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Maintain security of information

Your reflective journal must be kept secure at all times, as it may contain notes about clients' personal details. Your entries will also describe client behaviours and how you have dealt with them. Ensure others cannot access your entries. Be careful to never identify any clients or colleagues by name, to ensure their privacy and confidentiality is maintained.

Make regular entries

Write in your journal as often as possible. Self-reflection is most beneficial when carried out on a regular basis, as this reinforces the habit and helps you become more skilled at self-analysis. Your reflective practice journal notes can also be used as a means of identifying professional development opportunities and for raising points of discussion in evaluation sessions with your supervisor and/or peers.

Reflect on performance

A useful way to begin self-reflection is to have a series of questions that you ask yourself at the end of every day. These questions may include 'What did I do well today?', 'What could I have done better?', and 'What can I learn from the experience?'. When using it to reflect on your practice, acknowledge what you are doing well and where you are improving, as well as any difficulties you are having.

Supervision

Being provided with effective supervision can encourage you to develop your skills and knowledge and become confident and competent in your work roles. Effective supervision is a powerful tool for professional development, as it provides the opportunity to openly evaluate and explore your experiences at work and to receive guidance and support from others who have experienced similar issues.

In community services organisations, a supervisor is usually someone who is experienced in the area of work that team members are undertaking, and can provide appropriate guidance and support.

Here is how a supervisor can help you with self-evaluation:



Education

- ▶ Supervisors mentor members of their team and ensure they have access to professional development opportunities. They provide guidance about issues and problems that may prompt self-evaluation and encourage attempts at changes to work practice as a result of the evaluation process.

Administration

- ▶ Supervisors perform a range of administrative duties to ensure members understand their roles and can access required resources. They offer support in accessing organisational policies and procedures required for professional development and ensure time and space is available within the workplace for self-evaluation processes to occur.

1B Reflect on and recognise the effect of values, beliefs and behaviour in practice

As everyone has limitations of some kind, being self-aware and understanding your weaknesses as well as your strengths can assist you in becoming a more effective community services worker.

Community services work can be complex and demanding, as it involves working with people who have different value systems, beliefs, life experiences and personal circumstances.

In order to carry out your work effectively, you need to understand how your own personality, beliefs, values and behaviours impact on others and influence your practice. Any limitations you have may be highlighted in the close working relationships you have with clients and co-workers. For example, if you find conflict difficult to deal with, you may struggle to carry out your work effectively, as there will be many situations that require you to use effective problem-solving and conflict resolution strategies.



Values, beliefs and behaviour

Working effectively with clients requires you to have a high level of self-awareness. This means understanding how your values, beliefs and behaviour may impact on your clients, and seeking appropriate support or advice for your skills and cultural awareness if needed.

Values and beliefs, and their impact on behaviour, are described below.

Values

Values represent personal standards. We learn personal values from our families, social and cultural groups, religious beliefs, school and personal experiences. Values can vary between cultures and societies. For example, you may place high value on personal freedom and individuality; however, in some cultures it is more important, especially for women, to value conformity and duty to others.

Beliefs

Beliefs are based on what people believe to be true; for example, many people have religious beliefs that guide how they live their lives. Individual beliefs are not easily changed, as they provide a basis for a person's understanding of the world. It is important to examine your own beliefs and not assume that what you believe is right and logical or that the beliefs of others are incorrect and irrational.

- ▶ being open to the idea that even within cultural groups there are many different viewpoints
- ▶ being willing to learn and clarify areas of misunderstanding
- ▶ adapting your work practices to suit client needs
- ▶ understanding how biases, discrimination and racism affect people's lives
- ▶ adhering to anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation and policies.

Understand context

It is important to understand the contextual influences on people's lives, which include experiences, circumstances and other influences that impact on the way others think and behave. For example, people who have experienced discrimination or other social injustices may be angry and find it difficult to trust others, including those who are working to help them.

Consider the following strategies to avoid conflict or misunderstandings.

Be willing to listen

- ▶ Sometimes you may work with clients with radically different world views from your own. For example, there may be people from some cultural groups who still prefer their daughters to marry at a very young age. This may seem unjust, but it is important that you do not directly challenge or confront their beliefs and values in a hostile manner. You should show a willingness to listen and, if necessary, to calmly explain how things are different in Australia, where a high value is placed on young women being educated.

Work with a cultural specialist

- ▶ Sometimes you may need to enlist the help of someone with specialist cultural knowledge. Role titles include cultural liaison officer, multicultural service officer or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officer. Ethno-specific services also help people preserve their own cultural values and practices in Australia and assist them to understand community services and activities.

Negotiation and conflict resolution skills

Your ability to negotiate and resolve conflict depends on your ability to communicate openly with people you support about their issues and concerns, and to collaborate with others in making decisions that address the needs of all parties. It is also important to listen carefully to other people's points of view.

Successful negotiation and conflict resolution involves working with individuals or groups to reach an acceptable outcome for everyone involved. It is important to establish the needs a person may have that are not being met. For example, if a person feels that their cultural needs are not being respected, it is important to establish exactly what cultural requirements they have and how these can be met by the service provider.



Encourage open, two-way communication

Communication is based on sending, receiving and interpreting messages. We have all been in situations where we have said something only to realise that the person we are speaking to has interpreted the message in a completely different way from what we intended.

When giving feedback, choose your words carefully and give the feedback recipient an opportunity to respond to what you have said. If the recipient does not have a chance to talk about or clarify feedback, they may become resentful and feel they have been unfairly criticised.

Communication skills

Some important communication skills for giving, receiving and analysing feedback are outlined below.

'I' statements

When you use the word 'I', you are taking ownership of what you say and sending a clear message about personal responsibility. The use of 'I' helps you communicate in a direct and active way and allows you to clearly state what you feel or think about a situation.

Active listening

Active listening involves focusing all your attention on what another person is saying. Avoid interrupting until they have finished what they want to say. Ask questions or paraphrase what the speaker has said to clarify and check your understanding.

Observe body language

Observing a person's body language should give you an indication of how they are feeling and their level of comfort. If their body language reflects that they are upset by what you are saying, you may need to pause or change the way you are giving the information.

Respect difference

Be aware of individual differences when providing feedback. For example, some people find it harder to give and receive feedback than others. There may also be cultural differences in the protocols of giving and receiving feedback.

Be supportive

Avoid focusing only on negative aspects of a person's behaviour or performance. Acknowledge what they do well and what they are good at in addition to areas where they can improve.



Complete all tasks

Work collaboratively to complete all assigned tasks identified as being needed at the planning stage. Update planning and delivery documents as required to take account of changes and challenges that arise along the way, and be sure to also carry this forward to the evaluation stage so that documents are current and feedback is relevant.



Seek feedback

Seek feedback on performance and achievements towards stated goals and objectives, and use this feedback to inform future collaborative activities and specific work within your organisation.

Feedback from other sources

Feedback can also be provided from other sources and this can also be used to inform and guide the development of your professional practice. Some feedback from other sources may be formal, whereas other feedback may be informal or anecdotal.

The type of feedback you receive depends upon the person offering it and the particular situation. For example, a volunteer may comment that they enjoy working at your organisation because they are offered regular opportunities to participate in professional development activities. A trainee worker may complete an evaluation form at the end of a training session you run to provide feedback about the session.



You should try to use any feedback you receive to help you reflect on your own activities and performance, and use the information to further develop your skills and knowledge.

Accept feedback non-defensively

Most people feel defensive if they think someone is being critical of them. This is a natural reaction. However, keep in mind that the feedback you receive from clients, organisations or others is meant to support and help you rather than make you feel incompetent.

You may appear defensive if you respond to feedback by:

- ▶ becoming angry
- ▶ being rude to the feedback provider
- ▶ interrupting and arguing with the feedback provider
- ▶ denying that the feedback applies to you and refusing to take personal responsibility
- ▶ failing to consider or act on feedback
- ▶ getting your 'own back' on the feedback provider by giving them negative feedback.



Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 2A Determine improvements needed based on your own evaluation and feedback from others**

- 2B Identify potential support networks both internal and external to the organisation**

- 2C Seek specialist advice or further training**

- 2D Recognise requirements for self-care and identify requirements for additional support**

- 2E Devise, document and implement a self-development plan that sets realistic goals and targets**

Enhance your own practice

Community services work can involve challenges that cannot be resolved by one person alone and it can be a field that is physically and mentally stressful. To meet challenges, it is important that you build support networks and know where you can obtain specialist advice. You also need to know how to take care of your own mental and physical health and be willing to seek additional support when it is required.

You should take advantage of opportunities to help you develop your skills and knowledge through training, performance reviews, supervision and mentoring. In many organisations, this information becomes a part of your self-development plan, which guides your actions and professional development choices during the year.

You can promote your own development by keeping up with industry developments, applying these in your practice and taking action to stay abreast of trends.

Develop informal networks

Developing informal networks can be a natural process that occurs when you make contacts through the course of your work or attending meetings. People who become part of your informal network may be part of your own organisation or external to it. They may include those who you have helped in some way and those who support you to carry out your work effectively.

They may include people and groups you maintain contact with online to help build professional skills, learn from each other and solve problems. Online discussions about particular topics can be a great way of learning about areas of work that interest you and also gaining insight into the practices, ideas and activities of people who live in other places.

Informal network contacts may include people from the following areas.

Informal network contacts
Workers in your own area and other areas of community services work
Service user group representatives and advocates
Health professionals such as doctors and psychologists
Cultural liaison officers or workers from ethno-specific services
Teachers and trainers
Personal mentors
Online contacts and groups related to your industry or sector

Cultural groups

As Australia becomes increasingly culturally diverse, the number of people who have needs related to culture, customs, language and religion will increase. To understand and address these needs in a sensitive and professional manner, you may need to establish contact with people who can provide you with accurate information, such as representatives from different cultural groups or cultural liaison workers.

Take the time to research the demographics of your region or area and learn about the cultural groups who live there. Find out how many people from different cultural backgrounds use your services and whether there is an under-representation compared to your total number of service users. You can then make some informed decisions about how to build a cultural support network that can help you provide services and supports in an appropriate way and meet the needs of everyone in your region.



Role

A professional supervisor's main role is to:

- ▶ ensure workers have the level of practice supervision that workplace supervisors do not have time to provide
- ▶ provide evaluative feedback
- ▶ encourage self-evaluation and reflection
- ▶ help workers become aware of and deal with limitations in their work
- ▶ suggest personal and professional development opportunities
- ▶ guide workers when dealing with complex practice issues.

Peer supervision

Peer supervision involves participating in personal and professional development with co-workers or colleagues working in a similar field or occupation. It is important to remember that some of your peers may only have the same level of skill and experience as yourself and so may not be able to offer more-specialised advice on specific work tasks or problems. More-experienced peers, however, may be able to provide more-specialised forms of advice and support to help you enhance your own work practice through peer supervision.

Peer supervision enables workers to:

- ▶ share experiences and provide mutual support
- ▶ discuss issues they may not want to discuss with a supervisor
- ▶ exchange ideas for personal and professional development
- ▶ set up buddy systems that foster skills development.

Training

All workers should have access to training that promotes personal and professional development. Your supervisor should inform you of workplace policies regarding training and professional development, and work with you to identify relevant programs and opportunities.

You can also suggest areas of practice that you wish to improve and request relevant training. Often this is achieved through a formal review process completed each year. During this process you may be able to identify training requirements that align with your own career goals and ideas for future career directions.

There are many ways you can participate in training or personal development to enhance your skills and knowledge.

Further indicators that additional support is required

Behavioural, physiological and emotional factors can indicate you need additional support. Accessing additional support early on is far better than ignoring a problem and hoping it goes away. Failing to recognise additional needs for support usually just means the problem becomes worse rather than better.

Here are some ways you can identify whether you need additional support.

Do you need additional support?

Physical changes

Increases in blood pressure, changes to weight or sleeping patterns and problems such as headaches or muscle pain can indicate a need for support.

Negative approaches

Excessive use of alcohol, caffeine, other drugs, smoking, over-working or avoiding people or situations are unhelpful ways of trying to cope.

Mood changes

Feeling isolated, bored, frustrated or angry a lot of the time can indicate problems with stress or burnout.

Behaviour changes

Changes in behaviour such as being aggressive, grumpy, snapping at others or being sarcastic can suggest a need for action.

Absenteeism

Needing to take time off frequently for physical or mental needs can mean stress or workload are problem areas.

Example

Recognise the need for some support

Peta works around 45 hours per week and travels frequently as part of her job. She visits many families, completing support plans and attending meetings. She often does not have time for a lunch break and is known at work as the 'go-to girl' whenever there is a problem. Lately the problem has been Peta herself! She is grumpy, irritable and experiencing frequent headaches. Peta has been reading a book about stress and burnout and realises she is showing many of the classic signs of someone who is experiencing stress.

She decides to take some action and seek support from her supervisor. They meet to discuss Peta's workload and develop a plan to help her complete more of her paperwork from the office and to have a flexible start and finish time. This allows Peta to adjust her weekly schedule and start later the next day after she has attended a family meeting the night before. They also agree to hire an administrative assistant to complete some of the basic tasks that are taking up so much of her work time at present.

Peta's ability to recognise when things are going wrong and take appropriate action to seek support means she now goes home at the end of a 38-hour working week feeling content, satisfied and ready to enjoy her weekend.



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Professional development guidelines

Community services organisations must provide training and professional development opportunities to staff to meet legal and regulatory requirements. Professional development should be targeted and deliberate in order to fit within the requirements of the organisation's vision, mission and values and to ensure that it is offered in a fiscally responsible way. Professional development can be costly, so it is important that it is only used to help workers achieve goals that are clearly identified, planned and documented.



It is important for workers to follow organisation guidelines and participate in professional development opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge, to meet the objectives of the organisation and to provide quality services. A self-development plan is often used as part of an ongoing cycle of performance reviews or appraisals and invites workers and their direct supervisors to collaborate and develop appropriate goals for the following term, usually 12 months.

Specific goals

Specific goals are required for a personal development plan written as part of a performance appraisal or review process as a way of informing progress and development of future skills and learning.

You need to take your time when writing goals and ensure they are written in a way that states specifically what is going to be achieved. You may need to write a first draft of your goals then seek some input and advice from your supervisor or others and then discuss with your supervisor what should form the final version of your goals.

As you do this, reflect upon your own practice and consider what you have achieved already against existing performance competencies and role expectations and what you hope to achieve in the future.

Here are some ways you can make sure goals are specific.

Write specific goals

- ▶ Use precise language.
- ▶ Use numerical terms if relevant.
- ▶ Avoid general, vague phrases.
- ▶ Consider who, what, where and how.
- ▶ Ask another person to read the goals.

Timely goals

Goals should be written in a way that describes when they are going to be achieved, so that progress towards or achievement of the goals can be documented. For example, a goal within the area of technical skills may state that the person will learn to lead a group of trainees in performing safe manual-handling tasks when working with people who require physical support at home for personal care tasks. The goal may state that they will achieve this goal by completing a training program with a physiotherapist and writing a training plan by the end of June.

Create a self-development plan

Creating a self-development or personal development plan encourages you to think carefully about the goals you set and what you can do to achieve them. This plan focuses on expanding your skills and knowledge to achieve personal and professional growth.

Your organisation is likely to use templates and have a specific policy and procedure to guide you through writing a self-development plan.

The plan is usually prepared in conjunction with your direct manager or supervisor; although you may be asked to write your draft your goals first, before you meet. Then you can discuss your goals and consider their feedback and ideas before finalising your self-development plan for the next 12 months.

What to include in a self-development plan

- ▶ What you want to achieve (goals)
- ▶ When you want to achieve them by (time frame)
- ▶ How you will know when you have achieved them (measurement)
- ▶ What you will do to reach these goals (your actions)
- ▶ What help you need to reach these goals (support/mentorship/professional training)
- ▶ What aspect of your job these goals relate to (professional accountability)

- ▶ Clarify any questions with your supervisor.
- ▶ Use an appropriate file name.
- ▶ Date drafts when they are created.
- ▶ Work on the latest draft of a document each time it is opened.
- ▶ Save documents securely and back them up.
- ▶ Comply with any privacy or confidentiality requirements.

Example

Reflective diaries

Jazmin is writing a reflective diary entry about a significant event in her work day. She uses the following template to guide her thinking and writing.

What happened?	A team briefing went wrong and ended in a major argument among several team members, with me trying to continue chairing the meeting but eventually giving up and declaring the meeting closed.
Why did it happen?	A clash of personalities among team members and everyone trying to talk at once. No-one would listen to me as meeting chair.
How do I feel about it?	I felt frustrated and angry that I could not get control of the meeting. I was upset that my role was not respected.
What can I take away from this experience?	A realisation that sometimes different personalities can clash and that not everyone shares the same opinions or values in our team.
What could I do differently in the future?	I could learn to get control of meetings and be more authoritative and respond more quickly when things are getting out of hand.
Do I need any help or support to guide my learning?	Yes. I need to build some skills in managing meetings and dealing with personality clashes in a work team.
What will future success in this area look and feel like?	I can picture myself running a meeting where people can share their opinions and be heard easily and where questions are asked and statements made in a respectful way. I think this will make me feel more confident as a leader and more in control rather than feeling nervous and stressed about chairing a meeting.

Take the time to read widely and bookmark sites that you find particularly useful. An RSS feed can alert you to new information on a website that you visit frequently, so you know when there is something new to read.

Here are some areas and sites for you to explore.

Government and independent publications

- ▶ In the aged care sector, for example, the Australian Government provides comprehensive information about the industry. Access this information from the Department of Health. There are also independent online publications that focus on current issues in the sector. Three examples are the Community Care Review, Australian Ageing Agenda and Aged Care Insite.

Community services bodies

- ▶ Each state and territory has a community services industry body that reports on developments in all areas of social services. Websites contain a range of state, territory and national information on community services and social issues for industry workers and the people who use the services. The national industry association is the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and state and territory bodies are similarly named; for example, WACOSS (for Western Australian), and QCOSS (for Queensland).

Appraise and apply current developments

Industry developments may include changes to legislation, regulations and industry standards. These changes can directly impact on your work.

Some guidance to help you appraise and apply developments is provided here.

Identify developments

Your supervisor will update you regarding industry developments, but it is important that you have the skills to research and monitor relevant industry trends. Industry developments may include:

- ▶ changes to legislation and regulations
- ▶ changes to government policy
- ▶ changes to standards, accreditation and ethical practices
- ▶ evidence-based research that suggest new approaches to professional practice.

Assess impact

To assess the impact of changes, you should:

- ▶ discuss issues with colleagues and supervisors
- ▶ ask your supervisor if there are any training sessions you could attend
- ▶ check information on community sector or professional association websites for new developments and how they impact on work practices.

Legal requirements

Your community services job role requires you to have an understanding of the legal obligations that underpin your job role. This helps ensure that you carry out your work safely and in a manner that addresses needs and rights. You should be aware of your legal obligations, how to apply them to your work and where you can find additional information and support. State and territory legal requirements can change, and it is important to check whether any changes apply to your obligations.

Here are some examples of legal requirements where ongoing professional development may be required.

Legal requirements

Check the legal requirements that exist currently and use professional development strategies to ensure you remain up to date with any changes.



Work health and safety

Legislation varies depending on your work location and role in the workplace.



Mandatory reporting

Ensure you know what to report, how and to whom, depending on your role.



Discrimination

Legislation applies across Australia and affects many areas of work and daily life.



Qualifications to do the job

Ensure you hold appropriate and up-to-date qualifications for the job you do.

Here are the steps involved in the process of decision-making.

The decision-making process

- 1 Reflect on and assess the situation to determine the circumstances and facts.
- 2 Refer to a code of ethics, establish the ethical principles relevant to the situation and consider the potential harm the situation may cause if not resolved.
- 3 Examine options for responding to the situation.
- 4 Consult with others who can provide guidance or specialist advice.
- 5 Choose a course of action based on the information you have gathered and advice you have received.
- 6 Make sure you can justify your decision based on standards of practice or ethical principles.

Sector-specific legislation

There are laws and regulations that are directly relevant to different areas of community services work. It is important that you understand the legislation and related standards governing the community services sector you work in.

To research Australian legislation you can access the Australasian Legal Information Institute (AustLII) database at: www.austlii.edu.au.

For example, the primary Act underpinning residential aged care in Australia is the *Aged Care Act 1997* (Cth). This Act provides guidelines about how residential aged care services should be delivered, including the standard of care that services must adhere to, who is eligible for government-subsidised residential care, and residents' rights.

Laws governing other sectors include:

- ▶ state and territory child protection legislation
- ▶ state and territory domestic violence legislation
- ▶ state and territory mental health legislation
- ▶ Commonwealth legislation relating to the use and supply of drugs and alcohol
- ▶ Commonwealth legislation relating to disability services.

Example

Observe legal parameters

Aaron works in an aged care residential service. One of his jobs involves organising recreational activities and excursions for the residents. He takes this role very seriously, as he likes to see residents enjoying themselves and trying different activities.

One of his primary concerns is to ensure that residents are not put at risk in any way. This means he has to plan carefully to ensure he addresses all of his duty-of-care and WHS obligations. Before conducting any new activity or excursion, Aaron carries out a full risk assessment. He also provides guidelines to make sure everyone is fully informed about any possible risks and are prepared for them. For example, when going on a picnic, to avoid sunburn, sunstroke or heat exhaustion he always makes sure there is easy access to plenty of shelter, fresh water, hats and sunscreen.



Practice task 11

1. What are two examples of Commonwealth legislation that may apply to your work in community services?

2. Is it an ethical or legal requirement to ensure your qualifications are current and up to date?

3. Do you owe a duty of care to a child you are looking after during a flexible respite activity in the community?

4. During a visit to your local pool with your family, you notice an external door is particularly hard to open and you think about whether you should complain to the management about how hard it would be for someone using a wheelchair to open the door while sitting. Do you have an obligation or an opportunity to respond?

Click to complete Practice task 11

Informal and formal learning

Informal and formal learning are quite different and both can be useful in gaining skills and knowledge in community services.

Formal learning involves a structured, planned approach with a curriculum or stated learning outcomes that need to be achieved to reach a level of competency. Formal learning is used for attaining qualifications or achieving certificates of competency.

Informal learning can be made up of a variety of activities and these can often be undertaken according to individual preferences for learning and skill development. Informal learning is useful because it can often be completed in a flexible time frame and can be done in a very individualised way.

Some people find it much more motivating and interesting to learn in a formal situation whereas others are more motivated by informal learning. Think about which approach works best for you and which is most suited to what you are hoping to learn.

Here is a comparison of formal and informal learning approaches.



Formal learning

Formal learning involves a structured approach to teaching and learning and may be conducted face to face, online or through a blended learning method.

Instruction is guided by a teacher or facilitator and includes a variety of methods, including small and large group sessions and individual consultancy as required. End output is often a certificate or formal qualification such as a diploma.



Informal learning

Informal learning does not use a structured curriculum or specified outcomes. It can be used face to face or in online learning environments and is a method well suited to learning on the job, as it can be combined with regular work duties. Examples include reading social media content, observing the work of others, visiting facilities or programs, or receiving feedback from colleagues.

Widen your experiences

Widening your experiences in community services is very useful in continuing to build skills and expertise. Where possible, try to spend time observing or working with others who may be able to provide you with a different insight or approach that you can apply to your own work. For example, you may choose to spend an afternoon visiting a service that supports people who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This could help you understand strategies and approaches used to meet specific outcomes with this group of people. You could then analyse and interpret what you have observed and apply it to your own practices.



Personal behaviour, self-awareness and personality traits

Self-awareness and self-knowledge are important in any community services work. Many people who are drawn to this kind of work are naturally empathetic and have a strong desire to help others. Ideally, this should be coupled with an ability to be objective, maintain professional boundaries and avoid stress-related conditions such as burnout.

One aspect of self-awareness in community services work is having a clear understanding of your own values and beliefs. When you understand these and how you acquired them, it is easier to accept the belief systems and values important to others. You will also be more likely to realise when you need to set aside your own beliefs or ideas to carry out your work effectively.

Literacy skills

Literacy skills enable individuals to understand the written and oral information needed to carry out their work effectively. For example, community services workers are expected to be able to read policies and procedures to interpret what they are saying. They also need to be able to write reports, use verbal communication skills to understand the needs of clients, and exchange information with co-workers.

If you need to improve your literacy skills, there are a number of ways to do this. For example, you could attend relevant training, work in a buddy system with another worker, and practise your literacy skills as much as you can by reading and analysing workplace information.

Demonstrate commitment to upgrading skills and knowledge

It is important that you show a commitment to upgrading your skills and knowledge as a part of the performance review process and as you work to develop your future career direction. For many people, the job they begin their career in is unlikely to be the one in which they finish. Careers grow and change, and new opportunities arise. If you make sure your skills and knowledge remain up to date, you are in a better position to take advantage of changes when they occur.

If you are planning on a long and fulfilling career in the community services sector, it is important that you commit to upgrading your skills and knowledge whenever and wherever the opportunities present themselves. You owe it to yourself as well as to your future employers to ensure you are the best possible worker in the sector that you can be.

Summary

1. Community services work is an industry that is rapidly expanding and evolving. It is important that you take steps to keep abreast of developments in the industry and develop your skills and knowledge accordingly so you can apply new knowledge and skills to your work.
2. Community services workers benefit from seeking support and sharing feedback with team members and others outside their team and organisation. Creating professional networks ensures you have a wide range of expertise and resources to support you in your work.
3. Feedback from others is a useful way of determining your own need for improvements in performance in various aspects of your work.
4. Support networks within and external to your organisation can help you build your skills and maintain currency in your work practices.
5. You may need to seek specialist advice related to particular skills areas from people who hold specialist qualifications or roles.
6. It is important that you are familiar with guidelines in relation to professional development and seek opportunities for further learning and skill development that meet organisation requirements.
7. Review mechanisms such as appraisals and self-development plans are designed to evaluate staff performance and identify training needs. They also give workers an opportunity to consider their career goals and create personal development plans.
8. Self-development is an ongoing process that includes the writing of personal development plans or related documents with clear and realistic goals and time frames, and requires an ability to plan how you want to develop your personal abilities, skills and knowledge.
9. Community services workers must have an understanding of the legal and ethical requirements that underpin every job role. This helps ensure you carry out your work safely and in a manner that addresses the needs and rights of the people who use your services and helps you make appropriate decisions.
10. It is useful to think carefully about how you learn best and what sort of learning activities or approach suits your own needs and the needs of your organisation.