



“Where the heart is...”

Background/Executive Summary:

Loddon Mallee Housing Services operates an integrated model of service delivery focusing upon the needs of Homeless people.

The Bendigo office is a high client volume environment where clients can attend and make appointments to see a worker when their crisis is able to be ‘scheduled’ and where they can be seen ‘same day’ when their crisis requires immediate assistance.

Balancing the sensitive nature of people who are in crisis and trying to effectively triage with some of society’s most complex and disadvantaged people who are all by definition of attendance at the office, in crisis, requires a deft, sensitive, assertive and compassionate approach.

The purpose of this research paper was to identify whether LMHS are successful in juggling the needs of the clients in their immediate interactions with the service.

The program type that delivers this ‘first cut’ intake/preliminary assessment/crisis response to those in housing crisis and those who are homeless is the Housing Information and Referral (HIR) function of the Office of Housing’s contracted Transitional Housing Management Program.

HIR staff are the first point of contact for clients entering LMHS who wish to have a crisis dealt with.

The HIR staff are able to refer to an extensive array of homelessness support programs and resources both within LMHS as well as external agencies.

The report indicates that the HIR function is overwhelmingly successful at assisting clients in the resolution or mitigation of the immediate crisis.

The clients sampled randomly for this survey at point of exit from LMHS are overwhelmingly positive on their experience with LMHS.

It is clear from the research that the staff both work to understand the crisis from the clients view, as well as take appropriate steps to put



“Where the heart is...”

appropriate strategies in place at appropriate levels for and with the clients.

Why This Survey?

The researcher’s involvement in this survey was as part of requirement for a final year placement of a Bachelor of Social Work at La Trobe University in Bendigo.

The requirements of this final placement are that a 490-hour placement is undertaken that requires the student to undertake research or a project for the duration of the placement.

Consultation between the universities Field Liaison Co-Ordinator and LMHS ascertained that LMHS had a research topic suitable for a student to undertake.

LMHS identified that there was a need to get specific ‘exit’ feedback from their client group with the aim of identifying what the clients expected from the service and what the actual outcomes were.

The purpose of this is to ensure that, in the future, the client group is in fact accessing the right services to address the issues that they are facing as well as an indicator on what LMHS is doing well and what could be improved upon. The research also aims to provide LMHS with a general profile of the HIR client group, so as to allow the staff at LMHS to have an increased documented understanding of the issues affecting the client group.

The research has met the objectives of the stakeholders.

The researcher was Larissa McNaught.

Methodology

The first step in the process was to conduct a Situation Appraisal. This allowed for a clear understanding of what the purpose of the research was and who would be involved.

From this point a survey tool that would gather the relevant data outlined in the Situation Appraisal was designed. Consideration was given to previous tools that had been used by LMHS for similar data collection. It was evident from this that there appeared to be a trend towards quantitative research.

A decision was made that for this research an attempt would be made to gather data that would provide variety in the results, so as not to reproduce anything that had previously been done. Therefore a qualitative approach was chosen. The survey tool that was used is included (fig 1.1).

After the survey design was complete, the consultation process with the clients began. The process was that the clients would attend LMHS for an appointment with a Duty Worker (HIR) in Room 1. On the completion of this appointment, the worker would ask the client if they were interested in taking part in the feedback process. The



“Where the heart is...”

worker stressed to the clients that the research was an independent from LMHS, so as to allow them to feel comfortable with providing both positive and negative feedback. The participants signed a declaration that ensured their identity would at all times remain confidential and any examples they provided would remain anonymous (fig 1.2).

The information gathering involved the researcher sitting with the client and talking them through the survey. Generally, the surveys took roughly 15 minutes to complete. On the completion of the survey the clients were paid five dollars for their time. They were not aware of the remuneration until the completion of the feedback so as not to influence the feedback that they would provide.

On the completion of 30 surveys, the task of collating and analysing the data that had gathered began. This report is the final product of the research.

Findings

Participant Details

Following is the data in relation to the participants in the survey.

- A total of 33 participants were consulted, with 30 surveys being administered.
- This included 36.6% of participants who were males, 53.33% of participants who were females and 10% of participants who were male and female couples.
- The ages of the participants ranged from 16 to 56, with the median age being 29.6.
- Of the females that took part in the survey, the age range was from 16 to 51, with a median age range of 31.7.
- Of the males that took part in the survey, the age range was 18 to 56, with the median age being 27.

Geographical Localities

The findings from the data show that the client group come to Bendigo from a variety of locations both within Victoria and interstate. The maps (fig 1.3 & fig 1.4) show this. The data provided some interesting finding. It is as follows

- 81.81% of the participants have lived in at least one place other than Bendigo
- 12.12% have always lived in Bendigo
- 6.06% didn't mention geographical location

Children

Following is data in relation to the participants and whether or not they had children.

- 22.58% didn't have children
- 41.93% didn't mention if they had children
- 32.25% did have children in their care
- 3.22% had children that were not in their care



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Information provided to clients

The overwhelming response to this question was that the participants had little to no idea of the services provided at LMHS if they had not been previously. The percentage of participants who listed something that they knew the service provided, generally listed only one thing and didn't know of the multitude of services provided by LMHS.

- 44.11% said they knew nothing about the service prior to attending
- 14.70% said they knew ‘nothing much’, one respondent saying he initially thought LMHS was a women’s service
- 8.82% said they knew LMHS helped with housing
- 5.88% said they knew LMHS helped with emergency housing
- 2.94% said they knew LMHS helped with applications for public housing
- 2.94% said all they knew of LMHS was the location of the service
- 2.94% identified that LMHS would assist with the Bond Loan Scheme
- 2.94% said they knew ‘a fair bit’
- 2.94% identified LMHS would help with rental issues
- 2.94% said LMHS would help with housing needs, crisis, tenancy help and tribunal
- 2.94% said they knew LMHS helped with arranging accommodation
- 2.94% had a rough idea from previous visits
- 2.94% said they knew nothing prior to their first visit, but now have a good understanding of the services provided

It would appear that certain members in the community, who may be those who most need a service such as LMHS have little idea of what it is that LMHS provides. This would be more troubling except that despite the fact that the participants knew very little about LMHS and its multitude of services, it is encouraging to know that the clients will still attend the service in order to ascertain whether the services available are suitable to them.

Participants were asked about the LMHS reading material and whether they had seen any of this during their appointment. Almost 50% of the participants said that they didn't see any of LMHS's reading material at LMHS. This number is quite high and consideration for the reasons behind this may need to be given.

Mention should be made about the private rental listings that LMHS compile and hand out to clients. Participants spoke of the importance of this.

- 48.38% said that they didn't see any of LMHS's brochures at LMHS
- 25.80% said they saw LMHS brochures at LMHS and took some of them
- 16.12% said they saw LMHS brochures at LMHS, but didn't take any
- 6.45% said they saw LMHS brochures at other agencies

Consideration could be given to look at increasing the knowledge and understanding of the services that LMHS provide, to the wider community. A recent example of this is LMHS's involvement in the ‘Summer In The Park’ festivities. This is using a



“Where the heart is...”

positive program that is easily accessible to all community members, given that it is running over a long period and is free, to promote the work and services that LMHS provide.

Participants were asked to outline what the nature of the information that they were given during their appointment at LMHS was.

The most outstanding finding from the feedback provided for this question was the absolute mass of issues and concerns that the clients had requested assistance with.

This is really positive for LMHS as it says a lot about the skills and knowledge of the workers.

The variety of possible issues and concerns that the clients could have is staggering and should also be noted that many participants identified multiple concerns. The full range of responses was too extensive to include in this part of the report and therefore has been included in the Appendix as Appendix 1.

An attempt has been made to group the issues and concerns to give a broad overview of these concerns. These are as follows.

- Emergency Accommodation
- Housing options
- Financial advice/assistance
- Help filling out forms/applications for various things
- Information in relation to Office of Housing applications, Long term housing options, other relevant agencies, private rental, rent assistance, sharing accommodation
- Private Rental Listings
- List of local accommodation places
- Food

It is important to have an idea of what the follow up offered to the clients is. The following is what was offered to the participants in terms of follow up.

The majority of the follow up offered was further appointments with workers at LMHS, whether that is with the Duty Worker, or for an assessment with SAAP. The remainder of the follow up is lower level follow up that might have involved the worker making contact with certain people, such as a landlord, or for the client to get back in contact with the worker, or simply having the client assess the situation, so as if it deteriorates, they can re access the service.

- 29.41% had another appointment with the Duty Worker in Room 1
- 17.64% were referred on to SAAP
- 8.80% were offered a referral for food
- 8.80% were advised to make another appointment if any further problems arose
- 2.94% were given the option of another appointment if this was necessary



“Where the heart is...”

- 2.94% of participants had the worker doing some follow up for them
- 2.94% of participants were asked to get back in contact with the worker to update the situation, to assess if any further assistance was required
- 2.94% were provided with a private rental listing
- 2.94% said nothing further was offered
- 2.94% had an appointment with their landlord organised to discuss issues.

Referral Source

When asked where they found out about LMHS from, the participants responses were as follows

- 33.33% said they found out about LMHS from a referral at another agency
- 20.00% said they found out about LMHS from information provided at another agency
- 10.00% said they knew about LMHS because of prior knowledge of the service
- 30.00% said they found out about LMHS from friends or family
- 6.66% said they found out about LMHS from another source not listed above.

Knowledge of LMHS came largely from referrals at other agencies and from family and friend providing participants with information.

Other agencies that made referrals to LMHS included the Uniting Church, St Lukes, Office of Housing, the police and agencies outside of Bendigo such as Cornerstone (in Dandenong). Agencies and organisations such as St Lukes, EASE and the Golden Square Community House had information about LMHS available and some of the participants found out about LMHS this way.

Participants who said they found out about LMHS another way, other than those specified said that ‘other’ for them included ‘a person down the street’ and ‘word of mouth’.

Customer Service

Participants were asked how they felt they were treated during their consultation with the LMHS worker in Room 1.

The majority of responses were overwhelmingly positive. Some participants listed a variety of descriptive words and therefore there is too many to mention. The full range of answers for this question is included in the appendix. Following are the most common responses.

- 17.28% said they felt they had been treated good/rally good/great
- 12.34% said that the worker was well informed and good at their job
- 11.11% said they felt that the worker was friendly
- 8.64% said they felt that the worker was helpful



“Where the heart is...”

Other popular responses included things such as ‘genuine and not judging’, ‘very concerned’, ‘no complaints’ ‘made to feel comfortable’, ‘looked after well’, ‘relaxed’ and ‘fine’.

Participants were offered the opportunity to discuss in detail any particular experiences, both positive and negative that they had had with LMHS.

The majority of participants chose not to provide a response for this question. Only 30% provided a response. They are as follows.

- “It has all been good”
- The toilets out the back were messy, had no toilet paper and had spiders in there (the external toilets were closed to clients at the time and the client was misdirected)
- One participant had to wait 1 & ½ hours over his appointment time
- Participant who was in a THM property told of the excellent response she had had to her washing machine being broken. It had broken on the Monday and was to be returned the morning of her appointment which was a Thursday, she was very impressed by this
- “This place is positive”. The visit on this particular day was the first time this participant was unable to get some emergency accommodation, due to everything in Bendigo being booked out
- One participant responded that he had been able to get an appointment time in one day and was very happy with this and he didn’t have to wait too long
- “I find the place ok., good”
- It has “all been good, they have helped out in every way, more than expected”.

To gauge the general response to the service, participants were asked whether overall they were satisfied with the outcomes of the appointment, to which the following responses were provided

- 70.90% said, yes they were satisfied
- 25.80% said they were more than satisfied
- 3.22% said they were not dissatisfied

This response is a good indicator for LMHS that the service that they are providing is satisfying the expectations of the client group.

Duplication of Services

It can be helpful for workers if they have an understanding of the broader issues that the client is dealing with. A good measure of this is what other services are that the client is involved with. This allows good communication and collaboration between agencies to work towards the best outcome for the client.

Following is a break down of the clients who said that they were or were not involved with any other services and a list of the services that the clients were involved with

- 46.66% said they were involved with other services



“Where the heart is...”

- 46.66% said they were not involved with other services
- 6.66% didn't respond

These services included the Salvation Army, BRIT (Bendigo), The Anna Centre (psychologists), DHS – Child Protection, DHS - Office of Housing, EASE, CASA, Community Health (counselling) schools, St. Lukes, Centrelink, doctors, Community Health (Don St), Community houses (specifically Golden Square).

Return Service Users

These questions give a indication of whether the clients have used the services at LMHS previously with 60%* saying that they had previously used the services.

- 60% said they had previously used the service
- 40% said they had not previously used the service

(* As the interviews progressed and clients became more comfortable with the format it would appear that disclosure of repeat/return service usage called into question some of the earlier responses of how clients found out about the service in numerical terms, however in terms of initial point of finding out about LMHS the results probably still have veracity.)

To complement the data gathered in relation to return service users, data was gathered in relation to how many times they had used the service and over what time period.

Those who said that they had previously used the services at LMHS were asked to estimate how many times they thought that they had used the service. The answers ranged from

- 1 – 6 times with the median being 2.57 times.

Then they were asked over what time period this took place. The responses are as follows. The times for having used the service ranged from as far back as “over the last 10 years” and 1994 to more recently, such as May2000.

These time spans and the others suggests that the participants are quiet comfortable with accessing the service more than once and over a large time span if need be.

This is a good indicator for LMHS as it says a lot about their willingness to work with people who require support repeatedly, and importantly the clients confidence in returning to the service. It also indicates that the services that LMHS provide are crucial for certain members of the community.

Staffing and Management Issues

Participants were asked if they felt that the worker that they saw had understood their concerns and whether they felt that the worker had worked towards addressing these concerns. The responses are as follows

- 100% of participants said that they felt that the LMHS work understood their concerns.
- 96.66% said that the worker worked towards addressing these concerns, only



“Where the heart is...”

- 3.33% said that they felt that there was still a bit to do to work towards addressing their concerns.

The participants were asked to identify what it was that gave them the impression that the worker understood what the concerns and issues were.

The variety of responses for this question was huge, far too many to mention. The overwhelming response was that the participants picked up on a variety of indicators that gave them the impression that the workers understood what their concerns were. The full range of answers for this question is included as Appendix 3.

The safety and comfort of the clients is very important. It is also important to know whether the clients feel that the setting is safe and comfortable. The following is the responses to the question of whether the participants felt safe and comfortable in the setting.

- 93.33% said that they felt safe and comfortable in the setting
- 6.66% said that they felt safe and comfortable in Room 1, but not in the waiting room which one participant described as “daunting”.

This is a good response rate, with all of the participants who answered yes to feeling safe and comfortable in the setting answering so confidently.

The 6.66% who said that they didn’t feel comfortable in the waiting room identified that there had been an incident with another client who was upset and was verbally abusive. The 6.66% witnessed the one incident, there was not several incidents.

Some feedback on the length of time for appointments is crucial in determining whether the time allocated is sufficient for all of the concerns and issues the clients has to be aired. It would appear from the feedback that the length of time of the appointments is suitable, given that

- 100% of the participants said that the time allocated for the appointment was sufficient, one participant commenting that it was “quick, easy and simple”.

Service Demand and Actual Outcomes

The participants were asked to outline what the services, options or resources that they had requested of LMHS were. As with some of the previous questions, the full extent of answers for this question is too extensive to include here. What was significant in the data for this is once again the multitudes of different requests, with some participants making multiple requests to address all of their issues and concerns. The full list has been included as Appendix 4. Just some of the more popular requests and resource required were as follows

- Emergency Accommodation
- Long Term Housing
- Rent Arrears
- Priority Housing Application



“Where the heart is...”

To gauge the effectiveness of the service and to determine whether the service is providing the clients with their requests to address their issues and concerns, they were asked to determine whether they believed that they had been provided with an appropriate response to their concerns and issues. The results are as follows.

- 81.25% said the outcome of their appointment was that they got what they requested
- 12.5% said that they required another appointment to look further at their options
- 3.12% said a referral was made for them
- 3.12% said LMHS was unable to assist with their request, but was able to assist to a lesser degree

Response Times for Requests

Participants were asked to identify whether there had been any delays when attending for the appointment. From this question the following data was gathered

- 74.07% said that there was no delay for their appointment time
- 25.92% said that there was a delay for their appointment time, but it is known that of this 25.92%, over 50% of those were drop in clients, and therefore did not have actual appointment times.

Consideration must also be given to the possibility that if the participants were late for their appointment time that a waiting period is to be expected.

Those who said that they experience delays had a mix of reactions to this. One participant commented that it “can be a problem with children and when trying to make other appointment time”, others commented to getting in early, if they arrived before their appointment time and they saw this as a positive.

Another participant commented that the “wait wasn’t so bad when the outcome was good”.

Of the participants that said that there were delays with appointment times

- 85.71% said that the length of time was not long, ranging from 5, 10, 15, 20 minutes up to 1 hour.
- 14.28% said that the wait was too long, but didn’t say what this length of time was
- 75% said that they were provided with explanations as to why there was a delay
- 25% said they were not given an explanation, but that they just assumed that it meant things were busy.

Unmet Demand

Participants were given the opportunity to provide LMHS with some feedback on areas that they believed could be improved on. Just fewer than 50% of participants provided feedback for this question. The responses for this question have been used to make recommendations to LMHS. They are in the section below titled Recommendations.



“Where the heart is...”

Recommendations

The clients were given the opportunity in the survey to suggest things that they saw that may improve the quality of service that LMHS provides. These recommendations are as follows. The order that they are in is not reflective of anything, merely the order of the responses.

- Maybe furniture, but at least they provided ideas of where to obtain furniture cheap.
- Comment on food being available from LMHS when the View Hill Church is not open.
- Signs, brochures, etc, to tell people about places such as the Salvation Army, View Hill Church, St Vincent de Paul, etc.
- Coffee Bar (at not cost).
- Improved advertising and promotion of the service to outlying, regional areas such as Echuca.
- “Give em some bloody funding”.
- Financial Skills.
- Food.
- Public Telephone within or nearby to the LMHS office.
- Legal Aid advice.
- Water drinking fountain in the waiting room
- Bendigo needs a low cost, men’s shelter hostel service that provides a bed, shower and meal
- Drink fountain or tea and coffee area.

Observations made throughout the duration of the research have lead to the following recommendations also being made.

- Ramps in the reception area and in the hall way leading to Rooms 1 and 2 for parents with prams and people in wheelchairs. Given the logistics of the structure of the building, this is a difficult request. Options are being considered to arrange alternative access for people with these needs.
- Facilities where the clients can get a drink of water. A lot of people were observed, coming and going for appointments, rushing from one place to another and I believe that such facilities would allow them to refresh themselves and feel more comfortable and relaxed. It is understood that this is currently being looked into and hopefully will be in place some time in the near future.

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importantly, all the Participants who took part and provided the feedback that constitutes this report.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1 - What information was given to you during your visit to LMHS?

This list is as told to the researcher in the clients words. Therefore some categories may be similar sounding and this is the reason for that.

- Financial Advice
- Help filling out forms such as Utility Relief Grant and Rent Assistance
- Information about how to go about Office of Housing applications
- Emergency Accommodation
- Rent in Advance
- Getting on the short list for Office of Housing properties
- Information on Long Term Housing in Bendigo in the private rental market
- Help to get a worker to look for Long Term Housing in Bendigo
- Private Rental Listing
- Referral and information on the agency referred to
- Application for Housing
- Rental Arrears
- Emergency Relief
- Supported Accommodation Special Needs Segment Housing brochure
- Support Worker (SAAP)
- Information on the services that LMHS provides
- Priority Housing List
- Information on Rental Arrears
- Information on Private Rental
- Information on Sharing Accommodation
- Information on Accommodation in General
- What to do to keep a current Accommodation Situation
- Housing Options
- Financial Assistance
- Rental Advice (on pay dates etc)
- Private Rental Test
- Transitional Housing Applications/Information
- Information on Different Services that could help
- List of Local Caravan Parks
- Help with Food



“Where the heart is...”

- Options for Accommodation or fuel and help to fix car.

Appendix 2 - How do you feel you were treated during your appointment at LMHS?

This list is the comprehensive list of all of the responses to the above question.

- Excellent
- No problems at all
- Helpful
- Understanding/ Very Understanding
- Good Advice
- Genuine, not judging
- Lovely
- Good rapport between worker and client
- Well informed
- Friendly
- ‘Knows what she’s talking about’
- Really well
- Good at job
- Efficient
- “Good drawing out info, talking’
- Offered help
- Ok.
- ‘She helped’
- Helped with everything that needed help with
- Very nice
- Feel welcome
- Smiling
- Good/Really Good/Great
- No Complaints
- Relaxed
- Looked after well
- Polite
- Made to feel Comfortable
- Wonderful
- Fine



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- Very Concerned
- Caring
- Fantastically
- Well Mannered
- Funny
- Fabulous
- Very Kind

Appendix 3 – What gave you this impression?

As with Appendix 1, these responses are as they were told to the researcher by the participants. If they seem slightly familiar, this is the reason for this.

- Worker was Genuine
- Made sure everything was ok
- Did best to make sure everything was ok. before client left
- Worker knew off the top of their head what was needed/required
- Knew what they were talking about
- The way the handled the issues etc
- Explanations of situations
- Well informed and provided options
- Well resourced and knew what options would be suitable
- The worker was helpful, helped with budgets
- Did job well
- Was a “ball of knowledge”
- Knew about what was needed
- CEO’s interaction, stopping to have a chat with a client
- Worker’s personality, bright and sparky
- The way the worker came across
- Good, proper advice
- Willing to listen to the situation and then provide options
- Really understanding
- Very helpful/willing to help
- Was thorough
- Whole attitude (was good)
- Comfortable to tell the worker anything
- More information was provided
- Had a good idea of what services would be relevant
- Oozed compassion/Was concerned



“Where the heart is...”

- Made the client feel like they mattered
- Provided options and allowed the client to make their own decisions
- Through speech
- Worker’s personality
- Wrote things down and explained things

Appendix 4 – What resources/services/options were you hoping LMHS would be able to assist you with? What services did you need/request?

- Emergency Housing
- Long Term Housing/Accommodation
- Public Housing
- Food
- Fuel
- Money for Repairs to car to travel to accommodation elsewhere
- Priority housing application
- Help paying bills
- Rent Arrears
- Advance in relation to Rent payments
- Financial Assistance
- Housing Options
- Support to find Accommodation
- Help with forms to be filled out
- Utility Relief Grant
- Financial Advice
- Rent Assistance
- Wanting to know what assistance was available



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Figure 1.1

Participant Details

Name:

Date survey was filled in:

Date of last appointment at LMHS:

Background:

CLIENT PERSPECTIVE

Information provided to clients

What did you know about LMHS before you came to the service?

Did you see copies of any LMHS reading material during your visit/s?

What information was given to you during your appointment at LMHS?

What was offered in terms of follow up?

Referral Source

Where did you find out about LMHS from?

- a) A referral from another agency
- b) Information provided at another agency
- c) Prior knowledge of the service
- d) Friends or family member
- e) Other, please specify

Customer Service

How do you feel you were treated during your consultation with the LMHS worker in Room 1?

Are there any individual experiences of the service that you would like to discuss?

Overall, would you say you were satisfied with the outcomes of your appointment?

Duplication of Services

What other services are you involved with, if any?

Return Service Users

Have you used LMHS previously?

If yes, roughly how many times?

How long ago?

SERVICE PERSPECTIVE

Staffing and Management Issues

Did you feel that the worker understood what your concerns were, did they work towards addressing these?

What gave you this impression?

Did you feel safe and comfortable in the setting?



“Where the heart is...”

Was the time allocated for your appointment sufficient?

Service Demand and Actual Outcomes

What resources/services/options were you hoping LMHS would be able to assist you with? What services did you need/request?

What was the outcome of your appointment at LMHS?

Response Times for Requests

Were there delays or waiting periods for your appointment time, were these unnecessarily long, were reasons/explanations provided for this?

Unmet Demand

What services that LMHS doesn't provide would have been helpful for you, what isn't available that would have improved outcomes for you?

Thanks for the input into this feedback. It is greatly appreciated. LMHS envisages that the responses from this will help to work towards improving the services that LMHS provide in the future. **Thank You!**

Figure 1.2

Loddon Mallee Housing Services is committed to providing effective services to their clients. In attempting to determine whether this is being done successfully, research is being conducted to assess this. The aim is to work towards providing a service, which meets the expected needs of the clients.

As a result of this, an evaluation of what happens in Room 1 in terms of client expectations, the services provided and what the actual outcomes are, both positive and negative, is being undertaken. As part of this evaluation, consultation with people who have recently accessed the services that are provided in Room 1 is essential.

Your identity and contribution to this research and evaluation will remain confidential at all times. At no time will your identity be used and any examples that are provided will remain anonymous.

I, _____ am able to participate in this evaluation. My signature below is confirmation that I have read the above and understand these conditions and that I agree to participate in the evaluation.

Signed:

Printed Name:

Date:



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