



Implementing effective support and supervision in the youth work setting

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Implementing effective
support and supervision
in the youth work setting





Curriculum Development Unit
in Partnership with YouthAction Northern Ireland,
University of Ulster Community Youth Work Team, Magee
and Girls' Brigade Northern Ireland.

January 2014

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Foreword

A number of key themes emerged throughout the Quality Assurance Process which prompted the Curriculum Development Unit and youth work sector partners to respond by organising a series of seminars. The Support and Supervision Seminar is the second in the series.

The Support and Supervision Seminar took place in Belfast and Derry in October 2013. This booklet is written to complement the Seminar.

We hope that this booklet supports and motivates those who attended the seminar and encourages others involved in supervision.

We wish to extend our thanks to Gail Neill who facilitated the Support and Supervision Seminar and has written the booklet.

Copies of the Reflective Practice Booklet and further copies of Implementing Effective Support & Supervision Booklet are available from CDU.



Noel & Leighann would like to thank the organizing committee:

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CDU
CDU

Introduction



Gail Neill

The Implementing Effective Support and Supervision Seminar was presented in October 2013 by Gail Neill. The seminar was organised by The Curriculum Development Unit in partnership with YouthAction, Girls' Brigade and the University of Ulster at Magee. The seminar provided an opportunity for youth and community workers to explore support and supervision, as an aspect of the Quality Assurance Framework connected to developing youth work practice, developing people and developing the organisation.

The seminar aimed to support workers explore and evaluate the current mechanisms that exist within their organisations that provide support and supervision to staff and volunteers. In order to consider best practice a range of theory and key support and supervision literature was presented. Case studies were also used as a means of testing theories alongside the realities of everyday work and practice; and finally peer learning, through small group discussion, was built in to the day as a means of supporting workers make the connections between what was being presented and the specifics of their own particular youth work setting.

Furthermore this peer learning approach created a space for participants to highlight other mechanisms, beyond what had been presented, that could be employed within their specific settings.

The aim was that workers could -

- Identify core elements of outcome focused supervision,
- Consider theory and practice of supervision in the youth work setting, and
- Explore a range of tools and models that can be used within the supervision process.

Support & Supervision: opportunities for growth and learning

Love it, hate it or simply doing it because you have to, support and supervision elicits a range of responses from the supervisor and indeed the supervisee. How an individual feels about and approaches support & supervision and the value they place on it will be fuelled, in part, by their experiences of it thus far (whether as supervisor or supervisee). The ethos and systems of their particular centre or organisation will also impact on how useful and central they consider this aspect of their work to be. Having spoken with a range of practitioners and volunteers about their experiences of support & supervision these generally tend to fall under one of the following categories: -

Extremely beneficial: Individuals note those times, when as workers, they have been greatly supported through the support & supervision relationship. Here they have been encouraged to look at the big picture of their practice, reminded not to take things personally, while having the strengths that they bring to their role highlighted. They note that this approach encourages them to see the value of their contribution while looking for new ways of developing and growing. Within this structure individuals feel valued and supported and in turn feel that they can be honest and open about the good and not so good aspects of the work. Within this environment successes can be shared but there is also attention given to the 'disasters' that workers face; here 'failure' is not glossed over but rather is viewed as an opportunity to reflect, learn and grow.

Frustrating: This kind of support & supervision was marked by irregular, often unannounced and poorly prepared sessions. Here it was felt a supervisor, with very little direction, would expect a

deep and meaningful reflective realisation on the part of the worker. These ad hoc sessions often lacked creativity, could be hit or miss in terms of their usefulness, and were often interrupted by phone calls or cancelled due to other meetings. The uncertainty surrounding these times and the lack of direction within the meetings left staff and volunteers feeling uninspired, unmotivated and at times out on their own.

Stressful: These were the planned in advance sessions that involved lots of proformas, templates or other associated paperwork. The focus was often linked to targets, budgets, job descriptions and organisational outputs that had the power to fill a worker with a sense of impending doom! These meetings were dominated by a clear sense of hierarchy and marked power differentials that left workers feeling that their job might be on the line if they didn't tick all the boxes in the right order and at the right time. Here staff noted that as a result, they approached these sessions as a sort of interview where they would present their strengths while avoiding any mention of those areas not going so well.

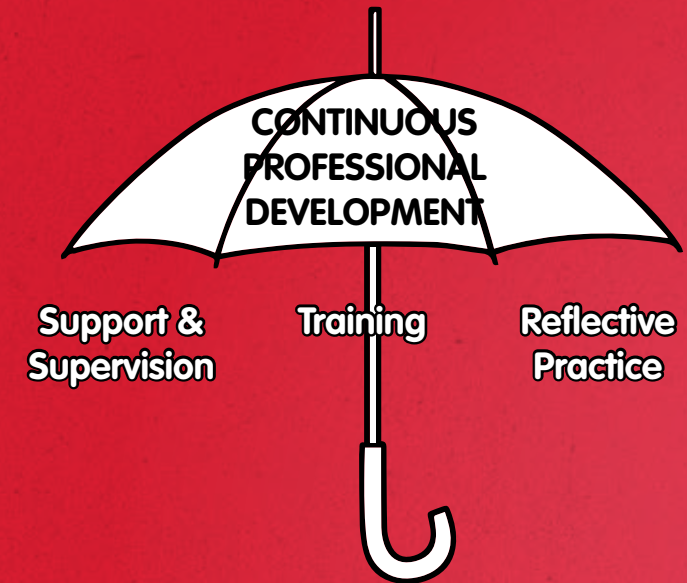


A brief background and theory to support & supervision

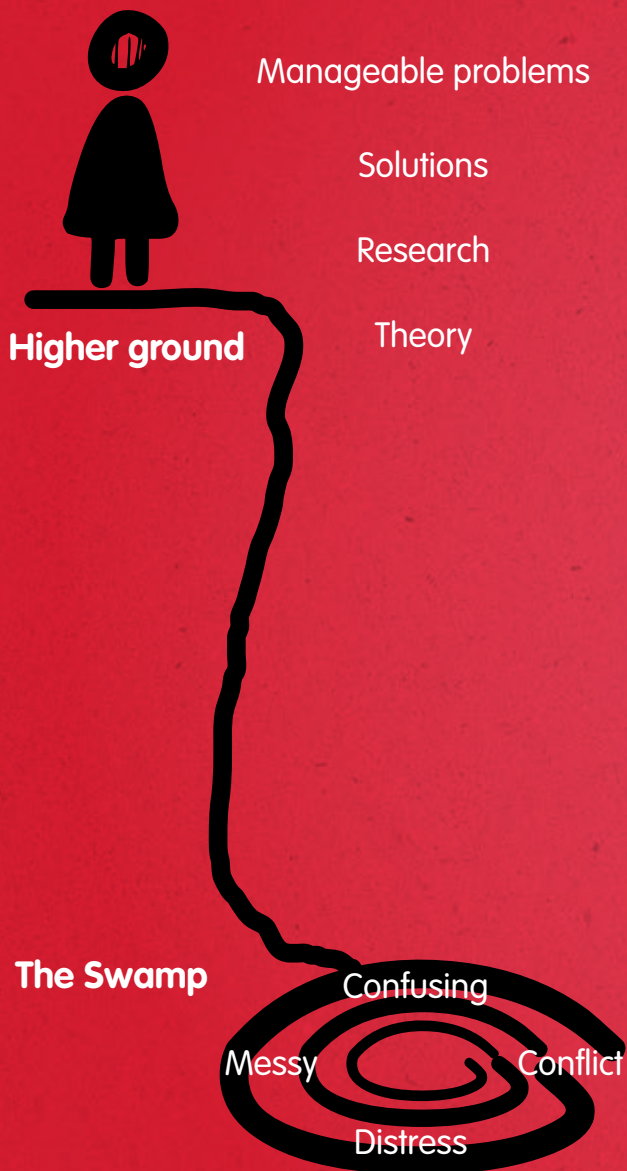
While support & supervision has taken various forms in youth work settings over the years it was not until the 1980s when support & supervision became more mainstream. In part it was fuelled by calls for increased professionalization amongst those who worked with those considered 'vulnerable' (either due to their age or life circumstances). Support & supervision was a way of managing that allowed for work to be measured against the policies, procedures and ethos of the organisation. Responding to an increased awareness of a libellous culture that brought the work and neglect of many professions and organisations to media attention, support & supervision was a tool that allowed more senior staff to have a closer insight into the daily practice and engagement of workers. So while support & supervision was in part a mechanism of management the focus was not entirely around greater control and accountability of staff and volunteers. Support & supervision also became a means of providing support to workers at a time when the role of the worker and the significance of youth work as a profession was developing;

workers were now facing increasingly complex and emerging situations and doing so alongside other professions. Parallel to the supportive element that support & supervision offered there was also a growing recognition of the value it could bring in affording continuous learning and development for staff and volunteers through guided reflection with a supervisor. Reflecting and learning in this way offered staff and volunteers the chance to be more self aware through exploring and developing appropriate responses to the issues raised daily from within their practice.

While support & supervision may have emerged as a response to calls for increased control and accountability of staff and volunteers, today there is a greater appreciation of the value that this can also bring to the work as a result of providing support and opportunities for on the job learning, growth and development. Support & supervision, alongside training and reflective practice, is central to the on-going process of development for staff and volunteers.



“Ideally, however, support and supervision should be one facet of an organisations overall commitment to enhance learning and individual accountability”.
(Harrison & Wise, 2005: 217).



Learning in the 'swamp': supporting staff make sense of the messiness of the work.

As highlighted earlier support & supervision is not simply about working within organisational systems but rather about recognising the need for and providing space to deal with the complexity of the work. Youth work by its very nature can be unknown, ever changing, challenging and at times disturbing. The individual worker encounters many experiences and individuals that can test their ability and leave them questioning the actions they opted on. American academic Donald Schon suggested that it was the ability of the individual to reflect on action, as a means of continuous learning, that was a defining characteristic of professional practice. He used the analogy of high ground and low lands to explain the need for reflective approaches to learning when working with people.

Within this analogy the highlands represent those areas of practice where staff and volunteers encounter particular situations that can be dealt with by drawing upon the policies and procedures of the organisation. The areas faced here

are not problem free but they are, most likely, the areas that have been covered during induction, training or by having a general understanding of the ethos of the organisation. Having this knowledge to draw from supports the worker to take action, confident that they are doing so in the 'right' (agreed or approved) manner; armed with this knowledge and confidence, workers can stand firm on the high ground.

The swamp (lowlands) on the other hand illustrates those areas of practice where staff and volunteers encounter unique and complex situations, as Harrison and Wise note that "*human problems cannot be solved by the simple application of technical solutions... people's problems are far too complex and messy to be resolved in this way*" (2005:196).

These confusing, chaotic and grey areas of their work are those that are often not covered in training or highlighted within staff handbooks. Here workers are confronted with the distress of human to human encounters and where there are no standard responses, rules or guidelines to direct them. It is within the swamp that workers are expected to use 'common sense' as their guide book and as a result workers can feel unsure,

unsupported and left on their own to deal with the situations and people they encounter.

Whether working as a paid member of staff or as a volunteer much of the youth workers time will be spent in the swamp. Hawkins and Shohet note “*distress, disturbance, fragmentation and need*” as some of the difficulties that workers can encounter there (2006: 182). They go on to note that when this is met by an empathic worker they too can “experience parallel distress and sometime disturbance and fragmentation within themselves” (ibid). It is important therefore that workers are not only supported (through support & supervision) in surviving the distress of the swamp but also have opportunities to make sense of and learn as a result of what they are encountering there (through reflective practice). As Atherton notes, “*supervision is the process of reflecting on what you are doing with the help of another, in order you do it better*” (cited in Pritchard, 1995: 178). This swamp analogy illustrates the mutual relationship between reflective practice (learning in areas where you have received no formal learning) and support and supervision (supporting workers to survive and make sense of

these encounters). These two not only go hand in hand but also add strength to the significance of the other.

Furthermore Harrison and Wise note,

“...youth workers are not specialists, they are the last of the generalists and they should be proud of this. Educational establishments such as schools, colleges and universities offer fixed curriculum and a system that takes the learners through it. Youth work is different, youth work starts where young people are at...” (2005: 14).

In light of the breadth of work covered by youth workers and the depth and complexity of what they encounter it is impossible that all can be adequately addressed before one starts out in practice. In order to work more effectively therefore it is crucial that spaces are created where workers can continue to learn throughout their practice by reflecting on the situations that they are facing and developing informed, professional judgements and decisions that allow them to take action in those areas where they previously received little or no training or direction.

Support and supervision can support the staff member or volunteer to

- take action when there is no rule/ guide book
- take action based on ‘common sense’ (informed thought based on previous professional discussion)
- act and work in a way that best represents the organisation
- to feel supported in the actions they take.



Bingo!

Participants were given the opportunity to list all the words and phrases that they linked to support & supervision into a bingo card. This little energiser exercise, intended only to summarise the morning input, offered a real insight into the value that people afforded supervision but also the hurdles that they faced in making this effective within their youth work setting. Little did anyone realise just how competitive the groups could be; whether motivated by winning, their previous experiences of bingo or the star prizes that were on offer, the competition was fierce! Below are just a few illustrative comments from the groups.



Learning	Growth	Safety
Venting	Difficult	Off line
Management	Ad hoc	Feedback

What support & supervision looks like can be as varied as the responses to the Bingo game; the focus of the work, the makeup of staff teams and the structure of the organisation will all shape what support & supervision looks like and how it is implemented in various settings. Harrison and Wise note that it can be a reflection of what is happening at a wider organisation level; for example “rigid policies and procedures, by form filling and checklists” or it can appear “unstructured and informal...and easy-going” (2005: 217). It is dangerous and misleading to present a one size fits all model of support & supervision. How it looks should take into consideration all the unique and particular points raised above and should reflect your organisation rather than imposing a fixed model that may not respond to the specifics of your setting.



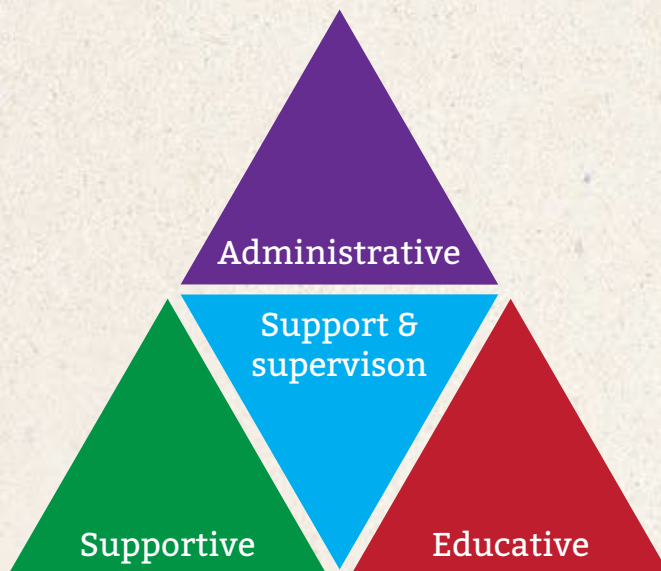
So while it may vary in how it is implemented the literature is fairly consistent with regards to what the aim of support & supervision should be. It is about:

- Recognising the value of the people working or volunteering within organisations
- Supporting staff and volunteers as they encounter and deal with ever changing, complex issues
- Providing regular check ins with staff and volunteers to consider their practice alongside organisational procedures
- Offering on-going feedback, challenge and encouragement (Martel, 2005).

Support and supervision promotes the ‘best interests of the client’ (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006: 57)

Models of Support & Supervision

So while the implementation of and procedures surrounding support & supervision may vary from organisation to organisation there are a number of models that can be considered when designing centre or agency specific bespoke approaches. Kadushin (1976) is one of the key thinkers in relation to the area of support & supervision and many since have drawn on his work to develop subsequent methods and tools. He notes that there are three key areas that support & supervision should attend to. These include:



Administrative - (often called managerial by others writing in this area) is concerned with “*sharing responsibility for work standards and practice*” (Harrison and Wise, 2005). This aspect is focused on ensuring that work being undertaken is done so in a way that reflects the “*philosophies, policies and priorities*” of the agency (ibid). Here a workers practice is measured against agencies policies, agreed goals, tasks and organisational standards. Within this aspect of support & supervision the supervisor has some responsibility to “*ensure that the work of their supervisee is appropriate and falls within defined ethical standards*” (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006: 58).

Educative - is focused on “identifying and developing skills, knowledge and attitudes in relation to the work” through reflection, professional discussion and the identification of further training (ibid). Here the focus is on learning through reflecting on one’s individual practice (done through reflective conversations and/or set tasks and recordings). Alongside developing learning through reflecting on their practice this aspect helps individuals

identify those strengths that they bring to their work and how these can be maximised alongside those areas that can be further developed through training.

Supportive - is concerned with providing staff and volunteers with the space where they can acknowledge and release, through purposeful dialogue, some of the pressure they are facing as a result of their everyday practice. As a result of giving time and attention to some of the pressures the worker faces they can subsequently feel more understood and supported. This aspect of support & supervision focuses on them as a worker; how they are feeling, areas where they struggle with and what measures can be implemented to further support them.



While the model above is presented as a triangle where all three aspects are of equal size, Harrison and Wise warn that at times not all areas are attended to or will receive equal attention. They state that “it is often the case that the triangle becomes skewed, with more emphasis placed on one aspect of the process than the other two” (Harrison & Wise, 2005:221). In the reality of everyday practice, where deadlines, goals and funding regularly dominate it is hardly surprising that practitioners note that it is the supportive aspect of the triangle that often gets least attention or is sidelined in light of more ‘important’ and pressing matters within the administrative aspect of the model. Harrison and Wise note that while it may not always be possible for all three areas to be given equal attention on every occasion, it is important to review the balance offered to ensure that support & supervision does not become restricted to one area or that a particular aspect is skipped on a regular basis.

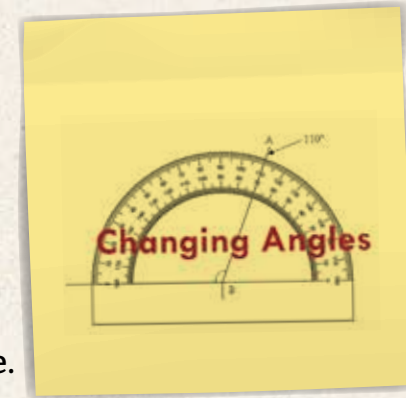
While not providing a model structure as such, Harrison and Wise (2005) highlight the following headlines as core aspects of the support & supervision process. They state that the focus should be on providing the staff member or volunteer with new or enhanced way of exploring their work.



Changing angles

- Here the role of the supervisor is to look at the particular situation being presented by the worker from a different perspective. In changing angles Harrison and

Wise note that it can offer “... a new perspective with fresh insight” (2005: 202). The worker can benefit from seeing their practice from a different perspective or view point. The supervisor is not being prescriptive in their feedback or necessarily offering solutions but rather provides a new way of looking at the situation that may in turn support the worker in drawing new conclusions or solutions for themselves.



“Good supervision increases the ability of the team to contain pressure, stress and disturbance” (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006: 184).

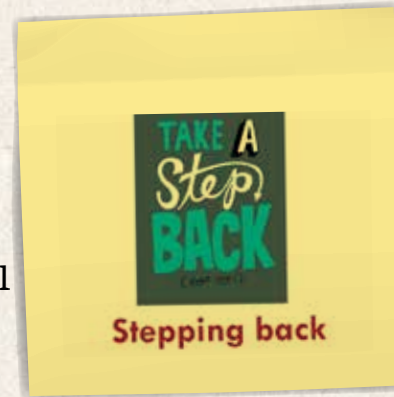
Developing a vision - This aspect focuses on creating a vision and agreeing how that vision will be realised through a partnership

approach (supervisee and supervisor). Here the focus is on developing a shared vision around the purpose, intention and overall goal or aspiration of the work; where workers articulate where things are, where they would like to take them and how that development will take place. This is goal orientated and focuses on moving things forward using a partnership approach to the work. This is in stark contrast to how workers often feel coming out of a supervision session (for example “with just another list of things to do”). Using this approach, the goal is clear and there is an understanding of the role that they and others have in achieving this; here the vision is shared and the worker plays a part in its realisation.



Stepping back - With clear links to the supportive element of the Kadushin model this aspect is concerned with helping the worker

step back from the situations they are encountering and take some time out. Harrison and Wise (2005) note that this is important in order that potentially difficult situations do not overly impact on an individual’s understanding of their work more generally. For example when faced with a potentially hostile or emotive issues it can be the case that a worker loses perspective as the intensity of the situations casts a shadow over the work, people and/or agency more generally. This can result in staff and volunteers becoming despondent, unmotivated and feeling ineffective. Having a supervisor to help you step back can help you gain perspective and consider that the issues, problems or people that are currently dominating your horizon as a worker are but part of the picture rather than a reflection of the whole work place horizon.



Letting go - The fourth aspect noted by Harrison and Wise (2005) is concerned with supporting individuals recognise those things that

are beyond their control (for example funding, organisations policies or structures). When these become the sole focus support & supervision can become increasingly draining for all involved. Rather support & supervision can be a place where the worker is supported in accepting the balance between those areas where change and movement can be realised and those areas that are larger, longer term matters for the organisation or agency. While it is important to acknowledge those areas that are causing stress for workers it is also important to let go (give less attention or focus) to those areas where an individual has very little control. It may also be the case that rather than being left to feel helpless as a result of letting go that workers and supervisors can be tasked with identifying small mechanisms or measures that can limit the distress the worker is experiencing.



Joan Tash (1967) was a significant commentator in the area of supervision within youth work practice. She emphasised the significance of supervision as a forum for learning. Rather than presenting a support & supervision model she illustrated possible learning outcomes that can result from supervision.

Outcome Learning from practice -

Acknowledging that all learning for work with people cannot take place in the classroom this approach recognised and placed value on '*on the job*' learning that can happen as a result of reflecting on ones work. Here workers are equipped, encouraged and supported to learn as a consequence of reflecting upon and evaluating their practice.

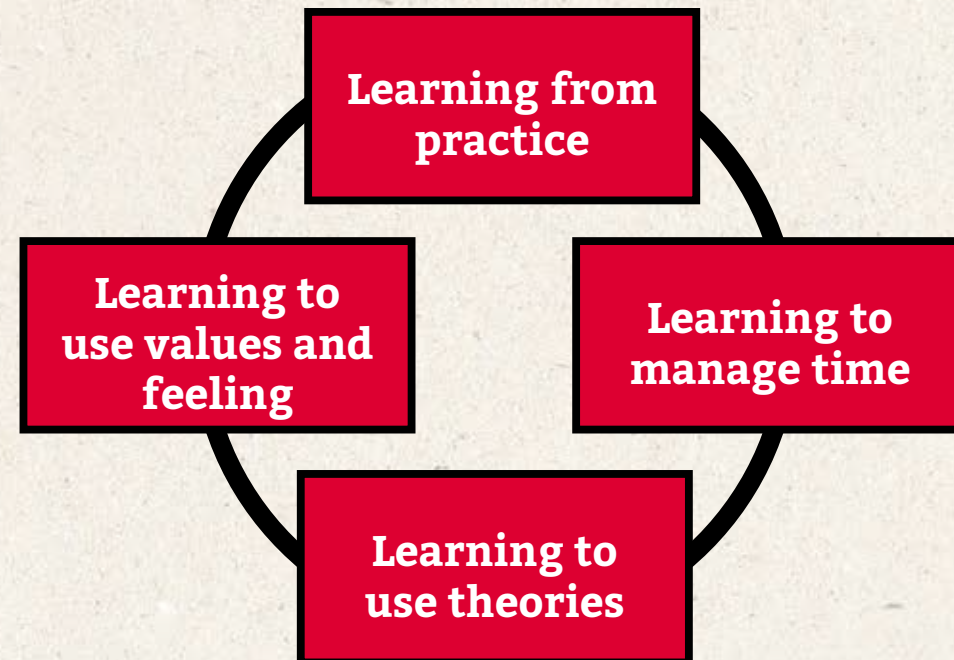
Outcome Learning to use values and feelings - Within youth work practice ones feelings and values can be a help and a hindrance. The worker needs a level of self awareness that will help them to consider the impact of self in their interactions with other. Supervision is one way that an individual can receive feedback in this area and can be challenged to explore and learn more within this particular aspect.

Outcome Learning to use theories -

Whether through the application of grand theory or smaller scale local research, here the aim is focused on supporting the workers learn through drawing on more traditional forms of information. Drawing on theories and research can offer the worker a greater understanding and appreciation for the factors impacting upon and influencing their work.

Outcome Learning to manage time -

Through discussion and work planning with their supervisor the worker can identify priority areas and work within agreed goals and deadlines. The goal is that workers learn to work efficiently within organisational policies and procedures.



Hawkins & Smith (2006) developed the **CLEAR** Model of Supervision: a staged model that illustrates some of the typical phases of a support & supervision process

Contract - Whether at the outset of the entire process or at the beginning of each session, 'contract' is highlighted as a means of ensuring that attention is given to and there is agreement around the anticipated outcomes, the purpose and focus of the sessions and an understanding of the basic ground rules for meeting and working together.

Listen - While this may seem a most basic inclusion in any model, Hawkins & Smith (2006) note the importance of active listening. The value of listening in a way that helps identify the issues, that communicates that you have grasped their reality and which enables the supervisor to frame a session based on these issues is what can turn a casual chat into an effective support & supervision session.

Explore - Through questioning, listening and reflection it is the joint exploration by supervisor and supervisee that can generate new insight and awareness. It is through this shared approach that new and different options for handling a situation, person or problem can be identified.

Action - Within this model there is a clear sense of listening to the supervisee but also, through exploration, of moving things on. Having explored the situation this phase concentrates on agreeing actions that might move the identified situation forward. In order to limit the stagnation that can result from talking over the same problem or situation repeatedly, steps (large or smaller scale) are agreed by both parties that ensure an action focus within the sessions.

Review - The final phase, like the first, can be done at the end of the overall process or at the end of each meeting. Here the supervisor and supervisee review those actions that have been agreed, reflect on the process so far and evaluate the usefulness of the sessions. This phase ensures that neither party becomes complacent or gets caught within a system that no longer is meeting their needs or goals.

Key components of effective support & supervision

Alongside models that can provide the would-be supervisor with some direction regarding what areas can be covered within support & supervision there are other components of supervision that should also be considered.

Agreeing clear aims, roles and outcomes for these meetings – Harrison and Wise (2006) note that while “your organisation might have appraisals and performance reviews ... these have different purposes and need to be distinguished carefully from the supervisory process” (2005: 220). In order for staff to be open and non-defensive support & supervision should not be set up in such a way that disclosing, as a way of learning and self-awareness, is viewed as a weakness that will be used against them at some stage. It is important therefore from the outset, and repeated at various stages throughout the process, that the aims, purpose and outcomes of the sessions are repeated.

Preparation - While some organisations and agencies have pro-formas that are completed in advance of support & supervision sessions this is not the case for all. It is important therefore that

thought is given to how discussion and reflection will be stimulated, whether through on the spot reflective exercises, or through pre-assigned tasks or ‘homeworks’ etc. It is important to take consideration of the learning styles and preferences of those you supervise; not everyone will respond well to being asked to simply reflect on the spot or to write up a lengthy report. Using a mixed methods approach from time to time should be considered as a means of keeping people engaged and avoiding the monotony that can result from repeated use of the same methods.

Openness to feedback – The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee plays a major role in the success and effectiveness of the support & supervision process. The quality of this relationship is integral in ensuring openness and frankness towards feedback. Care and attention should be given to maintaining a healthy working relationship between both parties.

Ability to ask for what you need – Creating an environment where both parties can ask for what they need has been highlighted as a marker of an

effective support & supervision process. If the supervisee feels that they have no say in what is done during these sessions or if the supervisor feels that they have to magically bring the sessions to life without the supervisees involvement then support & supervision could be set up to fail. Allowing the supervisee a say over what happens during the session can help invest them in the process as well as responding to their needs (for example “can we use this particular method of reporting next month, I liked the more visual aspect of the tasks we used previously” etc). Likewise it is important that the supervisor can highlight what they need from the supervisee in order for the sessions to be more effective (eg “I have prepared some material but in order for us to get the most of it, your participation is really vital”).

Time and space – The time and space that is given to support & supervision sessions can be a real indicator of the value that has been afforded to it (or if not the case, it can certainly be perceived that way). In order to value the process it is important that these sessions are regular, not cancelled at the last minute, and are given attention (not dealing

with other calls or staff members during these meetings). It may be the case that you consider conducting these meetings outside of your office as a way of giving greater attention to the supervisee.

Confidentiality - Again, in order to support an openness and honesty within the support & supervision process it is important that the supervisee is clear about what from the support & supervision meetings is shared, when and to whom. Harrison and Wise (2006) note that “it is not always possible to ensure the confidentiality that we would wish...” it is important therefore that supervisees are clear regarding the limits of confidentiality and the reporting processes.

Contracts – Drawing up a contract at the outset of the supervisory relationship and reviewing this throughout the process helps to outline and implement the parameters and purpose of the sessions; what both parties can expect from the process, highlights individual obligations, notes any reporting procedures, and responds to the hopes and fears of the supervisee.

The effective supervisor

Throughout the seminar the realities and pressures of support & supervision within everyday practice were discussed. Rather than setting unrealistic goals in the form of an ‘ideal supervisor’, participants considered some of the qualities or characteristics required of an effective supervisor.

Characteristics and qualities outlined within the literature include – Empathy; understanding; unconditional positive regard; congruence; genuineness, warmth, appropriate self disclosure, attention, concern, flexibility, investment and openness (See Rogers, 1956; Coche, 1977; Albott, 1984; Aldridge, 1982; Hess, 1980).



“When contracting with your supervisor, both parties need to have the opportunity to say how they see the purpose of the sessions, how much their expectations match, and look at their hopes and fears concerning the working relationship”
(Hawkins & Shohet, 2006: 34).

Structures of supervision

More often than not support & supervision takes place using a one to one format and is conducted by a line manager; this however does not always need to be the case. Following are some alternative structures that can be used when providing support & supervision to staff and volunteers.

Group Supervision - Using the group format to provide support and supervision to staff and volunteers. In this context the group (between 4 – 8 people) consists of people specifically coming together for support & supervision. This may be a group of students on placement, volunteers, or staff members in similar positions from across your organisation or agency. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) highlighting the following advantages of this approach to support & supervision –

- It can limit the power dynamics at play within traditional supervision formats.
- It can remove the role of “expert” from the supervisor and instead allows for peer learning and interaction. As a result individuals have noted feeling more supported and less judged or assessed.

- “...unlike one to one supervision the group provides a supportive atmosphere in which new staff or trainees can share their anxieties and realise that others had similar issues” (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006: 152).
- It can enable workers to develop problem solving skills and look less to their line manager for solutions.
- Using a group structure a range of possible ‘solutions’ for identified problems or issues can be developed.
- Can generate a greater sense of empathy from others who feel in similar positions to those who are presenting areas of concern.

There are also disadvantages or areas that will need consideration when using this approach –

- Group dynamics – managing these in order to create a safe space where individuals feel included
- Group processes - being aware of and facilitating during storming, acting out, power play etc phases of group development

- Participants lacking levels of self awareness (over sharing, dominating the space, talking over or down to others etc) may detract from a more general focus on all group members.
- Groups can establish strong norms and roles that can be hard to break. This can be very beneficial when these norms and roles are positive and affirmative but their management can become the sole task of the supervisor if unhelpful or unhealthy norms are developed.
- It can limit the time and attention that individuals might get; time management becomes central to the supervisors role.

It is important that group supervision does not replace regular one to one check ins that a staff member or volunteer will have with their line manager (individual management, educative and support issues, from time to time, will still need addressed).

Team Supervision - Is very similar to group supervision in format but consists of specific teams (for example staff or unit teams or geographical teams). The advantage and disadvantages

highlighted in group supervision should be considered for this approach to support & supervision also. Brown and Bourne (1996) raise the following points in relation to this technique.

- Team supervision can help motivate the team as successes can be celebrated and reflected upon. Conversely however this approach can be demotivating if there are few areas to celebrate if the focus is always on areas for development.
- It can offer a greater sense of team and team working (as members pull together, are united through similar issues and develop a greater sense of empathy etc); the reverse however can also be true.

Peer Supervision - Hawkins & Shohet note that when people are not receiving adequate support & supervision either due to time, ability or resource issues that they can look to set up their own. Within this format individuals identify what qualities and characteristics are currently missing within supervision and that individuals who have those particular skills are sought. They suggest that a peer or a peer triade can be beneficial.

While this approach responds directly to the self identified needs of the worker

Hawkins & Shohet note that without a clear leader or structure that the focus can get lost and therefore there is a greater accountability placed on the members to ensure the ongoing effective management of the group (2006). This form of supervision may not attend to the administrative aspect of support & supervision and line management may still be required in order to attend to the practical aspects of the workers role.

Off-line Supervision - Buys in additional support from outside the agency or organisation to provide support & supervision to staff and volunteers. This approach may be useful in the following cases -

- As part of a larger supportive and learning structure (to supplement existing mechanisms).
- When organisations are dealing with internal restructuring and staff and volunteers will be without support & supervision for some time or what will be offered will focus more heavily upon the everyday managerial aspect of the work rather than support or education elements.
- Fire-fighting scenarios like in the case of a supervisory relationship breaking down. Pritchard notes

off-line supervision as being able to offer an “objective view” at such times (1995: 183). Alternatively this form of supervision can be of benefit when internal politics are being played out between staff members and management that could limit the effectiveness of the supervisory relationship.

- At specific times for specific reasons. A short term injection of additional support to bulk up on-going support & supervision at a time of specific need.

Off-line supervision should not however relinquish the responsibilities of the line manager (who should be there to supervise and support the ongoing work). Off-line supervision is simply an added component that can be implemented when direct line supervision is not sufficient.



Key task of a supervisor...feedback

Hawkins and Shoet (2006) note that offering feedback to the supervisee is one of the key tasks of the supervisor. Highlighting five different styles for providing feedback they emphasize the importance of reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of your preferred style and the impact this can have on the supervisee.



1. Prescriptive - Giving advice, being directive and instructive (For example “you need to write a report on that” “you need to stand up to that particular individual” “this is what you need to do”). This approach can be very useful during times when a worker is unclear of how best to proceed in a particular situation or if they themselves have tried a number of different, unsuccessful, approaches. If, however, the supervisor uses this approach constantly it may limit the opportunities afforded to the worker to develop and have confidence in their own problem solving skills.

2. Informative - Being instructive, offering information (For example “this is how this particular system works” “you will find similar reports on this site” “That particular agency has similar research in that area”). Here the focus is on pointing the individual in the direction of relevant information that may help them deal with a particular situation rather than providing them with an answer or ‘solution’. If consistently used the worker may feel frustrated, that more work is created for them by a supervisor who appears to hint at rather than give an answer to the issues they are raising.

3. Confrontative - Providing challenge and direct feedback to the worker (For example “When you talk about a particular young person you laugh or roll your eyes, why is that?” “you appeared very angry when talking to that member of staff”). This approach can accelerate learning and self awareness by jumping directly to the issues as you perceive them. It is important however to be aware how often you use this particular style and how the worker responds; it can close down learning and damage relationships if a worker feels that they are ‘picked on’ through the supervisory process. An awareness of the individual and their possible reactions should be considered.

4. Cathartic - Asking questions that acknowledge the pressure that a worker might be facing; creating a space to release tension (For example “How is that situation making you feel?” “What else is going on for you at this time?”). This response can allow workers to ‘vent’ some of the frustration, confusion or disappointment they are facing. Framing questions in a manner that can allow workers to be open and honest about the difficulties they are facing.

5. Catalytic - Encouraging action and movement through personal reflection and discussion (For example “What might you do now to change the situation?” “What might be the consequences of taking those particular actions?”). Here the role of the supervisor is focused on providing the drive required to shift the situation from discussion to action. The supervisor holds back on telling the worker what they should do but instead facilitates them in thinking through possible scenarios and the impact of these. This approach places value on the skills of the worker and helps them develop action-focused, problem solving skills.

Each of the approaches highlighted have advantages and disadvantages; times when they are suitable and times when they should be avoided. Similarly the recipient of this particular approach to feedback will also have a significant impact on how effective the approach might be.

Thinking Hat - Reflect on the supervision that you currently offer - can you make links to any of these approaches? Which approaches do you use; which are you comfortable with or avoid?



*Hawkins & Shoet (2006)
note that feedback should
be - Clear, Owned, Regular,
Balanced, Specific*

Blocks to supervision

While beneficial, the implementation of support & supervision is not problem-free. Following are some of the potential blocks that the supervisor may encounter throughout the support & supervision process (see Hawkins & Shohet, 2006 for further information on this).

There is not scope within this paper to go into more detail regarding specific ways in which to address these blocks, it may be useful however to consider how you might address these within your own personal setting. To clear/address the blocks within my own organisations I will need to...



1. **Previous experience of supervision** - A previously bad experience of support & supervision can result in the supervisee being wary of supervision systems whereas a previously positive experience may leave the supervisee feeling that no one will be as equipped or effective as their previous supervisor. It might be useful to find out during the initial session their experiences of supervision in the past and those aspects that they found useful and those aspects which they did not enjoy.
2. **Personal inhibitions** - For a range of different reasons the supervisee may feel hesitant to engage in the support & supervision process; this can manifest in a range of responses and defensive routines. These can include
 - **The pre-packed approach** “Things might look a little messy but I’ve actually got it all sorted”.
 - **The information flooding approach** “You don’t understand – here are all the details”. This can result in all the focus being on replaying the particular situation and little time given to identifying or agreeing any action.

- **Energetic denial of any need for supervision** “This is not really new to me...I’m familiar with that already....I’ve already tried that”. Seeing supervision as a training ground for apprentices’ can make some people reluctant to engaging with the process; they feel that they have nothing new to learn or more specifically nothing new to learn from you.
- **The self flagellation approach** Here an individual falls into the trap of magnifying their own shortcoming – “I know I’ve made a mess, I just never get this right”. The excessive focus on those areas that have not gone so well can strip the confidence of the worker and create a negative learning environment that requires the supervisor consistently providing positive feedback as a means of building the confidence of the worker.
- **Fault finding or nitpicking approach** “You make a good point but that would never work with this particular client” “This situation really is a special case; you’ll have dealt with nothing like

this before". Here the supervisee is unable to accept any instruction or suggestion, but rather focuses on why these particular suggestions will not work.

- **The displacing of the problem in supervision on to the supervisor**

"No, I'm fine with how things are panning out, are you not happy?" Here the worker denies any issues raised and instead transfers these back onto the supervisor (Gilbert & Evans 2000).

3. Difficulties in handling authority -

Supervision may become blocked if a worker, for whatever reason, finds it difficult to deal with authority. This may result in them working to 'prove' themselves or being overly critical of themselves as a defence mechanism; either response is not helpful within the supervisory relationship. It is important therefore to remind the supervisee that the purpose of support & supervision is not to "insult or criticise the worker" (Adirondack, 1990 cited in Pritchard, 1995: 178).

4. Role Conflict -

Confusion around the roles being fulfilled and the relation (too close or too distant) between the two parties can hinder support &

supervision. If the person providing supervision is a colleague this can feel to close and lead to specific problems (for example, not taking things seriously, doubting levels of confidentiality or feeling like it's a place to gossip) and likewise if the person providing supervision is too senior this too can create its own problems (for example the supervisee doubting the ability of the senior worker to fully understand the realities of work on the ground or feeling the need to impress the senior staff member by highlighting the positive aspects of the work only).

5. Assessment -

Any linking of the support & supervision process to appraisals or performance reviews can have a major impact on the willingness of the worker to be open and honest regarding their practice; as the issues raised during their honest reflection in support & supervision may be reason for them being penalised during part of any reviews that take place. It is crucial therefore that workers are aware of the link, if any, between support & supervision and other tracking, monitoring or probationary systems.

6. Difficulties in receiving support -

For a range of reasons the worker may find it difficult to receive feedback and this can limit the effectiveness of support & supervision. They may feel that they are being offered support because others feel that they are not up to the job themselves, or that someone is trying to take over their role or that they are being corrected; all of these can confine their ability to receive support.

7. Organisational blocks -

Practical arrangements can also result in blocking support & supervision; issues around time, money, resources, changing personnel, location of offices and internal recording systems all need to be considered.



Conclusions

Within the seminar the following key points of conclusion were drawn:

- Regardless of what some people think, a professional qualification does not “magically bestow[s] the ability to operate successfully... without feedback” (Harrison & Wise, 2005: 216). Support & supervision is a key learning tool and beneficial to those at every level within your particular setting.
- There are a range of tools and models that can be used to create effective support & supervision; regular review and evaluation of how efficient your current systems are is important.
- Support & supervision prepares workers for the ‘messiness’ of real youth work; it can leave them better equipped to take appropriate action on those areas not covered in the ‘rule book’.
- Support & supervision is a structural means of upholding standards, exchanging information, and enabling skills development to be targeted to the agencies objectives (Browne & Bourne, 1996).
- Supervision for the supervisor is essential.
- Supervision is an essential component of quality assurance.

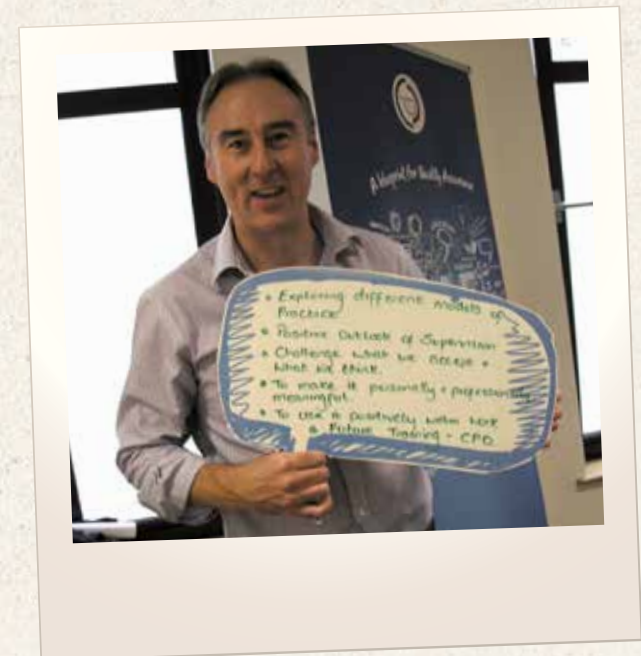
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Thank you for attending and contributing to the seminar

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