

Title: “Can you make respite fun?”

Sub- Title: Recreation and Leisure Support in Respite Services

What: Quality recreation and leisure support is increasingly seen as one of the key objectives for people seeking respite. But what is the relationship between respite services and the recreation support they provide for people with disabilities? How well do we identify our consumers’ recreation expectations and needs? How well do we provide respite that meets those recreation needs? How do we know we how well we doing in meeting that need or, quite simply, how do we make sure it really is fun? In this workshop we are going to inviting you to bring your experience in delivering fun respite services to a discussion of these questions with the aim of developing the quality of the recreation support you are providing as part of your service. There will be an emphasis on respite that is provided through group recreation activities but the contribution of other types of respite services will be welcomed.

Who: Andrew Stock is not a specialist in recreation or respite but he does know fun when he sees it. He is the coordinator of a group recreation programme at Northern Beaches Interchange in Sydney.

Part One

Who are you? Where are you coming from?

This introductory session began by asking participants to break out into small groups- preferably as a pair with someone they didn't already know- and asked them to discuss three questions:

1. Three things you personally do for fun?
2. Three things you do at work?
3. Three things you dream of doing?

After bringing the group back together we pointed out that there were three purposes of this 'icebreaker'.

Firstly, it was to remind us of the fundamental nature of what each person believes to be fun in determining our sense of identity. Secondly, it was also a chance to hear a little bit about what someone else does for fun and what they do for work as a way of getting a feel for the diversity of people and services in the session. Finally it was important to recognise the value of what we each dream of doing. Where we are going as individuals and where we are going as services in our community is determined by what we imagine and hope for the future, what we dream of doing.... we are always imagining what we would like to do and gradually working our way towards it. It is a reminder of the theme of the whole conference- the future direction of respite and support.

Part Two

Where do we want to go? How do we improve the 'quality' of the respite and support?

We are all asked to measure the *quantity* of support we provide (e.g. total hours of care, costs of wages etc) but how do you measure the quality of what you do? There are limitations in all qualitative measures and the risk that they only confirm our own assumptions (eg consumer surveys, monitoring or evaluation systems can sometimes produce positive reports on low quality services).

Many people rightly argue that listening to your clients is the best method of determining the quality but that too is sometimes limited (eg especially vocal clients get all the attention while some 'silent' clients fear that complaining will jeopardise their support) and sometimes clients with very limited experiences and choices often only ask for very limited activities. In addition, respite, by its very nature, is very much focused on the need for the carer to have a break and much of its qualitative measures are seen from the carers perspective and attending to the disability needs of the client.

An alternative way of measuring the quality of the support we provide is to begin to focus on the abilities and experiences of the client (or the person with a disability). What are they wanting out of respite? From their perspective the key outcome is often the recreation and social support aspect of the respite service. So how do we know we determine quality respite in terms of recreation and social support? How do we make sure respite is actually fun for the clients?

This next part of the session began by asking participants to discuss their own 'case studies' that exemplify successful respite and support. They were asked to go back into their small groups and answer these two questions;

1. Can you nominate three examples of the best quality respite or support?
2. What were the reasons you think it was good i.e. nominate the 'qualities' or characteristics of good respite?

When the groups returned we asked each of them to nominate the qualities they had considered essential in their examples of high quality respite or support. A summary of the qualities noted are listed below. Although that not all of these qualities was essential for ensuring high quality respite and support it was agreed that the really 'high scoring' examples of respite and support included a high proportion of the qualities listed below. We have grouped them into six general areas and they are:

1. Understanding and responding to client interests and abilities
2. Interaction with others
3. Challenges or new experiences
4. “Normal” Experiences
5. Planning, planning and good planning
6. Staffing and management

Understanding and responding to each person's interests (ie each person has a unique idea of what is fun)

- Focus on developing the interests and abilities of individual not just attending to 'needs' related to disability
- Providing a diverse choice of activities (eg a mix of sporting, social, cultural, educational, environmental etc)
- Respect for individual preferences even if it isn't always 'appropriate'.
- Mini-activities within each activity that seek to address the diverse interests of individuals
- Regular formal and informal client feedback and evaluation (including incident reports)
- Develop understanding, trust and confidence through regular contact in long-term support relationship
- Include and inform the carers to engage their support of the activities
- Remember that consumers with very limited experience or communication may only choose activities what they know
- Take what they know they like and develop it further

Interacting with others

- Socialising with peers
- Interacting with wider public/community
- Socialising with staff or volunteers

- Socialisation and relationships outside the family
- Socialising as a whole family
- The more interaction with as many people the better
- Broadening relationships and sense of identity
- Reducing isolation
- Community partnerships with other individuals or groups on informal or formal level

Challenge or New Experience

- Challenge an essential part of experience and growth
- To be given a choice of challenges relative to each individual's ability level
- Clients with limited experience often benefit from being challenged to do more than they or others expected of them
- Challenges extend the realm of experience and sometimes offer opportunities to learn new skills
- Encouraging independence- support an individual without regularly challenge them can reinforce the need for support
- Sense of achievement relative to individual's level
- Giving responsibility to the person receiving care for some aspects of event (including reversing support roles)
- Doing something 'new' or different to the usual activities normally experienced with family, work or school

Normal Experience (Normalisation)

- Doing something normal for the sort of group(s) that an individual might identify with (including appropriate activities of age, culture, interest, etc)
- Developing a sense of belonging to a group- including sometimes belonging to a group where having a disability is normal

Staffing

- Adequate supply of skilled staff to meet basic needs of individuals
- Motivated and encouraging staff- especially staff who can enjoy the activity the clients want to do
- Well supported, trained and rewarded staff

- Staff abilities and skills would ideally compliment the interests, abilities and needs of clients
- Staff that are included in planning and and development of activities take more responsibility in their success
- Staff need to be trained in leadership of groups

Planning

- Good planning increases the probability that opportunities for fun will be maximised.
- Fun can be spontaneous but it should not be based on luck... good planning can capitalise on opportunities
- Planning that involves all stake holders with the lead taken by consumer, staff with coordination support
- Planning that is able to positively respond to misadventures such as unexpected changes in the weather, behaviour incidents or care issues,
- Research a diverse range of activities and the flexibility to adapt to specific interests and changes in need
- Plan for the whole event- including planning the many different individual activities within a larger activity
- Plan for each individual- planning each person's whole day based on their specific interests and creating opportunities for fun

Part Three

Where to from here?

- Go back and listen to your consumers, your families- what are they really wanting, how well are you planning the care- are the consumers and staff taking the lead? Can you see the qualities listed above? Are they really having fun?
- Develop your service and the skills of your staff to better meet those needs (eg recreation training, service development sessions)
- Begin to think beyond the concept of respite and start imagining your community several years from now. Where do they want to go?

**If you would like more information on specific aspects of the above contact:
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