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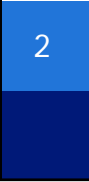
Permanent and Agency DSW's – Working in Partnership


ASSID Victoria
Disability Support
Worker Conference
2009



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Overview

- Why do DSW's work for an agency?
- Agency DSW's
- Permanent DSW's
- An Agency DSW's Story
- Current relationship and perceptions between Agency and Permanent DSW's
- What can agencies and their DSW's do to assist the working partnership?
- What can organisations and their Permanent DSW's do to assist the working partnership?
- Benefits of Permanent and Agency DSW's Working in Partnership

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Reasons DSW's work for an agency

From a national survey of 155 DSW's working as agency staff, below are the main reasons they work agency, in order of importance:

1. The flexibility of work days/hours – 50%
2. Having a Work/life Balance – 23%
3. Having the variety to work at different sites with different clients – 21%
4. Trying sites before applying for a permanent role – 4%
5. Money – 2%

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Profile of an Agency DSW

- Flexibility is the #1 reason staff work for an agency, followed by Work/Life Balance and the ability to work at a variety of sites with a variety of clients.
- Money ranked last, which may surprise you if you think DSW's working agency are doing agency work for this reason.
- The average length of employment with an agency of the DSW's surveyed is 3 years.
- This indicates a long term career option for a large portion of agency DSW's, which may surprise you if you think this is a short term role on the way to another career or a permanent role.
- The hardest thing about starting a shift at a new site is getting to know the clients needs quickly (34%) and being expected to know where everything is without asking (24%).

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Profile of an Agency DSW

- Only 40% of agency DSW's said they received an induction to a new site 75% or more of the time. 30% said they received an induction only 50 – 74% of the time.
- 70% of agency DSW's feel they are treated differently than other staff.
- 61% said they only accept shifts from sites that they have received adequate support from on shift.
- 68% said they would not take a permanent role if offered one.

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Profile of an Agency DSW

The main disadvantages of working agency shifts for agency DSW's surveyed are:

- Not getting time to get to know the clients better
- Not being able to plan things in advance as they are oncall for shifts
- Inconsistency of hours means they don't always know if they have enough shifts for the week
- Feeling like a second class worker due to attitudes toward them on shifts
- No sick days or annual leave paid
- Distances they sometimes travel to get to shifts

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Agency DSW Comments:

"When you go to a new site you are rarely treated as a professional"

"Working agency has certainly increased my professional working knowledge of clients varied support needs in terms of working within different program structures"

"I did find it a little nerve-racking when I worked with a new client or work environment, but having worked agency, I have overcome this as I always get a brief on the client or work situation from my agency"

"Some handovers are rushed so its uncomfortable to ask questions when you know the Permanent staff member wants to leave their shift"

"I have found that with dedication and professionalism permanent staff become much more confident in the abilities of an agency staff member to act as a valuable member of the team, and can even develop a co-worker relationship over time."

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Survey Results of Permanent DSW's

- 80% of Permanent DSW's said they treat agency staff differently than their colleagues
- Permanent DSW's said the hardest thing about working with agency DSW's was 'their lack of knowledge of the clients / site' (25%).
- The 'need to prompt them to do things' and 'lack of initiative' ranked second (both 15%).
- The main benefit for permanent staff of working with agency DSW's was their 'Fresh ideas' (30%).
- 'An extra pair of hands when short staffed' and 'No Politics' ranked second(both 18%).

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Survey Results of Permanent DSW's

- If Permanent staff could improve something about agency DSW's, the #1 response was having better trained agency staff (17%)
- Better trained agency staff was referred as specific site skills e.g peg feeding
- The general opinion of the experience level of agency DSW's that Permanent staff had worked with on shift was 7.5 out of 10

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Permanent DSW Comments:

"The hardest thing about working alongside an agency DSW, is feeling like you have to take on more responsibility"

"Permanent DSW's can be judgemental of agency DSW's, frustrated at small things agency staff might not know about the house or the clients"

"Agency staff have a fresh outlook, and aren't sour about things when they walk through the door"

"Agency staff are more willing to step outside the square and suggest ideas/opinions that might not be raised otherwise by permanent DSW's"

"Agency DSW's don't get involved in house politics as they don't know the house"

"Agency staff are given the more 'dirty jobs' to do"

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An Agency DSW's story

Maria Tarasenko started as an agency DSW for Randstad in Sydney, and then moved to Perth where she continued as an agency DSW.

I'd like to share with you Maria's story as told from her experience as an agency DSW.

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Current Relationship between Agency & Permanent DSW's

- While agency DSW's get an average score for level of experience of 7.5 out of 10 from Permanent staff, there are some underlying comments and feelings in the relationship that need to be overcome for a successful working partnership.
- Permanent staff have comments that speak of doing more work when agency staff are on shift, they get frustrated when staff don't know the client/site, staff show lack of initiative and agency staff are given the 'dirty jobs'.
- Agency staff have comments that they are rarely treated as a professional and are treated like a second class worker on shift, they don't always get an induction at a new site or proper handovers on shift, and a lot of agency staff would only accept shifts at sites where they feel they have been supported.

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Highlighted concerns that cause perceptions of Agency DSW's

- Lack of Initiative
- Lack of Experience / Training
- Lack of Communication
- Lack of knowledge of clients / site
- Motivation Level – needing to be prompted to do things that are part of the role
- Not showing confidence to help permanent staff / taking lead
- Asking too many questions

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What can agencies and their DSW's do to change this perception and create a working partnership?

- Thorough inductions by agencies and thorough shift details when booking agency staff can help alleviate many of the issues.
- Agency inductions should incorporate:
 - How to use initiative onsite
 - Effective communication
 - How to act confidently and take the lead when necessary
 - How to work alongside a Permanent staff member rather than needing to be directed by them

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What can agencies and their DSW's do to change this perception and create a working partnership?

- As a working partnership, agency inductions can incorporate organisation specific information so agency staff have already had information about the organisation and/or sites prior to commencing work.
- When an agency books a staff member into a shift, detailed information about the site and where possible the client/s can be given to assist in orientating someone prior to arriving at their first shift.
- Agencies need to be responsible for ensuring agency staff are trained to meet the requirements of working at any site, and have a long term commitment to training.
- Agencies need to be responsible for the workforce they provide to the disability industry. They need to recruit agency staff with the appropriate experience levels and skills.

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How can organisations and their Permanent DSW's assist the working partnership?

- When an agency DSW starts a shift at a new site, they should be inducted as per a set checklist to cover all requirements needed for the shift.
- A checklist can be one set by the site, by the agency, or a combination of both.
- A thorough induction will:
 - Minimise questions throughout the shift
 - Increase level of communication
 - Address the lack of knowledge a new agency worker at the site has
 - Allow them to be confident that they know what to do and can take the lead when necessary
- If you induct agency staff, it will allow agency staff to have confidence that they have been accepted as a worker on the shift.

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How can organisations and their Permanent DSW's assist the working partnership?

- With no induction or handover, agency staff will start the shift already feeling:
 - unconfident
 - unaccepted
 - unknowledgeable
 - inadequate as they will have to ask questions throughout the shift
- Permanent staff need to recognise the experience and skill agency staff can bring to the role. See the individual that arrives to the shift not the 'stereotype'.
- Agency staff often have a varied experience that will allow them to adapt to most new situations, given the right knowledge at the start of their shift.

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How can organisations and their Permanent DSW's assist the working partnership?

- Give the agency immediate feedback during or after the shift ends, if agency staff don't meet the requirements of the role.
- It is impossible for an agency to ensure inappropriate staff do not get sent to further shifts if feedback isn't provided to the agency about the staff member.
- Feedback is the ultimate tool to make sure the industry maintains a quality workforce, whether agency or permanent staff members.

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Benefits of Permanent and Agency DSW's Working in Partnership

Permanent Staff Benefits:

- Exposure to additional and complementary skills via agency staff
- Client care levels not compromised on shift due to being short staffed
- Better communication
- Shared workload leads to better job satisfaction
- Build trust with Agency staff so they can feel free to do their own role
- Shared shift responsibility and accountability
- Fresh ideas and energy
- Reduced politics

Agency Staff Benefits:

- Exposure to additional and complementary skills via permanent staff
- Confident to deliver client care
- Better communication
- Shared workload leads to better job satisfaction
- Build trust with Permanent staff so they feel they are an equal member of staff
- Shared shift responsibility and accountability
- Feel able to contribute and that their ideas will be considered

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Changing the way Agency DSW's are recruited, trained and how they perform in their role on site, as well as changing the way Permanent DSW's induct, treat and work alongside Agency staff is essential to achieving a mutually beneficial outcome for Permanent and Agency DSW's.

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As with the theme of this conference, DSW's are more than just carers, this is a career that makes a difference.

Working in Partnership as we have seen benefits both Agency & Permanent DSW's but most importantly ultimately increases the care levels for the people we are all here to ensure we make a difference for – the disability community.

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Questions?

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Maria Tarasenko's story – Agency DSW

I have done 1000s of shifts in the community and worked with some great facility staff... and some very difficult ones. I would like to give you an insight into being “the agency worker”

Not just anyone can be an agency worker..... it takes a special kind of person... Imagine having to walk into a different work environment every single day, not knowing who you are working with, not knowing the clients you are working with and what challenges lay ahead... all while representing yourself and the agency that you are working for while doing what you were born to do... CARE. Walking into different people's lives everyday... and hoping that at the end of it, you have made a difference.

From the moment an agency worker walks into a facility they need to “hit the ground running” An agency worker needs to be a switched on individual, have a broad knowledge of an entire spectrum of disabilities, know how to handle challenging behaviours and be a very good communicator; both verbal and written skills a must. Every person has different likes and dislikes, different choices in how they need and want help. At the beginning of a shift we need to familiarise ourselves with the general emergency settings of a house.... that is the easy part... next comes the requirements of familiarising ourselves with the clients we are providing care and support for: We need to know and understand Client's Individual Profiles, behaviour intervention support plans, meal time management plans, personal care plans, medication requirements, allergies, emergency contact details, appointments they need to attend, skill capabilities, transfer plans and their level of physical assistance. We need to document and record changes in health and behaviours We want to know and need to know so much to deliver the best quality care possible to make sure the client's care level is never compromised, while respecting their rights, and freedom of choice. All of this needs to be done while following the policies and procedures of every different organisation you are working for.

Quite often we are seen as the person who earns more than they do, but does half the work. It's disheartening to walk on to shift and hear “Oh great, another agency staff” “Oh no, I'd rather work alone than with an agency worker:” “you get paid more than me, you can do the work” We are not the enemy - if given a great induction and handover then my shift is a success on many levels. We are here to work with you, to take some of the load off you. We want the same outcomes as you do... and that is to ensure that the people we are caring for live long and fulfilling lives.

My job as an agency disability support worker is very challenging yet it is highly rewarding. It is a constant journey, an educational path that never ends, meeting experienced staff (just like us) experiencing and working with different disabilities and behaviours and learning triggers and diffusers and knowing that they are different for every individual. Every day you get to leave a little bit of your happy spirit with people who are not as fortunate as we are.