
Brief Report

A Case Management Approach to School Counselling

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INTRODUCTION

Case management is a well established practice in many settings (Leavitt, 1983; Platman, Dorgan, Gerhard, Mallam, & Siliadis, 1982; Roessler & Rubin, 1982; Sanborn, 1983; Schwartz, Goldman, & Churgin, 1982; Steinberg, & Carter, 1983). It is commonly understood as

...how to work with more than one case at a time, how to select which case to work with, how to move from one case to another, how to establish a system to insure movement of all cases, how to meet objectives one has established (Henke, Connolly, & Cox, 1975, p. 218).

The concept and use of the case management approach is consistent with the pressure for accountability in the counselling field.

However, school counsellors appear hesitant to adopt case management because of "lack of time." Ironically, there is evidence that counsellors in situations where there are large counsellor-student ratios are more involved in accountability efforts than are counsellors with small counsellor-student ratios (Fairchild & Zins, 1986). Wheeler & Loesch (1981), after reviewing the literature, concluded that minimal training is the primary reason why there is little activity in the area of accountability (p. 196). Fairchild & Zins (1986) in their study of members of the American School Counselors Association found that "the greatest percentage of respondents (51.9%) indicated that they were not familiar with methods of obtaining accountability information ..." (p. 198). Birk and Brookes (1986) confirm a disparity between ratings of the importance of accountability and the adequacy of training for such activities. Myrick (1984) concurs that "the greater problem would appear to lie with lack of leadership and training which could provide practical models, relevant instruments and examples of data analysis."

The deficits appear to be not only in training but in field supervision. Studies of the supervision of school counsellors suggest that supervision is not directed toward case management, but rather focuses on meetings, planning and development, in-service coordination and other administrative functions (Wilson & Femley, 1987; Barrett & Schmidt, 1986; Comas & Cecil, 1983; Schmidt & Barrett, 1983). Regardless of the rationale for reluctance, "Few counsellors would deny that more evidence is needed to support the valuable work that they are doing." (Myrick,

1984, p. 218). Case management serves this purpose in addition to its primary function.

The advantages of the case management approach are common sense benefits which invite increased satisfaction by client, counsellor and system. Among other advantages, it:

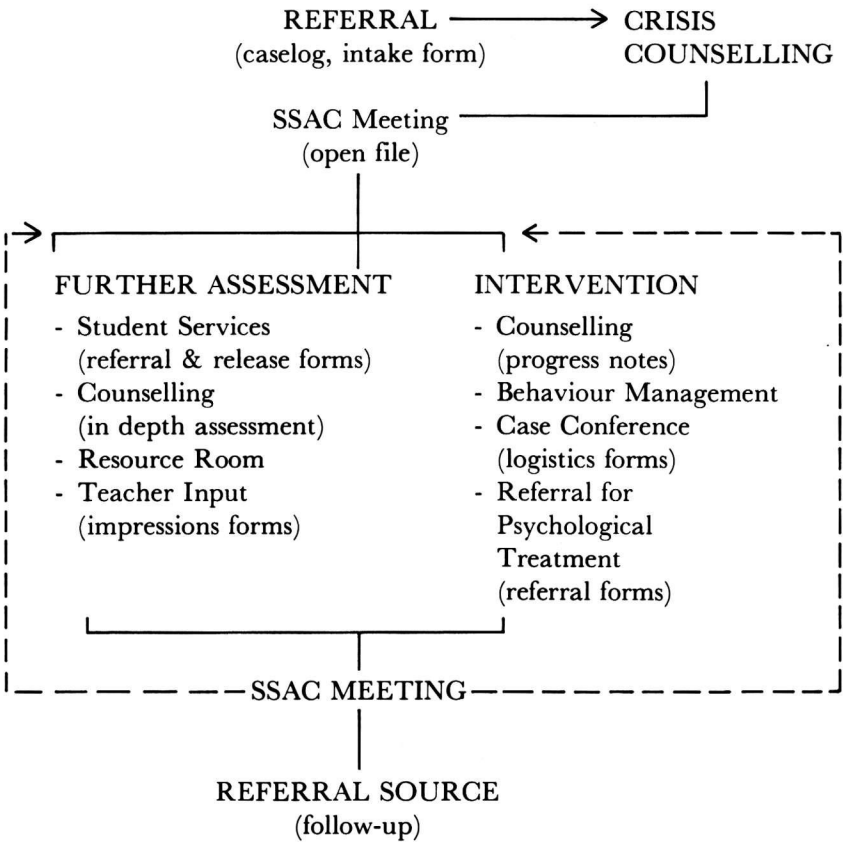
- assures assessment and action on virtually every referral
- provides for assessment of the appropriateness of every referral
- clarifies the expectations of the referral source
- clarifies "who is the client?" and in doing so clarifies the combination of counselling and consulting required.
- provides feedback to the referral source
- invites case supervision by colleagues and supervisors
- increases the likelihood of adhering to ethical and professional standards
- provides for easy compilation of statistics as a data base for formative evaluation
- provides for easy access to data for reports and recommendations

Case management is not a counselling technique in itself. It is an attempt to provide an individualized global picture of the client. Tollefson (1968) writes, "Skillfully used, these methods afford the counsellor a procedure for synthesizing the data acquired from a variety of sources and techniques" (p. 3) and are an "important means by which counselors develop skill in case analysis to better perform counseling and consulting functions" (p. viii). Nearly two decades later, however, her statement "Our experience indicates that case study of an individual. . . is conspicuously absent in the working world of most school counsellors," (p. vii) appears to remain true. This paper provides one example of a functioning case management system used by a practising counsellor for managing individually referred cases.

A CASE MANAGEMENT APPROACH EXAMPLE

The setting in which this approach is practised is a K-9 school of 500 students of primarily middle to upper socio-economic status. The counsellor has a half-time position.

The crux of the case management approach lies in the Student Services Assistance Council which, after variations in the approach, now reviews every referral. The Council consists of the counsellor, the principal, vice principal and the resource room teacher. This group meets weekly, along with any teacher who, as a referring source, chooses to attend. The following flow chart indicates the basic process and the related documentation:



The approach includes the following components:

- Referral form
- Referral Council
- Referral Logs
- Intake Form
- Case Log
- In Depth Assessment Form
- Follow-up Form
- Feedback Forms
- Communication Forms

The nature of the referral determines the combination of the components that are implemented. Neither the process, nor the documentation, need be burdensome or cumbersome. The objective of the case management approach is to deal with the case professionally and expediently. The forms involved in the process are designed to minimize the time involved in documentation. As often as possible this means the counsellor places a check mark on one of several options or fills in a blank rather than writing a narrative report.

Referral Form

This initial contact simply identifies the student and the concerns of the referee. Unless it is of an emergency nature, the referral is placed on the agenda of the next referral council. The name is placed in the General Referrals Log.

Referral Council

The referral council is composed of an administrator, the counsellor, the special education teacher and the referring source. At a weekly meeting, the referrals are discussed with the objective of determining services that need to be supplied to the child. In most cases no action is taken on the referral until after the meeting. The meetings include: and update of the status of each case; an evaluation of cases to determine whether the file should be closed, whether new directions should be taken or whether to continue with the present intervention; and new referral discussions resulting in action plans.

Referral Logs

Two referral logs are kept. The General Referral Log is used to note every incoming referral. This allows for an overview of the counsellor's total case load and the status of any individual case without referring to the student's specific file. Information is recorded concisely. It includes: date of referral; name of student; grade; referral source; the nature of the concern; date the case was brought to the referral council; the case management agency; whether a counsellor file was opened; date of closure and units of time spent.

The second referral log — Referrals to Student Services — allows the counsellor to remain knowledgeable about the status of any case referred to Student Services. This form can set the counsellor's mind at rest by confirming that his or her role in the case has been appropriately exercised even if the case is not closed. It clearly indicates the nature of the assessments completed and the follow-up status relative to those assessments.

Intake Form

The Intake Form is completed upon receipt of a verbal or written referral. It contains basic information about the referral and assists in establishing an initial direction. The intake form includes: date of referral; name of student; grade; teacher; name of contact person; relationship and phone number of contact person; the referral source; the nature of the concern; the frequency, duration and intensity of concern; teacher interventions; referrer's expectations; case management options and conclusions and actions.

Case Log

The Case Log is stapled to the inside cover of the file folder at the time of opening the file. Its purpose is to record the units of time used in dealing with the interventions and discussions concerning the case. It is a running account of when, how long, and what kind of service was provided.

In Depth Assessment Form

The In Depth Assessment Form is initiated on an optional basis when the case is likely to be complicated or ongoing. Although the longest of the forms and therefore the one most likely to be questioned in terms of time effectiveness, it is vital to an overview of the case. It prompts the counsellor to avoid early erroneous assumptions based only on referral information. This assessment form brings together the vital statistics of the student and provides (together with information from the referral source) the basis for the initial hypothesis and intervention strategies. The form includes: Demographic Information; Academic Information; School History; Behavioural Information; Health Conditions; Family Information; Family Map; Family Dynamics; Previous Efforts at the Concern; a place to note Conclusions; and a place to note questions which arise from the initial interview.

Follow Up Form

The Follow Up Form, or progress note, is used to keep a running account of the issues with which the counsellor is dealing. Questions arising from the interventions and new hypotheses are noted.

Feedback Forms

The Impressions provides a method of obtaining information from teachers who are in direct contact with the student. It is a request to provide the counsellor with the teachers' impressions in four general

areas: Academic; Classroom Behaviour; Peer Relations; and Other Comments.

The Memo To (Referrer) Form advises the referrer in general terms of the resolution of the case. This formalizes what has been done and what suggestions or recommendations were made. This communication has valuable potential in terms of public relations and staff support.

Communications Forms

The counsellor can develop Communication Forms to ensure that all affected individuals are informed of case conferences, meetings and assessments. With the increase in legal liabilities surrounding issues as informed consent, it is vital that the counsellor have on file the necessary documentation to protect both the counsellor and the school system for litigation. Apart from legalities, public relations are furthered by such communications.

CONCLUSION

The case management approach presented here affords the counsellor a time effective means to work with a wide variety in individual referrals while simultaneously gathering a data base which can be used to address accountability and professional issues.

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Ronna and Allen are married to each other and share research and writing interests.

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Copies of the described forms are available.