Implementing a Best Practice, Case Management Framework at Yeppoon State High School.

Action Research Project Report

Christina Rigo, Danielle Helbers, Wayne McBurnie, Kerri Wellspring and Sophie Yasso

Education Queensland
Yeppoon State High School lies within the Fitzroy - Central West Queensland region for Education Queensland. The 2008 Regional Operation Plan identified that an effective, robust case management system is an indicator of success in the management of students at-risk. Consequently, district and school staff have worked together to review Yeppoon State High School’s current case management approach by way of an action research project.

Yeppoon State High School is located in one of the fastest, population growth areas in Queensland and is the only State high school servicing the Byfield, Yeppoon and Emu Park townships. The nearest Special Education schools and other State high schools are located 40 km away in Rockhampton.

Consequently, the school is dealing with increasing numbers of at-risk students presenting with complex and challenging needs, including students with indigenous heritage, disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health care plans, significant emotional and behavioural disturbances, and students who are in out-of-home care. There are also a large number of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enrolling from feeder schools over the next few years.

These students are likely to require carefully planned and considered support to increase student success in schooling and provide support for teaching staff within the school. The school requires effective case management systems to manage its diverse student population, and is suitably placed to test effective models and strategies.

BEST PRACTICE INVESTIGATION

The Action Research Project Team was made up of various staff members across the Fitzroy - Central West Queensland region and involved the Senior Education Officer - Student Services, the district Community Education Counsellor, and specialist school support staff including; Guidance Officers, Special Education teachers and Heads of Special Education Services.

The team started the action research project by identifying issues that were provoking a change model. These issues included -

- More single parent families who are time poor and facing more economic hardship.
• Teachers and administrators asked to provide increasing quantities of instruction in academics and life skills, with fewer resources than was previously allocated to education.
• School attendance as a legal and social imperative.
• Disengaging youth, with a need for instant gratification, who are technologically savvy and bore easily under the traditional model for education.
• Increasing mental health issues.
• More reported cases of child abuse and neglect.
• Increased aggression and violence in schools, both verbal and non-verbal.
• A shift from public to private education, creating a filter process that appears to present a higher percentage of challenging and complex student cases in the state school system.

In examining the individual issues that were particular to Yeppoon State High School, such things as tracking systems and processes presently in use were identified, along with resource availability; particularly identifying areas of support within and external to the school, and addressing the quantity, quality and access issues for various students and their families.

The goals for the team centred around three key areas.
1. Linking legislation with policy and process, particularly with regards to discrimination, risk management, student protection and inclusive education.
2. Development of a comprehensive and user-friendly kit containing relevant documents, checklists and resources that match policy with process.
3. Better identification and support processes that respect the individuality of each case, as well as demonstrating transparency and validity of strategies undertaken.

The team gathered information via literature reviews and examination of best practice models presently in use, particularly the North Queensland region’s Case Management Framework.

The North Queensland region has implemented and tested a Case Management Framework into some of its schools and is seen as having expertise in this area. Yeppoon State High School sought direction and leadership at various times from the
North Queensland regional office and its associated schools. Many of the principles underlying their approach form the basis for the framework that has been implemented at Yeppoon State High School.

Other key resources used included the Australian Guidance Counselling Association and MindMatters websites, and information obtained from participation in professional development opportunities.

BEST PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

Over the course of nine months a Case Management Kit was developed by the Action Research Project Team, as a guide for use at Yeppoon State High School. The kit outlines key strategies including -

- Case Management Entry
- Data Gathering and Specific Assessment
- Plan Development and Implementation
- Monitoring and Reviewing and
- Transition and/or Case Closure.

It also provides checklists of processes, useful documents and website resources that could be used at the discretion of the allocated case manager.

The Case Management Kit developed had its processes tested on two of the school’s ongoing cases of significantly at-risk students, with success. In using the kit and the processes checklist, it was felt that all avenues were investigated and planned for. While the checklist is not prescriptive, it allows for comprehensive cross checking. The students have been personally involved in the creative management of their schooling and given both internal and external support structures to help them continue with their learning.

EVALUATION

It has been identified that while any school addressing case management will need to have materials and a clear process for case management, it will also need system level, transparent processes understood and supported by the school as a whole.
Failure to address whole-school strategies risks a “hit and miss” or isolated approach to case management. Yeppoon State High School is endeavouring to deal with this concern via the implementation of the School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) strategy. It is believed that case management practices will be strengthened and enhanced as the school progresses through the various stages of this strategy.

The YSHS Case Management Kit has been shared with some of the feeder, primary schools in the region. As such, other schools look to Yeppoon State High School for advice and leadership in the process of increasing their own school’s capacity, and the Action Research Project Team has been able to disseminate information across the region and champion the work being conducted at Yeppoon State High School.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Christina Rigo          Danielle Helbers       Kerri Wellspring
crigo5@eq.edu.au         dhelb2@eq.edu.au          kwell21@eq.edu.au