Understanding enabling approaches

Many services, particularly home care services, are implementing enabling\(^1\) approaches. An enabling approach recognises that people have the capacity to improve and to gain or regain abilities. The focus is on what a person can do and what they want to be able to do, and works with them to achieve this. This is very different to the traditional approach of focusing on what a person cannot do and doing it for them.

What does an enabling approach look like in practice?

Enabling services often:
- Have a helping ‘to do’ rather than ‘doing for’ approach
- Are goal focused
- Use a multidisciplinary assessment and team (including a variety of people such as home care staff, social workers and physiotherapists)
- Provide time-limited services

CASE STUDY

Ian is a 70-year-old widower. Following a short illness, he is referred to the Home and Community Care program by a social worker who is concerned he has not been eating properly since losing his wife. He doesn’t have many friends or interests outside his home.

Traditional Approach: Ian is referred to Meals on Wheels, which he will receive five days a week for the rest of his life. After a trial visit, he refuses the offer of a place in a centre based day care, which he perceives as ‘just ladies sitting around and talking’.

Enabling approach: Ian is referred to Meals on Wheels, where he is offered an initial six month service and a place in a men’s cooking class. After three months, he decides to reduce Meals on Wheels by half and together with two other men he met in the cooking class, starts using the local shopping bus to collect groceries for his dinner recipes. After a further three months, he does not require Meals on Wheels at all.

Case study adapted from the IMPACT NSW website
What does an enabling approach mean for carers?

The enabling approach is very different to traditional home care. For some carers it may be the cause of anxiety, particularly if they do not understand what services are being provided, and why. Carers may fear that the enabling approach is motivated by a desire to provide less assistance to people if they are not appropriately included and supported.

Enabling approaches are often more time consuming in the short term, as it can be more difficult to help somebody to do something rather than just doing it for them. This may impact upon carers. Both the person and their carer must be adequately supported throughout the process for enabling approaches to succeed.

Do you want more information about enabling approaches?

This fact sheet provides only a brief introduction to the concept of enabling approaches. For more information see the following links:

Active Service Model Project, Victorian Government Health Information

Impact NSW
http://www.impactnsw.com/

Independence Programs, Silver Chain, Western Australia

Northern Sydney Wellness and Restorative Care Project, Uniting Care Ageing