

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?
(Who will care and protect the carers?)
Juvenal, Satires, vi: 347-8.

Purpose of this research:

A steering group of community workers who hold an interest in external supervision had its genesis in 2006. The group comprised four people who work in agencies in the Tangata Whenua, Community and Voluntary sector (TWCV) and Internal Affairs. The agencies are Community Waikato, Anglican Action and Birthright. I joined them in 2007 and we are developing a strategy to improve access for the TWCV sector to appropriate external professional supervision.

As a member of this group my focus for this research is to find out;

1) What information has been published concerning external professional supervision for those people who work in the TWCV sector in New Zealand?

and

2) What value is placed on the provision of external supervision by organisations within this sector and how is the value demonstrated by the organisation's policy and procedure?

The findings for this project will contribute to existing knowledge by:

- Helping to inform the development of a strategy to improve access for workers in the TWCV sector to appropriate external supervision.
- Confirm best practice in relation to external supervision.

Ethical Considerations:

This research was undertaken by an online survey. None of the respondents or their organisations can be identified. The respondents were also informed that the findings will be published in the Community Waikato panui Kumara Vine.

Defining external supervision:

So what do I mean when I talk about external professional supervision?
There are many definitions;

Supervision is the key site for the discussion, reflection and resolution of ethical dilemmas in practice. (Briggs and Kane 2002).

Supervision is regular protected time for facilitated in depth reflection on your clinical practice (Bond and Holland 1998).

Supervision is lifelong learning and development as an adult- a specific learning developmental and supportive process (Zerga 2002).

Supervision is regular dedicated time for an in depth reflection on professional practice. It enables experienced professionals to achieve and sustain and creatively develop a high quality of practice through the means of focused support and development. (Unitec short course on supervision).

Supervision is a process in which one worker guides and facilitates another worker in meeting organisational, professional and personal objectives. (Tony Morrison 1993).

Findings:

I received 55 responses to the questionnaire. This would have been out of approximately 400 agencies so the return rate was approximately 12.5 %. (Compare that with the Report on the Western Sydney Community Forum project and they received 30 responses out of 2000 workers!)

These responses cannot give me an accurate picture of what is happening in community organisations as those organisations who do value supervision may have been more inclined to respond. The findings for this research therefore are based on the responses and are indicative.

One respondent did not complete the questions 3-23.

The responses to the question; “what is your understanding of supervision”, generally showed a good understanding of its purpose;

“....it provides a reflective supportive opportunity to staff to examine their practice and reflect upon their own well being.”

“Professional development- clarity around their role and their practice.”

“An external supervisor enables, guides and facilitates the supervisee (employee) in meeting certain organisational, professional and personal objectives and standards of practice, relating to competency, accountable practice, continuing professional development education and personal support.”

“Stay focused on the day to day service our organisation offers. Invaluable for me to cope, not only with individual issues but with the running of the service.”

“Safe forum for practitioners to receive support, clinical guidance, feedback and support and encourage professional development.”

“A collaborative process to enable workers to participate to the best of their ability.”

“A process that aims to meet organisational, professional and personal objectives which include competence, accountable practice, professional development and personal support.”

“A person who can listen, provide an objective viewpoint and suggest strategies for change.”

Policy and Practice:

Asked if their agency has a supervision policy 36 respondents said that their agency did have a policy, and 18 said they didn't, (one third).

35 respondents said that their policy and practice are in alignment.

One replied; “Mostly, but I think we could do better about ensuring people actually access that supervision.

One agency responded that supervision was strongly supported by the organisation but not so much by the Board.

When asked what drives their agency's policy on supervision, it became apparent that they are driven primarily by a value of caring for staff, to prevent burnout and keep them safe mentally, emotionally and physically. Keeping the agency safe by maintaining best practice was also given a lot of importance. Some of the policy was part of the agency's training policy and some was driven by outside requirements or funding requirements such as MSD contracts or it is a requirement of professional membership such as the New Zealand Association of Counselors and the Association of Social Workers.

One response also highlighted the supervision policy and practice as being a tool for managing risk.

“ Inherent part of the personal safety plan.”

“Our agency knows that external supervision is imperative to the sanity of its workers and is taking all steps to ensure that this is adhered to.”

Professional supervision for all staff is a strict requirement and is part of the deed and is built into policy. It works well for this agency.”

One respondent said; “driven by a few social workers who have attended Liz Beddoe/ Allyson Davys supervision course in Auckland. Our passion has ensured that the importance of supervision is recognized by our organisation.”

Yet another response was emphatic in its value on staff and client safety; “supervision is an essential safety practice for staff and clients; “We would require it whether it was a funding requirement or not.”

“Supervision ensures safe practice and accountability to the client, the agency, the profession and the wider community. It maintains quality of service and prevents the burn out of valued staff.”

“The agency is a crisis service and places great mental demands on staff. The clients are high need and intense. Staff must have an outlet for themselves if they are to maintain a high and positive working level. Professional supervision plays a huge role in allowing this. “

How much is the cost of monthly supervision per employee and is it factored into the agency’s annual financial budget? My questioning did not elicit whether or not the amount given included GST. One respondent did not know how much the agency paid and one was in the process of reviewing the amount of payment. All of the agencies factor the cost of supervision into their budgets.

The average amount paid per monthly supervision session is between \$90-\$100.

Amount	Number of agencies	Rural or Urban
\$50-\$60	2	regional
\$80.00 - \$90	9	7 rural 1 urban 1 regional
\$90.00 - \$100	9	2 urban 1 rural 6 regional
\$120.00	3	2 regional 1 urban
\$180.00	1	regional

Organisations that provide services across the Greater Waikato feature in the costings from \$50 a session to \$180 per session, while rural agencies appear to pay less than their urban counterparts.

Who receives Supervision and by whom?

Overwhelmingly the agencies that have a supervision policy responded that all staff working directly with clients receive supervision. Those agencies that employ clinical staff do not as a general rule offer supervision to administration staff as well but some do on request. Administrative supervision was largely the role of the manager.

Most of the agencies that offer supervision to volunteer staff do so if the have a student on placement in which case they are supervised internally and externally or if they are a trainee in facilitation. Some said they do offer volunteers

supervision but didn't elaborate as to what the volunteers do or if they have client contact.

Who chooses the supervisor?

When it comes to whether or not staff can choose their own supervisor; only one respondent said that the agency chooses the supervisor, 13 allow the employee to choose and 12 allow the staff member to choose within certain criteria.

These were listed as:

- ✳ Must provide supervisor's details and credentials.
- ✳ Providing the supervisor has the appropriate skills.
- ✳ The final decision rests with management. (X3).
- ✳ The supervisor has to be approved by the agency.
- ✳ Only if the supervisor is not associated with the agency.
- ✳ Staff can choose from a number of approved supervisors.
- ✳ They choose from a list provided or can choose their own so long as the supervisor is qualified.
- ✳ The supervisor must be registered. (NB there is no registration board for external supervisors but this comment may refer to social workers and counselors who are registered within their discipline association).

In my introduction I have pointed out that the Waikato Supervision Steering group is hoping that this project will contribute to existing knowledge by:

- Helping to inform the development of a strategy to improve access for workers in the TWCV sector to appropriate external supervision.
- Confirm best practice in relation to external supervision as an issue for community workers.

One of the issues surrounding external supervision for the community sector is what should the minimum qualification be for people to be able to offer external supervision and charge for their services? Also there is no Association of Supervisors in NZ which means that there is no guarantee that the supervisor is trained and that the standard of supervision is a satisfactory one. This can render an employee and their employer vulnerable to inappropriate and untrained supervisors with no method of redress. It is also important to note here that counseling and supervision are two distinct disciplines and while one may be qualified as a counselor they are not necessarily qualified to provide external supervision.

21 responses indicated that the agency does require a written contract or agreement between the supervisee (employee) and the external supervisor and 4 said they do not.

The majority of respondents knew what clauses were in the agreement or contract and were able to tell me. These included;

- Confidentiality
- Safety
- Openness
- Honesty
- Timeframes
- Frequency
- Venue
- Record taking
- Responsibilities
- Conflict of interest
- Ending the contract
- Accountability
- Disputes and feedback reporting
- Engagement in the supervision process
- Adherence to the Body's Code of Ethics
- Adherence to agency policies.
- \$ amount per session
- Reporting requirements and agency involvement if there are serious concerns for safety of supervisee or client.
- Personal counseling where indicated

18 respondents said their agency was a third party to the supervision contract/ agreement and the majority said that there was a clause in the contract/ agreement for tripartite discussion between the supervisor, supervisee (employee) and the employer (Agency).

Two of the comments were:

"Yes, if the supervisor has concerns about client safety, supervisee's wellbeing, ability to carry out the role, supervisee's professional competence and issues that cannot be resolved within the supervision session."

"The organisation should be able to assess the benefits as it is in their interests that staff are well supervised and the budget needs to be spent for the benefit of the organisation and the service it provides."

2 respondents said that their agency is not a third party to the supervision contract/ agreement; 4 did not respond to the question because they do not require a contract and one did not respond to the question although the agency does have a contract.

"No- the content of the supervisor session is confidential so there is no need to share it with the employer. The supervisor may suggest changes to the employer without breaking confidentiality (as agreed by the employee.)"

Community organisations are known for being resourceful. This was clearly evident with the responses to the question; *what other supports does your agency have in place to guide/ support staff in the work they do?* The responses were:

- ❖ Line supervision /management supervision and availability
- ❖ Kaumatua/ Tohunga
- ❖ Board members with appropriate expertise
- ❖ Other agencies as required.
- ❖ Field workers
- ❖ Peer mentoring- but there is not that support for the manager.
- ❖ Debriefing
- ❖ Staff/ team meetings
- ❖ Internal supervision
- ❖ Peer group for student placements (counselors and social workers.)
- ❖ Performance appraisal
- ❖ Sometimes pay for external counseling for staff in some cases.
- ❖ Professional development opportunities.
- ❖ Reporting
- ❖ Workload monitoring
- ❖ Fortnightly team supervision.

Most of the respondents felt that these other supports worked very well for their staff however it was dependent on the line manager and the employee taking responsibility for initiating the supports when required.

I noticed that peer support networks were not mentioned as they were with the agencies that do not have a supervision policy or practice.

“Excellent- there is an environment of complete trust and an opportunity to air issues in private. Supervisors offer appropriate suggestions to improve behaviour and skills etc and progress can be identified at the next supervision session.”

Barriers and Constraints:

There was no holding back here and a myriad of reasons were given as to what might be the constraints to organisations providing or continuing to provide supervision for staff. Several barriers and constraints were cited from each respondent in response to this question.

1 respondent didn't respond.

5 said there were no constraints or barriers to providing supervision;

25 said that the cost of supervision would be or is a major factor in acting as a barrier to providing supervision;

Time cost to the agency; 8

Worker buy in and understanding of the purpose of supervision; 11

Accessibility to trained and qualified supervisors; 11

Accurate reporting back; 3

Lack of co-operation between staff, management and supervisors; 1
Attitude of the Board; 2
Employer resistance; 2
Over and above core requirements. 1

The three major factors that stand out here as barriers to effective external supervision within an organisation are:

- 1) Financial cost.
- 2) Worker buy in and understanding of the purpose of supervision.
- 3) Accessibility to suitably trained, qualified supervisors that understand the work of the agency.
- 4) The time cost to the agency.

These 4 outcomes might have been different had more people responded to the survey.

Agencies that don't have a supervision policy:

18 respondents said that they do not have a policy for providing staff with external supervision however only 9 said the cost of supervision was not factored into the agency's budget and 8 said it was. One did not respond.

The reasons given for this are:

- ✳ Cost and lack of resources; 10
- ✳ Time off; 1
- ✳ Lack of Board understanding; 1
- ✳ Lack of understanding of the importance and purpose; 6
- ✳ Unsuitable or unqualified supervisors; 2
- ✳ Transport; 1
- ✳ Small townism; 1
- ✳ Lack of recognition in the practitioner's field by major funder. 1

10 identified with being rural organisations, 3 were regional, 4 urban Hamilton 1 didn't specify.

Other supports listed as being in place for employees are:

- ✳ Peer / team leader / manager support is in place;
- ✳ Internal supervision and positive support systems; (Respondent did not elaborate on these.)
- ✳ Network discussion and training in best practice;
- ✳ Peer group mentoring;
- ✳ Employee Assistance Programme;
- ✳ Yearly Appraisal;
- ✳ Networking with other agencies;
- ✳ Natural stress relief techniques e.g. yoga and naturopathy;
- ✳ Conferences, community house networks, communication with trustees;

- ✱ Free access to the manager;
- ✱ Team meetings.

2 responded that they have no supports in place for staff.

When asked how well these supports work some of the comments were:

- Sharing supervision with someone who works in the same field is very helpful as you don't need to explain some of the characteristics of the work.
- Good but it doesn't allow for practice development in a focused way.
- Not that support for the manager.
- Fairly well.
- Adequate currently but may not always be. I believe they are still trying to understand the purpose and role of this position. I have a person I can download to but this is slightly different.
- OK but could be improved with formal supervision.
- Very effective.
- Works well for some but can be difficult for those staff who work away from their peers.
- Working well
- Depends on the staff member concerned. Some of us make use of it and some don't.
- Working appropriately.

I noticed a flatness about these comments whereas the comments received by the respondents who were receiving external supervision seemed a lot more positive.

"Management yet to find value in supervision."

"We don't know what it is or how relevant it is to our agency."

"Because the voluntary Board simply has no understanding of the usefulness or the need for supervision. They do not understand it. "

"We would consider it if we could source the funding."

The categories of work these agencies are involved in were across a broad range of client groups and services:

- ✱ Youth/ rangatahi
- ✱ Older person/ Kaumatua
- ✱ Health and Disability
- ✱ Women/ men
- ✱ Families/ family violence
- ✱ Emergency / Poverty
- ✱ Prisoner rehabilitation.

- ☀ Drug and alcohol.
- ☀ Community House.
- ☀ Miniature adult (babies and children)
- ☀ Information
- ☀ Oscar workers
- ☀ Rape awareness
- ☀ Offenders with disabilities.

There were a mixture of responses to the question; what is your understanding of external supervision?

“I have asked three managers and none of us understand- sorry! “

“Professionally related, regular coaching/ supervision by an acknowledged person with expertise.”

“ A formalized process whereby a practitioner (paid or voluntary) works with a supervisor (external to or independent of the practitioner’s work place to attain high and safe standards of work, to develop and learn through self reflection in a supportive and appropriately challenging environment.”

“ No clear understanding.”

“External supervision is where you can conversate (sic) about anything whether it is good or bad.

“A chance for those providing counseling or other services to “unload” and receive counseling themselves.”

“Not sure. There seems to be different types.”

“External supervision I would think is someone you could discuss organisation’s matters with to assist with understanding and advice of particular matters. But do not really understand the roll (sic).”

“An opportunity to explore practice and methods, reflect and receive feedback.

More responses from agencies that don’t provide external supervision were unclear as to its purpose than those received from agencies who do.

Conclusions:

These findings support my original premise that many workers in our sector are dealing with complex human issues and one third of the respondents said their

agency does not have a supervision policy. Many do not understand the role external supervision plays in order to keep them, their agency and their client safe by reflecting on practice and agreeing on professional development needs.

One of the questions that needs to be included in future analysis is what qualifications do the external supervisors hold that are engaged by agencies in providing external supervision to their staff. Do the agencies know? What we already know is that there is no minimum qualification needed.

Another question that could be useful is an analysis of the staff turnover rate compared with agencies that do have an active supervision policy and those that don't.

Judging by the poor number of responses received to this questionnaire, one conclusion I can draw is that external supervision is not a priority for most organisations.

In terms of the size of the agency and whether or not they provided supervision to staff most did regardless of size. One small agency employing 6-10 staff didn't offer supervision to staff while one large agency employing 20-50 staff didn't so no substantial conclusions can be drawn from this.

Nor could any distinction be drawn about whether geographic factors influenced the provision of supervision. The two agencies that did not have a policy or practice on supervision came from both rural and remote and urban areas.

Regardless of the range of services provided or the client group served, external/clinical supervision was provided by the majority of agencies to employees working with clients regardless of the age or needs of the client group.

Recommendations:

- 1) That the findings of this research be published in the Community Waikato panui "Kumara Vine", with a view to highlighting the need for agencies to consider the importance of providing external supervision to those staff who could benefit from it.
- 2) That the supervision strategy working party develop a strategy to raise awareness and develop guidelines around good practice for external supervision to various stakeholders i.e. staff, management, Board and funders. This may include a suggestion that funders also fund the cost of travel for workers in small towns to receive external supervision elsewhere.

- 3) That a NZ Association of Supervisors or register be established so that minimum standards can be set as to the qualifications for those offering external supervision in the Tangata Whenua Community and Voluntary Sector to ensure accountability for supervisors and protection for supervisees and employers.

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