Safety Culture

Guidance

Safety Culture

An organisation's culture with regards to safety can be equally as important as its safety management system in keeping people safe and healthy.

Safety culture is a combination of the individual and group values, attitudes and behaviours that influence how health and safety is managed within an organisation, and how effectively processes and procedures are implemented. Safety culture should influence, and be influenced by, the overall values and ethos of the organisation.

Negative or poor cultural factors are likely to have a detrimental effect on the organisation's ability to maintain safe practice and prevent the occurrence of incidents and/or accidents. A poor culture may encourage non-compliance with procedures, and quite often poor practice can be reflected in other areas of work beyond health and safety as well.

Conversely, strong practice can support employees to follow and actively promote the organisation's safety management systems and procedures. A positive safety culture will also support new employees and/or seasonal workers to quickly adopt and implement the organisation's procedures.

Indicators of good safety culture:
The diagram above shows how various indicators together contribute to good safety culture and youth work organisations should aspire to achieve these.

Management commitment:
The culture, attitudes and behaviours demonstrated by managers and senior leaders within an organisation are shown to be critical in influencing the behaviour and application of workers. The combination of commitment and action of leaders, along with their decisions will set the benchmarks and expectations for safety throughout the organisation.

The active involvement of senior managers in the safety management system and the compliance with processes is very important to encourage higher levels of motivation throughout the organisation to promote health and safety agendas.

Perceptions of the level of management commitment will be influenced by factors such as:
- o The relative status and focus given to safety in comparison to productivity, costs and other organisational objectives, such as target numbers of young people engaged in youth programmes

o The resources and investment seen to be given to the management of safety in terms of finances, time, people & training
o The visibility of senior staff in the promotion of positive safety behaviours and compliance with procedure i.e. role-modelling and leading by example.

Managers within youth work organisations should demonstrate behaviours showing that the safety of young people and colleagues will always be considered in their decision making and actions.

Strong and effective communication channels:
Workers should be aware of and understand their own responsibilities with regards to safety and should be aware of procedures to raise and respond to safety concerns.

Communication should be two-way between senior leaders and all other staff. Youth workers should be actively encouraged to discuss and raise issues of safety and risk and should feel as though their concerns will be taken seriously by colleagues and managers. Processes should be in place to ensure that concerns are investigated and appropriate action is taken to address any issues when appropriate to do so. It is important for workers to see the positive results of their behaviours to promote a positive cycle of good safety practice.

Active worker participation:
Workers at all levels should be encouraged and empowered to take ownership of safety practice within their roles. Senior managers should proactively seek the input of workers into safety issues to make best use of their knowledge and understanding of specific issues relevant to their role. Structured opportunities such as time in team meetings, workshops or focus groups should be available for workers to input into safety management discussions.

All youth workers - including volunteers - should be encouraged to take responsibility for safety and be supported in doing so with appropriate briefings and training. Effective processes should be in place to encourage the reporting of incidents, near misses and any other safety related concerns.

Training & information:
It is important that workers feel supported and adequately informed to carry out their role. Youth work organisations should ensure that robust processes are in place to identify and address relevant training needs for workers at all levels, and workers should have ready access to specific safety information including policies and operating procedures. Youth workers should be actively briefed on specific hazards and risks relevant to their role and each individual youth programme.

Motivation:
The levels of motivation of workers to comply with and promote good safety practice may be influenced by a number of factors relating to the overall organisational approach and ethos, such as:
- Whether senior staff promote and encourage safety practice through their own actions
- Whether or not safety concerns are taken seriously when raised
- The precedence given to safety within the organisation and the allocation of resource
- Whether or not workers feel adequately supported in their role
- Whether or not workers feel they have a voice and are actively encouraged to input into safety matters
- How easy procedures are to follow and how effective they are
- How arduous and time-consuming procedures are
- Rewards can even be considered for good safety practice such as the quality of risk assessments produced, identifying new hazards etc

Appetite for learning and development:
Youth work organisations should strive to continually learn and improve their practice. Procedures should include adequate opportunity for reflection, to identify lessons learnt and to implement changes and improvements to practice moving forward, including in response to incidents or concerns raised. These should be reviewed and monitored at Board or Management Committee meetings as a permanent agenda item. Organisational policies and procedures should encourage individuals to reflect on their own practice also.

Measuring safety culture

Organisations should aim to improve safety culture and one way of helping to do this is to set organisational targets. These are often included with safety policy statements of intent and could include, for example, reducing incident rates, days off work for ill health etc. Larger youth work organisations could consider establishing ways of measuring the indicators of good safety culture and monitor this over time with reports being made to the Board.