

PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION, WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

Recent research undertaken with the community sector on behalf of the Waikato Professional Supervision Strategy Working Party¹ found that while there is clear understanding of the need for clinical supervision for practitioners there was limited understanding of both the importance of professional supervision in the context of community sector employees overall or of good practice guidelines for choosing a supervisor.

One outcome of the research has been the development of this set of guidelines that both demonstrate the benefits and outline the process for undertaking effective and appropriate supervision.

What is it?

Professional supervision is an interpersonal interaction with the general goal that one person, the supervisor, meets with another, the supervisee in an effort to make the latter more effective in helping people (Hawkins and Shohet, 2000²). Supervision is one of the processes used in community organisations to ensure workers are accountable and are encouraged to develop their skills, abilities and analysis. Supervisors oversee and support the work of supervisees in a way which allows the supervisees to reflect critically on their work and to make changes where necessary.

Why do it?

Supervision supports the supervisee;

- To develop skills and strategies
- To clarify roles and responsibilities
- To develop professionally and meet professional objectives
- To provide consistent quality of service delivery
- To identify and manage stress
- To discuss and work to resolve challenges and issues in a safe environment

Finding the right supervisor

Often people hear about potential supervisors through recommendations of colleagues. Many supervisors advertise in the yellow pages and through various organisations, such as counselling organisations, community houses and so on.

Knowing what you want and what to look for when choosing a professional supervisor is vital to achieving a great outcome for supervision.

It is important that the supervisor has knowledge and/ or experience of the tangata whenua community and voluntary sector, its culture, diversities and complexities relevant to the supervisees job.

As there is no minimum qualification for professional supervisors the working party suggests that the supervisor you choose belongs to a professional body such as the NZ Association of Counsellors, NZ Association of Social Workers, NZ Association of Psychotherapists, the NZ Nurses Organisation or similar association and also holds an additional qualification in professional supervision. Do not be afraid to ask a potential supervisor what qualifications and membership they hold as this is an investment in your organisation.

It is important that individual needs are met within a supervision relationship. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand models have been developed which ...

'...create a mode of supervision in which practitioners of a certain ethnicity are supported to practice within a supervision process that is grounded in spiritual, traditional and coherent theoretical understandings congruent with a unique worldview. Culture becomes the overarching environment of supervision' (Beddoe and Egan 2009 cited in Davys and Beddoe 2010 page 18)³.

Supervision contracts

The working party suggests that as the employer pays for professional supervision and that professional supervision is concerned with employee replenishment, review, reflection on work practice and professional development and adherence to agency policy and procedure and protocol determined by legislative requirements, a three way agreement should be signed between the supervisor, employee (supervisee) and the employer.

Confidentiality between supervisor and supervisee will not be compromised as long as limits to confidentiality are agreed to by all parties. An employer does need to know when there are serious issues affecting the employee's practice with clients.

The supervisor will instigate the negotiation of a three way agreement or contract which can include;

- The responsibility of each party to the agreement ,
- Objectives; negotiated between the 3 parties and agreed to,
- The frequency of sessions,
- The cost , including GST- who pays, how and when,
- The time, place and duration of sessions,
- The purpose and goals of supervision including professional development for the supervisee,
- The term of the agreement,
- The process regarding mediation if a conflict arises e.g. identifying a neutral party to assist if necessary,
- The process to be followed in case of safety issues,
- Confidentiality and its limits,
- Reciprocal cultural respect,
- The availability of the supervisor in times of crisis around issues of safety,
- Notice of cancellation of a session,
- The role of the agency,
- Expectations of both supervisor and supervisee,
- Who will keep notes on the supervision sessions,
- Comment on the informal processes that may be used between supervision sessions or to augment formal supervision.

Commonly asked questions:

Q. Is the supervisor getting professional supervision?

A. Everyone who is a professional supervisor should get regular professional supervision.

Q. How do I know if I will get on with my supervisor?

A. It is essential to establish rapport and connection with your supervisor before beginning a working relationship. Many supervisors will offer the first session free of charge in order to establish that rapport.

Q. Is it a good idea to change my supervisor from time to time?

A. An effective supervisor provides support while focusing on reflection and exploration of the practitioner's work with clients. The supervisor creates an environment that will sustain learning while still monitoring the professionalism of the supervisee's work. If your supervisor is not doing this and sessions are becoming too comfortable or your needs are changing, you may wish to review your options in line with your supervision agreement.

Q. I live in a small town where everyone knows each other.

A. If you do not feel comfortable having supervision with someone who lives/works in the same town as you, ask your employer to factor travel costs into the wages and supervision budget and funding applications. Many practitioners travel out of their town for supervision in order to establish boundaries and ensure confidentiality.

Q. What can the employer expect to pay for supervision?

A. Charges can range from \$80 per session to \$180 per session. The working party suggests a fair charge is a fee between \$90 plus GST and \$120 plus GST per session depending on the size and budget of the agency.

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²Hawkins, P. and Shohet, R. (2000) (2nd edition) Supervising in the Helping Professions. An individual group and organisational approach. Milton Keynes, OU.

³Davys, A.M., & Beddoe, L. (2010) . Best Practice in Professional Supervision; a Guide for the Helping Professions. London: Jessica Kingsley.



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