NIC 1 SAOL Evaluation Report

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Approved original allocation from Task Force: £13,163

Interim allocation: £6,600

The contribution of Task Force has been for an evaluation - a draft of which is available *'From mainlining to mainstreaming'*

Overview: The SAOL programme assists women who are recovering from drug addiction to recover in a holistic way. The programme has attracted a great, deal of attention because of its success and the demand for knowledge of the programme resulted in the organisers deciding to write a report on the processes and features that brought about this.success. This was the component that was funded by the Task. Force

Section A — Background to the Project

'Whatever it takes to enable an individual to gain her self-respect back and become a full and valuable member of her society - that is what SAOL attempts to provide' (Joan Byrne, SAOL Manager). The word 'saol' translates as 'life' and is also an acronym and stands for Seasmhacht (Stability), Abaltacht (Ability), Obair (Work) and Leann (Learning).

Central to the idea of SAOL is addressing the needs of 'stabilised' women drug users - meaning that the women are taking prescribed methadone consistently under the supervision of the City Clinic. However, in the context of the SAOL project, 'stability' is about more than methadone maintenance. It is the aspiration to calmness and control in their own lives where their abilities and talents can blossom and where they can enjoy and benefit from the learning available in the project.

It has long been recognised that the SAOL project offers tremendous potential for women who are recovering from drug problems. However, in order to allow for the replication of this project it was considered essential to describe how the project works and what features and processes are central

to its operation. Thus, a crucial part of the rationale for the project is presenting the model for others. This was seen as extremely important given the commitment of SAOL to share the acquired knowledge and information to others.

In line with this the funding for the project is precisely to do this ie. to produce a report by SAOL about its operation.

B Stages of Project Development and Implementation

Planning

The decision to go ahead with a publication on the process and practices of SAOL was based on the perceived, needs of groups who frequently made contact with the SAOL office and staff. Rather than there being a formal needs analysis, the need became apparent in the contact with various groups. Specifically, the groups who made contact with SAOL in this way wanted to know what might work or at least what had worked for SAOL – thus the need to describe it simply.

Rather than going out to look for a the target group, most of the relevant target groups would have made contact with SAOL themselves. The most frequent kind of inquiry was one that involved wanting to find out what the SAOL programme was about.

The rationale for this activity was based on these interactions with other groups with similar interests. Given the need to replicate the programme in other-situations, the advice of the SAOL staff was constantly being sought. This resulted in repetition that was both tedious and time consuming. Thus, it seemed sensible to write all the information down so that it could be more accessible with less trouble for the SAOL staff

Objectives

In line with. this analysis of the situation the objectives of the project were: To undertake a research study into the existing SAOL project with the aim. of fully documenting the processes and techniques that have made the project so successful so as to allow for its replication elsewhere. A related aim is to make it clear to the Drugs Task Force what the project is about. Similarly the aim is to provide useful and practical documentation so that the

project will not always be required to repeat explanations of how they have operated but rather will be able to point to the- documentation that will be produced.

Since these objectives were written dowry, there has been little change beyond the fact that a new objective has been acquired viz., an Evaluation of SAOL 1, that is the outcomes of the first phase of the SAOL programme.

In deciding the. objectives, the staff of the SAOL project had a major input. Specifically, the objectives were decided in the context of the needs of staff and the constant requests for descriptions of the SAOL programme.

Needs and Benchmark measures

This project is different from others that were directly addressing the issue of treatment. However, a most relevant benchmark: was the need to have standard open days on a regular basis to provide information to various groups. It is anticipated that the need for these occasions will either disappear or will diminish dramatically

Implementation

Staffing

Three people who are seconded on a part-time basis to complete the project from their normal work in SAOL, make up the staff of the project. This is an especially demanding task since none of those involved would have experience of writing of this kind. The training provided is mainly on report writing and on research skills. This is provided in-house with a particular focus on the writing of the present report.

There are two features that assisted in this arrangement: the first being that the training is in-house and secondly that there is real interest by staff in this activity. On the other hand there are difficulties arising from the competing demands on time from other important activities in SAOL. This is due to the fact that it was necessary to release on a part-time basis the most highly motivated and competent members of the team, which in turn caused difficulties down the line.

Community Involvement

There are a number of major links with other activities and community groups. These involve, establishing what progression routes are most beneficial, the sharing of practice and experience, and influencing policies where this is relevant and possible. The project is able to network effectively with others largely because SAOL has some resources to do this and because it shares values and principles which are crucial in networking. On the other the demands on resources and a clash of ideologies make it sometime a difficult task to network effectively.

There is considerable satisfaction with the local community involvement. This is because the whole project and the resulting publication, is based on the experience of the community and its activities within the community

Management

The monitoring of the on-going implementation of the project is, in effect, an effort to ensure that the report gets written. Bearing in mind the nature **of** the project (writing up processes and practices), a system of both internal and external checks were employed to monitor this work. These were considered to be working effectively but to be stressful

Nature of Service/Clients Served

None of the items relating to profile of clients are relevant given the nature of the project which will be a publication for people interested in replicating and developing the work of SAOL. It is expected however, that systematic feedback v/ill inevitably be conveyed to the project both formally and informally on the basis of the reactions of other groups who read the publication and who wish to comment on it. It is also planned to have a systematic follow-up on the success of the project

Outcome

The report, which constitutes the project, is nearing completion at the present. There were two pitfalls which were considered by the organisers to have been avoided. The first of which was finding the time to do what was a. very demanding activity. The second was that they underestimated the effects of taking core staff away from their normal work in order to write up their experiences.

The success of the project will be judged on a number of criteria but the most important of these will be people's interest in reading the report on the project as well as the extent to which the principles underlying the project are brought to bear on the drugs problem in other projects. In the immediate aftermath however, it would seem that. Level of interest in the SAOL work is greater and important lessons have been learned about management in the course of writing the present report. They have also learned about the limits of what can be done.

The potential of the project is that until now little written material had been available on women and drug use, nothing had been written on practice, and there was little information on culturally appropriate systems. The organisers would claim therefore that to some extent, the project was unique. Putting this in the public domain would be a great service.

With regard to the doing of similar projects, the SAOL management are convinced that if a similar project were to be undertaken in the future, it should be written into a workplan and costed in the budget. Equally they are convinced that it would be a very valuable exercise.
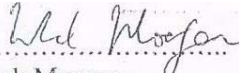
C Conclusions

In the opinion of the evaluator, it is not possible to separate the writing up of the processes of the SAOL programme without considering the nature of the SAOL programme itself In the writer's modest involvement (a short few hours), it came across that the SAOL programme is more like a. philosophy, more a way of thinking about the world and one that is truly holistic. One cannot be but struck by the confidence that permeates the personnel in the programme; by their absolute conviction that their approach will work. The second feature of the programme is the emphasis on education not in a narrow sense but in the very broadest way while acknowledging the importance of formal qualifications. The third feature of the programme is the 'liberation' philosophy. In this regard, it is no co-incidence that the programme has a feminist orientation that is reflected in informality, the absence of hierarchies and a strong emphasis on social-emotional features.

Capturing these kinds of subtle matters is very difficult. However, it is extremely important that they try to do so. For that reason the project was

extremely worth undertaking. Obviously it turned out to be much more difficult than was anticipated. To capture the essence of a programme is relatively easy if it starts with guidelines as in the case of the AA 12 steps. To capture the essence of an ideal and a way of thinking (like in SAOL) is much more difficult.

I have only one recommendation. The SAOL project were of the view that the publications of their processes and practices would alleviate the burden of having to explain to countless people what they were about. It would be a pity however, if having read the report, those most interested did not have an opportunity to meet the SAOL people in person. The strength and conviction of the project can be conveyed best in a face-to-face interaction!!

Mark Morgan