

ARTICLE COMMENTARY

By Ton Visser, Member of de DBI Communication Network

An Evaluation of the Use of Focus Groups in Services for Adults with Congenital Deafblindness

Comments from the perspective of a manager

'As a manager it is easier to be responsible for services when you know what their focus is and why this focus is necessary'

This quote, a response from one of the managers of a group home that took part in the project, reflects the strength of the project and explains its success. The project was based on various assumptions, which in my opinion are essential to providing high-quality services for deafblind adults. One assumption was that management, and in particular group-home managers, should be familiar with the services provided. Otherwise it is impossible for them to understand the minimum required from the organizational perspective to provide high-quality services. This ensures that social workers do not find themselves in the position of having to spell out what they need; instead the manager is there to support them. Their inclusion in the project was an important aspect of its success. A second assumption was that, with clients and staff constantly coming and going and client needs changing over time, ongoing staff training is essential.

What I particularly like about the Norwegian project is the model chosen. It is a clear intervention model with a moderator, consultants, group-home managers and social partners, all of whom have their own roles. The reference in the article to the projects in Denmark and Sweden is very valuable. The participants in the Norwegian project learned from their experiences and the clear theoretical framework certainly contributed to the success of the project. What was essential to the project was the way in which the partners worked together to identify the most relevant intervention and what would be needed to realize this. This created a sense of shared responsibility.

The model is especially strong in ongoing staff training; this is once the participants have completed longer basic training. The evaluation also expresses the need for sufficient basic knowledge, and indicates that other staff-training options such as supervision, individually or in groups, are also important. I support the conclusion that it is important that the participants in the project understand (also from a theoretical point of view) why they have been successful. Otherwise the success will be short-lived. A last thought relating to the evaluation itself is on the use of an external observer. I personally have excellent experiences of using an external observer who makes observations at the beginning and end of the project, preferably by filming the participants. He or she later discusses these

observations with the participants. It can be most inspiring to see your work through the eyes of an external professional.

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