Handout 3: Skills for Effective Casework

Skills

1. **Effective listening**: The qualities of an effective listener include:
   - Wants to listen
   - Pays attention
   - Shares responsibility for interaction
   - Minimises distraction
   - Mirrors body language
   - Doesn't fidget
   - Is able to remain silent
   - Asks clarifying questions
   - Tries to see the speakers point of view
   - Reflects feeling and content
   - Summarises
   - Concentrates
   - Uses minimal encouragers such as "aha", "mmmm", nodding head
   - Faces person
   - Doesn't judge or evaluate
   - Doesn't change the subject
   - Supports the feelings of the speaker, doesn't dismiss feelings or try to cheer up the speaker

2. **Barriers to Effective Listening**: Listening can be poor when:
   - the environment is distracting;
   - the listener has preconceived ideas;
   - the listener is judgmental;
   - the listener is preoccupied;
   - the listener is distracted;
   - the listener only listens to the words not the key message;
• the listener keeps interrupting;
• the listener tries to do most of the talking.

3. **Dealing with Difficult Issues**: The caseworker needs to have courage and a range of skills available to them to assist them to deal with difficult clients and difficult situations. These skills include problem solving skills and the skills of assertion.

4. **Effective Questioning**: To assist the client to explore the issues of concern to them.

5. **Engagement**: The ability to establish a relationship.

6. **Problem solving** (see Handout 12)

7. **Conflict management**: Caseworkers are often called upon to mediate and assist in the resolution of conflict. The core skills used here are the same as those used in effective interpersonal communication and include effective listening, effective questioning, assertion and assessment of the clients needs.

8. **Advocacy**: Sometimes, needed resources are not present or are withheld from a specific client. As an advocate, the caseworker tries to make needed assistance available.

9. **Interviewing skills**: Interviewing is a formal conversation in which a caseworker seeks to gather information and or facts from the client, to assist the client to reflect upon the issues in their life including the causes and the options for change.

An effective interview cannot be reduced to a formula because people are contradictory and unfortunately are not always predictable. The effective interviewer has a variety of strategies and techniques that can be used to obtain information from people while maintaining a productive and positive relationship.

The fundamental skills of interviewing include:

• Analysis of the interview
• Awareness of relationships
• Verbal communication skills
• Non verbal communication skills