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REPORT ON MEETING OF YOUTH WORKERS AND OTHERS

HELD AT JOHN OXLEY YOUTH CENTRE

ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH NOVEMBER, 1988

The meeting commenced at 10 a.m. Approximately 33 employees of John Oxley Youth Centre attended the meeting. These employees comprised Principal Youth Workers, Senior Youth Workers, Youth Workers and ancillary staff.

Mr. Ian Peers, Executive Director, Youth Services, Department of Family Services also attended the meeting and acted as Chairman.

The meeting had been organised by Mr. Michael Roch and other Youth Workers who had expressed concern at difficulties that Youth Workers were experiencing with the management of John Oxley Youth Centre and in particular, with the Manager, Mr. Peter Coyne.

Mr. Roch addressed the meeting on problems between Youth Workers and senior management. Mr. Roch said that some of the problems that existed included:-

1. Low morale of staff;
2. high level of overtime;
3. high turnover of staff.

Mr. Roch suggested that a committee be formed to investigate these matters.

Mr. Peers as Chairman, suggested that the meeting air its grievances. He suggested that discussion on any matters raised be along the following format.

1. What do the problems seem to be?
2. What are the most likely causes?
3. What things should be done to correct the problems?

1. Problems

The following problems were identified by those present:-

- Organisational needs seem to be getting attention over individual needs.
- Lack of balance of organisation.
- Lack of consultation, e.g. shift changes.
- Some people feel the need to talk to non-wing staff.
- Sometimes the staff are not compatible and this is not considered.
- Deliberate attempt to put incompatible people together.
- Stressful to work with new people and getting worse.
- New appointees are required to function immediately.
- Youth Workers not clear where Centre is headed and how changes will affect Youth Workers; i.e. Youth Workers can't see "the big picture".
- Unclear what definition of a "good" Youth Worker is at John Oxley Youth Centre.
- John Oxley Youth Centre seems different from other Centres in philosophy and approach and is more demanding than other Centres.
- There is an expectation to get more involved in programmes, but that intrudes into personal time for preparation as there are no planning opportunities in work time.
- Need for some personal time/space during a shift.
- Overtime demands are excessive and sustained; consequently people feel obliged to work overtime.
- Youth Workers highly stressed and run down.
- Accusations by children about staff.
- Youth Workers don't feel supported by management.

2. Causes

- A lot of changes made and not enough time to adapt.
- Delays in appointment of Senior Youth Workers.
- Lack of decision-making and inconsistency of management.
- Inexperience of Acting Senior Youth Workers.
- Roles are unclear particularly with inversion of decision-making process.
- Lack of clarity about new decision-making model and whether it actually works in practice.
- Some Youth Workers retain old ways. If Youth Worker is paramount, then Youth Worker needs support and nurturing into new role.
- Authority and responsibility must go together.
- Lack of trust/goodwill in management undermines change process.
- Lack of clarity about remuneration/courses.
- Lack of education about Youth Workers' Award.
- Youth Workers unclear on how, should, or whether breaks be taken.
- Demands on management re building and staffing takes attention away from staff.
- Perceived expectations of programmes differ as different people expect different things.
- Some people are into consultation, whereas others engage into authority/hierarchy.
- People unsure what ills are. Some people require direction.

3. Requirements

- Team building and interpersonal skills development.
- Teams need to be small and identifiable within larger teams.
- How to form effective partnerships quickly.

- Look at rostering and team formation.
- Clear aims and objectives for the Centre between management and Youth Workers.
- Clarification of roles i.e., who is responsible for what.
- Definitions required.
- Review of role differentiation, i.e., security vs. programmes.
- Performance appraisal.
- New staff should be "extras" until trained.
- New staff need training before they assume full duties.
- Team liaison meetings should be regular at an agreed time and to be used as a problem-solving form.
- Establish cross sectional problem-solving group (agenda items for next team liaison meeting).
- Professional development courses. Courses should be available for all staff.

Conclusion

Mr. Peers indicated that it was evident that problems existed among Youth Workers with management and that it would be necessary to resolve these problems.

Mr. Peers said that in relation to the non-appointment of senior staff, the Department proposed to appoint officers to the Senior Youth Worker positions in the near future.

It was also suggested that a suitable date for a team liaison meeting should be arranged as soon as possible.

The meeting concluded at 2.30 p.m.

Submitted for information purposes.


B.G. MANN,
ACTING SENIOR INDUSTRIAL OFFICER.


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