

Model policies
on
working with young people
for
non-residential youth services in NSW

by Nick Manning

Youth Action & Policy Association (NSW)

2004

Part 2
Casework

Model policies on working with young people for non-residential youth services in NSW

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The model policies are available from <http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies>, as:

- PDF files for easy printing and reading
- web pages for quick viewing of particular policies
- Word files for easy copying + pasting into your own policy documents.

Warning!

These are model policies for agencies to adapt to suit their circumstances. We have done the best we can within our resources, but it is not possible to write a single policy which meets the requirements of the wide range of youth services in NSW. You should not rely solely on the information here, but should refer to other publications and authorities and if necessary get qualified advice for your specific situation.

We have attempted to include all the relevant legal requirements as at 2004. However the law is sometimes complex and open to interpretation, and applies to different youth agencies in different ways. If necessary you should get legal advice about your own policies. The information here is not legal advice. If there is a real possibility of legal action, you should talk to a lawyer before you decide what to do.

These policies reflect law which applies in NSW, which may be quite different to law in other states and territories of Australia. Using these policies outside NSW without checking the law, may put your agency, staff and volunteers at risk of breaking the law.

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Contents

Part 2: Casework

- 4 Casework essentials
- 6 Casework: Getting new clients
- 8 Casework: Information, advocacy, referral, and ongoing casework
- 11 Casework safety
- 12 Casework: Caseload and supervision
- 14 Casework files

**The other parts of this publication (below) are available from
www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies**

Part 1:

How to use these policies

Activities and services

- Drop-in & use of centre facilities
- Young people's use of computers
- Street work
- Holding mail for young people
- Excursions and camps

Part 3: Rights and responsibilities

- Young people's rights to their personal information
- Keeping and destroying records
- Code of conduct for staff
- Complaints
- Rules and consequences

Part 4: Inclusiveness

- Developing an inclusive youth service
- Expression of religion, culture and lifestyle
- Eliminating harassment, vilification and excluding behaviour

Part 5: Privacy and confidentiality

- Privacy essentials
- Collecting personal information
- Privacy statement & privacy consent form
- Using personal information within the team
- Security of personal information
- Disclosing personal information with consent
- Disclosing personal information without consent

Part 6: Child protection

Part 7: Safety

- Duty of care statement
- Individual risk assessment about a young person
- Report risks and serious incidents to the Manager
- Medications and medical treatment
- Vehicles
- Home visits
- Smoking
- Alcohol and illegal drugs
- Crime and police
- Suicide
- Non-violence
- Critical incident response

Casework essentials

This policy is the first of a set of policies including:

- Casework Essentials
- Casework: Getting New Clients
- Casework: Information, Advocacy, Referral and Ongoing Casework
- Casework: Safety
- Casework: Caseload and Supervision
- Casework Files.

Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII):

Roughly speaking, PII insures the agency's advice and casework services. More information:

- *Insurance: What's it all about? A guide for not for profit organisations* (2004) by Sandra Handley. Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) (02) 9211 2599 or <http://www.ncoss.org.au/insurance>

Aims

The Casework set of policies aim to ensure that the agency's casework services are:

- **accessible** (to all young people within the agency's target group regardless of background or circumstances)
- **confidential**
- **safe** (physically and emotionally, for young people, staff and others)
- **respectful** (staff and young people treat each other with respect, and staff promote mutual respect between young people and adults such as their family and government agencies)
- **empowering** (we resource young people to manage their lives independently).

Inclusiveness

Staff must implement access and equity strategies and procedures as outlined in the policy *Inclusiveness: Developing an Inclusive Youth Service*. In particular, casework staff must:

- develop their cross-cultural awareness
- ensure that young people from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances can find out about and access the service
- use interpreters whenever necessary and possible.

Staff must also make decisions and judgements in fair and non-discriminatory ways, based on:

- facts and reasonable beliefs, not superficial assumptions, unsubstantiated allegations or rumours
- information about individuals, not generalisations about a "group" they belong to (eg. an ethnic group, or people with a particular mental illness).

See the Inclusiveness policies.

Other policies

As you implement this policy, also comply with these policies:

2. Casework: Casework essentials

- Privacy policies
- Child Protection policies
- Complaints
- Individual Risk Assessment about a Young Person
- Report Risks and Serious Incidents to the Manager
- Vehicles
- Crime and Police
- Non-violence
- Suicide
- Critical Incident Response.

Casework: Getting new clients

This policy is one of a set of policies on casework. See the Casework Essentials policy for background to this policy.

Procedure

Referrals to the agency from other people

If you receive a referral from someone other than the young person themselves, eg. another agency, or a family member of a young person, then you must only act with the young person's consent:

- Only contact the young person if you are confident they want you to, or if they are an existing or previous client. (Otherwise tell the person making the referral that the young person should approach the agency themselves).
- Only make an appointment or other arrangement for a young person when you have their consent.
- Ensure that the young person wants to use our agency and understands that they can end the relationship at any time.
- Ensure that the young person, and if necessary the person who made the initial referral, understands the privacy statement (see Privacy policies). In particular, that we will not disclose any personal information to the person who made the referral, without the young person's consent. (Personal information even extends to whether the young person has become a client or not).
- If it later becomes clear that the person who made the initial referral supports the casework goals and can assist the casework process, then if appropriate try to gain the young person's consent for you to disclose information to that person so that you can involve them.

Anonymity and privacy

You can provide information or referral without recording name, address or other personal details.

Once the interaction moves beyond just one-off information or referral (eg. you open a file or make a formal written referral), comply with the Privacy: Collecting personal Information policy and the Privacy Statement and Privacy Consent Form policy:

- explain the privacy statement
- ask the young person to fill in the Privacy Consent Form.

Statistical information

Record only the statistics the agency requires. Don't let this interfere with an informal and youth-centred approach.

2. Casework: Casework: Getting new clients

Other teams at this agency

You cannot access personal information about the young person held by other teams at this agency (eg. a recreation or educational program), or vice versa, without the young person's written consent.

If family members are clients too

Where a service is provided to both a young person and other members of their family, either as separate clients or as joint clients (eg. family counselling), the agency must agree with each client in advance about when privacy will be maintained and when it won't. Each client must freely consent to any arrangement to disclose information to other family members.

Intake

During intake you should:

- find out what the presenting issue is
- provide any basic information you are able to
- make an initial assessment of how the agency might be able to assist, based on agency policy
- inform the young person that the agency cannot assist, or might be able to assist, or can assist.

Intake?

Intake refers to the first time you provide a casework service for a particular young person.

Intake might occur in a formal intake session, or during other activities such as drop-in or street work.

See the policy Casework: Information, Advocacy, Referral and Ongoing casework.

If the agency cannot assist, you should:

- explain why
- inform the young person of other agencies which might be able to assist, and ask if they would like your help in contacting those agencies
- give the young person a copy of *Your comments and complaints about this agency* (see the Complaints policy).

Staffing for intake

Only be open for intake when there are at least 2 people present:

1. a paid or volunteer staff member responsible for running the centre or activity; and
2. a paid or volunteer staff member, a staff member of another agency, or a student on placement who is over 18.

If you cannot maintain this minimum staffing level for any reason, immediately close intake until you can restore the minimum staffing level.

2. Casework:

Casework: Information, advocacy, referral and ongoing casework

Casework: Information, advocacy, referral and ongoing casework

This policy is one of a set of policies on casework. See the Casework Essentials policy for background to this policy.

Procedure

Information

The agency must keep up-to-date resources on the topics young people most often need information about.

When you give young people information:

- only give information which you are confident is accurate
- only give information which you are qualified to give (eg. don't give legal or medical advice)
- do encourage young people to get qualified advice (eg. from lawyers and doctors).

Stay up-to-date:

Do not rely on a written information manual unless you can keep it up-to-date:

- Use ServiceLink, the statewide online services directory
<http://bsd.p.hsn.net.nsw.gov.au>
- Create an online manual using your browser's favourites/bookmarks or create your own web page with links to other agencies' web pages.

Advocacy

Your decision to assist the young person with advocacy, and the amount of time you put in, should be based on factors such as:

- agency policies
- your workload
- the needs of the young person
- the ability of the young person to advocate for themselves
- benefits to the young person of your assisting with advocacy
- likely outcomes.

When you advocate you should:

- be clear about your role to the young person and to others
- be respectful, honest and assertive
- promote self-advocacy: teach the young person information and skills, and maximise their involvement in the process.

2. Casework:

Casework: Information, advocacy, referral and ongoing casework

Referral to other agencies

Referral includes:

- *formal written referral*: writing a letter to the other agency or using an electronic referral system such as ReferraLink
- *verbal referral*: contacting the other agency yourself or with the young person
- *informal referral*: giving the young person the information so they can contact the other agency themselves.

As much as possible you should make referrals based not just on the publicly available information about an agency, but on your understanding about:

- how accessible and youth-friendly the agency is
- the values informing the agency's interactions with young people
- how successful the agency is at achieving young people's goals

Establishing ongoing casework

At the time (or as soon as possible after) you establish an ongoing casework relationship, you should develop a case plan: a shared agreement and understanding with the young person about:

- what issues you will work on and what goals the young person wants to achieve
- how you will support them in reaching these goals, including what sorts of things the agency will and won't do
- what other services you will access to help in meeting these goals
- what responsibilities you have to each other
- how you both will make decisions
- how often you might meet or talk to each other
- how or when the relationship might end.

Explain and discuss all relevant policies of the agency, including:

- Casework policies
- Young People's Rights to their Personal Information
- Privacy policies (including Privacy: Disclosing Personal Information without Consent)
- Code of Conduct for Staff
- Rules and Consequences
- Complaints.

2. Casework:

Casework: Information, advocacy, referral and ongoing casework

Limiting & ending casework

Limiting

The agency should have policies, procedures and expectations which assist staff to put appropriate limits on casework services, so that young people don't become over-reliant on the agency, and staff do not risk burnout.

Ending

You should have clear criteria for the decision to end a casework relationship, such as:

- the young person wants to end it, or
- when all casework goals have been achieved, or
- there is little more that the agency can do, or
- the young person has not been in the target group for 12 months or more, or
- the young person has been banned from the agency and all its services (see the Rules and Consequences policy).

When you end a casework relationship:

- arrange for post-casework support if appropriate
- provide any appropriate referrals
- update the young person's contact details if necessary
- follow the procedure for closing a file.

Post support

Consider providing transitional support after ending casework, such as a limited amount of phone contact.

Vulnerable young people

Ending a casework relationship may have a major impact on some young people, including those who generally feel rejected or excluded, and those where the agency is the main source of social connections and adult involvement in their life.

When you decide to end casework, and when you discuss this decision with the young person, take into account how this might impact on them. Where appropriate, assist the young person to find alternative sources of social connections and adult involvement.

Casework safety

This policy is one of a set of policies on casework. See the Casework Essentials policy for background to this policy.

See also policies on:

- Child Protection
- Non-violence
- Alcohol and Illegal Drugs
- Vehicles
- Home visits
- Street work
- Individual Risk Assessment about a Young Person.

Procedure

- Base minimum staffing decisions on any individual risk assessments.
- If unsure about safety, have a second staff member, student or volunteer join you in an interview or meeting.
- Consider the office layout including access to exits, lockable doors, alarms etc.
- Lock away all knives and tools which are not in use.
- Keep your keys to your vehicle, the building, and offices on you at all times.
- Carry a fully charged and fully credited mobile phone with you, switched on, at all times.
- Do not leave any young person alone in an office with access to confidential information. Keep filing cabinets locked.
- Do not meet a young person off the premises if you feel unsafe.
- Do not continue a meeting or session if you feel unsafe.
- Report all incidents, threats and other safety-related information to the Manager.

Mobile phone tips:

- program an emergency number into your mobile
- consider using a spare pre-paid mobile so no calls come in while you are with the young person.

Casework: Caseload and supervision

This policy is one of a set of policies on casework. See the Casework Essentials policy for background to this policy.

Procedure

Caseload

The agency should set and enforce a maximum allowable caseload for each staff member, calculated according to the number of high, medium and low intensity clients. This maximum should also be adjusted down when a case is particularly traumatic (eg. horrific abuse).

Regardless of whether their caseload is within the allowable limit or not, staff must tell the Manager if they believe that their casework may contribute to occupational stress or other illness.

The Manager must take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that each staff member's caseload at any time (both the number of cases and the nature of those cases) is not likely to contribute to:

- occupational stress or other illness
- the staff member "cutting corners" and not meeting legal and safety requirements (eg. risk assessments, informed consent, privacy etc).

Supervision

The agency must provide regular professional (clinical) supervision for all caseworkers. (This is distinct from the supervision provided by a team leader or manager in the organisation, which must focus on organisational issues and requirements).

Professional supervision can be provided by:

- a team leader or manager, but only if that person is (or was) a caseworker
- another caseworker inside or outside the agency
- an outside consultant.

Informal debriefing

The agency should encourage quick, informal debriefing between staff to "let off steam" about casework issues and clients.

Formal debriefing

The agency should also provide a regular way that staff can debrief about casework issues and clients, such as a weekly debriefing session.

2. Casework: Casework: Caseload and Supervision

As much as possible the supervision should be provided by someone the caseworker is comfortable with.

Professional supervision aims to:

- assist debriefing and help manage stress
- provide guidance on casework decisions and strategies
- review casework plans
- explore and apply theoretical frameworks
- promote professional development.

Supervision should be provided by a combination of regular face-to-face meetings and one-off face-to-face or phone contact at short notice when needed.

Professional supervision and privacy

Staff member's privacy: It must be clear to all involved whether a person providing supervision is obliged to maintain the staff member's confidentiality, or whether they are permitted or obliged to report certain things to the agency.

Young person's privacy: Supervision must not breach a young person's privacy. As much as possible the discussion of particular cases should avoid identifying the young person.

However it may be more realistic to name the person providing supervision as a member of the team on your privacy statement, so that young people know that personal information may be shared with that person (see Privacy policies).

Casework files

This policy is one of a set of policies on casework. See the Casework Essentials policy for background to this policy.

Files

- Keep all information relating to the young person together in one file, or in a series of linked files.
- Files can be paper-based or computer-based or both, as long as they meet the needs of caseworkers and legal requirements (eg. privacy).

Your record-keeping has 2 main purposes

It should:

1. Assist the agency to fulfil its duties
2. Demonstrate to others, if necessary, how the agency has fulfilled its duties.

Those duties are:

- providing quality services requested by the client
- following agency policies, procedures and instructions
- duty of care
- duty to protect privacy
- duty to act only with informed consent
- other legal requirements (non-discrimination, child protection etc).

What information to record

Record the information your team needs and nothing more. This includes:

- information your team needs to provide the service the young person wants
- information your team needs for statistics for your agency or your funding body
- information your team needs for safety.

Avoid collecting information for information's sake. For example, do not record (unless they are genuinely needed to provide the service the young person wants):

- criminal record (see Privacy policies)
- HIV AIDS information (see Privacy policies)
- religion and spirituality
- sexual preference or activity.

Procedure

Opening a file

Open a file for a young person if:

- this team is likely to be working with them again
- you wrote a letter, made a written referral or need to file some other document.

Otherwise, do not open a file for one-off work such as information and referral or for informal contacts such as drop-in or street work.

Privacy and consent

Comply with the Privacy policies. When you open a file, give the young person a copy of the privacy statement with the Privacy Consent Form attached. Do not ask them to fill in the form and sign it until you are confident that they understand it.

What to include in the file

Each client's file must contain:

- Privacy Consent Form (which also records contact details) - see Privacy policies
- Individual risk assessment if required (see the policy Individual Risk Assessment about a Young Person)
- copies of any documents including written referrals in and out
- any complaint made by the young person and details of its resolution
- a record of each phone call, email, fax and letter sent
- a record of each session or meeting.

The record of each session should record what was discussed and agreed, eg:

- general history
- issues
- case plan, goals and agreements made
- progress in addressing issues
- information and advice given
- referrals made.

Each entry

Each record or entry must:

- have the young person's full name
- have the name of the staff member making the record
- have the date the record was made
- be legible and avoid abbreviations, jargon or slang which others may not understand
- be in English (unless the agency permits other languages).

2. Casework: Casework files

Opinions and judgements

Record opinions and judgements only if you have the skills to make them. Remember that other people may read what you write, including other team members, the young person and in rare cases the people in a court case if your file is ever subpoenaed.

Avoid clinical terms to describe someone's mental state unless you are recording the diagnosis of a medical/psychological practitioner. Instead of eg. "*Sam is schizo*", or "*Sam is manic depressive*", describe what you observed, eg. "*Sam's mood seemed to swing from extreme to extreme.*"

Avoid ambiguous statements, eg. "*Joe was very aggressive*" might really mean "*Joe shouted at me*" or "*Joe threatened to hit me*" or even "*Joe was very assertive about his rights*". Be specific.

Avoid colloquialisms which are open to wide interpretation eg. "*Sam was a bit psycho*" or "*Sam was really mad today*".

Ask yourself:

- Are you qualified to judge?
- Is it necessary for you to judge?
- Is it a careful professional judgement (not casual speculation)?
- Is it written unambiguously?

The young person's rights regarding their file

The young person has certain rights, under NSW and Australian privacy laws, to:

- see the personal information the agency holds about them
- ask the agency to correct, delete or add to the information.

For more details see the policy Young People's Rights to their Personal Information.

The agency must keep the original file after casework has ended. The agency should provide a copy for the young person if they ask.

Does the young person own their file?

You may use an approach to casework where the young person owns a folder or portfolio recording their goals, progress etc, which they may keep with them if they wish. However such a folder is distinct from the agency's file (if needed). An agency file:

- **is not necessary** for one-off work such as information, referral, street work etc
- **is necessary** for ongoing casework to meet certain requirements such as risk assessment, informed consent etc
- is the legal property of the agency (though the young person has certain rights regarding the information in the file)
- should be kept at the agency both while the young person is a client and after the young person stops being a client (see the policy Keeping and Destroying Records).
- must be shown to the young person on request (under privacy laws).

2. Casework: Casework files

If another agency wants the file to assist with their work with the young person, provide a copy (not the original), but only with the written, informed consent of the young person (see the policy Privacy: Disclosing personal information with consent).

Closing and disposing of a file

Before you close a file, check to ensure that it:

- has all necessary documents to record the services provided
- is not likely to be misleading at a later date or to another person
- has the most recent contact details known for the young person.

Record on the front of the file whether it is to be kept permanently or the date it should be destroyed (see the policy Keeping and Destroying Records).