

# What Sort of Supervision?

*In the Winter 2002 News and Views (pp6-11) there were two papers on supervision for guidance practitioners. In the first of these papers Rosemary Jolley asked for experiences from colleagues. Gill Aslett (Volunteer Quest Employment Support Team, Cambridge; Open University Associate Lecturer, and NAEGA member) replies.*

I welcome the review of Andrew Edwards' publication, which Rosemary uses to bring so many important points into the debate on supervision within guidance. Widening the debate by considering how other professionals work is indeed valuable. She asks for others to recount their experiences, and although mine are no longer within my own practice, I hope my contact with practitioners through research, tutoring (the *Open University MA module E839 "Guidance and counselling in learning"*) and volunteering allows me to do this. I would like to comment on three points:

- ▶ definitions
- ▶ the role of managers
- ▶ what can be done NOW.

**Defining what supervision is** when widening the debate is important, and within this exercise, it grew to (possibly) encompass appraisal, problem solving, mentoring, and other features. The Guidance Council standards cover the provision of most of these. But to provide for the professional growth and well being of practitioners, to move from good to excellent, I think we cannot improve on the definition (albeit from a counselling background) given in Sheila Trahar's (2002) paper, citing Proctor:

*"The objective is to enable the counsellor to gain in ethical competence, confidence and creativity so as to give the best possible service to her/his clients" (p 9)*

I hope we can keep those three 'ethical Cs' – Competence; Confidence; Creativity – in mind for guidance too. This should allow us to come to terms with the difficulties some may feel with the word 'supervision' that are also reported in Trahar's paper.

**The role of managers.** I have not met one practitioner who considers supervision can link in with appraisal and performance review. This is partly because many managers do not come through a guidance route, and are not therefore professionally aware of the complexities met and competencies needed. This was particularly clear from the groups of practitioners I met with in 2000, regarding their views on the development of guidance (Aslett 2001). But also the dilemmas arising from a process carried out on behalf of an organisation rather than for individual practice are difficult to resolve. Three of my 2002 OU students found themselves in the position of managing and mentoring others, giving rise to much discussion and food for research but no resolution of the dilemmas!

So **what can be done now**, when the provision of guidance is often not yet structured to include a form of supervision leading to growth of the three ethical Cs? And while we are debating the form of supervision, who can be trained in its practice? An example of what can be done now is taken from my volunteer role (I maintain the information base) at the Quest Employment Support Team in Cambridge. The team has

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five advisers, working with adults with various disabilities. It is work that brings them into contact with many difficult decisions, both for themselves and their clients. The agency gained GAB accreditation in 2001, and all advisers work towards the NVQ4. They have had fortnightly advisers' meetings for some time, to keep in touch with outreach work, network contacts and administrative detail, but now one of these meetings each month is called a 'Peer Supervision Group' meeting, and will concentrate entirely on casework. Even if this is just an hour or so every month, I know from my own practice in the 90s that it is a process that can enormously help in developing the growth of ethical competence, confidence and creativity. I hope there will be more debate re group or individual supervision (there are strengths and difficulties in both), but I am sure the route to professional supervision is now clear within this agency.

### References:

Aslett G (2001) "IAG development: support for the adult guidance practitioner", *Journal of Access and Credit Studies* 3 (2) 130-142

Trahar S (2002) "Supervision for career practitioners in HE – developing the reflective practitioner or an unwanted intervention?" *NAEGA News and Views*, Winter 2002

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### Dear NAEGA

I was interested to read the articles on Supervision in the last edition of News & Views (winter 2001).

Croydon Adult Learning Advice Centre (CALAC) was established in South London in 1986 – and one of its objectives was to reach unemployed adults (we had a number of target groups – the 'usual suspects!'). A year or so into its operation we became increasingly aware that our success in meeting this objective meant that the service was attracting a range of users, whose circumstances and issues were placing some unanticipated demands on the team of advisers and support staff. For example this included refugees (the service as located near to Lunar House), those with mental health difficulties and occasionally adults who were homeless.

One of the ways we sought to address this was to introduce supervision sessions for the staff – something not commonly available to guidance rather than counselling staff at the time. We found a counsellor locally who was prepared to facilitate these sessions – but she didn't have guidance training or a guidance background. The sessions proved beneficial in enabling staff to download some of the issues which arose in relation to their work with clients and there was value in having an external facilitator. However, given the counsellor's lack of guidance experience, the training element was restricted to what the staff could learn from each other. After some time we came to the conclusion that regular sessions for advisers to review their own practice together, using case studies to discuss their approaches to client work was really as effective. This was probably so in part at least because:

- ▶ the team were very supportive of each other; and
- ▶ the team included some very experienced staff.

Each adviser would bring 2/3 case studies of clients they had found more challenging to assist. This way of providing support also offered the opportunity to identify individual/common training needs, and consider how these could be met, (including those development needs, which could be met internally). In some cases for example, a less experienced adviser would sit in on a client interview with a more experienced one (with the client's permissions of course).

My experience would certainly encourage IAG providers to arrange some form of supervision/peer support process – and would agree that finding a supervisor with a guidance background would be beneficial.

Your sincerely

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