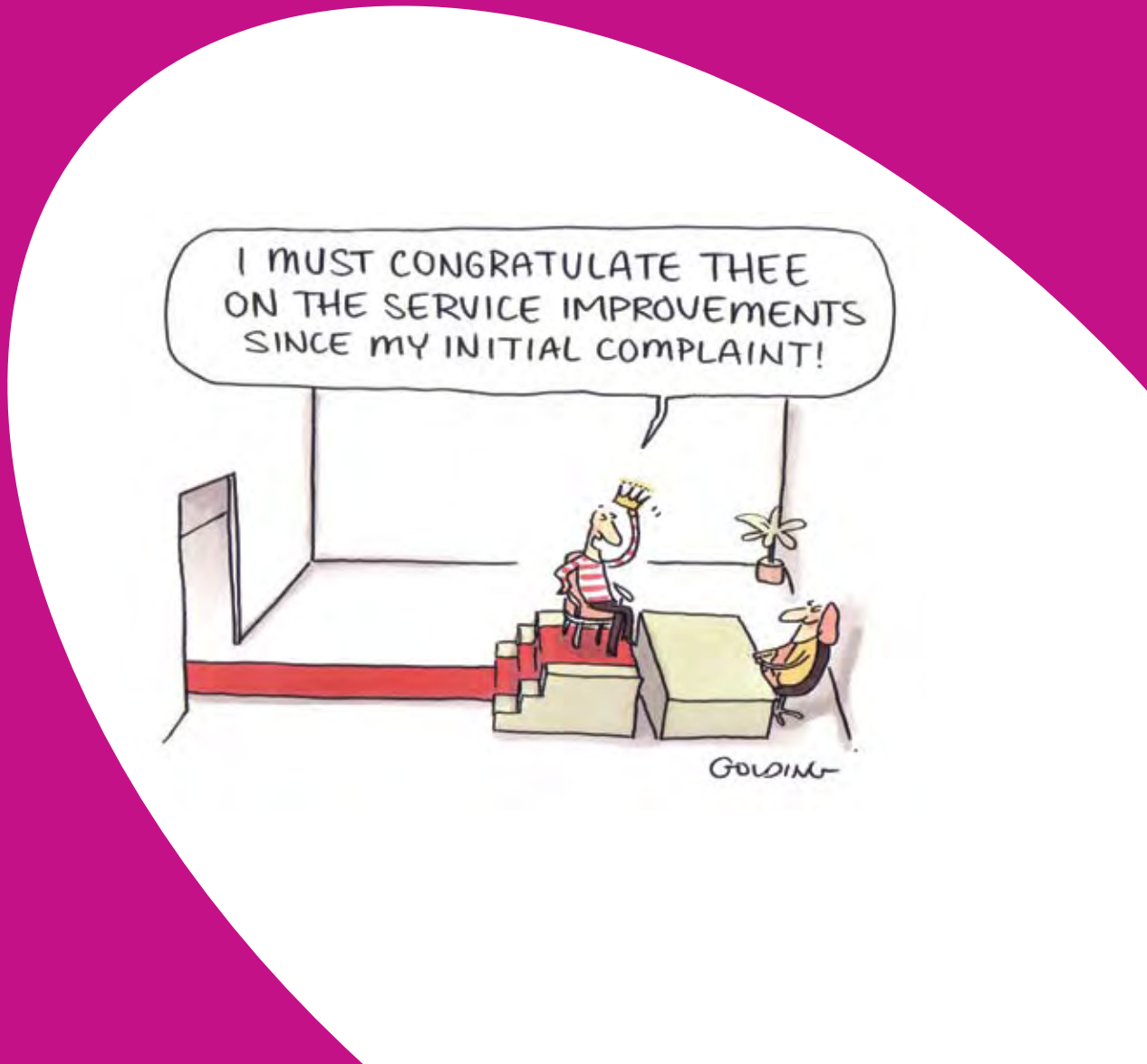


# Chapter 1

Quality human service



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### Helen's story

Helen complained that her 20 year old son Peter was not able to access respite care when the family was experiencing a crisis.

The DSC assessment officer found that there was a history of tension and disrupted communication between the parent and the disability service. Peter had not accessed respite for more than a year due to the communication issues. The family were increasingly stressed and angry about asking for assistance. Service provider staff reported feeling intimidated and frustrated as they were not able to get cooperation from the family. They regarded Helen as difficult and threatening.

In dealing with the complaint, the DSC assessment officer designed a process to have the two sides discuss the issues. Beyond the communication issues, the parties needed to agree upon a process for assessment for the purpose of determining respite needs. It was discovered that emergency respite in the area was operating as planned respite. This raised systemic and resource issues. The family was subsequently provided with respite and the process for accessing it was more fully explained.

The provision of good quality human service is based on a sound and trusting relationship that develops with the users of the service, through an ongoing process of effective communication. This is important to ensure the service continues to appropriately meet people's needs. Good service delivery is about enabling people with a disability to say what is working and not working for them so that actions can then be taken to build on what is working and address what is not working.

This is based on an expectation that people with a disability have the right to expect quality services and these services have an important role to play in improving the quality of life of people with a disability. Many people with a disability and their families are increasingly aware of their right to receive quality services. However, this has not always been the expectation.



*When people not used to speaking out are heard by people not used to listening then real change can be made.*

*John O'Brien (2007)*

### 1.1. Quality Framework for Disability Services in Victoria (2007)

The DHS *Quality Framework for Disability Services in Victoria* (the Quality Framework) acknowledges the importance of good human service delivery for people with a disability through the identification of sixteen areas of life that describe what is important to people with a disability, and their outcome standards. These life areas are described in the outcome standards and focus on lifestyle, opportunity, choice, participation, rights and well-being.



### Thought

*In addressing these areas it is important that your organisation records what you are learning in terms of both what is working and what is **not** working, from the perspective of the person with a disability.*

The importance of complaints to the provision of quality services is clearly identified in the Quality Framework, which seeks to promote a culture of quality and continuous improvement across the disability sector. Specifically, the Framework describes promoting a culture where:

*Quality should be seen as a right of support users, including people with a disability and their families and a collective responsibility of providers, including direct support staff, senior management and boards of management.*

*(Quality Framework for Disability Services in Victoria, 2007b)*

The Quality Framework identifies a number of quality management principles which should inform a quality approach to disability service provision. The specific principles we will pick up here are those of:

- focusing on service users
- involving support users and staff
- taking a systems approach
- making decisions based on facts, feedback and evidence
- using a process approach
- encouraging continuous improvement.

The Quality Framework has nine industry standards. While the standards should be seen as an integrated whole, industry standard seven recognises the importance of effective complaints management systems. It emphasises the importance of an approach to quality improvement that has a clear focus on improved service outcomes for service users. People with a disability and their families need to be actively engaged in the development of services. It specifically highlights the importance of complaints being addressed promptly, fairly and respectfully without compromising services to the individual.

As an example of the integrated nature of the Quality Framework, addressing the issue of information on your complaints handling procedures being accessible to service users also informs the



broader quality perspective with Standard 1 (Service Access), which requires services to have accessible information and equitable practices (Quality Framework for Disability Services in Victoria, 2007b: 16).

The Framework highlights the importance of various sources of evidence when assessing the quality of the service. These include:

- documentation
- observable practice
- measuring outcomes
- systems and processes.

The self audit tool at the end of this guide asks for all these sources to be considered when assessing your organisation's complaints system.



**Figure 1: Structures and processes that lead to good practices, better services and desired outcomes for individual support users (Dept. of Human Services Understanding the Quality Framework for Disability Services in Victoria, 2007b: 7)**