

Introduction

Title

Ageing and Disability: The Training
Needs of Disability Support Workers

Presenter

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Underpinning
philosophy to
my research



Background to the Issues

A person born with an intellectual disability eighty years ago would not be expected to live past their second decade (Carter and Jancar, 1983). In recent years, a combination of factors including improved care and the recognition of the rights of people with a disability to receive appropriate medical attention and personal care has seen this figure increase dramatically. By 1993, a person with an intellectual disability had a life expectancy of 70 years (Strauss and Eyman, 1996).

Background to the Issues

While this improvement in life expectancy is naturally a very desirable outcome, it has resulted in a new problem for disability support organisations and the wider community that remains unresolved; how are a substantial number of people with an intellectual disability going to be supported as they start experiencing age-related health problems?

Staff and Training

A person with an intellectual disability who is experiencing ageing related issues often has needs that fall outside the expertise of the disability sector staff, while the staff within aged care services often have limited or no experience in dealing with people with intellectual disabilities. This naturally results in significant training and re-training issues as staff try to adapt to working with new client groups with differing needs and requirements.

But what training is needed?

- ◆ How do we know what training is needed for direct support workers?
- ◆ The content of training is often determined by non-direct care managers or Registered Training Organisations (RTOs including TAFE) based upon their own perceptions of what is important.
- ◆ There is almost no research around the world that has directly asked the support workers, the actual people doing the work, what training would benefit them.

The Current Study

- ◆ The Purpose of the current study was to ask the individuals at the coal face (i.e. the Direct Support Workers) what they thought were the most important issues they were facing in their day to day work with respect to the ageing needs of people with an intellectual disability.
- ◆ One aspect of the study looked specifically at the training needs of direct support workers to better assist people with disabilities as they age.
- ◆ The participants in the study were drawn from 12 different services providers (a variety of small, medium and large) across regional, rural and remote New South Wales.

Methodology

- ◆ The current study used a Delphi Survey tool that was delivered via either email or through Australia Post.
- ◆ In simple terms, a Delphi research model proposes a series of very open ended questions and requests that each participant write down as many answers as they think are relevant.
- ◆ The survey is done anonymously, and every person can indicate their agreement or disagreement with the proposed issues of the other participants.

Delphi Methodology Continued

- ◆ The answers from all participants are then collated together, and re-presented to each individual for further consideration. This process continues until agreement is reached within the group upon what issues are important.
- ◆ Once the issues are accepted by the group as being appropriate, each participant is asked to rate the issues on a Likert-scale (one being irrelevant and seven being critical)
- ◆ All of the participant's responses were again collated to determine which issues they considered the most important
- ◆ The entire survey took 12 months to complete

The Survey

- ◆ The Participants were initially asked 6 questions;
- ◆ *What do you think are the main issues or problems that a person with an intellectual disability will face as they age?*
- ◆ *What are the main signs of ageing that you have seen in people with intellectual disabilities (i.e. physical health issues, social impacts, emotional issues, mental health issues)?*
- ◆ *From an individual staff perspective, what are the main issues you experience in providing support to someone with an intellectual disability who is ageing?*
- ◆ *What do you think are the main issues facing the families and friends (including co-residents) of someone with an intellectual disability who is ageing?*
- ◆ *What do you think are the main issues or problems facing a rural organisation that provides support to someone with an intellectual disability who is ageing?*
- ◆ *What do you think are the highest priorities in training for staff who assist individuals with an intellectual disability who are ageing?*

The Results

Accredited Training Priorities

- ◆ Certificate IV in Disability with the inclusion of appropriate units covering time management, observation skills, personal attitudes, ethics, record management, behaviour management and alternative communication strategies
- ◆ Disability Work Skill Set – “People with a Disability who are older”

The Results Continued

Other Training Priorities

- ◆ Mental Health First Aid;
- ◆ Quality of Life (Active Support) Training;
- ◆ Annual refresher courses (particularly around using assistive technology and manual handling equipment);
- ◆ Consider participation in some form of ‘accidental’ counsellor training to assist fellow residents, friends and family following a person’s death.

The Results Continued

Recommendations for Management

- ◆ Talk to the RTO before your course starts and clearly outline what your training needs are with respect to ageing and disability – don't rely upon 'generic' approaches
- ◆ Look at collaboration with aged care providers for joint inductions, shared training opportunities etc
- ◆ Look outside the box for 'specialist' training – e.g. get a local pharmacist to explain what affect "ageing related" medications may have upon a person

Any easy questions?

Best Contact Details

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