

Case management homicide crimes

An evaluation of the '*Service for surviving relatives of victims of homicide crimes*' project provided by Victim Assistance Netherlands from 2008 until 2010

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Summary

The research study

In 2007 the '*Service for surviving relatives of victims of homicide crimes*' was launched. Case managers have been central to the new service. Case managers are professional, paid staff of Victim Assistance Netherlands (SHN). Immediately after a murder or manslaughter their services are mobilized to ensure that surviving relatives are offered appropriate help and support. In order to give shape and substance to the service, a project organization was established with the aim of further developing and implementing case management within the SHN organization and its working methods.

The following research question was central to this evaluation study: To what extent is the 'service for surviving relatives' project adequately designed and implemented? The study into the 'service for surviving relatives' project was conducted primarily for evaluative purposes. For two and a half years (from July 2007 until December 2010) the project organization was followed by means of attending meetings, studying relevant documentation and conducting interviews with project staff members. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with twenty respondents within the police force, the Public Prosecution Service, SHN and grief support groups. By using various sources for a prolonged period of time a clear picture has arisen of the project organization and the way it developed.

Conclusions

The service was started on the basis of experiences in everyday practice. Grief support groups were among those who advocated a professional crisis centre and support of surviving relatives of victims of homicide crimes. The launch of the project organization actually coincided with the start of the service. During the project the service was given shape and substance on the basis of the experiences of the case managers. This way of working entailed, among other things, that essential elements in the project organization evolved during the course of the project. In a general sense, the project has had sufficient time and opportunity to evolve in the desired direction. Many things which scored poorly in the beginning were adapted and gradually improved.

The case managers were not always sufficiently supported by adequate facilities from within the project organization (for example, no performance interviews were conducted, little practical assistance was given and so on). The enthusiasm of the case managers within the project group must be considered vital to the success of the development of case management. At the time of the project, but also afterwards, it remained unclear what the case manager's caseload could or should be; at any rate, the organization did not develop a clear policy in this respect. This was partly due – this study showed – to an inadequate recording of the case managers' activities and the time they spent on them.

Co-operation with external partners, in particular the police force or family liaison officers, needs constant attention, also now with the introduction of case management pertaining to serious

violent and sexual offences (EGZ case management). It turned out that new crops of police officers were not always aware of what SHN case management can do for victims and surviving relatives. The external partners were satisfied with the service because case management clearly meets a need in supporting and helping people by professionals. Our study pointed out an important aspect which needs attention, namely the (psychological) burden which the task of case management entails. The demand-driven working methods and the high level of availability entail the risk that the case manager's tasks become unlimited, with all the concomitant risks of managers getting burned out. In addition to paying attention to any overburdening of case managers it would be a good thing to conduct mental health check ups periodically, like the ones the family liaison officers receive, because their work can be emotionally stressful.

The initial problems the project encountered did not lead to dissatisfaction among the surviving relatives, as research into this group showed. The surviving relatives were highly satisfied with the service. The strength of the service lies in the case managers themselves.