

Disability Services Queensland

delivering quality services and
building supportive communities

Child Safety Research Forum: DSQ/DChS MOU



Queensland Government
Disability Services Queensland



Overview

Working in partnership
Successful inter-agency collaboration
Challenges
MOU: communication; transition from care
Practice guidelines
Joint training



Working in partnership

Child protection as a whole-of-government responsibility

Prevention and early intervention vs statutory intervention

Areas of expertise

Partnerships as pre-requisites for collaboration



Definitions and models of interagency collaboration

Inter-agency collaboration: a specific type of partnership that focuses on the capacity of the partners to deliver/achieve a common goal or purpose

Practice is often difficult to achieve and maintain

Elements of successful interagency collaboration ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Robinson, Rosenberg, Steel and Stainbeck (2003)



Elements of successful interagency collaboration:

Recognition and definition

Clear concrete goals

Effective informal relationships

Policies and procedures

Training

Collaboration perceived as mutually beneficial

Shared responsibility

Coordination



Recognition and definition

There must be a shared recognition of the need for collaboration (not just lip service)

There must be a shared definition of the meaning of partnership (ie of the necessity for a combination of expertise, knowledge and resources)



Clear concrete goals

These form the basis of successful collaboration

Goals need to be formalised

There is a need to ensure interpretations are shared

**There is a need to establish: what we trying to achieve,
for whom and under what conditions; what success
looks like**

**Goals need to be underpinned by formal structures and
relationships and by appropriate governance structures**



Effective informal relationships

These are equally as important as formal structures

They include:

- clarifying roles**
- developing trust**
- sharing anxieties**
- conflict resolution**
- identifying resources and needs**

Informal relationships are important at all levels: locally (front-line staff, managers) and centrally



Policies and procedures

Staff need to know what is expected of them by their own agency

They need to know what they can expect of other agencies

They need to know how the policies and procedures of the two agencies intersect.



Training

Across-agency training can be a powerful catalyst for collaboration

It is a mechanism to:

- ensure everyone hears the same messages**
- identify areas where understandings differ**
- identify barriers to collaborative practice**
- develop consistent, but locally-tailored, solutions**
- enhance relationships**



Collaboration perceived as mutually beneficial

The reasons for collaboration must be clear

The stated benefits must outweigh the perceived costs



Shared responsibility

Participating organisations should share equal responsibility to ensure that one organisation does not dominate the partnership

This requires clarity around broader individual and organisational roles and responsibilities and a willingness to respect and seek to understand differing viewpoints



Coordination

A mechanism (or mechanisms) for coordinating the responsibilities of the partnership is required to ensure that skills and resources are utilised appropriately.



Specific challenges

Agency level:

- Alignment of stated missions and objectives of agencies (disability vs child protection focus)

Officer level:

- Shared on-the-ground definitions of ‘disability’ and ‘in need of protection’
- Child safety officers: not specifically trained to understand the needs of children with a disability
- Disability officers: not child protection workers



Specific challenges

Child level:

Children with a disability in care:

- behaviour may be manifestation of effects of abuse, trauma and attachment issues etc as well as or rather than the disability



The MOU

The MOU is ONE mechanism, at the formal level, to support working in partnership and inter-agency collaboration

It assists with:

- identification of shared goals**
- specifying the benefits of collaboration**
- specifying how coordination will occur**
- identifying relevant policies and procedures**
- specifying the nature of shared responsibilities**



The MOU between DSQ and DCHS

Overview: the MOU sets out principles and respective roles and responsibilities to support the provision of services to children and young people with a disability who are at risk of harm or in need of protection

It is signed by the Directors-General of the two agencies

It has a built-in monitoring, reporting and governance arrangements

It provides the formal framework for working together.



The MOU between DSQ and DChS

Scope/aim: to promote effective communication and collaborative service provision between DSQ and DChS

Target group: children and young people with a disability who are at risk of harm or in need of protection

Context: the protection of children and young people and provision for their well being is most effective when provided through partnerships, based on agreed principles



The MOU between DSQ and DCHS

Principles include: effective partnerships optimise integrated and coordinated case planning and service delivery

Roles and responsibilities summarise, for each agency, relevant core business, including legislative underpinnings:

- DSQ: lead agency in relation to disability issues with a responsibility to promote the safety and well-being of CWD



The MOU between DSQ and DCHS

- DChS: lead agency for the whole-of-government response to child protection

Schedules to MOU: these specify how the agencies will work together in specified circumstances (currently schedules are in place regarding communication and transition from care)

A separate protocol has been agreed for responding to families who require out-of-home care for their child for reasons of the child's disability

(A multi-lateral MOU underpins the delivery of the 'Evolve' inter-agency service)



The schedules: communication

The communication schedule acknowledges:

- The need to develop/enhance a culture of collaboration
- That barriers to effective communication can occur due to a range of structural, cultural and systemic factors
- The need to work together to overcome barriers through the effective identification of problems and the implementation of shared solutions
- Information sharing protocols



Communication action plan

Collaboration:

- Provide relevant information
- Undertake eg training to promote awareness of roles and responsibilities of both organisations
- Develop and disseminate procedures for sharing information about children with a disability known to DSQ who enter the child safety system
- Continued joint participation in Evolve inter-agency services



Communication action plan

Overcoming barriers:

- Jointly implement transition from care planning process
- Jointly implement collaborative decision making around children requiring out-of-home care for reasons of their disability
- Be responsive to requests to share skills and expertise (eg training, communication materials)
- Promote the MOU via intranets and joint information sessions and/or workshops



The schedules: transition from care

This schedule:

- Relates to young people with a disability who have a disability as defined under the *DSA* and who have been supported by DChS primarily in out-of-home-care placements.
- Specifies the referral process from DChS, DSQ's response commitment, eligibility confirmation processes and, for eligible young people, DSQ's support and involvement in the DChS planning process



The schedules: transition from care

- Specifies the information DSQ may be able to provide regarding adult disability services
- Confirms that DSQ can assist to ensure appropriate funding submissions are made
- Confirms that DChS is responsible for referral to GAAT if appropriate
- Specifies roles at the transition point –across the time of the young adult's 18th birthday and subsequently



Practice guidelines

Practice guidelines, intra-agency policies and procedures, and other supporting documentation are other FORMAL mechanisms for supporting partnerships and collaboration.

For transition from care, DSQ has DSQ policy and procedures that specify the detail of DSQ staff roles and responsibilities. Similarly DChS has relevant sections in the practice manual.

These ‘drop down’ from, and support, the MOU



Joint training

Training is also a FORMAL mechanism for supporting partnerships and collaboration

Implementation of the MOU, its schedules, and other collaborative processes require shared information sessions, discussion and work-shops

Implementation at the local level supports the development and maintenance of locally-based partnerships and relationships



Relationships

**Relationships can be specified FORMALLY
but need to work INFORMALLY**

They are required at all levels

**They require ongoing development and
nurturing**

They require trust, respect and commitment



Summary

The MOU is an important element in the formalisation of collaboration and partnerships, providing high level authority

It is essential that the MOU and other formal structures are operationalised through the development of informal local partnerships

The ‘Evolve’ inter-agency service has provided significant learnings about the detail of effective collaboration, at both formal and informal levels