# *Consumer Perspective Supervision Reflective Piece*

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## Abstract

This reflective piece was completed by a student as part of the assessment criteria for successful completion of the Consumer Perspective Supervision Training Course facilitated by Inside Out & Associates Australia in November 2022.


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*Upon commencing my role as Consumer Lived Experience Manager six months ago, one of my highest priorities was to ensure that all staff were setup with discipline specific supervision. Although I knew that having discipline specific supervision as a consumer worker was essential, I only vaguely knew the reasons why. For instance, I knew that it would provide a safe space for staff to reflect on their work practice and discuss anything they felt they would like to bring to the space. But that was about it. You would have thought I would have known more about it than this, but I only had very limited access to discipline specific supervision myself throughout the beginning of my lived experience career. Even then, it was still unclear as to exactly what the supervisory relationship was supposed to look like.*

*At the beginning of my role as Manager, it was outlined by my clinical senior that supervision was what I was required to provide to the consumer workforce. So without having completed training in Consumer Perspective Supervision (CPS) (yet), I approached it in the best way I knew how….do the best I can to support my staff and draw off the knowledge I already had. Initially and surprisingly, it wasn't difficult to connect consumer workers with an appropriate supervisor. Reason being, I initiated more collegiality with our sister service and their lived experience workforce, so we began connecting people in a 'cross-service' style arrangement. Our staff also seemed to be quite happy to connect with the current list of supervisors we could offer.*

*What did appear to be difficult however, was advocating for external supervision to be available to those who wanted it. This took multiple conversations and strategic advocacy to get my manager onside with understanding the importance of being able to offer this to staff. The reasoning behind the pushback was the potential financial impact that external supervision could have on the organisation as our lived experience workforce continued to grow. What helped get this understanding over the line, was outlining the importance of safety and how having connections outside of one's organisation in which they work can make staff feel like their reflections remain confidential and that they have no link to the organisation they work within. External supervision also offered a potentially broader and richer level of experience from the supervisor.*

*I was relieved and excited that I had been accepted into the next round of Consumer Perspective Supervision Training because I really felt it would add a huge amount of value to the support I could provide my workforce and the people I was already supervising. I also felt a wave of nervousness as I wasn't quite sure what to expect or whether I would have to completely change my approach thus far. I wasn't sure how this might impact on the supervisory relationships I had already begun to*

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*develop and the type of support I was providing my staff.*

*Prior to commencing the training course, I had done about 2-3 supervision sessions with three different consumer workers. What I focused on the most during these sessions, was creating a safe space where staff felt they could be open, honest and reflective about their work. In order to do this, I remained non-judgemental and reminded the supervisee that whatever they brought to the supervision session was not going to impact on the way I viewed them as a staff member or person, and was completely confidential. I also reminded them that the space was very much led by them and that there was no agenda or preparation required. That they could bring whatever they felt to the session and that we would see where that leads us. This worked really well and the supervisees were grateful to have a space which felt safe. At this point in time, in my mind, I thought to myself that this isn't so hard, and that I could continue to do this fairly smoothly and easily on an ongoing basis. Little did I know how much more there was to supervision than I had initially thought.*

*I began undertaking the training course, and met some incredible consumer workers from around Australia who were all eager and passionate about becoming qualified supervisors. Our facilitators made it a comfortable environment where we could openly express our thoughts, challenges and questions no matter how obscure or deep they were. One of the biggest questions I had coming into the course was; what is CPS and how can I explain it to my supervisees in the early stages of the supervisory relationship? Well, I was pleased to know that this answer was made clear as the training begun and I became more and more confident about how to articulate that to my supervisees.*

*The best way I have found to describe CPS to someone is by exploring the underpinning values and principles of consumer perspective work, such as, self-determination, connection, mutuality, lived experience as expertise, responsibility, authenticity, transparency, hope and curiosity. This provides a foundation for all our conversations and acts as a reminder and reference for both myself and the supervisee that it is a co-learning journey in which both the supervisor and supervisee can reflect on their practice and discuss any ideas, thoughts and challenges within their role. It is these ideas, thoughts and concerns that are looked at through the consumer perspective. At first, I found the values and principles quite surprising and realised I had already made some errors in aligning with genuine CPS. It encouraged me to reflect quite deeply on the supervision I had provided so far, and I realised I wasn't providing enough of a co-learning space, nor encouraging my supervisees to come to their own conclusions. I began to realise that one of the fundamental elements of CPS (and a core*

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*principle) is that it is a reflective learning relationship, not a 'teacher' and 'student' relationship.*

*One of the other fundamental aspects of CPS I explained to my supervisees, and what was a major learning for me, was that CPS is profoundly different to clinical supervision, line management, mentoring and coaching. Realising that CPS was a co-learning relationship helped me to understand why it is so different to traditional forms of supervision or line management which is based around overseeing and evaluating an employee's contribution, performance and development.*

*Understanding this, and reflecting on it, became one of the biggest challenges I faced upon reflection of the supervision training course. I realised that separating the lines between CPS and line management is difficult and complicated. Coming into this role as a manager, it was outlined to me quite clearly at the start, that I would be acting more as a 'Discipline Senior' than a manager and I was under the impression that very little (if any) line management or operational oversight of the workforce would be my responsibility. This acted as the motivator and driver for me to setup supervision with a number of my staff members, because I knew that I wouldn't run into the issue of line managing them as well. However, as my role has developed and I have established myself and my confidence, I have begun to see the difficulties that lie with having little to no governance of the lived experience workforce as a manager. It has made communication and reporting pathways muddy and unclear, it has left confusion about what decisions can be made by me in regards to the workforce (such as roles and responsibilities, staff safety, recruitment and payroll… to name a few). As a result, things are beginning to shift and evolve as we join forces with our sister service and advocate for significantly more responsibility and leadership of our workforce.*

*With this change developing, the difficulties of separating line management and supervision have become vastly apparent and has been playing on my mind throughout the training course. Over time, as I begin to take on more line management duties, I have noticed the impacts this can have on the supervisory relationship, particularly when it comes to performance management and interpersonal issues between staff members. What is supposed to remain a safe, reflective space for supervisees, can drift into becoming unsafe as you try to supervise someone who you are also navigating performance issues with. It is only through the training course that I have realised the importance of not blurring these lines and the impact it can have on your relationship with that person. In order to counteract this, I have begun reviewing my supervisory relationships and whether my future responsibilities will mean I can no longer continue to provide supervision to certain people.*

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*I am beyond grateful to have had the opportunity to attend the training, because it has really cemented the importance not only of consumer perspective supervision and honouring the CPS model, but it has clearly shown the importance of keeping supervision and line management separate, and the damaging impact that it can have when you cross these lines. I will bring this forward into my practice to ensure the utmost safety for my staff.*

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