

# TASMANIAN HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING WORKFORCE SYMPOSIUM

## KEY POINTS

SALAMANCA INN, 23/6/16

### PEER EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAM, VICTORIA

- PESP began with the intent of raising consumer awareness of rights but instead found a huge demand from system providers for access to consumer expertise about homelessness systems and experiences. A formal evaluation of the Program is available on the PESP website<sup>1</sup>.
- Individual consumer stories were shared, and insights offered about the service system and how it could be improved. Speakers highlighted the importance of involving consumers (as system users) in its helping to shape its design, to make sure that effective and well targeted services are offered.
- Consumer participation refers to decision making about service system design and operation, not involvement in case planning.

### KEY POINTS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM

#### CONSULTING WITH CONSUMERS AND CO-DESIGN

- Two key benefits of involving consumers in developing consumer-centred services are:
  - Better service design, delivery and outcomes
  - Building the capacity of consumers, elevating their experience into recognised expertise; providing learning opportunities; and helping to rebuild (physical and mental) health and sense of self.
- To be effective, co-design needs to be supported by a clear policy commitment and adequate resourcing. Service providers have limited capacity (time and funds) at present to consult well – they already struggle with the erosion of resources and managing the conflict between service improvement and service delivery.
- Involve consumers at the very beginning of program (or facility) design. By integrating their knowledge and expertise early, the opportunity for more effective outcomes for consumers, providers and the community is maximised.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://chp.org.au/services/pep/homelessness-learning-from-those-whove-lived-it-pestp-evaluation/>

- Government and non-government providers need to audit their processes honestly and frankly to assess how well they consult with consumers.
- When consulting / engaging with consumers, be mindful of how difficult it can be for people who have experienced homelessness to take part and the courage it takes for them to participate.
- Consumer engagement needs to be genuine and adopt:
  - A willingness to listen and respond to what has been said.
  - Transparent and accountable processes.
  - Honesty about the nature of the process and the level of consultant that is being offered (where does it sit on Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation in the PowerPoint presentation - is it token, participation, partnership?).
  - Feedback processes reporting what was said, what changed as a result, what can’t be changed and why, and the long and short term steps being taken to affect change.
  - A commitment to supporting consumers’ capacity to participate successfully (for example, by helping them understand the system, the process, their role, concepts and / or terms and acronyms used; providing a support person to help with problem solving or other need; providing a supportive team environment; matching consumers and to tasks they are suited to, providing a clear position description<sup>2</sup>).
  - A realistic commitment of funds and other resources to support effective consultation (one Victorian organisation allocates its 10% of project budget).
  - Buy-in across the organisation for consultation (some organisations made a commitment at Board level through appointing consumers as members).
- In the absence of resources, services providers should think creatively about how to engage with consumers (e.g. through Policy Officer or other existing positions or appointments to Boards).

#### **OUTCOMES REPORTING FRAMEWORK FOR SHS AGENCIES**

- Effectiveness depends on whose definition of outcomes is used. A focus on service system (Government’s focus) is very different from a focus on consumer experience and expectation. Our current engagement with consumers sits between tokenism and participation and needs to improve to involve consumers in service system evaluation.
- Surveys were not considered an appropriate mechanism:
  - Consumers receive them regularly and are cynical about how they are acted on.
  - Service providers estimate a possible 90 surveys across the State as part of outcomes reporting and posed the idea of a sector co-ordinated participation framework instead
  - Any survey should be kept short and simple.

*“Stop pointless surveys.” (Consumer)*

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<sup>2</sup> The PESP Position Description is available at: <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Appendix-J-PESP-Position-Description.pdf>

## **PROVIDING SERVICE SUPPORT TO CONSUMERS**

- We need to debunk the stigma of homelessness and make it safer for people to talk about homelessness. Shame is a major inhibitor for people asking for help.

*“Being able to talk about it is the single best thing we can do.” (Consumer)*

- Consumers often only want their most immediate needs met and don’t want to participate in detailed personal assessment when first entering the homelessness system. They value their privacy and prefer to share personal information with trusted people. Service providers need to keep this in mind and avoid over reaching when conducting initial assessments.

*“I just somewhere to stay, I’ll deal with my teeth later.” (Consumer)*

- With consumer consent, organisations should share as much case-relevant information as possible to avoid the need for consumers to retell their story. Re-telling is difficult, re-traumatising and exhausting for some people (for others it can help with healing). A consumer’s consent to share information should be time-limited.
- People who are homeless often feel invisible and without a voice. Don’t be afraid to ask questions or acknowledge us. Be willing to share the power to help people who are helpless.
- Service providers should not jump to conclusions or assume consumers can’t make decisions – they demonstrate their capability through the bravery and strength they show by stepping forward to ask for help.
- People need to be able to share their stories in a safe and non-judgemental environment.
- Safety within shelters can be a large issue for consumers.
- Service providers should network locally so they know who does what where, work together and share information to offer strong, integrated support.

*“Don’t be jealous of each other, work together” (Consumer)*