possible and are reluctant to seek help, or actively resist it.

Bringing services to the family in their own home seems a self-evident solution. A home-based intervention does not require a client to come to an appointment, attend a programme or participate in a group. The worker joins the family in their home base and sees their reality through being part of their lived daily experience. The worker is on the spot and they can address issues as they arise.

This type of service requires a special kind of professional engagement that values and respects the family, conveys warmth and caring, and hooks into the family's own underlying yearning to live their lives differently. This work requires well-integrated professional practice that can support and encourage yet also firmly address anything that will jeopardise the safety and wellbeing of children and other vulnerable members, and do it in a way that maintains a real human relationship with the family.

It takes a special kind of agency to support effective work of this type. Stepping into the lives of vulnerable families cannot be taken lightly. The agency must provide sufficient rigour through their systems of oversight and review to ensure that intervening is safe for families and workers alike. It must provide professional leadership, and through its ethos, values and principles anchor an approach that is respectful and nurturing yet does not collude with abuse and harm. Through both formal and informal processes - the training, supervision and accountability, the open debate, honest reflection and emotional support – the agency enables the workers to be creative, effective and safe in their work with troubled families.

What works?

A challenge for agencies and workers is to know what works best. Every family is different, and the service is tailored to each family's needs, strengths, hopes, understandings and ways of working.

Research results are inconclusive; some programmes show positive effects and others do not, perhaps because of the variability in families, social workers and programmes. David Fergusson et al, in a recent study that also examined the international literature, concluded that there is an urgent need to identify the factors that make home visiting programmes work.¹

This exploratory study investigated the elements and parameters of effectiveness by drawing on and examining the actual experience of social workers involved in home visiting family support in two community-based agencies.

The two agencies

This project involved the Family Help Trust (FHT) in Christchurch and Family Support Services Whanganui Trust (FSS) in Wanganui. Key points about the two agencies are:

- both are long established and well-respected agencies committed to sensitive high quality work with vulnerable families and to the safety and wellbeing of children
- FSS offers a wide range of services for families, while FHT is specifically set up for, and works exclusively with, families defined as at very high risk
- FHT is based in a major city with a wide range of other services to whom clients can be referred for specialist help; FSS is in a provincial town with fewer services and hence a need to provide a wider range of range of services in-house (for example, parenting programmes and a telephone support line)
- FHT clients meet a threshold score on a 50-item assessment scale to be accepted for services and are then assigned directly to a social worker to assess and plan with the family what is needed; FSS clients come with a wide range of needs and issues that are discussed and assessed with a senior worker and, if a clear social work role is identified, are linked to a social worker
- FHT targets at risk children pre-birth and can remain with the family up until that child starts school; FSS social workers remain involved for as long as both parties agree – on average about eight to nine months – and clients can return at any time

Both agencies provide home-based family support with hard-to-reach, multi-problem families. Both are strongly focused on children's safety and well being, and work with families so that they can provide safe care and nurture to their children. Both are committed to high standards, to being effective but doing no harm, and to openly examining the work they do. This project is a part of that commitment.

¹ Fergusson, David et al, 2005

Process

The process of exploration involved three exchange visits between the two agencies and a two-day facilitated workshop. Absolute confidentiality was maintained throughout all these processes, and no identifying client information was used in any discussions or recording.

On the exchange visits, visiting and visited workers were paired for a day and a half and participated in the usual work of the agency. The paired workers subsequently compared notes, and on the final half day of each exchange visit all participants gathered to share their observations and insights. These discussions were recorded, summarised and the notes circulated.

This process of paired home visiting was not always comfortable. Working together and being observed interacting with clients, and later sharing experiences in the group, exposed workers to unusual scrutiny and at times questioned and challenged familiar ways of working. The picture of best practice that emerges here is built on the lived experiences of these practitioners, and demonstrates their commitment to their client families and to achieving best practice.

Structure for analysis

The two-day workshop followed the three exchange visits. Staff from both agencies came together for a facilitated process using an Appreciative Inquiry process.² The workshop began with each person's example of work that had been effective and satisfying, and explored these experiences to build a picture of best practice.

The facilitators posed six questions to help the participants organise the elements of best practice they identified. The questions were based on the facilitators' knowledge and experience of this area of work and on the reported experience of the workers from the two agencies during their exchange visits. The six questions were:

- Engaging – what did you do to engage the family at the start?
- Assessment and planning – what worked?
- Overcoming later challenges – what worked?
- Social work knowledge and skills – what was most useful?
- Resources – what were the practice / cultural frameworks, models, theories and other resources that you used in your work?
- Professional support – what worked?

Workshop participants shared their experiences of effective work, and drew from each other the factors they identified under each question. These were recorded on stickers, grouped into clusters of similar items and grouped and regrouped as participants examined and talked together about the emerging patterns. The clusters of elements that make for best practice were further examined in the process of analysis for these guidelines to ensure all elements were captured and identified in a consistent way.

² An Appreciative Inquiry is a way of working with groups that recognises and uses each person's knowledge and experience in a solutions-focused approach. It builds effective, positive and sustainable outcomes that are based on the collective experience of what works and what is effective.

An organic whole

The framework in Figure 1 (below) shows the elements that contribute to best outcomes for families (as identified through the exchange visits, workshops and analyses) in relation to the actual work process. This framework shows that:

- single elements are insufficient by themselves to achieve effective outcomes
- the whole is a dynamic and interacting system; it is not linear and does not describe a step-by-step progression
- several elements appear and have influence in more than one place
- the individual elements are used flexibly to accommodate the style and personality of the individual worker, each client's characteristics and situation, and the interactions that occur between them
- all the elements dovetail together and the whole describes an organic process.

This framework and the interactive nature of the elements has good fit with the "Integrative View of Social Work Practice" diagrammed in Sheafor and Horejsi and reproduced in Figure 2.³

The elements of best practice

The picture of home visiting family support built up through the exchange visits and the workshop pinpoints the following as the keys to best practice:

- The **self** and the way the self is presented – is a major component of a social work intervention, with the **attitude and manner** facilitating a connection with the client and enabling the worker to build and sustain an enduring working relationship
- The **social work relationship** – is the fundamental tool and the necessary basis for change through social work intervention
- **Assessment, planning & review** – is the **process** through which worker and client agree the issues to be addressed and the specific goals and direction of the work they will do together
- The **fine balances** that have to be successfully struck in several ethical areas
- The **added value** – is what the social worker brings to engender change –
 - the overview that comes from not being involved, but being an outsider with experience and analysis from other similar situations
 - the belief in humanity and a conviction that growth and change are possible
 - the repertoire of techniques, models, programmes, services, and tools for change that can be enlisted to promote change

³ Sheafor, Bradford W and Charles R Horejsi, 2006

- the judgement that guides the choice of timing, pace, manner and tools used
 - the project-management role of moving the plan forward, adjusting and changing as needed
 - the selected decision-making and review processes (sometimes formal) that engage the client family and sometimes others involved in a process of planning and review
 - the art and science of social work that use a human relationship, passion, caring and intuition and a kete⁴ of knowledge and resources to make things better
- plus the underpinning professional disciplines of supervision, training and accountability and the agency and team culture that provide support, guidance, and safety for worker and client alike.

Participating workers in this study often said “...it all dovetails together” as they explored what worked well. It is important to keep this organic relationship in mind as the detail of each separate element is discussed in the sections that follow.

Limitations and future directions

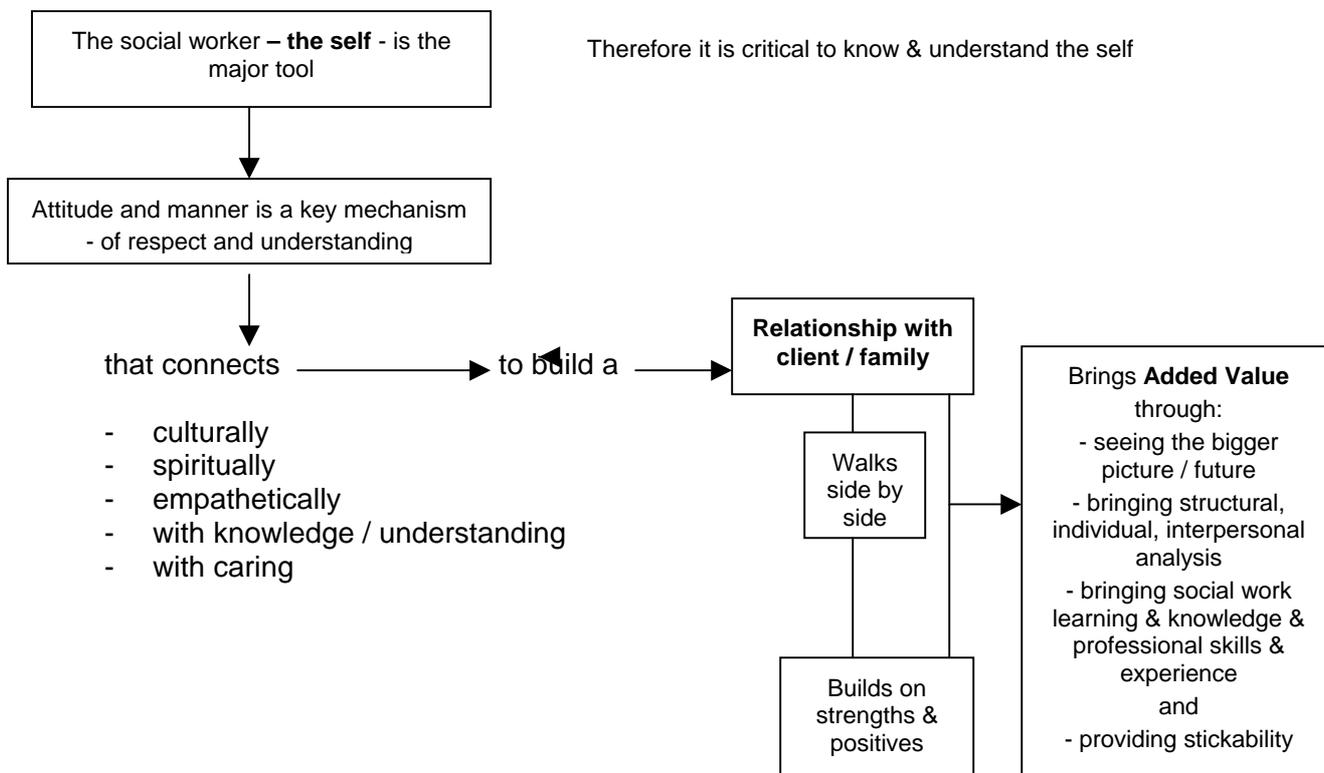
The processes used for this examination of practice mean that the resulting guidelines have some limitations. Not every practice question that arose could be examined in depth. The focus was on the foundation, the fundamental matrix of attitude, skills and knowledge and of agency structure that underpin safe and effective work. The more specialised skills, such as risk assessment, crisis intervention and conflict management – critical competencies to address the family issues that capture headlines when children die or are severely injured – need to be built on top of this solid foundation.

One of many unaddressed questions that arose is the observation that different approaches may be needed for those families needing help for a period of difficulty compared to the work needed with those with multiple areas of risk and vulnerability, who have had no experience of committed positive family relationships and who struggle with basic daily practicalities.

This prompted discussion between the two managers about the types of interventions that are effective for ultra high-risk clients. It was noted that the entire FHT cohort met these criteria and around 45% of the FSS client group. Both organisations are keen to investigate this further through in-depth comparative research using matching cohorts from each service to evaluate practice effectiveness. The addition of matching cohorts from one or two other agencies, if possible, would provide a more nationally representative picture.

⁴ The flax basket in which food or other treasures are carried.

Figure 1: Workshop-identified best practice elements & processes



Negotiates a series of delicate balances and fine lines

- between affirming strengths & positive & making judgements, insisting on safety
- between a humble and gentle approach while holding greater power (therefore self-awareness and supervision and accountability are critical)

In social work, the position of the worker vis-à-vis the client is a critical element. (Compare other professions – for a brain surgeon, knowledge and skill are more important than the relationship)

Uses Processes

Setting goals, pacing & changing with the client
 Decision-making processes (various as appropriate)
 Actual tools and models of work

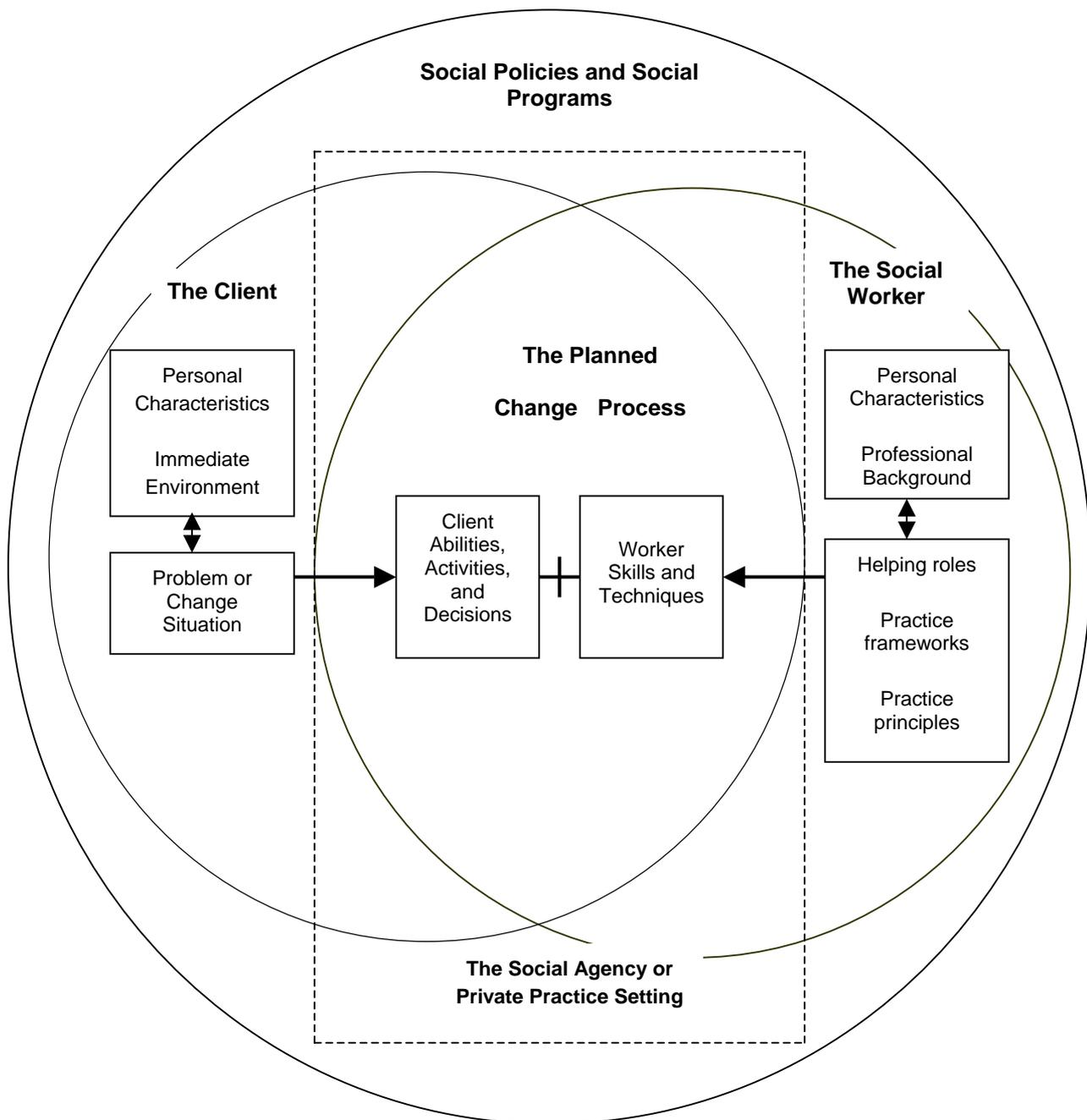


Underpinned by Supervision + Agency Culture + Team Culture
 These mirror and must be congruent with the relationships and processes above.

This all dovetails together – and needs to do so

Figure 2: Integrative View of Social Work Practice (from Sheafor & Horejsi, 2006)

The Social Environment



Part I

Best practice elements in detail

1. The self

1.1 Introduction

The social worker is the tool⁵

Social workers work in the realm of the personal and, compared to other professionals, have fewer external tools with which to meet the needs of their client. The social worker's own self is a major component of the tools they use.

The social worker's primary practice tool is the self (ie, his or her capacity to communicate and interact with others in ways that facilitate change). The skilled worker is purposeful in making use of his or her unique manner and style of relating to others and building positive helpful relationships with clients.⁶

The fundamental significance of the self was evident in responses during the two-day workshop. Participants identified things about the self as critical in every single area of the social work process. For example, a large proportion of the responses to "what works" were elements of the self, and one in three of the elements selected as the "most useful social work knowledge and skills" related to the skill of knowing the self and knowing how to use the self.

The pre-eminence of the social worker's self as a major tool presents a challenge for worker and agency alike, and requires active steps to ensure the work is safe for both the client and worker.

The demands on the self coupled with social work motivation to care and do something worthwhile for others can be a trap. Studies find that working with at-risk families results in workers with high levels of emotional exhaustion (or "burn out") but also high levels of job satisfaction. This can lead to soldiering on to a degree that is unhealthy and potentially pose risks for client and worker alike.⁷ Agencies and workers are both responsible to monitor and manage these effects on the self.

The participants in this project said that getting to know the self is "a journey" – something that is ongoing and not ever finished.

Knowing your own emotions and reactions, how you react in interactions with others, and what to do when a client sets off one of your personal triggers are tools that are fundamental to safe and effective social work.

⁵ Quote from participant in the project workshop

⁶ Sheafor & Horejsi, 2006, p69

⁷ Stalker et al, 2007

1.2 What are the skills to develop?

Knowing the self; self-awareness	Other-awareness
<p>Increases self-awareness, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows his/her own personality • Understands his/her social & cultural background & the values, beliefs & assumptions that come from these • Knows the things that trigger emotional responses – anger, fear, joy • Develops an understanding of his/her own spiritual dimension or wairua 	<p>Through self-awareness builds empathy with others, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses own journey of self-awareness to be aware of the journey for others • looks through the eyes of the other to develop insight
Self-care	Managing the self
<p>Shows appropriate care of self, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knows the importance of self honesty • seeks supervision when it is needed & learns to recognise when it is needed • is honest in supervision • understands own need to care for others, & balances this with care for self • takes breaks • uses humour • knows his/her own limits 	<p>Shows ability to manage the self, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learns to distinguish between emotions & reactions that come from the self and those that arise from interactions with & reactions in others • uses self-understanding to control emotional reaction • develops skills in problem-analysis and problem solving⁸ • learns when to say nothing and/or walk away & when to reveal a personal feeling or uncertainty to a client⁹

⁸ Stalker et al, 2007, see competency in problem-solving as a key skill that enables the worker to manage emotionally exhausting social service work without harming clients.

They identified as helpful what they called “*active engaged coping strategies*” such as problem solving, cognitive restructuring, seeking social supports and expression of emotion.

These strategies contrast with “*disengaged coping strategies*” such as problem avoidance, wishful thinking, social withdrawal and self-criticism, which are more likely to lead to depersonalising clients.

⁹ Sheafor & Horejsi, 2006, suggest that “*When properly used, self-disclosure has the effect of making it easier for the client to talk about a sensitive topic and feel more at ease with the worker. ... As a general rule the use of self-disclosure should be avoided completely in the early stages of relationship building and used sparingly at other times.*” (p151)

1.3 How are these skills used in practice?

Giving the self	Modelling self-awareness
<p>Gives of the self, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responds authentically, openly and appropriately • is true to the self • genuinely reaches out toward the other in humility • is sufficiently self-aware & comfortable to accept the self of others • is honest and open in a professionally appropriate way 	<p>Demonstrates an open, positive and managed use of the self, which models & helps teach lessons such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is ok to be yourself • everyone is different • relationships build on self-awareness • you can be yourself and still let others be themselves too
Managing the self	Cultural competence
<p>Manages the self - in order to create an appropriate social worker / client boundary - that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knows own personal triggers • recognises own limits • recognises own triggers might lead to over-reaction or avoidance • recognises own imaginings (projection) for example, thinking the client will not like you if you ask a particular question • is unshockable and non-judgemental (ie, while not condoning abuse & harm manages personal emotional reactions and is therefore able to exercise professional and ethical judgement) • recognises when supervision is needed, and seeks it 	<p>Demonstrates the basics of cultural competence, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knows their own cultural & social heritage • recognises how much is universal and “normal” & how much is simply the way that things are done in their own family and culture • realises that “cultural understanding”, “cultural sensitivity” and “cultural knowledge” require first an understanding of the self
Using the self	
<p>Brings self-awareness into interaction with the client</p> <p>Actively uses the self to build & sustain a social work relationship</p> <p>Manages the self so that personal values, beliefs & emotion do not distort a healthy social worker/client relationship</p> <p>Applies knowledge & understanding of body language to better understand the client’s emotions & to consciously control their own</p>	

2. The social work relationship

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of home-based family social work is to change aspects of individual and family functioning. Effective change depends primarily on the relationship between worker and client.

*A bond of trust must exist before people are willing to risk that difficult human experience – change. Thus the most fundamental tool of the trade is the use of a **professional relationship** ... A positive relationship is a precondition for effective work with individuals, families, or groups of clients ...*¹⁰

The nature of the social work relationship is unusual and it takes skill, experience and guidance to build it well. The worker is in a more powerful position than the client yet acts like a friend. The worker has to meet the client's needs but also the needs and expectations of the agency, the profession and wider society. A worker who is part of an indigenous people or another cultural, refugee or migrant community has yet another set of expectations to meet.¹¹

The social work relationship can range from entangled to rigid. It demands scrupulous attention and conscious work through self-reflection, supervision, and agency monitoring.

2.2 Relationship Building

Research suggests that each social work relationship is actively built – it is a “social construct”. Social workers have to learn how to find an appropriate boundary between the personal and the professional, and a point of balance between over-involved and cold indifference. The way this is done and the best point of balance is affected by the particular work place and by the culture, social class and gender of worker and client.¹² Maintaining an appropriate personal and professional boundary is particularly delicate but important when work occurs in the client's home setting.

The relationship has to be formed at the beginning and then sustained over time – “not just getting in the door but staying there” as one manager expressed it. The worker needs the skills to engage, to actively build rapport while also preparing to deal with difficult personal and family matters.

The initial engagement is critical, otherwise the work will never be based on a real understanding of the family's situation, ways of functioning and their true perspective on things.

*If you don't build rapport, clients will simply give us what they think we want to hear, not who they really are.*¹³

¹⁰ Sheafor and Horejsi, 2006, p38

¹¹ Zubrzycki, Joanna, 2006 pp4-12

¹² Zubrzycki, 2006

¹³ Workshop participant

Workers describing this stage talk about a gentle and quiet process of connecting, a slow pace, and an emphasis on careful exploration and listening.

The initial stage of engagement sets the ground for the later work. It has to be realistic and honest about the purpose, yet leave space for the relationship to be built and secured.

You don't need models and theories for getting in the door. The first visit is only rapport-building, not so much about work.¹⁴

The relationship once established has to be sustained. In the workshop, the two phases of the relationship – getting in the door in the first place, and then sustaining a working relationship – were considered separately. However, the elements of best practice identified turned out to be the same, but differed in pace and intensity.

2.3 Key elements

The key elements identified in the workshop as relevant to the social work relationship are:

- the self
- an attitude and manner that will enable worker and client to connect, and embark on an agreed journey of growth, healing and change
- practice that is person-centred and strengths-based
- professional competence such that the worker:
 - knows what s/he can offer and has a repertoire of tools, approaches, knowledge and skills
 - can consciously use and control the self
 - is culturally aware, sensitive and competent
 - knows how to build and sustain a safe and supportive social work relationship while moving toward change, and

The self

Half of the elements identified at the workshop as “social work knowledge and skills” were about the social worker’s self and their relationship with the client.

With self-knowledge and self-understanding, the worker does not need to be defensive and self-protective and is less likely to be caught by their own or the client’s emotion. They are free to be themselves and to find their own best balance of warmth with professional distance and detachment.

¹⁴ Workshop participant

Attitude and manner

90% of the elements that participants identified as fundamental to successful engagement related to the worker's attitude and manner.

The way the self is presented to the client determines the degree of connection that can be achieved and sustained. Part learned and part compassion it is the spiritual quality – the wairua – through which we connect with each other. It is a sensed but intangible thread that supports the client's search for meaning, purpose and connectedness in their lives; the "... often mysterious art of building hope and creating opportunities for sustainable change".¹⁵

Strengths-based, person-centred practice

Strengths-based and person-centred practice is a professional stance that has clients in charge of the process and holds that they have within them the knowledge and resource to manage their lives and resolve its difficulties in ways that work for them. There is a balance to be found between this practice position and issues of safety and harm to others. These are the "fine balances" that have to be negotiated, and are discussed in part 5 below.

Professional competence

The social worker is not present in the family's life to be a friend, although many elements of friendship are relevant. If a client is to let go of the familiar and try something new, they have to feel that it is safe to do so and that the worker has the skills to support a safe process of change.

Stepping into the personal life of a family is a huge privilege and responsibility for worker and the agency. Both have to take steps to ensure that no harm is done, that interactions are supportive, just and ethical, and that the worker has something to offer.

¹⁵ Vaughan Milner, 2006, p64

2.4 What are the skills to develop?

The self	Attitude and manner
<p>Knows the self sufficiently, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be relaxed & comfortable & able to be themselves • knows their own personal “triggers” – the interpersonal situations that produce a strong emotional reactions • recognises when these triggers are fired in work situations, ie that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ are about the worker not the client ○ may lead the worker to under or over-react to the client’s situation or provocation • manages these reactions <p>Finds a personal style as “social worker”</p>	<p>Develops self-knowledge, experience & skills about how to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show interest, curiosity, caring & empathy for individuals, families & groups <p>Knows that attitude and manner are culture-bound, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is aware of their own social and cultural norms • knows and respects those of other cultures • is able to adjust their own behaviour to connect
Relationship building	Professional competence
<p>Uses the core skills in their interaction with the client, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notices their reactions and responses • checks in with them regularly in language that works for them • avoids making assumptions • moves at their pace (except when there is risk of imminent harm) <p>Works through with supervisors & practice managers to find the fine balances, ie:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how person-centred & strengths-based practice fit with agency expectations & commitments to child safety • finds the way to resolve these for this family <p>Uses skills that build interest, caring & empathy, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strives to get inside the head of the client; sees things through their eyes • attends to a “spiritual” quality in the relationship; a connection with the spirit of the other 	<p>Is aware of the bigger picture</p> <p>Has a future picture, a plan; hope</p> <p>Knows their stuff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is well-informed • knows what is possible; • has a kete of knowledge, skills, information & frameworks <p>Knows and understands issues of power</p> <p>Shows stickability and persistence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is able to withstand changeability, slippage & sometimes direct hostility <p>Exercises self-support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeks and uses supervision • seeks other expertise, networks with others <p>Has good time management</p> <p>Shows a learning attitude, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open to new learning and styles • upskilling • always learning

2.5 How are these skills used in practice?

A gentle, humble approach	Culturally aware & competent
<p>Approaches the family with genuine humility and gentleness, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greets with a friendly warm expression, smiles • takes time to enter the home – showing respect and reverence for someone else’s private space¹⁶ • uses a soft manner • is real, true to the self • actively listens, checks out what s/he has heard • takes time & is patient • shows respect • is honest & transparent • shows trustworthy behaviour <p>Uses the self in a way that is authentic, honest, genuine, transparent</p> <p>Uses spirituality and spiritual practices (eg, a prayer) if appropriate, for focus and guidance</p>	<p>Knows and respects cultural expectations – for example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • removes shoes (unless this is a health hazard) – it is better to be asked to keep them on than the opposite • eye contact – sometimes ok, sometimes not • appropriate body stance & greetings • recognises seniority and the correct processes for engaging and inquiring <p>If appropriate, shares a karakia & whakapapa</p> <p>Seeks cultural advice and guidance</p>
<p>↘ ↗ Uses more of these four elements at a slower pace in the engagement phase ↙ ↖</p>	
Consciously builds a relationship	Professional
<p>Takes time to find out “Who are you?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finds links and points of connection • creates an environment of safety • explores connections, draws a genogram, whaka whanaungatanga • actively finds things to value about them; shows interest in their interests • finds incentives • comes with no preconceived ideas or assumptions; learns from them • person-centred – they are in charge of the process • demonstrates “unshockability” (“have heard things like this before”) & “stickability” (“will stick by you through this”)¹⁷ 	<p>Displays professional behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is on time (and phones if running late) • provides clear information eg re the agency, re client rights • promises only what can definitely be delivered • uses professional tools, eg scales, whakapapa, genogram, interview formats • Does the straight talk when necessary – in proportions relevant to the situation & the stage of relationship building <p>Adjusts relationship building to match the stage of engagement and development</p> <p>Judges what is appropriate in this case</p>

¹⁶ “... a person’s home is his or her sacred space ...” Sheaffer & Horejsi, 2006, p221

¹⁷ Though where there is risk to the safety of children or young people or other vulnerable family members, the worker may have to firmly name some behaviours as unacceptable.

The Social Work Relationship

Relationship sustaining	Person-centred, strengths-focused
<p>Actively cements connections & feelings of safety, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looks for & names areas of connection • shows interest, encouragement & enthusiasm • is clear & honest about what will happen & how, & any limits <p>Actively uses communication skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses body language to present the self through eyes, facial expressions, body position • consciously uses body language to display respect, interest and concern • listens to the client's words & notices body language and demeanour • uses clear, straightforward, warm language <p>In the context of an honest appraisal of what needs to change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actively looks for strengths and positives <p>Finds examples of ways the client has succeeded in the past - and names these to the client - in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hook the client's own coping skills • give the client heart to keep going • gather clues as to how best to support this client • use the client's own resources and usual styles of overcoming challenges. <p>Consciously paces the interaction to the client</p> <p>Has fun; enjoys humour</p>	<p>Looks for and builds on strengths</p> <p>Sustains a positive relationship and focus through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belief that someone can change • hope and optimism • active caring; awahi • staying positive • focusing on strengths • affirming achievements • motivation and encouragement <p>Gives voice and power to the family & whanau:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciates their story; their journey • actively gives family a voice, a role, responsibility • stays true to what they want • meets their needs if at all possible <p>Adjusts the pace to suit the client by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • going at their pace • not pushing • challenging and then stepping back • backing off; relaxing the pace • trying a different angle • being flexible • being guided by their fears & need to stop • saying it is ok to stop • being guided by them when it is the right time to begin again <p>Attends to issues of power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is constantly aware of the power imbalance • Avoids being caught in power games

3. Assessment, planning & review processes

3.1 Introduction

Home visiting social work is about change, and effective change is based on an assessment of what is needed and what will work. The way that assessment and planning are done with the client makes a difference.

Assessment and planning begin with a relationship and then require skills that sufficiently engage the client in an assessment and planning process to:

- assess together the issues that are causing trouble (for the client and/or for others)
- agree to work on changing some aspects
- make and work on a plan for change
- sustain the work over time
- frequently review, reassess and re-plan
- bring the work to an appropriate end point that is acknowledged and celebrated

3.2 What are the skills to develop?

Engagement	Analytic ability
<p>Knows & understands thoroughly one or more assessment frameworks that the social worker & client can use together to structure their planning</p> <p>Has the skills to engage a client family in a process of change</p>	<p>Has or develops the ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • see the bigger picture • identify the problem(s) • see where the client can get to with appropriate support and input • pinpoint the likely starting point(s) and the pathway from there • break the task into small manageable pieces
Holistic analysis	“Project-planning” type skills
<p>Understands the individual(s) and the dynamic interplay with others in the family group and wider networks</p> <p>Understands and engages appropriately with their community</p> <p>Knows about other services available and how to build these into the plan</p>	<p>Understands change in human settings, and the steps needed to achieve change</p> <p>Knows the steps in making a plan</p> <p>Develops the steps and judges the timeframe</p> <p>Reviews progress regularly and adjusts when necessary</p> <p>Documents appropriately and clearly</p>

3.3 How are these skills used in practice?

Assessment	Engaging the client in change
<p>Begins with the family telling their story.</p> <p>Builds the story into a full social work assessment that provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a beginning knowledge of the key issues facing this family • awareness of any known safety issues • recorded baseline information to measure change, & for accountability <p>Builds a full picture of the family & the context of their lives, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • names, ages, relationships, & current living & care arrangements • ethnicity, and iwi if relevant • family & whanau & neighbourhood connections • referral agency & other services currently or formerly involved • family strengths & supports • family history (including parenting) • education & health / disability status • children's safety - protective, precipitating, predisposing & perpetuating factors <p>Gets clear what is not working so well for the family - their perspective & others involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family violence, child harm • alcohol & drugs, mental health • relationships, parenting etc 	<p>Makes the purpose clear at the beginning</p> <p>Hears what the client wants and needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attends to words, pauses and hesitation, voice tone, body language • uses tools to aid the discussion and exploration, eg pens and paper • responds, clarifies, checks <p>Takes great care with goal-setting – especially the first – to ensure it is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a partnership • manageable <p>Finds their goals, what they want to change and a process that will work for them</p> <p>Talks straight but supportively about risks that have to change (eg family violence, harm to children, addictions)</p> <p>Talks through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actions and consequences • what if ...? <p>Warms them to the task through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hearing their story • acknowledging their past successes • others' success from similar circumstances • breaking the issues to be worked on into small achievable steps ("baby steps") <p>Finds a good starting place – sometimes a crisis precipitates this – and keeps it going</p>

Assessment, Planning and Review

Plan-building	Sustaining work on the plan
<p>Uses appropriate framework(s) and processes to assess the situation fully Judges the key issues to be addressed overall, drawing on -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thorough assessments • knowledge, experience & what works <p>Selects the building blocks for a workable plan -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finds strengths and past successes to build on • sets limits – ie, names areas of risk that must be part of the plan - in a supporting way, eg <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ challenges the issue not the person ○ brings the focus onto the child(ren) - the impact on them and their needs <p>Uses formal planning processes when required or appropriate, eg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening Families meeting • Whanau hui • Case conference 	<p>Maintains motivation through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassuring & normalising (eg, “We all face challenges”) • reframing • pointing out & celebrating small successes • being realistic <p>Builds allies for change in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whanau • community networks and activities • other agencies and services <p>Uses frequent reviews – formal & informal – so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • steps are kept manageable • goals & steps can be changed in response to client family need & wishes • the client keeps control & gains confidence <p>Keeps the momentum going & avoids drifting</p>
Review	Agency oversight
<p>Reviews progress constantly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • checks in every step of the way • shows client how far they have come • uses measurements / scales etc as appropriate • uses agency protocols for periodic more formal review <p>Adjusts the goals, the plan and the steps</p> <p>Celebrates and builds on successes</p> <p>Documents clearly & uses the written record as an empowering tool (perhaps signed & celebrated by the family) – to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress over time, decisions made & changed, lessons learned • their competence to chart their own course & find their own solutions 	<p>Agency line manager and/or case work supervisor reviews each client’s situation regularly with the worker, ie:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • checks that plans are made and reviewed and progress documented • talks through with the worker their view of progress, issues • periodically meets the family with the worker or builds in co-work <p>Adjusts the goals, the plan and the steps</p> <p>Celebrates and builds on successes</p> <p>Documents clearly</p>

4. Added value through social work resources, knowledge & frameworks for analysis

4.1 Introduction

In addition to a supportive relationship and encouragement to risk change, the social worker brings perspective, experience, knowledge and tools that provide the “added value”.

Being an outsider enables a social worker to see the bigger picture for the client. Being warm, supportive and caring but not personally connected and involved, gives a perspective that differs from a family member or friend. The worker also brings experience from other families in the same or similar situation and, having focused professionally on human situations, a repertoire of knowledge and skills that add value to the basic caring relationship.

When you meet with the client family you bring your kete of knowledge that will be dipped into depending on what you hear and agree to work on together.¹⁸

Best practice is more than simple knowledge and technique. Responses from participants in this project suggest that technical skills and knowledge provide less than half of the elements that make a difference. The elements that contributed to their best work were:

- 30% knowing and using the self
- 30% the social work relationship
- 40% techniques and technical knowledge

There is a lot to know, as the section below shows, and it needs to be known well. It is not useful (and can be harmful) unless it is well understood and thoroughly integrated into the self – the “who you are” of each social worker.

¹⁸ Quote from workshop participant using *kete* the Maori term for a flax basket in which food or other treasures are carried.

4.2 What are the resources, practice & cultural frameworks, models and theories to have in your kete?

Human development, psychology & sociology	Human difficulties
<p>Has a demonstrated understanding of human behaviour, development, groups and institutions, for example, knows about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and adult developmental ages and stages • Mental, physical, emotional, behavioural, spiritual dimensions of individual human nature • An holistic understanding of the dynamic interactions within and between individuals, family & whanau, groups & social networks • Sociological understanding of society and the dynamic effects of social structures & groups, of culture, norms, & values 	<p>Knows and understands common recognised syndromes and difficulties, for example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autistic Spectrum Disorders • Addiction • Disability • Family violence dynamics
Structural analyses	Theories of change
<p>Has a thorough grasp of analyses that examine the issues and dynamics of power between individuals, groups, and larger sectors of society, and the effects</p> <p>For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feminist analysis • capitalist analysis • family violence analysis • colonisation analysis 	<p>Knows what works and when and for whom, for example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) • Counselling skills; tikanga counselling • Te Whare Tapa Wha • Te Wheke
Social work practice frameworks,	Techniques that promote change
<p>Has a repertoire of cultural and practice approaches and frameworks, for example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task-centred social work • strengths-based; solution-focused approach • empowerment model • Duluth (stopping violence) model • By Maori; for Maori approaches • Te Whare Tapa Wha 	<p>Has a repertoire of techniques that prompt and support change, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframing • Naïve enquiry • De-escalation • Motivational interviewing • Checking, reframing, reflecting and mirroring • Conflict resolution <p>Understands the principles & processes for adult learning</p>

Legal frameworks	Other services
<p>Knows relevant laws and legal system and knows how they can work to constrain, limit and empower, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Children, Young Persons and Their Families (CYPF) Act • the Care of Children Act • the Domestic Violence Act 	<p>Knows when a particular individual, family or group needs to access other services and knows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is available outside the agency in the community • when and how to refer on • how best to connect client and service, treatment or support group
Tools and equipment	Specific formal programmes
<p>Media such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos, DVDs, internet, audio, books and other aids to learning <p>Specific educational resources</p> <p>Specific change tools, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Power & Control Wheel <p>Tools and equipment that are part of the change process itself, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • buying a cellphone, teaching the client how to use it as part of achievement and safety planning 	<p>Knows and can use formal programmes for specific learning and change, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting support & development approaches, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ P5 ○ Triple P ○ 123 Magic ○ Incredible Years • Programmes for specific groups or issues, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anger Toolbox ○ Surviving Adolescence

4.3 How are these resources used in practice?

Through the assessment, planning and review processes described above, the social worker and client family build a partnership to work to achieve the agreed goals.

Daily work with client families	Assessment, planning and review
<p>Observes and responds to client situations, drawing on the knowledge, techniques, equipment and programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that best fit the “teachable moment” <p>Uses specific tools or integrated knowledge (often an instinctual part of the self) in all interactions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talking through a current dilemma • doing practical tasks together • driving to an appointment 	<p>Draws on the combination of knowledge, techniques, equipment and programmes available (including those integrated as an instinctive part of the self) in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making assessments • planning with the family • consultation with colleagues & supervisor • reviewing & reporting progress • making recommendations

5. *Dilemmas and fine balances*

5.1 Introduction

Home visiting family social work is not a tick-box activity that simply needs a good check-list and training to use it well. Workers daily walk fine lines and negotiate delicate balances.

Many of the guiding principles, values and indicators of best practice that have been identified here are counter-balanced by an equally strong value, principle or practice element that is its direct opposite. It is the ability to hold them all, to integrate them into the self and to balance them appropriately in each case that is the art and science of social work and that marks the skilled practitioner from the beginner.

The dilemmas and tensions range along continuums that are about issues of power and authority. They raise questions such as:

- to what extent can the relationship between social worker and client be one of equal power
- when is it valid, appropriate or even necessary to assert and / or exert authority and when is it safe and effective to simply support the client and move at their pace
- what are the behaviours and actions that require the worker to actively intervene
- how do we maintain the primacy of children's safety and wellbeing - and hold the family as the expert of this

5.2 Key principles and goals

There are apparent contradictions in aiming to provide services that simultaneously:

- are client-directed
- will not compromise child safety and well-being, **and**
- effectively change situations for the better

These three have to be held – by worker and agency – in a creative tension. Each is vital but none can be held to the exclusion of the others and still be considered best practice. Each needs to be somewhat tempered by the other two.

Client directed

A strong imperative for effective home-based family social work is that the work is *client directed*. This means that it:

- moves at the client's pace
- accepts their reality
- is responsive to their wishes and feelings

- “goes with” the client at their pace
- is non-judgemental (that is, likes and accepts them as people even though there may be aspects of their behaviour that are not likeable, acceptable or approved)
- works to client-chosen goals and with client decisions and consequences
- build’s on the family’s strengths in protecting their children

A client-directed approach is not only ethically defensible and just. It works. When the client finds their own motivation, keeps control of the process, and finds resolution that will work in their family, change is more likely and to happen and to last.

Child safety and wellbeing

The two agencies in this study are clear that an absolute imperative in their work is *the safety and wellbeing of children and young people* and the clear expectation is that workers will secure safety in a way that maintains a respectful and positive relationship with the client family. A client directed approach cannot mean that children and young people are abused or neglected or otherwise harmed.

Harm to children is difficult to address. It is not always visible. Challenges to parenting are deeply personal and can shake already fragile confidence, yet unaddressed abuse and neglect often does irreparable harm. The ability not to collude with abuse and neglect and yet to maintain a constructive and enduring social work relationship with the family is a challenge and a key test of effective social work.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness means striving to ensure that the involvement of a social worker actually makes a difference. By definition, this must imply some form of assessment and judgement, so while the work is client-directed and focused on strengths and positives, it is not simplistically non-judgemental.

Achieving effective change sits somewhere between supporting a client to do whatever they like and conversely taking control, directing, and making decisions from a position of greater power. Lasting change comes from the integration of knowledge, skills, and processes in the context of a constructive personal relationship.

5.3 Strengths-based practice

The resolution of these dilemmas is often called a “strengths-based approach”.¹⁹ This approach – in its true form - is not a Pollyanna view that only looks at the positives. It looks at reality, and holds that that reality can and must be faced and mastered. The work is to support families to face and resolve the tough issues in their lives.

¹⁹ Munford & Saunders, 1998

Strengths-based, person-centred practice confirms the client as master of their own life but needing support, honest reflection, suggestions and guidance to untangle some areas of chaos. The worker's task is to find a way to hook the family's strengths and to support them to face and deal with problems and issues of safety in their family.

It requires sound judgement and the weighing up of multiple interconnecting factors. It develops through experience, training and professional guidance. Supervision and clinical guidance are critical.

The strength comes from holding the tensions, believing that family can and must find the solution, and not backing away. Done well it has the power to produce dynamic and lasting change.

5.4 What are the skills to develop?

Integrated practice	Professional disciplines
<p>The effective social worker has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> worked through all relevant facets of the self (above) has found a way to be that self & form an effective social work relationship with a client family <p>Has worked through the competing imperatives in the work, so that s/he:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> has a fully integrated grasp of the principles & priorities can hold the inherent tensions & be neither immobilised nor reactive can work through each individual situation holding the key principles and priorities while responding step by step as appropriate in each individual situation is calm, patient and persistent in working through the layers of decisions and actions needed for a well-targeted response in each individual situation <p>Has worked through in clinical supervision how best to personally withstand the stress and tension of situations that demand finely balanced judgements and actions; the areas where the self is most strongly challenged</p>	<p>Works for continual improvement in self-knowledge, skills and professional knowledge</p> <p>Manages conflicted situations using reflective practice & honest, thorough participation in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clinical supervision agency supervision peer supervision and co-work interagency scrutiny advice from experts client feedback professional development and training <p>Does not work alone, that is, routinely opens work – especially in these areas of difficult balance – to be critiqued by others (as above), setting out clearly what:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adults & children are saying adults & children are doing the worker understands by these actions & statements the social worker's response <p>Participates in professional debate and development – in the agency, community and wider professional networks – to help develop best practice in these challenging areas</p>
Knowledge	Skills
<p>Has well-grounded knowledge about :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> what works to promote change; what needs to be done in various situations developmental needs of children and young people dynamics of addictive and violent behaviours and the impact and outcomes of these behaviours on family members assessing child safety – the protecting, precipitating, predisposing & perpetuating factors <p>Has an in-depth understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meanings for clients - social and cultural contexts and realities 	<p>Has fully-developed skills in building & sustaining a social work relationship in particular has developed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> well judged timing and pace a comfortable style that is warm, positive & appropriately professional <p>Has repertoire of skills for dealing with & challenging unacceptable behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in the midst of family life & practical help (“the teachable moment”) in crisis intervention in a formal way when required (eg, making a notification to CYF) <p>Can raise issues and challenge behaviour without losing the client</p>

5.5 How are these dilemmas & fine balances worked out in practice?

Every step of every day requires judgement and skill to correctly balance client autonomy, child and family safety and effective change.

Between client-directed & worker intervention	
<p>The worker is clear about any limits or “bottom line” requirements (eg, re child safety & health, ethical limits or statutory requirements), and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes any limits clear at the beginning • builds them into the relationship & into the plan <p>The worker invites the client family on a journey and, within the limits above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has an idea where the journey is going, but sees it as up to the client family what they take from it • does not set out to “make” clients change but finds the key for this client family and invites them to change <p>The worker walks alongside and invites participation when s/he:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses empowering language to encourage and invite • looks together at various options • talks through consequences of following each pathway • reframes • creates an actual change so that the client experiences a different way • finds the client’s own longing for change & hooks into this • reiterates the goal – what the client really wants – as the lever for change • uses the assessment planning and review processes for example, goes back & looks again at the client’s own goals & plans 	<p>Being directive can become a habit, so needs to be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • infrequently, wisely and consciously • in keeping with the stage of the relationship • when necessary to ensure the safety of children & young people & other vulnerable people <p>Even positive skills (such as focusing on strengths, presenting as warm & accepting, emphasising self-direction, using particular language, voice tone and techniques) can seem like manipulation, so the worker needs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect on their use of authority & technique • ask - Whose needs is it meeting if I take charge now? • check in supervision & with others that approaches & strategies used are appropriate & necessary to achieve client goals <p>When authority is need to achieve sufficient safety for a child or other vulnerable family member, the worker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does it in a way that maintains the mana and dignity • is explicit about the process that s/he is using • allows as much choice as possible • holds fast to the duality that the harm must stop and that the family has and must find the strength to face and address the tough issues <p>The key is how things are done and for whose benefit.</p>

<p>Between non-judgemental & making judgments</p> <p>Between unconditional positive regard & challenge and disapproval</p>	
<p>An effective social work relationship is based on respect for each person’s humanity, and a belief that people can change.</p> <p>A non-judgemental attitude is fundamental to a social work relationship but making judgements is valid when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is a conscious professional process – the worker is aware & knows that they are making a judgement & not simply reacting • it relates to those things that are at the heart of what the worker is there to do • not to speak or act would collude with violence and abuse <p>How judgments are made or disapproval shown depends on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the stage of relationship building <p>Couch any judgements or disapproval as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • part of the worker’s advocacy for a primary client (for example, the child, or person with disability or vulnerability) • consistent with the client’s own goal 	<p>When the worker genuinely & unexpectedly shocked:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disguise feelings of shock– unless someone’s immediate safety is at risk • raise the issue later after first discussing it in supervision and with colleagues and careful preparation • or, openly name the issue and say that you need to go away and think about it and talk to others <p>Plan how to make challenges & judgements so that there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a focus on the behaviour, not the person • a way ahead & some choices– even if it is tough and not particularly pleasant • a genuine promise of ongoing support – the “persistence” & “stickability” that characterise the best and most effective work <p>Recognise that clients may deliberately attempt to shock the worker – to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • test their mettle or commitment • see how far they can go or • see how “bad” they have to be before this worker gives up on them too

Part II

Professional support: Best agency practice

6. Agency Practice

6.1 Introduction

An agency providing home visiting social work carries a heavy responsibility for its workers and for the families into whose lives the service steps. Managing social workers and running a home visiting social work service is not a standard management task, and the agency and its systems have to support, guide and enable a service in which:

- the self of the worker is a tool
- change rests on the social work relationship formed between worker and family
- cycles of assessment, planning and review are tailored to each family and to their changing circumstances
- the worker is equipped with a wide range of knowledge, skills, and competencies
- critical dilemmas arising daily are negotiated effectively

Research consistently finds that what enables social workers to deal well with the emotional demands, contradictions and frustrations of their work is having:

- work that is challenging and worthwhile
- sufficient decision-making authority to do their best for their clients, and
- support from co-workers and supervisors.²⁰

Managing an agency so that it can deliver a consistent, safe and reliable service yet allow for the individuality of both workers and families is a formidable management challenge. The senior management teams in this project²¹ noted that it takes years of hard and persistent work and adaptation over time to get the structures, systems and ethos right.

An agency earns its reputation through the quality of its work in the community, and the social workers in this project identified the professional support that most helped them do their best work. In order of frequency they mentioned:

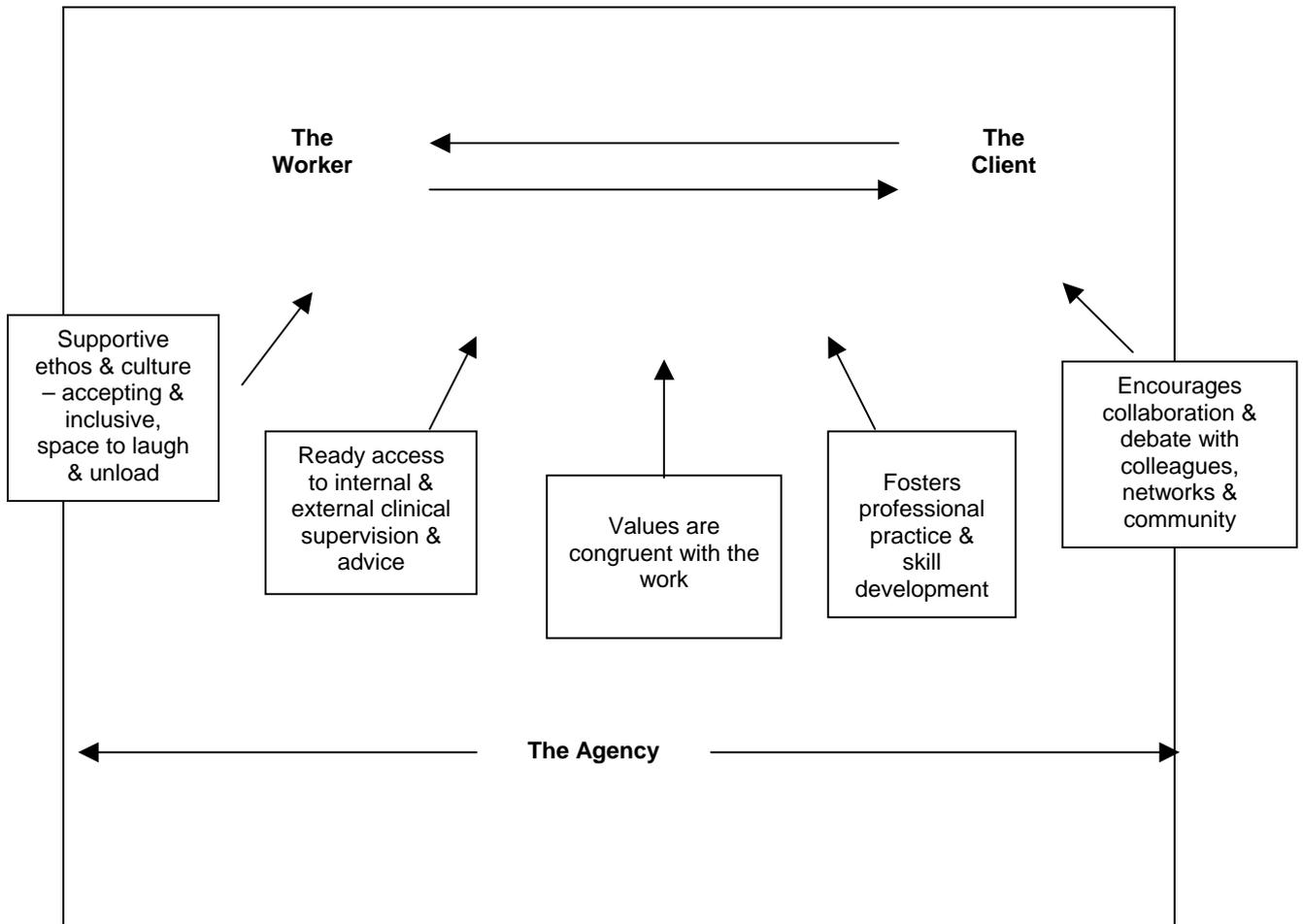
- supervision and advice
- an agency and team culture that is supportive and inclusive
- professional development, that incorporates recognition of prior learning and life experience
- work that is collaborative; not working in isolation

²⁰ Stalker et al, 2007, pp 186-187; Wells, R, 2006, p1187

²¹ The senior management teams comprised the two agency managers and their respective clinical leaders.

These elements form the three-legged stool – the social worker; their connection through a social work relationship with the client; and the underpinning agency processes, culture and ethos that support and sustain safe and effective practice.

Figure 3 Agency elements that support best practice



Providing these supports is the responsibility of agency managers and senior staff.

This section looks at learnings about the role of the agency and senior staff in delivering best practice home visiting social work support.

6.2 What core supports are needed?

Supervision	Agency Culture
<p>Supervision that is supported, encouraged and well resourced and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clinical supervision – which focuses on the individual self & the way the self is used & reacts in the social work relationship • in house supervision – which monitors & supports case management • on-demand supervision - the “open door policy” with a senior practitioner available for support, advice & debriefing whenever required • cultural – based on particular cultural concepts & models of interaction • from peers – which provides ready support, other perspectives & ideas, & is encouraged <p>In-house supervision that maintains regular casework oversight and has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supervisors / case managers with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ strong clinical skills & knowledge, and ○ a manageable number of social workers to supervise • tight structures to ensure that the work with each client is regularly reviewed • a focus on the work with clients to check & guide the approach, the models, analyses & tools drawn on • clarity about the boundaries between matters that belong in internal supervision & those that belong in clinical supervision (or counselling) <p>Where material resources are needed, such as formal programmes, books, videotapes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purchases & maintains them • supports the training needed to use them correctly <p>Access to external expertise & advice</p> <p>Policies that require participation in regular supervision</p> <p>Supervision for supervisors</p>	<p>An agency that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is driven by social work principles & values & respectful practice • is committed to the safety & wellbeing of children and young people • works within a strengths-based practice • participates in open & honest professional debate • mirrors best practice in positive & supportive collegial relationships <p>An agency and team culture that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourages & models self-reflection & self care • encourages workers to own difficult issues they are facing & to seek help with problems <p>An agency culture that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actively builds teams & encourages a strong team approach • respects what each team member brings & codifies this approach in agency operating policy • encourages worker input into decisions about agency policy & how the work is done • ensures that workers, managers and Board members all know each other • encourages time together as a team, having fun & “having a laugh” <p>A workplace that is made safe through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • honest, open relationships • management that is supportive, approachable & trustworthy & responsive to feedback • policies that foster safe work & support the professional disciplines of planning, recording, supervision & training • openness to seeking & hearing outside views <p>A physical environment that provides the space needed for work with clients, office work and team building</p>

Professional development	Interagency practice
<p>An agency that encourages personal development so that workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have opportunities to increase their knowledge base & update their training • are encouraged to prepare for & accept more responsible & challenging roles <p>An agency that encourages managers and social workers to belong to relevant professional groups & associations that build:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional & ethical frameworks that stand outside the individual agency • collegial support outside the agency • access to expertise • a strong professional voice <p>An agency that provides for & encourages participation in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training, conferences & workshops that build clinical skills, knowledge & familiarity with useful resources • personal development planning • professional associations <p>Workers attend to their personal professional development through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being open to new learning • identifying training and professional development needs arising from work with families and seek ways to meet these needs • seeking opportunities to extend knowledge, understanding and skills <p>A climate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognises professional debate as healthy and necessary • expects open participation in debate • embraces debate on new challenges • makes allowance for and manages the time it takes 	<p>An agency that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • values the benefit that accrues for clients, the agency & individual practice from exposure to a range of views • is open to the scrutiny, accountability & challenge that comes from exposing work to outside view. • actively engages in collaborative practice <p>An agency that encourages, supports & resources workers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involve other agencies in their work with families • work cooperatively with others involved to help achieve the family's goals • learn the skills of interagency practice • improve links between home & the key institutions relevant in each case (that is, schools, statutory agencies) • engage with the wide network of services and agencies in the community <p>An agency that is fully engaged with its local community, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevant social service agencies & social service networks • local iwi and hapu • professional associations and groups <p>An agency that has a voice and is involved and active in the wider community and nationally</p>

6.3 How does an agency provide the needed management & support?

In a separate discussion at the end of the workshop, the two senior management teams explored their learnings from the project in relation to the management and professional leadership of an agency. This section sets out the key insights, ideas and strategies from that discussion, and covers:

- agency culture and ethos
- providing and managing clinical supervision
- recruiting staff
- client intake
- assessment, planning and review
- not working in isolation
- risk management

6.3.1 Agency culture and ethos

Social work requires a management framework where everyone involved (each senior manager and board member) understands the nature of social work. Best practice will flourish when the agency itself lives the values and philosophy that underpin social work. In particular it needs to support and give weight and space to:

- reflective practice – that is, encouraging self-reflection, seeking help, admitting doubts and uncertainty, learning from experience and creating a clear structure to support the exchange of ideas and thinking
- openness – that is, fostering case discussion, co-working, debriefing, expressing emotion, seeking external opinions and expert advice
- holding child safety and wellbeing paramount – that is, ongoing enquiry in each case, holding a clear stance in interagency forums, providing staff training and a child-friendly environment, and offering broader leadership in relevant political debates
- culturally safe practice – that is, holding culturally sound attitudes, values and beliefs, acting to validate and support cultural needs and practices, being well-connected with local iwi and hapu, and with leaders of other ethnic groups
- necessary professional disciplines – that is, providing clinical supervision, case management, ongoing training and professional development

It is difficult to provide the needed agency ethos, structures and professional leadership unless managers have a clinical background in addition to competencies in human resources, and financial, relationship and risk management.

6.3.2 Clinical supervision

Supervision is a key professional support and risk management strategy. In clinical supervision the social worker particularly examines the self and the way the self affects and is affected by the work. For the worker it is a professional discipline, necessary for safe practice and professional development. For the agency its provision is a challenge which needs to effectively balance the needs of worker, agency and client.²²

An Agency using external supervisors still carries responsibility for casework decisions. The clinical supervisor is engaged to enhance the social worker's practice, but -

*"Case management stays in the agency"*²³

Using an external supervisor requires workable boundaries and clear agreement between all parties. Risks to be managed are:

- the external supervisor being out of step with, and/or cutting across, agency values, goals, priorities and casework direction, and a lack of appropriate accountability back to the agency
- the worker excluding the agency, for example, declining to discuss with a line manager an issue arising in their work with the client because "I've discussed that in supervision"

External clinical supervision operates well if the agency:

- identifies the qualities and competencies for an external supervisor²⁴
- establishes a three-way contract that includes:
 - supervisor accountability back to the agency²⁵
 - agreement about what is reported back to the agency, and how
 - expectations that workers attend supervision and go prepared
 - expectations that supervisors will encourage workers to use agency policies and procedures to guide their work and to raise any concerns about agency practice
- helps workers identify issues that need to be explored in clinical supervision

An important agency function is to identify workers experiencing serious personal difficulty. Emotional burnout is a particular risk in social work, as the motivation to help others can keep workers struggling on beyond their own resources, and the

²² A comprehensive Aotearoa/New Zealand guide to supervision in non-government agencies is available in The Supervision Directory Steering Group, 2005.

²³ Quote from management team meeting

²⁴ One agency in this study has a panel of external supervisors with appropriate knowledge, skills and values who accept the agency contract, and from whom social workers select a supervisor.

²⁵ Both agencies in this study have experienced significant difficulty when accountability back to the agency has not occurred and/or has not been part of the contract.

strategies the worker uses to cope can be harmful to clients.²⁶ It is a significant risk and needs to be understood and managed.

External supervision is a valuable investment. It provides the social worker with a regular and safe place for reflection on the self, relationships and the dilemmas and challenges in the work with families. It is also a healthy safety valve for the agency. It can also be useful at times to engage an external supervisor on a one-off contract to work with one or more workers on a particular issue.

6.3.3 Recruiting staff

*HR competence is fundamental to providing good services to families.*²⁷

Part I shows that effective social work comes only in part from knowledge, skills and techniques. Equally significant are the self of the worker and their capacity to build warm, supportive yet professional relationships with families. Recruiting and selecting the right people matters.

Selection practices need to be rigorous and include processes that:

- brief applicants about the realities of work in the agency and allow them the time and opportunity to self-select
- examine in some depth the individual, their attitudes and values, their self-honesty and resilience
- use the selection panel process flexibly, for example, taking a break mid-interview to check with each other and identify areas that need further exploration
- thoroughly check suitability with referees and former employers

These processes give weight to personal qualities, which may come from prior learning and life experience, rather than formal social work qualifications, although having qualified and registered staff is the ideal.²⁸

6.3.4 Client intake

Client intake is where agency and community interface. The intake process sets the direction for the effectiveness of the agency's work with this client, and needs to assess:

- client need
- whether the agency can meet the need, and
- who in the agency will be assigned to join this family to meet this need

²⁶ See Stalker et al, 2007

²⁷ Quote from agency manager

²⁸ Useful wording for advertisements and position descriptions is "... preferably with a social work qualification or working towards a qualification".

While the two agencies in this project manage intake differently,²⁹ they agreed that:

- working with referrers and providing them with a well-structured intake information format save time in the long run and lead to better targeted referrals
- more than one person in the agency being very familiar with the family situation provides social work back-up and safety, and gives the family another pathway into the agency
- in-depth initial social work assessments can be achieved either through a specialist practitioner or as part of the relationship-building process with the assigned worker

Matching family and worker

One of the strengths of an initial assessment by a senior practitioner is that this then guides the assignment of the social worker. Munford and Sanders note the importance of selecting a worker who is likely to have synergy with the client family.³⁰ Rather than randomly assigning staff, they argue that finding ways to get a good fit between worker and family makes a constructive social work relationship more likely and hence increases the probability of positive change occurring.

6.3.5 Assessment, planning and review

Cycles of assessment, planning and review are standard processes in many endeavours. In social work the changes observed are rarely a linear progression but rather incremental changes with sequences of gaining ground and slippage. Assessment, planning and review are necessary professional practices that maintain momentum.

Given that most social work occurs in private and is difficult to measure, these processes are important also for agency and worker accountability. Casework planning and review are windows through which the interaction between worker and client can be glimpsed and need to be viewed by managers with clinical knowledge and skill.

29 One agency has a highly structured 50-item intake form that is completed and scored by the referring agency. A minimum assessment score determines whether or not the client fits the service. This process is appropriate for an agency whose service is designed for a tightly specified client group, and while the intake form contains elements of assessment, it is not a comprehensive social work assessment. This assessment is completed by the assigned social worker during the relationship-building phase.

The other agency, with a wider client base, uses a specialist senior practitioner to engage the family in a comprehensive social work intake assessment that also checks for fit with the agency's services. This phase of work leads either to assignment to an agency social worker or to referral to a more appropriate service (or sometimes resolution of the issue). This method provides initial assessments that are consistent across the agency and which also guide the assignment of a social worker.

30 Munford and Sanders, 1998

The agency supports effective processes of assessment, planning and review when:

- planning and review routines are set in agency policy and procedures³¹
- workers are involved in the development and review of the frameworks and processes, so that they are workable and shaped by practical experience
- there is clinical input into the assessment frameworks and processes
- workers receive the training and skills development needed to use them
- there is technical support, for example, printed formats, recording assistance such as a dictaphone, and expert assistance with data entry and analysis

The agency itself needs to mirror the social work process with its own cycle of assessment, planning and review.

6.3.6 Not working in isolation

A specific learning from the exchange visits in this project is the invisibility of the social work relationship. It highlighted the need to build in a strong agency overview of the work done and to periodically observe directly the quality and safety of the social work relationship.

Mechanisms that increase openness and scrutiny include:

- visits to families by worker and clinical leader together at key points
- co-working with colleagues and developing skills in co-working³²
- ensuring that at least one person other than the social worker has an in-depth knowledge and understanding of each family's situation
- systems to ensure that worker and clinical leader or agency supervisor actively review each family situation regularly³³
- expecting, encouraging and resourcing workers to collaborate with other agencies and be part of shared casework, interagency planning, and collaborative networks

Although at times challenging, workers found it was also supportive and reassuring to have another pair of eyes and ears and a second opinion.

Agencies need to mirror this openness, especially small stand-alone community agencies that can run the same risks of closed thinking and insularity as a social worker who works in isolation with a client. Opportunities for new ideas and perspectives, scrutiny and challenge come through participation in community meetings, professional associations, conferences and relevant national organisations.

³¹ Several workers said that policy requirements and systems are helpful.

³² The exchange visits showed that social workers are not used to being observed or observing, and agreed parameters are needed. For example, is the observer silent or do they participate in the relationship? If they do, how do they do it and what is their role? How are they described to the client family? How are observations conveyed to the social worker? What is the fit with performance management?

³³ From the exchange visits one clinical leader adopted the system observed in the other agency.

6.3.7 Risk management

Managing risk is a key issue for services that step into private homes where family function is fragile and at times dangerous. The introduction of the social worker into the home inevitably changes the dynamics and equilibrium, and must at least do no harm. It also cannot ignore any harm or abuse that is occurring.

Confronting harmful and damaging behaviours, while still retaining a warm and supportive relationship that keeps the worker and family engaged in safe ongoing work and facing the problem, is a critical challenge. Managing this well is a litmus test for effectiveness.

These are not situations where the correct response can be learned and documented. Each situation is different - what worked last time will not be right for this family today. The agency can support workers with these issues only if it has wrestled with them itself. It needs to understand and have integrated the tensions and the fine points of the dilemmas so it can provide clear professional leadership.

Quality depends on a well-managed agency where workers and families are safe. Responsibility to manage risk means that, although the agency needs the flexibility that reflects a human enterprise, it also needs a hierarchical structure with clear levels of accountability, responsibility and decision-making authority.³⁴ Best practice can flourish within this structure provided there is also strong professional leadership and the social work team is inspired and professionally supported.

³⁴ The agencies in this study have found that a hierarchical structure is needed for efficient decision-making and for worker and client safety. Experiments with flat structures have found they provide inadequate accountability and control for an agency offering this type of work.

In the end

This project was an opportunity for everyone in the two agencies to look hard at what they do and why, and to step outside their comfort zones and challenge themselves. New ideas, new questions and changed practices occurred from the first exchange visit and augur well for future good work.

While these guidelines tease out the elements of best practice, this type of work is deeply personal, interactive and in some respects unknowable. It is often of the soul rather than the mind, and needs to be undertaken and supported in ways that nurture the spirit.

In my experience the diverse and perverse aspects of human nature inevitably draw social workers into the unknown.

In this unmapped territory that is unique in each situation, workers have to hold patterns and tensions in their mind until some sense emerges. An uncommon sense of understanding that is a combination reflecting the uncertainty of intuition and the unfathomable.

The flash of insight – intuition – comes and goes like quicksilver and it takes a bold step and imagination to use the form or idea to create meaning. This in turn provides hope and optimism, and the passion that enables transformation.

Effective workers use this practice wisdom instinctively, artfully and, possibly, unconsciously.³⁵

³⁵

Milner, Vaughan, 2006, p66

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