

NWSS STRUCTURAL HISTORY

This excerpt is taken from a detailed history that has been kept since inception and available on the website in the History folder.

North West Residential Support Services (Changed in 2019 to North West Support Services) was formed in 1991 with one contract to support two semi-dependent young men with visiting support in Tasmania's first shared home. The value of the annual contract was \$1,500.

Over its twenty-nine-year history the organisation has worked with the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services (now Communities Tasmania) to auspice other services, provide intensive support and partner with Forensic Disability for helping disabled people coming out of the criminal justice system.

In the beginning, as a "greenfield" without any attachment to traditional structures and no funding reserves, NWSS developed a homebased office system that outsourced to an independent accountant, to provide administration support on a pay as needed basis.

As the organisation grew, it saw no reason to develop the traditional structures and continued building its homebased office network in the North West Region and partnering with more administration outsources as required on pay as needed arrangements. It soon became apparent that such a model offered many advantages. NWSS chose to outsource all of its administration and business requirements for the following advantages:

- Placing leadership with direct service personnel who could focus on the delivery of high quality, personalised service (programmatic) with all administration elements (non-programmatic) kept in the background as resources
- Creating primary pathways for values, beliefs and touchstone orientation and training
- Avoiding wasteful middle management structures with their competing silos, factionalism and politics
- Creating substantial savings that could be directed to organisational development, protecting clients and enriching their lives
- Creating an outward view into the community, partnerships and mainstream inclusion

Outsources have been carefully road tested and chosen for:

- Appropriate products and services that meet our needs
- A willingness to supply at long term outsource rates
- An alignment with or interest in the purpose, values and beliefs of the organisation
- A willingness to teach and support the organisation to strengthen self-sufficiency
- An interest in a partnership of mutual exchange towards a better understanding of each other's roles, in particular towards the outsources gaining an understanding of disability, vulnerability and marginalisation

Outsourced today consist of:

- Lawson Hyland (Chartered Accounts):
 - Business management, accounting and secretarial
- Quartz Consulting:
 - Industrial governance
- Armstrong Media:
 - Programmatic governance
- The Real Learning Experience:
 - Strategic planning and workforce management and development
- Cape Studios:
 - IT and digital resources
- BIGhART:
 - Community and culture
- AON Risk Services have provided risk, workplace health and safety and insurance advice and management since inception. We are considered by our workers compensation insurer, Allianz, to be in the top trio of performers in Tasmania

This structure now has a twenty-nine-year history with contracts this year to the value of \$16 000 000. NWSS does not advertise its services beyond word of mouth. Our growth rate currently causes periodic intake closures while we refine our structure to ensure that the service can maintain its personalised direct service quality.

This structure eliminates waste and enables the organisation to channel its savings back into:

- Programmatic service development – Safeguarding the alternative structure and benefits to clients
- Programmatic real estate – Three flexible programmatic studios as community bases, and for lifestyle activities
- A recreational program that consists of:
 - Camping holiday caravans
 - Sailability and boating vessels

- A vehicle fleet of twenty-nine including four wheelchair accessible vans ensuring that all clients can travel to family and favourite activities and events
- Organisation funded home improvements
- A professional film unit for lifestyle activities and training videos
- Canoes
- Bush walking wheelchairs
- Beach wheelchairs
- Etc.

The value of this structure to the Board of Management includes:

- Control and access to administrative outsourced expertise devoid of management politics and risk
- Finances under the influence of Australian standards and provider credibility
- Room to concentrate on direct service quality

Separating the non-programmatic from the programmatic opened up a model that allowed for the development of a direct service team management approach. The management team slowly grew from two to seven at the time of writing and adheres to strict team protocols and understandings:

- All decisions that impact on the people being supported and support staff are reviewed by the team before implementation
- Ideas for improvement are always welcomed and explored
- Work patterns and loads can be adjusted to suit family and social needs
- Work is targeted to direct service without interference from administration dominance
- Home based offices, a vehicle and all necessary IT equipment
- Working by project and need rather than by hours
- Being prepared to understand each other's position descriptions and support each other
- Being prepared to move tasks between team members to balance workloads, maintain family and socially friendly routines, and be succession and crisis prepared
- Being prepared to work with, and learn to understand how to use outsource services

There always remains a hierarchical responsibility that tracks from the Board of Management, to the General Manager, to the Direct Service Manager, to the Direct Service Coordinators, to Coordination Assistants, to support workers. But this hierarchy cannot eclipse the team protocols, understandings and commitment to transparency.

With fluctuating workloads and the sharing of middle management responsibilities the management team needed an instantly available set of fluid resources to offset the outsource model without having to fall into the old hierarchical business dominated structure.

One of the big problems in our sector, and probably many others, is the lack of opportunities for support workers to gain experience at supervisory, team leader and management team member levels. It can be a long wait of many years to get such opportunities. Courses are fine and endorsed by NWSS, but the actual experience is harder to come by.

From our workforce we have gathered, by invitation and calling for expressions of interest, a pool of fifteen Coordination Assistants (CA's), who are either aspiring to these roles or are willing to help the team with tasks that they are good at.

These CA's form our insource team to which we give a monetary value and allow the management team members to purchase their skills from this pool for assistance to offset workloads. The CA respondents in turn get valuable training and experiential opportunities. Management team members, if they feel their workloads are growing, are reminded that relief is dependent on them developing and nurturing support from the insource team. The benefits from this approach are:

- The management team members:
 - learn to cultivate their insource resource pool
 - learn how to strengthen succession and crisis planning
 - learn to train and delegate tasks and responsibilities
 - learn to create and manage their comfort zones
- That it defines the training for management team
- That it encourages ideas for change
- Being able to develop a social and family friendly approach for all levels of the organisation through strong back up

The advantages for the support workers in the CA insource pool:

- Gaining leadership training and experience
- Gaining a pathway to leadership in their sector
- Have interesting multi-task responsibilities at different levels
- Being able to influence change

Members of the insource team are standard support workers who are paid for their extra coordination assistant tasks at the applicable award rate.

This structure has kept NWSS constantly in front of needs and trends and greatly assisted in the rapidity of change from structural influences like NDIS to the rapid and chaotic adjustments required during unforeseen crises like COVID-19.

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