



# AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group

## GUIDELINES FOR PEER SUPERVISION FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

March 2015

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### 1. Introduction

These guidelines apply to the specialist peer supervision facilitated by the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group for any school social worker who identifies with and adheres to the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers, and seek to enhance the quality of their practice. Peer supervision facilitated by the Practice Group is particularly important for lone school social workers employed by individual schools or within multidisciplinary teams.

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group provides opportunity for peer supervision consistent with the obligations within the Supervision Standards (AASW, 2014), the Practice Standards (AASW, 2013), Code of Ethics (AASW, 2010) and the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011).

*Peer supervision, (is) a collaborative learning and supervisory forum .. established by two or more professional colleagues (social work or multi-disciplinary) of equal standing. Within such a forum, participants move between the roles of supervisor, supervisee and collaborative learner.*  
(AASW, 2014, p.6)

Peer supervision is underpinned by the three core values of social work: *respect for persons, social justice and professional integrity*. These values are applied to the processes and content of peer supervision, particularly with regard for those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or oppressed (AASW, 2014, p.3), and especially in response to children and young people with different abilities, diverse backgrounds and sub-cultural interests, in a difficult social environment where a smooth transition into young adulthood is hampered by economic, social and educational policy strictures.

### 2. Purpose of peer supervision for school social workers

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group provides specialist school social work peer supervision as an adjunct to, but not in place of the responsibility of employing school systems, schools or other organisations to provide professional supervision. The three integrated functions of peer supervision for school social workers are: *Education, Support and Accountability* (AASW, 2014, p.3-4).

**Education** fosters improved competence, quality and outcomes through the development of school social work knowledge, theory for practice, understanding and skills. Self-reflection and critical analysis explore the impact of the self as practitioner, and better understanding of children and young people, school educators and administrators, parents and carers. School social workers consider the impact of changing social issues, social and educational policy, schooling, welfare and other societal structures. Peer supervision encourages respect for individual and collegiate knowledge-building and the development of theory-in-practice.

**Support** encompasses acknowledgement of the personal impact of school social work, and the potential impact of personal reactions and emotions and practice. Peer supervision can provide encouragement and validation, a site for the exploration of difficult circumstances, and generate strategies for self-care.

**Accountability** focuses on the school social worker's responsibility for wellbeing and learning outcomes for students, in the sometimes difficult territory of schools and school systems as host settings, and among the competing interests of teachers, families and community.

**The supervisory process** should facilitate critical reflection on practice that encourages analysis of values and ethics, power dynamics, inter-personal dynamics, structural factors, theoretical understandings, alternative perspectives, professional knowledge and current research findings, in developing a more sophisticated understanding of practice issues and more informed practice choices. Such explorations often centre on particular case studies, scenarios or issues of concern encountered by the social worker in practice, but may also include practices and ideas that extend the social worker beyond their experience of standard practice. It is expected that supervision also provide a forum where social workers can engage in reflection on their use of self and the skills of social work practice. Professional supervision should provide a safe space for social work practitioners to report on their practice, be challenged and extended and to be supported and affirmed. (AASW, 2014, p.7).

### 3. Guidelines for the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group Peer Supervision for School Social Workers

School social worker peer supervision participants share responsibility to uphold the requirements of the Supervision Standards (AASW, 2014, Sections 9.1 and 9.2).

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group will ensure that:

- i. Peer supervision for school social workers is conducted according to supervision standards (AASW, 2014)
- ii. The confidentiality of participants, students and schools is protected, and meetings will not be minuted nor specific identifying details discussed outside of the peer supervision group
- iii. The peer supervision convenor/facilitator is an Accredited Member of the AASW, with 5 years school social work experience, and updated knowledge of professional and practice issues, research, theory and organisational developments in school social work.

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group will:

- i. Provide peer supervision open to all school social work practitioners, eligible for AASW membership
- ii. Foster understanding and build knowledge for reflection and critical reflection in school social work practice
- iii. Focus peer supervision discussions according to emerging professional, school, student or social issues
- iv. Encourage knowledge-building, evaluation of practice and research
- v. Monitor, manage or avoid potential conflicts of interest of participants
- vi. Secure accessible, comfortable and private venues for supervision group meetings and tele-conferencing
- vii. Allocate dates that facilitate the attendance of all interested practitioners, including rural and regional, and where possible, provide tele-conferencing option
- viii. Advertise dates and venues to all members on the mailing list
- ix. Provide attendees with confirmation of attendance
- x. Protect the confidentiality of the peer supervision environment by not keeping records of the content of sessions
- xi. Agenda as items for AASW(Vic) School Social Work Practice Group discussion, issues of interest and concern, as generated and agreed by peer supervision participants

Peer supervision participants will:

- i. Protect the confidentiality and privacy of colleagues, students and school communities
- ii. Protect the confidentiality of peer supervision participants
- iii. Continue to seek organisational and other opportunities for professional supervision
- iv. Integrate peer supervision into a continuing professional and career development plan

#### References

AASW, 2014 *Supervision Standards* <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/6027>

AASW, 2010 *Code of Ethics* <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/1201>

AASW, 2011 *Practice Standards for School Social Workers* <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/814>

AASW, 2013 *Practice Standards* <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/4551>