

# FAMILY ACCESS NETWORK

## CREATING A CULTURE OF QUALITY

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*CQI AND IMPLEMENTING THE NEW VICTORIAN HOMELESSNESS  
ASSISTANCE SERVICE (INDUSTRY) STANDARDS*

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*Final Report*

*December 2007*

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This report was produced by Family Access Network along with project consultant Kathy Desmond as the primary author. It formed part of the Accreditation Round One Sector Resourcing initiative funded by the Victorian Government Department of Human Services.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs	MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
BCOB	Breaking the Cycle Over Breakfast	NDCA	National Data Collection Agency
CHP	Council to Homeless Persons	OD	Organisational Development
CQI	Continuous Quality Improvement	OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
DHS	Victorian Department of Human Services	OoH	Office of Housing
ESP	Equity Support Program	PRAS	Private Rental Assistance Scheme
FAN	Family Access Network	PRBP	Private Rental Brokerage Program
HASS	Homelessness Assistance Service Standards	QIC	Quality Improvement Council
HAS	Homeless Advocacy Service	QICSA	Quality Improvement Community Services Australia
HEF	Housing Establishment Fund	SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
HCB	Housing and Community Building	SSATI	Same Sex Attracted, Transgender Intersex
HSS	Homeless Support Services	VHS	Victorian Homelessness Strategy
EMR	Eastern Metropolitan Region	YHAP	Youth Homelessness Action Plan

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Kathy Desmond

December 2007

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Until recently all homelessness services in Victoria which are funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) have been governed by the SAAP standards. As part of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, these SAAP Standards have been replaced by new Homelessness Assistance Service (Industry) Standards (HASS) which were first released in January 2005.

While Family Access Network (FAN) is a comparatively small youth service the agency's accomplishments over its 26 year history are well known to both DHS and the broader sector. One such achievement was FAN's near completion of the HASS by the end of 2005 following the release of the first draft standards by the Department in January of the same year.

The overall purpose of this project was therefore to document and describe how a small metropolitan youth homelessness agency understood, applied and managed the implementation of the new Homelessness Assistance Service (Industry) Standards (HASS). The core deliverable of the project was to produce a final report that would contribute to the sector's knowledge and experience in meeting the requirements of the new HASS accreditation system.

## About FAN

Family Access Network is a small community based youth service located in Box Hill in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Victoria. FAN provides a range of services for homeless and at risk young people, young families and accompanying children.

FAN is also a partner agency, along with Harrison UnitingCare, Anchor Community Care, Salvation Army EastCare and Wesley Homeless Services in the Integrated Youth Hub in the Eastern Metropolitan Region and delivers the Private Rental Brokerage Program in partnership with Anchor Community Care. This initiative was borne out of the core recommendations of the state government policy document 'Creating Connections' report, as part of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan 2.

## Understanding Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

One step in understanding CQI is recognising that there are fundamental differences that exist between achieving a culture of quality improvement and achieving accreditation. Not all accreditation systems are based on assessing an organisations capacity to implement CQI in daily work practice on an ongoing or continuous basis. Subsequently, the ability of an organisation to meet a particular set of standards does not necessarily mean that they have instituted CQI.

While the implementation of accreditation requirements within the community services sector generally reflects a positive trend toward benchmarking, evidence based practice, good practice and improved outcomes for clients, it has also meant that many organisations (particularly those that deliver multiple services types) must now undergo multiple accreditations. The notion of CQI as the dominant underpinning framework to an accreditation system has been rigorously supported in the literature and while the process of accreditation and the requirements of continuous quality improvement differ they are intimately linked.

## **FAN's Culture of CQI**

For the Board, management and staff at FAN the practice of CQI has been a consistent theme throughout the organisations 26 year history. For the last 10 years of its operation FAN has been led by a Manager with qualifications and experience in quality improvement. While such qualifications and experience of CQI in a manager is the exception rather than the rule, it is important to highlight that this is only one component of the overall 'quality' framework that an organisation must commit to in order to nurture and maintain a culture of CQI.

## **Tools for Achieving Innovation**

One of the core concepts that underpin CQI is that of innovation. The first and most important strategy that ensures the ongoing commitment by all key stakeholders within the organisation to innovative thinking and practice is that of FAN's recruitment process. The recruitment of Board members, volunteers and particularly staff is seen as a crucial element to organisational development and the foundations from which all else can then grow and develop. Ensuring that the right staff are engaged to deliver and further develop FAN's programs and services is viewed by all as a vital component of maintaining the culture and focus of the work with young people.

Another tool used by FAN is a staff portfolio system. This involves an annual planning day process where workers dedicate time and effort to identify potential portfolio priority areas for enhancing FAN's service response for the following year. The analysis is based on client trends emerging from workers interpretation of the statistical data collected over the past year on client needs, presenting and underlying issues and known service sector responses and/or gaps. Identified areas must be aligned with the strategic directions of FAN as set by the Board in their overall 3-5 year strategic planning process.

Innovation at FAN is also achieved through the involvement and participation of young people in the on-going development and growth of the organisation. Young people are seen by FAN as ambassadors – living testimony of the courage and inspiration that they offer to their community. Providing opportunities for young people to be ambassadors is a significant direction of the organisation and has resulted in many achievements.

## **Implementing the HASS**

The ease or difficulty that an agency experiences in implementing the process of meeting the HASS will be directly related to how much staff, management and governing bodies know about and are able to apply CQI. Because the notion and practice of CQI has been embedded within FAN's organisational and workplace culture for some years prior to the advent of the HASS, the rigors involved in meeting standards through accreditation did not pose an unmanageable stress on staff or the organisation. This is not to say that FAN sailed through the standards without encountering difficulties or obstructions to the process – there was significant work undertaken by all staff to improve systems, processes and practice as outlined in the HASS.

## **Barriers and Difficulties**

The main barrier most likely to be encountered in implementing standards throughout an organisation is a lack of knowledge, experience and understanding of CQI. The overall aim should not focus on meeting standards per se but in instituting and embedding CQI as a matter of every day practice. In this way and by using this approach an organisation may position itself strategically and be able to meet any accreditation standards that are required, irrespective of their source, format and language.

## Creating and Maintaining Quality Partnerships and CQI

As one of five partners in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) Creating Connections YHAP2 Integrated Youth Hub, FAN is committed to participating in a collaborative effort across the region to ensure that services for young people are provided within a coordinated, flexible and consistent framework. The work of self assessment for HASS combined with FAN's commitments on the Management Group of the EMR Integrated Youth Hub as well as delivering the Private Rental Brokerage Program in partnership with Anchor Community Care, has created a significant added workload for all staff at FAN.

A key component that contributed toward FAN's success as a partner in the new Youth Hub initiative was the organisations long history in providing 'added value' services that had been designed and developed to address identified gaps in the service system. FAN's approach to creating and maintaining quality partnerships comprises a multi-layered system that places clear communication at its core.

## Summary and Conclusions

The move toward continuous quality improvement and accreditation systems is part of a broader trend across all government funded service areas (both state and national) and will be a permanent fixture within current and future government policy directions.

While organisations that are affected by these changes continue to focus on the various sets of standards that have been developed within sectors such as homelessness services, alcohol and other drugs, children and family services, mental health, disability and family violence (to name a few) the result will be a continuous process of duplication and a proliferation of documentation. However, if an organisation instead directs its focus on how to embed CQI into every day practice – from governance to management to service delivery, the driving factor for instituting internal organisational change is to improve the way in which the organisation seeks to achieve its strategic goals and purpose.

For FAN the principles and practice of CQI has been embedded in the way the organisation has operated for some years. While there were a number of barriers and difficulties experienced in their process of meeting the HASS standards these were minimal and overcome quickly. The important aspect to note here is that there was minimal disruption (if any) to the programs and services delivered by FAN staff on the ground.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Background

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) is the state governments key policy direction that guides the provision of homelessness services throughout Victoria, including those targeting at risk and homeless young people, families and women and children who are experiencing family and domestic violence. The VHS first began in 2000, with the broad aim to deliver a comprehensive and coordinated response to meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness by developing a preventative and early intervention response to addressing homelessness as well as improving current responses.

In 2002 the VHS Final Report 'Directions for Change' was released and identified the key areas where service system changes were needed and proposed directions to achieve the necessary developments. The recommendations that emerged from this policy initiative covered a range of areas however three core directions were identified:

- All services should be underpinned by a common and consistent set of principles, owned by all elements of the homelessness service sector.
- All services' operations should be informed by common standards.
- All services should demonstrate a shared commitment to client-focused practices and systems, and should respect clients' rights, dignity and privacy.

Until recently all homelessness services in Victoria which are funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) have been governed by the SAAP standards, which were developed to fulfill the requirements of the SAAP Act as well as meet the needs of the state's bilateral agreement with the commonwealth. As part of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, these SAAP Standards have been replaced by new Homelessness Assistance Service (Industry) Standards (HASS) which were first released in January 2005. In addition to this initiative, the VHS also developed a Consumer Charter of Rights and Responsibilities as well as a 'Strengthened Complaints Mechanism' now known as the 'Homelessness Advocacy Service' and auspiced by the peak body, Council to Homeless Persons. The recently developed accreditation system for homelessness services in Victoria are based on the HASS which also encompass the Consumer Charter of Rights and Responsibilities as well as use of, and access to, the Homelessness Advocacy Service.

## Homelessness Assistance Service (Industry) Standards

The HASS are now the industry standards for all Victorian housing support and case managed housing support services that are funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Housing (OoH). Services under this banner include:

- Crisis accommodation services
- Homelessness assistance/support services
- Housing information & referral services
- Social Housing Advocacy & Support Providers
- OoH funded family violence services
- Homelessness Networks
- Peak organisations
- Children's Resource Program Providers
- Other state-wide resource services

The HASS underwent a number of revisions during 2005 and 2006 with the final (second edition) HASS released in November 2006 with further revisions to the HASS signposts completed by OoH in January 2007. Under the new accreditation system all service types noted above must become accredited by December 2009.

The second edition HASS are divided into five practice sections consisting of a total of 15 standards. Each standard is accompanied by a set of 'signposts' or 'evidence questions' to guide agencies and services in the sort of evidence that is required to meet the standard. The five sections of the HASS along with accompanying standards are:

### **1. Upholding and promoting consumer rights**

*Standard 1.1: Rights-based approach*

*Standard 1.2: Consumer participation*

*Standard 1.3: Complaints and appeals*

*Standard 1.4: Privacy and confidentiality*

### **2. Access to support for people experiencing homelessness**

*Standard 2.1: Access to the homelessness service system*

*Standard 2.2: Initial assessment*

*Standard 2.3: Effective referrals*

### **3. Direct service delivery and case management**

*Standard 3.1: Providing equitable access to support services*

*Standard 3.2: Engagement, assessment and case planning*

*Standard 3.3: Responsive support*

*Standard 3.4: Exit planning and case closure*

*Standard 3.5: Documenting case work*

### **4. Direct service delivery to specific groups**

*Standard 4.1: Supporting parents and accompanying children*

*Standard 4.2: Supporting young people*

*Standard 4.3: Supporting women, children & other people experiencing family violence*

*Standard 4.4: Providing culturally competent services*

*Standard 4.5: Providing advocacy services*

### **5. Working with the community**

*Standard 5.1: Building partnerships and integrated networks*

*Standard 5.2: Advocacy and community education*

## Background to the Project

While Family Access Network (FAN) is a comparatively small youth service the agency's accomplishments over its 26 year history are well known to both DHS and the broader sector. One such achievement was FAN's near completion of the HASS by the end of 2005 following the release of the first draft standards by the Department in January of the same year.

During 2006 FAN focused on integrating the changes to the HASS developed by the Department. One of the most significant was the change from HASS targeting only SAAP funded programs and services to a 'whole of organisation' approach. This impacted on what FAN had already completed as a number of programs and services provided by FAN are funded under alternative means, including private donations and philanthropic trusts. By the end of 2006 and the release in November of the second edition HASS, FAN had upgraded their self assessment journal to include the range of improvements made to the standards by DHS.

Current debates within the sector about the implementation of the HASS point to a range of difficulties that many agencies face, particularly in terms of lack of available resources, including the staff time and capacity to dedicate to completing the standards. This is perhaps more pertinent for smaller agencies with limited staff, high service demand and stretched budgets.

FAN's success in implementing the new standards has raised considerable interest among other agencies in the homelessness field as to how this was accomplished without additional staff or financial resources and within the time-frames detailed above.

As part of the Victorian government's implementation strategy for the new accreditation system, a limited amount of additional resource dollars was made available to the sector to assist homelessness services to complete and meet the HASS. The 'Accreditation Round One Sector Resourcing' funding was released in mid 2007 with the purpose to:

*...support organisations or groups of organisations to undertake specific projects that will contribute to them achieving accreditation, and/or will provide a range of other generic materials or tools that will assist them and the sector more broadly, to meet the requirements of accreditation.*

*DHS, 2007*

In May 2007 FAN was invited to apply for round one funding to undertake a small project that would document and describe FAN's processes for implementing the HASS and which could be distributed to other similar agencies to help guide them in their application of the new standards. This report represents the findings from that project.

## Purpose and Methodology

The overall purpose of this project was to document and describe how a small metropolitan youth homelessness agency understood, applied and managed the implementation of the new Homelessness Assistance Service (Industry) Standards (HASS). The core deliverable of the project was to produce a final report that would contribute to the sector's knowledge and experience in meeting the requirements of the new HASS accreditation system.

The main aim was therefore to:

*...demonstrate the consolidation of the key principles and implementation of continuous quality improvements within FAN's service delivery models, sector partnerships as defined by FAN's organisational philosophy and the Homelessness Assistance Service Standards (HASS).*

The methodology for the project consisted of six key phases:

- Review of organisational documentation including CQI systems, HASS self assessment journal, program reviews, staff minutes and specific tools developed as part of the implementation of the HASS.
- Review of current literature regarding quality improvement and accreditation systems within human services.
- Initial consultation and ongoing discussions with relevant staff at FAN including the Homelessness Support Services Team, the Manager, Team Leaders, the Coordinator of the Volunteer Program and Life Skills Program and Executive members of the FAN Board of Governance.
- Development of an initial report framework and structure, distributed to staff for comment and feedback.
- Development of a first draft report, distributed to all staff followed by a full staff team workshop to test the findings of the report and receive comments and feedback.
- Development of a second draft report, again distributed to all staff as well as the Board of Governance, for further comment and feedback.
- Consolidation of final draft report distributed to DHS key stakeholders for comment.

## Report Structure

The following report describes the key factors that underpinned FAN's approach and methodology to implementing the HASS self assessment process. Chapter Two provides some details on FAN, the organisations history, mission and vision as well as a description of programs and services. Chapter Three provides an introduction to the notion of continuous quality improvement and how this is a core principle that forms the foundations of all practice at FAN. Chapter Four outlines some of FAN's tools and strategies for promoting CQI and Chapter Five discusses how the HASS self assessment process was undertaken by FAN staff as well as identifying some of the barriers and difficulties that emerged. Finally, Chapter Six gives a succinct summary of the key points that have been highlighted in the report.

## 2. FAMILY ACCESS NETWORK

### About FAN

Family Access Network is a small community based youth service located in Box Hill in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Victoria. FAN provides a range of services for homeless and at risk young people, young families and accompanying children including:

- Homeless Support Services program, incorporating a Transitional Support Program, the Creating Connections Private Rental Brokerage Program (an initiative of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan stage 2) and Children's Program – Early Years;
- Life Skills Program;
- Volunteer Program.

FAN is also a partner agency, along with Harrison UnitingCare, Anchor Community Care, Salvation Army EastCare and Wesley Homeless Services in the Integrated Youth Hub in the Eastern Metropolitan Region and delivers the Private Rental Brokerage Program in partnership with Anchor Community Care. This initiative was borne out of the core recommendations of the state government policy document 'Creating Connections' report, as part of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan 2.

In addition to the above, FAN has worked closely with the ALSO Foundation over the past two years in the development of the 'alsorts' Program – a transitional support service for same sex attracted, transgender and intersex (SSATI) young people which aims to deliver a tailored response to the housing and support needs of homeless or at risk SSATI young people.

First established in 1981, the organisation is governed by a board of annually elected community members and is funded through SAAP as well as a range of philanthropic trusts, community based organisations and private donations. Total staff capacity at FAN is 7.6 EFT, covering a team of eight staff members, including: a Manager, a Homeless Support Services team of four workers (incorporating a team leader, transitional support services worker, private rental brokerage worker and dedicated children's worker), a Coordinator for the Volunteer and Life Skills Programs, an administration/reception worker and a part-time finance administrator.

FAN's programs and services are underpinned by a strong client focused, rights-based approach that seeks to maximise positive outcomes through timely intervention and strategic responses.

The organisations early beginnings and more than twenty-six years of operation play an important role in the contemporary work culture and practice framework of all staff.

*The community development model, so richly embedded in the formation of the agency, has continued and contributes much to the community participation, strong volunteer and donation base that enables FAN to continue to value add to services provided.*

*(FAN Annual Report, 2005 – 2006)*

Originally formed from the efforts of the local Box Hill community to foster an accommodation and support response to the increasing numbers of homeless young people in the area, FAN first began with a community placement service, shared private rental model and a volunteer support mentoring program.

These early years of operation (pre-SAAP and the now historically significant 'Burdekin Report' in 1985) laid the groundwork for the organisations current practice base:

*The model was very successful and laid the foundation for many of the values and practice principles still held strongly at FAN around building sustainable community connections for young people and fostering the involvement of the community.*

*(FAN Annual Report, 2005 – 2006)*

Based on the principles of community development FAN's early years service responses were innovative, grounded in the notion of promoting young people's 'connectedness' to family and community and almost entirely driven by a large team of dedicated volunteers. While more than 26 years of operation has passed since the organisations inception, along with countless service sector re-developments, changes of government (and government department names) and some significant research and learning's in the field of homelessness, the core principles which first underpinned FAN's approach to assisting homeless and at risk young people and young families remain both relevant and active today.

## Vision and Core Principles

FAN's vision is for a 'community which acknowledges and values the dignity and worth of all citizens and enables individuals to deal positively with adverse situations in their lives'. The core principles that underpin this vision are:

- [Supporting young people's right to self-determination](#)

In recognition of the needs of homeless and at risk young people, young families and accompanying children, FAN provides services that offer individual support according to their identified needs;

- [Assisting young people toward independence and empowerment over their own lives](#)

To reduce homelessness FAN supports and assists young people, young families and accompanying children who are homeless to achieve independence and empowerment;

- [Advocating for, on behalf of and with young people on the public and political stage](#)

To undertake advocacy and develop public awareness of the issues relating to homelessness in general, underpinned by FAN's commitment to housing as a basic human right.

## Mission Statement

*Family Access Network will provide support to young people who are homeless and those at risk of homelessness in the form of:*

- Access to accommodation and support options including therapeutic interventions for both young people and accompanying children.
- Development of resources for young people, children and staff.
- Provide social skill development opportunities for at risk young people and accompanying children.
- Engage in high quality research while conducting in-house research on best practice and innovation.

## Overview of Services

FAN provides a range of responses for homeless and at risk young people, young families and children. FAN's service structure includes:

- Homeless Support Services, incorporating a Transitional Support Program, the Creating Connections Private Rental Brokerage Program (an initiative of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan stage 2) and Children's Program – Early Years;
- Life Skills Program;
- Volunteer Program.

### Homeless Support Services

FAN's Homeless Support Services encompasses a client focused, case management framework for providing support and assistance to young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, across three key program areas. These are described in more detail below.

#### Transitional Support

Funded by the Office of Housing (DHS) via SAAP, the Transitional Support Program provides case managed transitional support to homeless or at risk young people between the ages of 15-25 years. The client group consists of single young people, young same-sex attracted, transgender intersex young people, young pregnant and parenting women, young families and accompanying children. FAN's case managed responses to homeless and at risk young people first commenced in 1981, however, FAN has been in receipt of recurrent SAAP funding since its inception in 1985 and for a number of years successfully managed properties through the Youth Housing Program. FAN has also managed the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) since it first began. FAN accesses a range of properties through Transitional Housing Managers, notably Community Housing (Vict) Ltd and Salvation Army EastCare, to support the varying housing requirements of young people in shared tenancies, lead tenant properties, shared pregnant/parent household as well as a range of properties for young families. In addition, FAN has access to a property provided by the Orcadia Foundation to facilitate a supported transition into a longer-term housing model for young families exiting into private rental.

As an addition to the case managed transitional support program FAN and the ALSO Foundation have partnered to create the '*alsorts*' initiative which is a pilot transitional response for Same Sex Attracted, Transgender Intersex (SSATI) young people. The pilot project commenced in 2006 and has been supported by a range of internal audit processes, awareness training for staff and volunteers as well as recruitment support and training of same sex attracted lead tenants and mentors.

#### Private Rental Brokerage Program

As part of FAN's Homeless Support Services and in response to the 'Creating Connections Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2 (YHAP2) funding, FAN established a Private Rental Brokerage Program (PRBP) in 2007 to assist and equip young homeless people to access and maintain private rental accommodation as a long-term option. FAN's PRBP provides services across the Cities of Whitehorse, Boroondara, Monash and Manningham. The Program provides an individualised response for young people who are currently within the transitional housing service system, including brokerage, rental and housing packages, workshops and supporting pathways into the private rental market. The PRB Program also oversees the Housing Establishment Fund across the same local government areas.

### Children's Program – Early Years

The Children's Program – Early Years has been in operation since 2006 and is funded through the Alfred Felton Charitable Bequest. The program provides the means to offer an on-site children's worker and resources to develop an integrated children's program including brokerage and equipment for accompanying children, secondary consultations to workers, support and resources to young parents both individually and through group work. The scope for the program is to ensure FAN's services, office site/s, equipment, policies, procedures and interagency processes are informed by a commitment to child-centered practices and philosophy. The program was further reviewed and expanded in 2007 and now offers a case managed response to young families, therapeutic interventions for children and partnership projects in the sector.

### **Life Skills Program**

The Life Skills Program is funded through the City of Whitehorse, the Rotary Club of Box Hill, The Lord Mayors Fund, The William Buckland Foundation and various smaller community, and philanthropic grants. The program offers a variety of workshop based activities for at risk young people to learn new skills in a personal development framework.

### **Volunteer Program**

The Volunteer Program has been in operation since FAN's inception some 26 years ago. The program continues to evolve in response to the changing needs of the young people who come to FAN for assistance. Volunteer opportunities and achievements at FAN are diverse, offering mentoring, lead tenants, child play supervisors as well as volunteer support to the Young Mum's, Life Skills and Peer Leadership groups. The contribution of volunteers to the development and on-going operation of programs and services at FAN is highly valued.

In addition to the above, FAN also operate an Equity Support Program which is funded entirely through community donations and enables a range of necessary and vital financial, medical, material aid and other related supports to be provided to FAN clients. During 2006-07 more than \$7,500 was distributed to clients across 114 episodes of support.

### 3. CREATING A CULTURE OF QUALITY

#### Understanding Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Continuous Quality Improvement can be simply defined as a commitment to constantly seeking out better ways to do things in an organisation (Desmond & Jaffe, 2005). A CQI framework provides a 'theoretically coherent and practical way for organisations to systematically identify, address and overcome the barriers to innovation' (Renhard, 2001).

*CQI encourages all staff in an organisation to recognise that the requirements for achieving accreditation are not a 'once-off' event, and will be ongoing, directly linked to improvements in service delivery and client outcomes. It requires an entire agency, at all levels, to ask the question: 'how can we do it better?' It also provides an opportunity to review organisational structure, to ensure it acts in support of optimum service delivery.*

*Accreditation, when put in context with CQI, represents a discipline for an organisation, instituting a process of reflection and review leading to the development of practical systems that will enhance service delivery and organisational performance. What is crucial, however, is that it is not regarded as an external process 'done to us by them'. Accreditation and quality improvement must, in the long term, be internally owned by all key stakeholders.*

*(Desmond & Jaffe, 2005)*

While CQI and primary health services have a long history together, the principles of CQI are a relatively new concept for service providers in the homelessness sector. Best practice however, has been a consistent theme within the homelessness sector for more than two decades along with a significant focus on research and development funded by all levels of government into good practice approaches and interventions that aim to prevent or alleviate homelessness. This effort has been of special importance for those target groups that are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, such as young people, indigenous people, older people with complex issues, women and accompanying children, people with mental health issues (as well as those with a dual diagnosis) and people with alcohol and/or substance use issues. These groups will frequently experience further disadvantage in accessing mainstream homelessness services and many form part of the 'hidden homeless' population.

Victoria is a leader in Australia for responding to homelessness as well as the array of associated issues that impact on both the risk factors as well as the structural factors that contribute to homelessness. For example, a number of the Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Pilot Projects that were funded in Victoria in the 1990's, designed and tested the early intervention model that later became the National Reconnect Program and the Victorian School Focused Youth Services. The provision of a specialist response to homeless young people with co-occurring mental health and AOD issues was also a Victorian initiative which led the field for responding to the unique needs of this vulnerable target group.

Although 'best practice' and 'demonstration' pilot projects are a feature of CQI and have been instituted in the field of homelessness for a number of decades, little has been accomplished in the past to ensure that the lessons learnt from these types of initiatives are built into the overall service system. The Victorian Homelessness Strategy, first instituted in the early years of this decade, formed the first step in addressing the fragmentation of the service system and looking toward a systemic approach that would provide a seamless and consistent level of quality services to homeless people.

## How 'CQI' and 'Accreditation' Differ

One step in understanding CQI is recognising that there are fundamental differences that exist between achieving a culture of quality improvement and achieving accreditation. Not all accreditation systems are based on assessing an organisations capacity to implement CQI in daily work practice on an ongoing or continuous basis. Subsequently, the ability of an organisation to meet a particular set of standards does not necessarily mean that they have instituted CQI.

Research into the area clearly indicates that the community services sector in particular understand this difference. For example, in 2000 the Quality Improvement Council (Australia) conducted research canvassing more than eighty organisations in the primary care and community services sector. The authors noted that while there was a high level of support among participating agencies for quality improvement the issue of accreditation was largely criticised:

*...the consultations also highlighted significant issues regarding standards and accreditation...the role of accreditation was more contentious as some thought it undermined the continuous quality improvement process by becoming an end in itself...Concern about costs included time spent preparing for reviews, the program fees and cost of staff participation...which was a particular difficulty for smaller and more remote agencies.*

*(Swerissen H., Macmillan J. & Skok A. 2000)*

Another area of considerable concern was the increase in the array of standards applicable to different service areas, sectors and service components:

*Concerns about the proliferation of standards and the duplication of quality programs and processes were also significant. Providers clearly find that duplication and proliferation add to the costs of participation in quality programs. This is particularly problematic for agencies providing a range of different community and residential programs which are covered by different standards and where there are several options for accreditation.*

*(Swerissen H., Macmillan J. & Skok A. 2000)*

While the implementation of accreditation requirements within the community services sector generally reflects a positive trend toward benchmarking, evidence based practice, good practice and improved outcomes for clients, it has also meant that many organisations (particularly those that deliver multiple services types) must now undergo multiple accreditations – some needing to participate in more than six different accreditation systems, many of which do not provide mutual recognition for like standards.

The notion of CQI as the dominant underpinning framework to an accreditation system has been rigorously supported in the literature. The process of accreditation and the requirements of continuous quality improvement, although different, are intimately linked and some experts (such as Renhard, 2001) argue that they should in fact be mutually exclusive if the outcomes of quality improvement are to be truly effective. Many accreditation systems, although not all, therefore include CQI requirements in their standards as part of an organisations obligation to improve outcomes *on a continuous basis* for the people and communities they serve.

## FAN's Culture of CQI

For the Board, management and staff at FAN the practice of CQI has been a consistent theme throughout the organisations 26 year history. For the last 10 years of its operation FAN has been led by a Manager with qualifications and experience in quality improvement. She is a certified QICSA review manager and her passion about quality improvement along with more than 25 years experience in the sector, has provided consistent leadership in creating a culture of quality at FAN. While such qualifications and experience of CQI in a manager is the exception rather than the rule, it is only one component of the overall 'quality' framework that an organisation must commit to in order to nurture and maintain CQI.

### Governance

The full support and dedication from an organisations Board of Governance to CQI processes and systems is essential, as is the Boards own CQI processes in their practice of governing (not managing) the organisation. At FAN the Board of Governance meet every two months, with the executive members meeting monthly with the Manager to discuss important issues as well as setting the agenda for each meeting of the full Board. There is a clear understanding of the division between governance activities and management issues. Like many other community agency boards, FAN Board members are frequently time poor. They have their own full time employment and family commitments and their activities on the FAN Board are completely voluntary. The efficiency of the bi-monthly meetings and monthly executive meetings means that the Board is primarily advised and informed by its executive members and the agenda is appropriately organised to maximise the time and effort of the full FAN Board.

The Board's purpose is twofold. First their duty is to govern the organisation as the legal representatives and second, to employ, oversee and provide support to their chosen delegated authority (the Manager). Board members are active, not passive, in their roles and there is an expectation that each will contribute in a range of ways to ensure that FAN's partnerships, collaborations and service delivery outcomes remain consistent with the Boards strategic directions as well as FAN's mission and vision statements. They are the overseer and protector of the organisations culture and the primarily body responsible for ensuring that FAN's corporate and cultural memory is documented and preserved.

The executive members of the Board (Chair, Deputy Chair and Treasurer) share the responsibility for overseeing and supporting the Manager. Their time commitment is greater than that for general Board members as they are required to meet every month with the Manager in addition to attending the bi-monthly meetings of the full Board. The executive meeting provides a regular and consistent point at which the governing body and management come together to discuss and agree on important issues and decisions. This is the practical application of how the Board maintains its strategic direction and focus.

### Staff

For staff (including volunteers), the underpinning principles of CQI are imbedded in the systems and processes they are required to use in their daily work practice and they have a core understanding and commitment to participating in a team culture of learning, improvement and good practice. Workers see each other as potential sources of learning and innovative ideas. Staff meetings are held fortnightly with a fixed agenda where everyone participates in discussions and information sharing about their workload and current priorities. The role of chair is rotated to encourage skill development and to share the responsibility of ensuring all items are covered within the appropriate timeframe. The chair is also responsible for maintaining relevant minutes in the staff meeting log book and establishing the agenda items for 'other business'.

The FAN Homeless Support Services team meets every week to discuss case work, intake and referrals, case loads, the volunteer program and client related issues. Key aspects of CQI processes in these team meetings are the two fixed agenda items of 'practice reflection' and 'data reporting/updates and analysis' (using the SMART data system). The weekly team meeting therefore not only acts as a reporting and accountability mechanism but also provides a regular and consistent opportunity for staff to reflect on their practice – what has worked well? what needs improving? what can be learned? and how can improvements be best instituted? The process of regularly reporting on client data also provides staff with indicators that assist in identifying emerging client trends. It gives meaning and interpretation to client statistics through a combined analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

## Management

As mentioned earlier FAN's Manager has considerable experience in CQI processes and systems as well as over two decades working in the field. This has provided the organisation with the leadership needed to support an approach of quality in the workplace. The application of CQI in management requires a commitment to creating effective and efficient communication strategies, transparent processes that are considered in the context of staff workloads and time, an inclusive and focused methodology toward recruitment processes and the valuing of workers initiative and ability to be innovative. While there are always areas that require any manager to make independent and sometimes unpopular decisions, in most cases all FAN team members are involved and participate in the decision making process. The focus here is on a team approach to problem solving and the Manager enables this through open communication strategies that keep all staff 'in the loop'. Role modeling in this context is an important aspect to FAN's management approach and style so that staff are also a witness as well as participant in the culture of quality in the workplace.

## Key Characteristics of a CQI Organisation

In 2001 Russell Renhard from the Centre for Quality in Health and Community Services at La Trobe University's Australian Institute for Primary Care, authored a report to DHS on quality initiatives within the field of human services. The key finding that emerged from his review of the published literature on quality and CQI was:

*...that quality initiatives — regardless of scope or focus — are more likely to be effective when used in an organisation or service that functions according to particular quality principles and practice. The key determinant of success of a quality initiative, therefore, is not the initiative itself but the nature of the organisation in which it is used.*

*(Renhard 2001)*

Renhard also identified and described six core characteristics that were most prominent in organisations that have experienced success in implementing, managing and maintaining quality improvement initiatives.

The following list describes each of Renhard's six core characteristics in the context of FAN, its staff team, commitment to CQI processes and organisational and workplace culture:

## **1. The use of problem-solving approaches based on statistical analysis/relevant qualitative data**

*Aspects at FAN that contribute to this are:*

- Regular and consistent processes for staff planning days, governance strategic planning and the involvement of volunteers and young people in identifying emerging issues and formulating strategic responses.
- Data analysis (qualitative and quantitative) feature as regular agenda items for staff and team meetings as well as Board meetings.
- Internal collection of data across programs/services (SMART);
- Workers 'maintain a stance of curiosity' so the data is seen as a 'story' which guides the analysis of variations, exceptions and trends.
- An ongoing commitment to providing 'added value' services and identifying internal and systemic 'gaps'.

## **2. The focus of analytical processes is on underlying organisational processes and systems rather than individual workers**

*Aspects at FAN that contribute to this are:*

- A workplace culture that values and promotes practice reflection;
- Problems are seen as opportunities for learning and are considered as 'organisational' issues not 'individual' issues. When problems arise management and staff look to the systems and processes that underpinned the action and consider ways of refining these systems in order to prevent unwanted or unintentional outcomes;
- Working as a team is seen as part of a 'mindset' and the process of learning is described by workers as having a 'ripple effect' in that it flows from one worker to another and encourages a collective learning environment for all staff.
- Opinions & analysis of staff are valued & reflected in the developmental nature of FAN's various 'added value' initiatives.

## **3. The use of cross-functional employee teams in continuous improvement activities**

*Aspects at FAN that contribute to this are:*

- Staff portfolios provide a systematic tool for promoting and instituting CQI and innovation (discussed further in chapter 4).
- Involvement and participation by staff teams in decision making processes and in the development of partnerships, collaborations and new initiatives assist in creating a 'macro' picture of the organisations work for all staff members.

## **4. Employee empowerment to identify problems and opportunities for improvement and to take the necessary action**

*Aspects at FAN that contribute to this are:*

- Workers participate in a workplace culture of 'enquiry' and are empowered to 'start the ball the rolling' in day to day work.

- A range of internal strategies exist to provide all workers with the opportunity and support to be innovative. Staff debriefing meetings, team meetings, senior management team meetings, staff work-plans, program/service reports, professional development plans, reports to the board, supervision, performance appraisals, organisational newsletter and partnership meetings are seen as more than just accountability mechanisms – each plays an important role in contributing to the knowledge base and skill level of workers.
- An overall focus on the development of partnerships is a key factor in FAN's operations and the organisation uses this to build and enhance staff skill in achieving effective partnership relationships.

## **5. An explicit focus on both internal and external stakeholders**

*Aspects at FAN that contribute to this are:*

- A clearly documented commitment to the practice framework that the organisation seeks to encourage. The 'strengths based approach' is client focused and is reflected in FAN's mission and vision statements as well as in the design of programs and services.
- Underpinning values and the organisations history play an important role in workplace culture.
- Commitment to creating and maintaining collaborative partnership relationships with external organisations, agencies and community initiatives.

## **6. An overarching philosophy that promotes sustained management support for this way of working**

*Aspects at FAN that contribute to this are:*

- Clear and documented commitment from the Board of Governance to quality improvement including practicing these principles in their own governance processes and activities.
- Appropriately qualified and experienced manager who provides clear leadership and is subsequently supported by the Board.
- Documented induction processes for all new and existing staff and which details the expectations of the organisation for all staff to participate and contribute to quality improvement.

## 4. TOOLS FOR ACHIEVING INNOVATION

One of the core concepts that underpin CQI is that of innovation. While this chapter highlights particular strategies and tools that FAN uses to achieve innovative responses for the young people they work with, it is worth noting that without appropriate leadership and a willingness to dedicate organisational time and effort, the effectiveness of any tools or methodologies described here will be greatly diminished.

The first and most important strategy that ensures the ongoing commitment by all key stakeholders within the organisation to innovative thinking and practice is that of FAN's recruitment process.

### Recruitment – The Importance of Creating a Shared Vision

The recruitment of Board members, volunteers and particularly staff is seen as a crucial element to organisational development and the foundations from which all else can then grow and develop. Ensuring that the right staff are engaged to deliver and further develop FAN's programs and services is viewed by all as a vital component of maintaining the culture and focus of the work with young people.

*Other managers have often commented to me 'you're so lucky to have such great staff'. While this is definitely a positive reflection about the work of FAN staff, it is by no means a case of 'luck'. It's about our recruitment process and practice, how we embed our values and philosophy into the way we hire new workers – its about practice frameworks and most importantly how we go about ensuring that each staff member is selected to achieve the right 'fit' for FAN's organisational culture.*

*(FAN Manager)*

All position descriptions are formatted to follow a fixed menu which includes:

- A description of the organisational context;
- Background to the position;
- Aims and objectives of the position;
- A description of the systems, workplace and team culture;
- Selection criteria;
- Position requirements; and
- Salary and conditions.

The role of all staff as participants in FAN's 'dynamic learning culture' and strengths based approach to working with young people is highlighted as well as the mission, vision and underpinning principles of the organisation. Interview panels and decision making processes for the recruitment of new staff include relevant workers from the existing staff team along with the Manager. This ensures that the views of key stakeholders within the staff team have a meaningful role in the final outcome. Each recruitment event also acts as an opportunity for improvement:

*I don't think we have had a recruitment process where we haven't at the very least refined the interview questions let alone the different stages of the process for future recruitment.*

*(FAN Manager)*

Recruitment however, does not cease at the appointment of the new employee. There is a two week formal orientation process where all existing staff are required to meet with the new worker and assist them in familiarising themselves with FAN's programs and services, team culture, systems and processes.

The two week orientation period forms part of an overall 12 week induction process which has been designed and developed as a learning module that requires the new worker to 'sign off' at different points throughout the three month process. Line managers are required to provide appropriate support and guidance in the process of induction to new workers and the staff team is also expected to assist whenever needed. The induction manual includes FAN's policy and procedures, all pro-forma's that the new worker will use as part of their job as well as detailed information on the organisations history, external relationships, Board of Governance members, management and staffing structure and strategic plan. There is a separate dedicated induction manual specifically for new workers to the Homeless Support Services program. All new workers are required to demonstrate their understanding of the material and information detailed in the induction manual at specific points throughout the 12 week period. The induction process is then finalised by a performance appraisal process.

The natural follow-up to FAN's comprehensive induction process involves strategies that aim to maintain the health and wellbeing of all staff as well as the workplace culture. This includes regular scheduled supervision, individual training program and calendar for professional development, individual work-plans, annual performance appraisals and exit interviews for when staff move on to other positions.

## Portfolios

In late 2003 the FAN staff team initiated a review process to reflect on and analyse some ten years of data collection on the young people who had been supported through FAN's programs and services. The impetus for this review came from a noticeable increase in the numbers of homeless and at risk young people, and particularly accompanying children, coming to FAN for assistance.

Although FAN was built on the foundations of providing 'added value' services wherever possible and ensuring a commitment to identify and respond to service gaps, the staff team noted that service delivery was still premised on a 'reactive' or 'crisis driven' model. Workers expressed a desire for more balance in their work - to contribute to 'the bigger picture' and become further involved in creating and implementing the strategic directions of the organisation's service response to young people and young families.

A decision was therefore made to modify FAN's internal service response along with instituting more strategic 'pro-active' practice frameworks. By early 2004 the staff team had instituted a strategic planning process that would guide them in finding solutions and determining how to implement them. The team discussed the idea of creating a portfolio system that would see individual staff members work on identified areas that were deemed to be significant issues and which required dedicated attention in order to further develop FAN's capacity to create a strategic and practical response.

*It was assessed that portfolios work well in partnership and foster a sense of team building and collaboration between co-workers, not to mention sharing the work load, whilst creating a balance in workers major role. The introduction of portfolios was an appreciation that although supporting clients creates wonderful achievements and recognition for workers it does have its challenges and impacts. The portfolio system supported worker resilience by providing opportunities for staff to reflect on and contribute to other organisational enhancements and offered diversity of opportunities and skill development.*

## How do the Portfolios work?

The portfolio system at FAN involves an annual planning day process where staff dedicate time and effort to identify potential portfolio priority areas for enhancing FAN's service response for the following year. The analysis is based on client trends emerging from workers interpretation of the statistical data collected over the past year on client needs, presenting and underlying issues and known service sector responses and/or gaps. Identified areas must be aligned with the strategic directions of FAN as set by the Board in their overall 3-5 year strategic planning process. In 2006 FAN implemented a new layer to the Board's strategic planning cycle through documenting the portfolio system's identified service gaps, areas targeted for further development and outcomes.

The portfolio planning process also measures, reviews and reflects on the achievements and challenges identified by the staff team in the previous year. The overall goal of this process is to clearly define and collectively decide on the identified priority areas that will lead the portfolio system for the next twelve months. In some cases this process often results in workers 'teaming' up to deliver work in common areas. Upon agreement of a final priority portfolio list workers will nominate their area of preference – some naturally follow desired areas that will enhance skills while others will look to how particular portfolio areas will further compliment and add value to their current role at FAN. Self directed staff teams emerge to work on their portfolio areas as defined by the group and report back periodically to the full staff team during the year.

Portfolio areas at FAN in 2007 include: Data and Trends; Research and Best Practice; CQI and Accreditation; Student Placements; Information Management; Income Generation; Enhanced Services; New Developments; Document Control; OH&S; and the Equity Support Program.

## Outcomes

Over the past three years a significant number of outcomes have been achieved through the implementation of the portfolio system. These include:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Equity Support Program (ESP).</li><li>- Private Rental Assistance Scheme (PRAS).</li><li>- Continuous quality improvement/practice reflection and accreditation.</li><li>- Specific roles for Privacy, OHS, SMART/Data, HEF and Information Management.</li><li>- Young people as ambassadors/participants: FAN club, Youth surveys, Peer Leaders, City of Whitehorse Young Person of the Month/Year.</li><li>- Service expansion/enhancements identified, including expanded services for pregnant/parenting young people and integrated onsite tailored counselling services.</li><li>- Peer Leadership Program.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Breaking the Cycle Over Breakfast Initiative.</li><li>- Document control/information management.</li><li>- Same Sex Attracted Transgender Intersex (SSATI) ALSO partnership Initiative (<i>alsorts</i>).</li><li>- Children's Program – Early Years and the provision of a range of services for young parents and children.</li><li>- Recurrent and expanded funding for Life Skills and Volunteer Program to meet changing client needs.</li><li>- Research Projects including: Project I (Making a Place to Belong and 'Young Motherhood and Homelessness – Opportunity for Change'; 'Making it Real' Sexual Health initiative etc.</li><li>- Youth Health Day.</li></ul> |
|--|--|

## Young People as Ambassadors

Another tool for innovation that is highly valued at FAN is the involvement and participation of young people in the on-going development and growth of the organisation. Young people are seen by FAN as ambassadors – living testimony of the courage and inspiration that they offer to their community. Providing opportunities for young people to be ambassadors is a significant direction of the organisation and has resulted in many achievements. Young people have participated in presentations at local public meetings, become research participants in FAN's research and development partnership initiatives, met with political leaders and contributed to national inquiries as well as participated in youth working parties and other regional activities.

As part of this approach FAN deliver the Life Skills Program which has been in operation for the past ten years, as a core component of this aim. The program offers a range of workshops and skill development for young people aged 16-25 years and includes a Peer Leadership Program where young people are trained in designing and facilitating workshops for their peers. Involvement in the Life Skills Program and Peer Leadership Program at FAN is the backdrop for many young people who have moved on to achieve broader recognition for their courage in overcoming adversity.

Since 1994 FAN has presented the Rhys Fox Achievement Award to nominated young people involved in FAN's programs and services in acknowledgment of their exceptional achievements. This award is named in honour of Rhys Fox, a committed and dedicated community volunteer who contributed significantly to the emerging youth housing services in the Eastern Metropolitan Region in the late 1970's and early 1980's. His bequest of funds to FAN in his will is now kept in trust and the interest earned each year is allocated to the Award which is presented every year at FAN's Annual General Meeting.

## The Role of Organisational Development

Closely linked to accreditation and Quality Improvement is the concept of Organisational Development (OD). OD is often associated with 'human resources' and while the core factor is 'people' it is more about a focused and deliberate effort to increase the effectiveness of an organisation and strengthen its social capital. The ultimate aim of organisational development, regardless of the frameworks or methodologies employed to achieve it, is strengthening an organisation and building its capacity to achieve and sustain a new (or improved) state that benefits all key stakeholders. The underpinning principles to organisational development are clearly focused on the best way to work with staff in order to create workplaces that are productive, creative and dynamic.

On the ground this means that an organisation will need to review the 'means' – that is all internal structures, processes, staffing arrangements, models of service delivery, practice frameworks and planning processes - to ensure that they are fully aligned to achieve the desired outcomes for clients. It also implies an ongoing process, whereby all levels of the organisation, from governance through to management, staffing and volunteers, allow a process of reflection and review on how they operate, the ways that they are structured, and the effectiveness and efficiency by which their services are delivered.

*I've lost count of the number and variety of planning/review type activities undertaken by FAN...even a few years ago when we reviewed our pager service all staff, volunteers and clients contributed to the process which then led to a three month trial...a "self-care" kit based on feedback from young people was developed as a checklist for who to contact, what to do to attend to anxieties/issues and/or practical contacts*

FAN's commitment to organisational development is evidenced by the processes which are used to further inform and improve the activities of all key stakeholders in their work toward achieving the organisations strategic directions. The key word that describes this approach is 'systems' – that is a set of documented and clearly articulated processes that all relevant stakeholders understand and are appropriately supported and equipped to implement. The notion of providing a 'systems' approach does not undermine the human focus of the organisations work – rather, in this context it is specifically designed to improve user friendliness and ease of operation (for staff using these systems) and focus energy and time on working with young people.

## 5. IMPLEMENTING THE HASS

The Homelessness Assistance Service Standards have been designed to create a benchmarking system to ensure that all organisations which are funded to provide homelessness support services in Victoria are consistent in their interpretation and application of good practice. The HASS aim to cover all key elements that have been deemed as constituting high quality service provision in the homelessness services sector.

The ease or difficulty that an agency experiences in implementing the process of meeting the HASS will be directly related to how much staff, management and governing bodies know about and are able to apply CQI. For organisations that have already focused their management and operational systems on quality improvement principles and practices, the HASS do not constitute a new way of working or any significant change in the way the organisation or its workers operate on the ground. Rather, it will act as a tool for 'tweaking' what is already in place. However, for agencies that have little experience and knowledge in integrating CQI into daily work practice, meeting the HASS may imply the need to implement a range of significant changes.

Past research has found that the reasons organisations seek to attain accreditation has a significant bearing on the process, benefits and outcomes attained. Brown et al (1996) identified three categories of why organisations will pursue accreditation and how CQI is or is not a feature of their process:

- *Compulsory Minimalist* (without instituting CQI): This is where an organisation or group of providers must achieve particular accreditation in order to maintain its operations. Organisations in this group generally perceive the accreditation process as a costly exercise that provides little benefit, other than to allow the continuation of services. There is limited involvement of staff and getting past the external review process is the primary goal.
- *Compulsory Converts* (partially instituting CQI): Again, organisations that fit into this category are compelled to achieve accreditation, most often through a change in Government policy. However, these organisations see the process of accreditation as generally a positive move that they hope will assist in the development of improved systems and processes. Accreditation is seen as a pre-cursor to CQI and the overall goal is to develop a useful and practical quality work-plan. There is a positive perception of the benefits of a quality system and workers are involved in the process. However, organisations in this category have a high risk of reverting back to 'old ways' when the accreditation process is completed and there is no real significant change in work place culture.
- *Committed* (voluntary participation in accreditation and CQI): These organisations primarily pursue accreditation as a means by which to improve operations as well as overall efficiency and effectiveness. Accreditation is seen as a small function of the overall CQI process and is usually implemented as part of a broader organisational development approach or initiative. CQI systems are already in place and seeking to improve practice on an ongoing basis forms part of the organisations workplace culture. Organisations in this category generally embark on national accreditation in a voluntary capacity and usually as part of broader organisational strategic planning. The main characteristic here is that CQI has been active in the organisation for some time prior to considering the move to accreditation.

## What the HASS Means for Daily Work Practice

As described in the previous chapters of this report, FAN has a long history of implementing CQI in its operations and systems. Because the notion and practice of CQI has been embedded within FAN's organisational and workplace culture for some years prior to the advent of the HASS, the rigors involved in meeting standards through accreditation did not pose an unmanageable stress on staff or the organisation. This is not to say that FAN sailed through the standards without encountering difficulties or obstructions to the process – there was significant work undertaken by all staff to improve systems, processes and practice as outlined in the HASS. In fact, it is interesting to note at this point that FAN, although lead by a qualified QICSA Review Manager, has not undertaken any form of accreditation prior to the HASS. The focus of the organisations development has been on embedding a culture of quality throughout all levels of the organisation which is also the most difficult task in any accreditation process that is based on CQI.

### Transforming 'standards' into daily work practice

The first step in measuring standards against practice as part of an accreditation process is to reframe its meaning and to understand how each of the standards relate to the work that is conducted on the ground.

By transforming the written standards into CQI questions that relate to specific practice and organisational operations, workers can then begin to understand the meaning that underpins the 'language' of accreditation and quality improvement. For example, section one of the HASS practice standards 'Upholding and Promoting Consumer Rights':

#### Standard 1.1: Rights-based approach

CQI Question/s:

*How does your program/service ensure that client's are properly & appropriately informed about their rights & responsibilities? What can be done to improve this system?*

#### Standard 1.2: Consumer participation

CQI Question/s:

*How does your program/service involve clients in decision making including program planning, review and evaluation? Is there more that can be done to involve the participation of clients in these processes?*

#### Standard 1.3: Complaints and appeals

CQI Question/s:

*How does you program/service ensure that clients are supported to exercise their right for lodging a complaint or appealing a decision? If you were a client would you feel confident and comfortable following this process? Have clients had an opportunity to provide feedback and comment on this process?*

## Standard 1.4: Privacy and confidentiality

*CQI Question/s:*

*How does your program/service ensure it maintains client privacy & confidentiality? Does this process meet privacy legislation? Is there a privacy and confidentiality policy and if so do all staff know and understand it?*

For an organisation such as FAN, where CQI is already part of daily work practice the process of measuring HASS against current systems becomes a whole of organisation task.

### Sharing the Load

From a CQI point of view it is important that all key stakeholders in an organisation participate in and share the workload of completing the accreditation process. Without the involvement of all staff accreditation simply becomes a case of 'getting over the line'. The organisation forsakes the notion of quality improvement and those most affected will not claim ownership over any changes instituted. Moreover, the organisations operations will most likely revert back to previous practice regardless of its effectiveness or efficiency.

At FAN the process of completing the practice standards was divided among relevant staff in a similar fashion as the portfolio system described earlier. Each worker held responsibility for specific sections and progress on the HASS standards were introduced as a regular agenda item at staff and team meetings. On occasions workers would team up to complete particular standards that crossed over between sections and which were seen as complimentary or part of the same process.

### Creating an Action Plan Framework

In addition to allocating the work load associated with self assessment against the HASS, the staff team also needed a tool for keeping track of identified areas that required further development or simply had to be 'checked' to ensure that the item complied appropriately with the specific standard/s. The tool also needed to monitor the progress made on each task as well as who was primarily responsible to ensure it was addressed within the specified timeframe.

An action plan framework was therefore developed to detail and monitor all tasks across a twelve month time frame. Actions and tasks were clearly articulated for each section of the HASS (from sections 1 through to 5) and divided into three monthly timeframes, in order of priority, covering each quarter of the year. In this way the workload for completing the self assessment against HASS was evenly distributed throughout the year and staff were more empowered to manage the extra workload across realistic and practical time lines. An important process for the action plan was to retain the documentation of all actions and tasks that had been met. The purpose of this was twofold – first, it meant that staff were able to see the growth in accomplishments as they progressed through the standards and second, it enabled new workers to the organisation to review the entire process rather than just what had been achieved in recent months/weeks.

**FAN HASS Action Plan (example of entry):**

<b>HASS SECTION 1: UPHOLDING &amp; PROMOTING RIGHTS</b>			
<b>JANUARY – MARCH</b>	<b>APRIL – JUNE</b>	<b>JULY – SEPTEMBER</b>	<b>OCTOBER - DECEMBER</b>
<u>Task/Action</u> e.g. Review client introduction/ information kit & add in Homeless Advocacy Service information & updated list of contact details for after hours services.	<u>Task/Action</u> e.g. Create new document detailing FAN's strategy for client participation and invite clients to become part of the youth committee. Consult with client to ensure documents are youth friendly,	<u>Task/Action</u> e.g. Revise client rights, grievance procedures and privacy charter.	<u>Task/Action</u> e.g. Appoint responsibility to staff member for updating and monitoring complaints register and add into position description.
<u>Responsibility</u> e.g. - Manager to add HAS information; - HSS Team to develop Welcome Pack; - Coordinator of Volunteer Program to update after hours list.	<u>Responsibility</u> e.g. - Manager to do draft; - PRB worker to invite clients on youth committee; - HSS Team to consult with clients.	<u>Responsibility</u> e.g. - Life Skills Coordinator to revise client rights & grievances.	<u>Responsibility</u> e.g. - Manager to be responsible for complaints register.
<b>Completed</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <i>Comments:</i>	<b>Completed</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <i>Comments:</i>	<b>Completed</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <i>Comments:</i>	<b>Completed</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <i>Comments:</i>
<b>HASS SECTION 2: ACCESS TO SUPPORT</b>			
<u>Task/Action</u>	<u>Task/Action</u>	<u>Task/Action</u>	<u>Task/Action</u>
<u>Responsibility</u> - -	<u>Responsibility</u> - -	<u>Responsibility</u> - -	<u>Responsibility</u> - -
<b>Completed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <i>Comments:</i>	<b>Completed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <i>Comments:</i>	<b>Completed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <i>Comments:</i>	<b>Completed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <i>Comments:</i>

## Barriers and Difficulties

While different accreditation standards will vary in the extent of detail which they prescribe and the manner in which they are formulated most will have some level of repetition and use unfamiliar or corporate style language. Moreover, the way in which standards are often worded can create confusion - particularly when they divide and separate particular processes that in practice tend to occur as one transaction. An example of this is the three processes of intake, assessment and referral. Another commonality among accreditation systems is the time commitment needed in order to complete a comprehensive self assessment process and the increased amount of documentation required to provide the 'evidence' needed to demonstrate compliance.

As discussed earlier the main barrier most likely to be encountered in implementing standards throughout an organisation is a lack of knowledge, experience and understanding of continuous quality improvement. The overall aim should not focus on meeting standards per se but in instituting and embedding CQI as a matter of every day practice. In this way and by using this approach an organisation may position itself strategically and be able to meet any accreditation standards that are required, irrespective of their source, format and language.

Specific barriers and difficulties that FAN encountered in their process of self assessment against the HASS were largely focused on the issues already discussed in the body of this report. That is, the extra time commitment, different understandings of the HASS by individual workers and ensuring that the standards and the requirements of CQI are consistently applied. Other barriers included:

- A changing staff team, where several key staff positions were redeveloped and new incumbents employed. This meant that the organisation and staff team needed to revisit the organisational quality frameworks that were implemented as part of the HASS and include these in the orientation and induction process.
- Significant variations in HASS processes and templates which meant that previous work on the standards needed to be further developed and information transferred across to new templates on several occasions. This was a particular point of frustration for those who had dedicated considerable time in writing up the standards.
- The absence of a 'peer organisation' in the Eastern Metropolitan Region to support organisations implementing the HASS. In particular, the HASS occurred at a time when the region was trialing the new 'Front Door' model as well as in concert with other sector developments and reforms. This has resulted in an 'overload' of work, particularly for smaller agencies. In addition, few if any other organisations embarked on the HASS at the time that FAN chose to move forward with the standards. This meant that FAN was called upon on numerous occasions to provide information and guidance to other agencies in the region about how to implement the HASS.
- Constant variations to the processes and requirements of meeting the Management, Finances and Governance standards. This has meant that FAN has been unable to fully complete the self assessment process against these standards.

## Creating and Maintaining Quality Partnerships and CQI

As one of five partners in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) Creating Connections YHAP2 Integrated Youth Hub, FAN is committed to participating in a collaborative effort across the region to ensure that services for young people are provided within a coordinated, flexible and consistent framework. The work of self assessment for HASS combined with FAN's commitments on the Management Group of the EMR Integrated Youth Hub as well as delivering the Private Rental Brokerage Program in partnership with Anchor Community Care, has created a significant added workload for all staff at FAN. To some degree this has tested the systems and processes that FAN had already developed in the past as well as providing the impetus for the development of new systems and processes where needed – particularly in relation to partnership arrangements and quality improvement.

*The implementation and ongoing partnership work across five agencies comprising different styles, culture, systems, capacity and resources, while retaining a spirit of cooperation, presents challenges for everyone. For FAN, we approached this challenge by remaining consistent to our systems and reflective practice...*

*FAN Manager*

FAN's role in the EMR Creating Connections Youth Hub initiative commenced in mid 2006 following the state governments call for submissions. Five agencies came together to design and develop a comprehensive integrated partnership model that would enhance service delivery and ensure improved outcomes for at risk and homeless young people. The five agencies included:

- Harrison UnitingCare (lead agency);
- EastCare (Salvation Army);
- Wesley Homeless Services;
- Anchor Community Care; and
- Family Access Network.

The EMR Creating Connections Youth Hub Management Group consisting of the five agencies was then formed and met regularly to develop the submission, service models and partnership systems of the new integrated youth hub. By January 2007 the full model was complete along with program specific frameworks, allocation of program components across the partner agencies, position descriptions and the key elements of a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would specify the contractual agreements and expectations between all partners. The MOU was finalised a short time later following comments and feedback from all key stakeholders.

The Private Rental Brokerage Program involved a further partnership between FAN and Anchor Community Care to cover the entire EMR. The local government areas of Whitehorse, Boroondara, Manningham and Monash would be supported by FAN, while Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges were the responsibility of Anchor.

A key component that contributed toward FAN's success as a partner in the new Youth Hub initiative was the organisations long history in providing 'added value' services that had been designed and developed to address identified gaps in the service system. FAN's Portfolio system, discussed previously in this report, is one core strategy that FAN uses to identify systemic gaps as well as develop strategic and planned responses.

The EMR Creating Connections Private Rental Brokerage Program model has its foundations in two of FAN's past initiatives dating back to 2003. Then known as the PRAS (Private Rental Assistance Scheme) it provided an individually tailored response supported by financial assistance on a sliding scale that spanned a six month period to young people and young parents entering the private rental market. In 2005 FAN introduced a new initiative called 'Breaking the Cycle Over Breakfast' which offered an educative package and presentation to real estate agents to address some of the barriers that young people and young parents experience in accessing private rental. Previous to these two programs FAN had also auspiced the Consumer Affairs funded Tenancy Support Program from 1997 through to 2004.

The PRAS and BCOB FAN initiatives were used as the basis of the model developed for the Private Rental Brokerage Program for the EMR. The FAN Private Rental Brokerage Support Worker was appointed in March 2007.

FAN's approach to the partnership on the EMR Creating Connections Youth Hub Management Group as well as their sub-partnership with Anchor Community Care in the delivery of the Private Rental Brokerage Program involved a range of strategies and processes. These included:

- Developing a reporting framework to the Management Group that included data on outcomes;
- Advocating and supporting a comprehensive communication strategy that involved presentations endorsed by the Management Group;
- Initiating, hosting and developing agendas for meetings with the PRBP partner agency across all layers including management/team leader/worker as well as ensuring that all key electronic communications were shared and meetings minuted/recorded and reported;
- Introducing an in-house 'Creating Connections' team including manager, team leader and program worker meeting monthly to:
  - Review the program activities within FAN;
  - Track data, trends and referral pathways;
  - Identify referral patterns and identifying where additional information may be required to support the sectors understanding of the "private rental readiness" component to better support outcomes for clients;
  - Strategies for rolling out the model and managing partnership elements, addressing intellectual knowledge, copyright and document control aspects;
  - Shared knowledge – the Manager communicates key information and outcomes from the Management Group meetings, including minutes. The worker circulates minutes from the workers meetings (across the five program areas) to the team leader and manager;
  - Develop strategies to respond to Indigenous young people including attendance at a two day Cultural Respect Training Program conducted by the Koorie Heritage Trust in 2007.
  - Developing linkages with Creating Connections Programs outside of the EMR, responding to enquiries about the PRBP model and sharing FAN resources and learning.

FAN's approach to creating and maintaining quality partnerships comprises a multi-layered system that places clear communication at its core. Internal activities and processes that support and maintain organisational external relationships include:

- 'Partnerships' are a fixed agenda item for discussion/updates at all staff meetings.
- 'Partnerships' are reported to the Executive and full Board at each meeting and frequently incorporate further discussion and/or the development of strategies to enhance FAN's external relationships;
- 'Partnerships' are discussed in supervision with individual senior staff and as part of the Senior Management Team;
- 'Partnerships' are represented in staff work-plans and position descriptions as well as the organisations Strategic Plan and comprehensively detailed in the Annual Report.

The efforts and initiatives developed by FAN that were borne out of the Creating Connections Integrated Youth Hub partnership occurred in concert with implementing the HASS and the process of self assessment. The two pieces of work were seen by all staff as interdependent as each contributed to the learning's and lessons for the other.

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of a set of industry standards for the homelessness services sector in Victoria has changed the way organisations will report to and be accountable for their services to key funding bodies. The move toward continuous quality improvement and accreditation systems is part of a broader trend across all government funded service areas (both state and national) and will be a permanent fixture within current and future government policy directions.

The array of sector reforms and subsequent accreditation requirements that has resulted in this change of direction has impacted heavily on all organisations that provide services along this continuum. As noted earlier, for some agencies which provide a range of programs and services that intersect and overlap with multiple government funding streams, the impact has been significant. For smaller organisations, the capacity to dedicate time, money and resources toward these new reform areas is proving difficult given the current context of limited budgets, high demand and increasing staff workloads.

While organisations that are affected by these changes continue to focus on the various sets of standards that have been developed within sectors such as homelessness services, AOD, children and family services, mental health, disability and family violence (to name a few) the result will be a continuous process of duplication and a proliferation of documentation. Valuable time and effort will be constantly re-directed from service delivery and organisational operations toward self assessment processes and developing documentation and evidence to suit specific accreditation body requirements.

However, if an organisation instead directs its focus on how to embed CQI into every day practice – from governance to management to service delivery, the driving factor for instituting internal organisational change is to improve the way in which the organisation seeks to achieve its strategic goals and purpose. The process is therefore linked back to ensuring that the best possible services are delivered and outcomes for clients are improved. The task of meeting standards and participating in accreditation requirements now becomes less cumbersome; duplication of effort is significantly reduced and there is set sources of documentation to act as evidence. New systems do not need to be created as they already exist and have been developed within a framework of CQI to meet the specific needs of the organisation rather than to meet a specific set of standards.

For FAN the principles and practice of CQI has been embedded in the way the organisation has operated for some years. While there were a number of barriers and difficulties experienced in their process of meeting the HASS standards these were minimal and some were attributable to the outside activities of the implementation process by DHS. The important aspect to note here is that there was minimal disruption (if any) to the programs and services delivered by FAN staff on the ground.

A core message noted earlier in this report is recognising that there are fundamental differences that exist between CQI and achieving accreditation. While this is not meant to undermine the purpose of accreditation processes it does draw attention to the reason why organisations should seek to institute a culture of continuous quality improvement into the workplace.

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