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#85 - Implementing Uniting's Revised Domestic and Family Violence Practice Framework: A critical reflection

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Objectives/aims

In 2022, Uniting revised its Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Practice Framework. This framework is currently used across Uniting's Early Intervention and Intensive Family Services programs, which include approximately 300 staff. The aim was to ensure that the Practice Framework better reflected current research and provided practitioners with the information and tools they needed to work holistically with families impacted by DFV. A second aim was to provide practitioners with flexible client pathways.

A key consideration during re-implementation was how to engender practitioner competence and confidence, as staff had strongly indicated that the previous framework lacked relevant information and resources. Practice coaching was therefore an integral implementation strategy.

Methods

Phase 1 of the re-implementation process involved setting up an implementation team and creating a strategy to deliver training and coaching across multiple programs/regions.

Phase 2 involved the delivery of training, plus establishing a dedicated Practice Coach to deliver coaching. This coaching provided staff not just with skills, but also guided support, and was designed to enable partnerships with staff and manage resistance (Reiss, 2015: xvi).



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Coaching allowed practitioners to reflect on practice, develop new practice approaches (through role-playing), and work through existing casework scenarios.

To support these activities, the implementation team produced an “Implementation Guide” and established a monthly meeting with critical stakeholders to share updates about the progress of the implementation and receive feedback from each region. These meetings enabled important discussions about barriers and enablers.

The Internal evaluation used administrative data to assess program reach, but then focused on qualitative data (surveys and focus groups) to critically analyse the experiences and perceptions of staff and their managers.

Main findings

Uniting used elements of the RE-AIM framework to evaluate the implementation. In relation to both effectiveness and adoption, a key finding was that practitioners’ experiences were predominantly positive. Many reported that coaching increased their confidence and made them feel more empowered when working with families. However, the evaluation also identified a sharp disjunction between the positive experiences of workers and the more negative perceptions of managers. When assessing the domains of implementation and maintenance, the evaluation found that managers were critical of changes to data accountability. While managers acknowledged that workers were highly satisfied with the provision of coaching, they themselves were dissatisfied with the way that only minimal data was captured about a worker’s interactions with a family. In contrast, workers welcomed the way in which the new framework freed them from some of the more onerous data entry requirements of the previous framework and allowed them to work more flexibly with clients.

This disjunction highlighted the need for data accountability to be built into practice implementation projects as an integral component, but also indicates that practitioner empowerment can be engendered by providing workers with choice in the pathways and tools that they use as well as the importance of reviewing strategies to enhance adoption (such as embedding data collection/accountability into implementation).

In terms of implementation, the evaluation also identified the need for consistent communication with managers. Once managers understood that the reduced data

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accountability was a decision made to support the application of the Practice Framework across a broad range of programs, they became more supportive of the process. Managers have also developed an understanding of future sustainability strategies that will improve the monitoring of fidelity to the model. These key conversations were facilitated by the internal evaluation and highlight the importance of 'de-implementation' strategies and strong communication planning alongside re-implementation activities.