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FINAL REPORT

Island Health

Report of the Workplace Assessment Process for 7 Oaks

February, 2022

Submitted By ADR Education Partnership
Jessica McNamara/ Partner
T | 250.598.9696
E | jbmcnamara@adrededucation.ca

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Introduction

Jessica McNamara (ADR Education) hereinafter referred to as the “assessor”, was engaged to design and conduct a workplace assessment process for 7 Oaks, Island Health.

Leadership is committed to improving workplace relations and quality of life at 7 Oaks. To do so, an assessment and analysis of the issues, concerns and opportunities for improvement was undertaken. The intent of the process was to identify the main issues and problems to determine how staff can work together more effectively and efficiently. The workplace assessment process is therefore not designed to find fault, attribute blame, or criticize. Its purpose is to provide staff, supervisors, and management with an opportunity to reflect on the dynamics, challenges and issues that may be impacting 7 Oaks’ functionality and wellbeing.

A process was designed that includes the following tasks:

- Conduct private and confidential interviews with staff on a voluntary basis
- Develop a list of consistent themes (dominant perspectives) about workplace challenges and issues needing attention and resolution
- Draft a summary report that describes the main themes requiring action and improvement, and provide a set of recommendations
- Present the report to the group and discuss its contents
- Provide strategic advice and assistance to senior management about how to move ahead with implementing an action plan

Thank you for taking the time to share your perspectives and insights. Your collective willingness to speak openly about your views and experiences is gratefully acknowledged. The responsibility for improvement and addressing unresolved issues rests with *all* team members, not just management or any single individual. Doing so will require the commitment and participation of the entire group to implement positive changes. Strong leadership and support from senior management is also necessary for moving forward effectively.

Nature of the Assessment

This workplace assessment is not an investigation. It is an enquiry by the assessor about the health of the workplace *from the point of view of those who work in it*. The assessor’s job is not to critically investigate the trustworthiness of anything that is reported to her nor to determine the factual accuracy of what was heard. On the contrary, the assessor is reporting on the opinions – perceptions, experiences, feeling and thoughts - of those who work in the workplace about its health and functionality. In total, 27 people were interviewed, input was received from both staff and management and two written submissions were provided. The assessment and corresponding analysis is made after completing the interviews and therefore offers an accurate reflection of workplace conditions and dynamics according to those who participated in the process.

The assessor was asked to conduct this assessment with a focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). When asked about DEI within 7 Oaks, very little information was provided by those interviewed and most stated that it is not an issue in the workplace. Issues relating to DEI were not a prevalent theme based on the interviews conducted. However, because the Assessor was asked to pay particular attention to this aspect while conducting the assessment, the information that was provided about DEI by a small number of interviewees is included below in the *Things to Note* section.

Self-imposed Limits to the Report

Predictably, in some of the interviews the assessor heard participants' opinions about conflicts with staff and managers. The themes that emerged from these interviews are included in this report. However, the assessor is not commenting about individual staff or managers and the specific conflicts they may be experiencing. As mentioned, a workplace assessment is not an investigation and therefore not intended to be a tool to determine wrongdoing or expose alleged breaches of performance. Where there are consistent criticisms and concerns attributed to individuals' behaviour in the workplace, management is encouraged to pursue those appropriately. That could involve advice, coaching, training, and other supportive remedies.

About this Report

This report aims to be concise and descriptive. It is composed by considering and analyzing all the information shared during the interviews. It captures consistent perspectives identified by those interviewed and does not highlight infrequently mentioned issues. Terms like "many", "some", "most", "a great majority" or "generally" will be used. Such terms are intended to give the reader an approximation of how broadly or narrowly a view or opinion was shared. The contents of the report are not a statement of fact nor are they designed to find fault or attribute blame. The report reflects the perceptions, opinions, views, and feelings revealed during the interviews. It describes and analyzes two main themes identified below.

These core issues need to be addressed for the workplace to move forward positively and improve its effectiveness and functionality:

1. Desire for Accountability
2. Need for Consistency of Approach

In terms of format, first a section on "Things to Note" is provided to highlight important considerations the assessor believes should be accounted for in the assessment given their impact on the workplace and its culture. Next, each of the themes is summarized and briefly analyzed. Direct, un-attributable quotes are included to contextualize the meaning of each theme. The quotes represent similar statements that were heard frequently and are sufficiently

general that they could have been said by anyone who was interviewed. Finally, a series of procedural recommendations are provided to address each major issue which are intended to support the development of an action plan.

Things to Note

1. COVID 19

It is important to note that the extra stressors and fatigue experienced because of COVID 19 contribute to the current situation at 7 Oaks. The Global Pandemic, changing Public Health Orders and mandatory vaccination requirements have taken a significant toll on staff and Leadership alike. This is an issue that contributes to workplace negativity in obvious ways (burn-out, impatience and grumpiness, tasks left uncompleted, workloads doubled or sometimes tripled by unfilled shifts and vacant lines). Some staff complete substantial overtime and may sometimes pace themselves in their work as a self-protective measure, particularly when there are shortages that mean they are working overtime while also being short-staffed. This reality needs to be acknowledged and considered when looking at the workplace situation as a whole.

2. Lack of Consistent Leadership

The Site has not had consistent and stable Leadership support for many years. There have been several different managers over the past ten years, and 4 different coordinators during that time. This lack of consistency has created a situation where initiatives have not been followed through on and people have often felt left to their own devices and under supported in their work. The current Leadership Team, although relatively new, initiated this Assessment and is committed to following through on the recommendations included in this Report.

3. Physical Layout of the Site

7 Oaks is comprised of five different houses, with one of them being the Administrative Building. The physical layout of the site lends itself to silos and therefore poses a spatial challenge in creating a sense of Team and interconnectedness. In addition, having Leadership centralized in one building contributes to a sense of division/separation between the administration and staff.

4. Diversity Equity and Inclusion

As mentioned above, while the subject of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion was deliberately explored during the interviews, very little information related to it was provided by participants and the two themes identified below took precedence in almost every interview. Furthermore, the analysis of the interview perspectives was conducted with an emphasis on issues related to DEI and very little emerged by using that analytical lens. It should be noted that several people interviewed spoke about alleged racist and discriminatory behaviour that occurred in the past

but did not report any current issues. It is the assessor's understanding that those supposedly involved in those past occurrences have since left 7 Oaks.

It is interesting to note that there was so little reported about DEI at 7 Oaks. The staff is relatively diverse, as is the clientele. The lack of focus on DEI among staff and Leadership points to an opportunity for 7 Oaks to embrace DEI in an intentional way by providing professional development opportunities, training, dialogue sessions and visible messages of support etc.

Some people spoke about issues associated with DEI which mainly focused on client-service related dynamics. For example, a couple of participants pointed out that because of the number of indigenous clients, there is a need for more training around Colonial History and Cultural competence/humility. In addition, it was mentioned that training about gender, sexuality and sexual identity would be beneficial as it would help normalize what some of the residents have experienced and how it may be impacting their current situation.

Themes

The following section describes and analyses the two core themes (main subjects) consistently identified through the interviews. They represent the main areas the Site should focus on to see improvements and move forward positively. As mentioned, the themes are based on the prevailing perspectives and impressions revealed during the interviews. They are framed and nuanced by the assessors' analysis of the information shared by those interviewed. Each theme is briefly described and analyzed, and includes direct, un-attributable quotes that help reinforce and contextualize key messages.

1. Desire for Accountability

The most prevalent theme arising out of the interviews was a desire for more accountability defined by the assessor as, "a willingness and commitment to accept responsibility for one's actions". Nearly every person interviewed expressed a concern about the lack of accountability among staff and a perception that in many cases people have lost the motivation to do their jobs thoroughly and completely and by extension, a reluctance to take responsibility for their performance.

"There is a lack of initiative, if people don't have to do something, they don't do it. People are setting their own agendas."

"People are not meeting the basic standards. It's really concerning. People are not following policy or protocol and there is no oversight."

"People are not completing their work, so it shifts to others. This creates resentment and burnout. If no ones going to do it, I'm not going to."

“There is so much drama that takes away from a client-centered approach. People need to be told, just focus on your job.”

“It is utterly shocking, the lack of accountability, work standards, work ethic and nothing is done about it.”

“There is no accountability or supervision. If you bring up an issue, nothing is done and it falls back to you. People don’t want to speak up anymore.”

“It is like we are self policing. If there is a problem you are expected to fix it or raise it. Then you get backlash from people.”

“There is a lack of accountability around finishing tasks thoroughly and completely. It is not my role to discipline.”

“There is no Leadership “eyes on”, where/who do you go to with issues? Nothing is ever done so people just give up.”

“It is crazy, people sleeping on shift, leaving early, showing up late. No one does anything about it.”

“Past leadership had a hands off approach and problems were swept under the rug. It set a foundation for “I can work the way I want to” and created unwritten rules.”

The desire for more accountability among staff, coupled with the concern that issues are not followed up on, points to the need for more Leadership presence in the houses and a clear complaint handling process that includes individual follow up and transparency (as much as confidentiality will allow). The Site needs to consider and establish its conflict and complaint handling philosophy and ensure that effective procedures are available to promote constructive engagement and problem solving. When conflicts and complaints are ineffectively addressed or seemingly ignored, it negatively impacts the Site’s overall wellbeing and trust in Leadership. Establishing increased conflict competence and capacity requires the integration of values and philosophy (attitude), with available approaches for constructive engagement (processes) backed by intentional behaviors and actions (skills and abilities).

2. Need for a Consistent Approach

It was reported that 7 Oaks has had a violent history and that some people are still traumatized by the incidents that occurred in the past. Some people also expressed that the violence has diminished considerably now and a shift to a new philosophy of psycho-social rehabilitation called *Safewards* has contributed to that decrease. Most people interviewed saw a shift to the new model as both beneficial and required but noted there is also resistance to it.

"...moving towards a new model where it is client focused, flexible and responsive. There is serious resistance to this, you have to stick with the unwritten rules that have been that way forever."

"Don't try a new way, you have to follow the undocumented rules. If you don't you are shunned for the day."

"We need to innovate and change, there are new approaches that are evidence based and there is resistance to implementing them. This creates friction because new staff bring innovation and care and they are getting shut down. We are losing good people."

"We are moving towards a more progressive approach but there is still the old ways of doing things. It creates a lot of conflict."

"There needs to be a balance struck between militancy and Safewards. People are not on the same page and it creates safety concerns."

"It is an outdated approach, control. We need to try and give some control to the clients but the old way of doing things, unwritten rules, prevail."

"The attitude is this is how it is, this is how it has always been. We need to change, the old ways are not current or effective."

"There really needs to be a balance between structure/routine and flexibility. Following rigid structures, that have no basis in policy or procedure is a disservice to the clients. Not to mention the friction it causes between staff."

"There needs to be more education about what the new approaches are in mental health. What is working, because following the old un-written rules is not."

"There does not seem to be a shared sense at 7 Oaks that healthcare environments need to be ever-changing in order to keep up with best practices, or that changes that do occur should benefit our clients and improve the care they receive, as opposed to making care more convenient for staff. "

As illustrated above, the majority of people interviewed expressed a strong desire to embrace best practices and new ways of approaching the work. Many identified that there have been improvements recently and that a cultural shift in approach is being attempted. Some of the positive changes identified included: increased emphasis on Harm Reduction principles, moving from team care to Case Management, the re-introduction of Collaborative Learning days and *Safewards*.

However, some people expressed concerns about the changes that are being implemented and felt that the scales are being tipped too far towards flexibility, at the peril of losing structure.

Regardless of the different views, 7 Oaks needs to ensure that it is current and consistent in its approach to psycho-social rehabilitation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations address the major issues described in this report and are intentionally procedural in nature. The specifics, including details about implementation and monitoring will be discussed with the group and finalized by Leadership. The suggestions presented below do not represent an immediate solution or quick fix. However, taken together they can be implemented successfully in the relatively near-term provided the motivation (of the entire group and not just Leadership), resources and leadership exist to do so. It should also be noted that several of recommendations below are already in the process of being implemented or are slated for implementation in the future.

1. Hold regular, mandatory staff meetings – ensure that weekend shifts and nights can be accommodated.
2. Conduct regularly scheduled performance reviews.
3. Rotate staff through different houses. Ensure that this is done transparently and across the board.
4. Increase un-scheduled Leadership presence in the houses. Consider decentralizing the administration and having offices across the site.
5. Increase opportunities for in-person learning and practice related communications – in service educational sessions, scheduled times for shift report, informal discussion opportunities.
6. Provide education and training to all staff on current best practices. Make expectations about workflows and practice approaches clear and visible.
7. Develop a clear complaint handling process that includes individual follow up and transparency about actions taken (as much as confidentiality will allow).
8. Create a standardized on-boarding process for new staff that includes assigned mentors or a specific person to assist with orientation, including the development and provision of an orientation package. Consider collecting information from regular, casual, and part-time staff about the topics staff think it would be useful to cover in a centralized orientation process. Orient current staff to ensure consistency of practice.

Follow-Up Review

A Follow-Up Review is a necessary and important part of the workplace assessment process. It is intended to evaluate progress, monitor changes, and determine what further actions may still be required for continuous improvement. Planning and organizing the Follow-Up is the responsibility of senior Leadership and should be determined at their discretion.