

*Commercial in Confidence*



**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE  
ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**Yorkshire MESMAC Group of Services**

**Prepared by  
Sue Brown FCIPD**

**On behalf of**

**Yorkshire & Humberside Assessment Ltd**

**January 2007**

## **ASSESSMENT REPORT**

<b>Organisation:</b>	Yorkshire MESMAC 60 Upper Basinghall Street Leeds LS1 5HR
<b>Senior Person</b>	Tom Doyle, Director
<b>No of staff</b>	24 + 9 Trustees + 16 Volunteers
<b>No of sites</b>	4
<b>Sites visited</b>	1 but covered employees from all sites
<b>Type of assessment</b>	First Assessment
<b>Site visit date</b>	18.1.07

### **Assessor recommendation**

**The Assessor concluded that Yorkshire MESMAC met all the requirements of the Investors in People Standard and recommends that they be recognised as an Investor in People. She would like to thank everyone for their warm welcome, hospitality and contribution to the assessment process and wishes them well for the future**

## **Introduction and Summary**

Yorkshire MESMAC was first set up to target men in the community who needed the knowledge, skills and resources to make informed choices about their lives, with particular emphasis on sexual health and prevention of HIV. Whilst this is still a significant part of what MESMAC does, their services have continued to expand to cover gay; lesbian and bi-sexual people and those with transgender issues. One of the projects is designed to support young men and boys who are sexually exploited through prostitution or abuse and another supports those living with HIV, many of whom are heterosexual. This demonstrates their commitment to providing varied and appropriate services to their communities (Leeds, Wakefield, Bradford and York/North Yorkshire) regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

MESMAC has grown over the years, not least because it works closely with external networks to identify issues and trends, and has the expertise to react very quickly to address needs identified through this wider association.

### **Methodology**

MESMAC came forward for assessment in January 2007. An initial visit took place on 11<sup>th</sup> January when the assessor was able to access information about the organisation. The interview sample was also discussed and agreed. The sample covered all roles and levels within MESMAC and took account of gender; length of service; full and part time working arrangements and included volunteers and the Chair of Trustees. In total 14 people were selected for interview and the site visit date was 18<sup>th</sup> January.

### **Objectives**

These were agreed as:

- To undertake an objective assessment against the requirements of the standard
- To interview a representative sample of employees, volunteers and the Chair of Trustees
- To offer feedback and suggestions for continuous improvement
- To address MESMAC's objective to ascertain how staff felt about devolving responsibility for policy development to small working groups rather than whole team involvement

### **Findings**

The whole assessment experience at Yorkshire MESMAC was extremely positive. People were enthusiastic in their comments about the organisation and how it was managed. There were many areas of strength in evidence, including:

- Clear focus and vision shared by everyone
- Excellent communications and wide participation by all stakeholders
- Steady growth and development of services
- Continuity of funding through well established streams
- Career progression routes available despite being a small organisation

- Strong leadership
- Democratic and consensus approach to decision making
- Genuine commitment to people's development
- Highly skilled and motivated staff
- Supportive body of Trustees
- Excellent use of external networks offering ability to influence strategies at the highest levels
- Attention to continuous development of both people and services

### **Areas for Continuous Development**

There were few of these identified and they were mainly in relation to developing or continuing with current initiatives to ensure the longevity of the service, and included:

- Whilst some development needs emerge after the project planning stage, it should still be possible to plan in known needs and resources required to address them. These could be captured in the form of corporate and/or team learning and development plans outlining time frames and learning objectives
- By addressing the above, it might be possible to ascertain at an earlier stage whether there would be surplus funds which could then be allocated to those who need more money to satisfy their particular needs
- Consider introducing a performance review procedure to obtain a holistic view of performance and future aspirations drawn from outcomes of the supervisions
- Where people use external facilitators for supervision, consider at least one internal supervision/performance review annually to address anything not covered through the external provision
- Consider increasing opportunities for income generation to further secure the future of the service. This could probably also include providing services outside your current geographical areas of working
- Continue to monitor and evaluate progress to inform future direction involving staff and volunteers from all areas of operation

## **Developing Strategies to Improve the Performance of the Organisation**

### **An Investor in People develops effective strategies to improve the performance of the organisation through its people**

There is an overall strategic plan outlining principal objectives, which are for the organisation to remain centred on provision of care and education to support its core service users and not to diversify outside this broad remit. The key long term objective is to reduce the incidence of HIV infection across the region.

Operational plans concentrate on outcomes stipulated within the funding contracts, although there is flexibility within these to address issues which come up as a result of working with the client groups. People work in teams dedicated to the specific projects which run in the four geographical areas. Everyone interviewed understood and could articulate MESMAC's overall aims and vision and also what their particular project was out to achieve. They also confirmed having the opportunity to influence how the projects ran, having a significant amount of autonomy in how they delivered the service and addressed changes along the way. In addition, through extensive external networking, they have the opportunity to influence regional strategy and policy making at the highest levels.

People interviewed had a good understanding of other teams' projects at MESMAC. This appeared to be because of the regular full staff meetings where they all updated each other on what they had been doing since the previous meeting.

Succession planning is considered at all levels – the senior managers have skills and knowledge enabling them to undertake each others roles; there is a progression route from Development Worker/Worker level to Co-ordinator level. Volunteers also have access to training so are encouraged to develop appropriate skills and knowledge. Vacant posts are always advertised internally initially and only if candidates do not satisfy required criteria are they then offered externally.

Several people hold training qualifications and put on a raft of internal development sessions for staff and volunteers. Each member of staff has access to a set amount of money each year to use for their professional and personal development. Monies not used remain 'in the pot' and people whose needs are not satisfied by the set amount can then have access to additional funds for training. Needs might be identified at the start of a project but might also arise whilst delivering the project, so a corporate forward plan is not produced. People and their co-ordinators (supervisors) were clear about what skills and knowledge were required so that project outcomes could be delivered. They were expected to be proactive in helping identify their own development needs, although they confirmed discussing these with managers at supervision so that they could be formally agreed.

Evaluation of learning systematically takes place through discussion afterwards of whether learning objectives have been met; identifying whether the learning can be taken forward and used within the workplace; discussing and sharing information with colleagues at staff meetings; monitoring projects to ensure that outcomes are being achieved and identifying any further areas needing development as the project continues.

Everyone is allocated the same amount of money for their development as part of the ethos of equality and diversity apparent within MESMAC. Similarly at staff meetings everyone is expected to update colleagues on what they have been doing. Regular away days offer the opportunity for all staff, volunteers and trustees to get together either to debate work issues or to enjoy a social function. People appreciated this consultative and consensus approach and felt that everyone did have equality of opportunity at work.

Management skills and knowledge are clearly defined within job descriptions and role requirements. Managers and Co-ordinators are clear about these and people understand what support they should have from their managers. There is an accepted standard of behaviour people are expected to adhere to – not just managers – which reflects the culture of the organisation and contributes to the excellent teamworking ethos apparent throughout. Behaviours include showing respect; listening to others' views; managers operating an open door policy and setting an example through effective role modelling. The staff handbook sets out roles and responsibilities for management and staff.

There is a significant amount of expertise within the Board of Trustees in various areas, such as law; finance; human resources and public health. Three places are available for staff members and volunteers are also encouraged to become trustees.

### **Areas for Continuous Development**

- Whilst some development needs emerge after the project planning stage, it should still be possible to plan in known needs and resources required to address them. These could be captured in the form of corporate and/or team learning and development plans outlining time frames and learning objectives
- By addressing the above, it might be possible to ascertain at an earlier stage whether there would be surplus funds which could then be allocated to those who need more money to satisfy their particular needs

## Taking Action to Improve the Performance of the Organisation

### **An Investor in People takes effective action to improve the performance of the organisation through its people**

The managers and co-ordinators could give examples of how they had supported people at work. Line managers undertake supervisions which are generally every six weeks, although this can be more or less frequent depending on need. People also have the option for external mentors to undertake supervisions and some people take advantage of this. People found supervision useful as a means of receiving feedback and discussing issues although they confirmed that ongoing one to one dialogue with line managers and senior managers was also the norm and that communications were very good.

There is no appraisal system, and whilst this is by no means compulsory so long as people have their development needs identified and met, MESMAC might derive value from taking a bit longer over one or two supervisions within the year. These performance reviews could then draw together all the information to form an overview of how the year has gone to date and what the longer term focus is for the future, both for the organisation and for the aspirations of the post holder. This doesn't have to be 'management by objectives' which is not the preferred way for MESMAC!

Additionally, for those who do use the expertise of external mentors, it might be useful for internal line managers to have this annual/biannual review with their staff to ensure that nothing is missed. It would also offer another opportunity to acknowledge their contribution to the organisation.

People confirmed that they all spoke at their three weekly staff meetings to inform everyone what they had been doing. This was an opportunity for them to receive additional feedback and praise for the work they were doing and ensured that everyone knew what was going on. **“X listens, responds and makes time – you can give feedback – it's two-way”**. Any external courses or conferences people had attended were also discussed at these meetings and learning shared widely where appropriate. **“It is managed well”**. **“You have good opportunities here – they support the training element well”**.

Delivering training to various external bodies is also a feature at MESMAC with several people holding Train the Trainer awards. Courses are run for external agencies and some of these are income generating. Whilst funding is quite stable currently, the voluntary sector is heavily dependent on external funding and income generation is advisable where possible to enable continuity of service if income streams do dry up. It appeared to the assessor that MESMAC has scope to increase its income, particularly through selling its training packages and that this could be more fully exploited.

Everyone interviewed confirmed feeling valued at work. They were all complimentary about the skills of their managers, who they said were approachable; good at listening; helped to identify learning needs; helped identify appropriate activities; communicated effectively and facilitated a high degree of autonomy within

roles. **“I feel valued – absolutely! They say thank you and well done”**. **“There is trust, flexibility, autonomy, recognition and acknowledgement. You are given the structure and support to make things your own”**. **“The hands off approach suits me and they are very good”**. **“X is fantastic! He’s grateful for the work we do and it’s recognised”**. **“X values my job and the part I play”**. **“They acknowledge people’s input. The AGM is the highlight of the year and not many voluntary sector organisations can say that!”** **“My expertise and professionalism are valued and they respond to training requests”**. **“We’re encouraged to be autonomous – it’s the only way to address needs – we have to be responsive”**.

Volunteers were equally positive in their responses to the way they are encouraged, valued and developed. They are largely responsible for manning the switchboard - listening to clients and signposting them to the appropriate services. They confirmed attending meetings; training weekends and having the opportunity to become Trustees.

A Volunteer Advisory Group has been set up to look at the role of volunteering within MESMAC comprised of a selection of staff and volunteers. This includes production and/or updating of policies and procedures which is now almost complete and recommendations of how to develop the volunteer services. This should add structure and offer a framework for development with the introduction of volunteer supervisions. People were enthusiastic about being involved in these smaller groups, which facilitated quicker decision making than whole team debate. However, people did appreciate the opportunity to discuss everything before final decisions were made at the full meetings. **“We get chance to discuss everything and often argue and disagree but we have the trust to do this – responsibility, trust and respect”**. **“We have healthy debate”**.

The induction procedure has been amended and improved recently and had excellent feedback. One feature was the time afforded for people to go through and understand all aspects. It covered practice exercised in completing forms; visiting all sites; included training elements and communicated the philosophy and ethos of the organisation. It is backed up by a useful handbook. **“It was well structured – it’s a very welcoming organisation”**. There is a support package for new Trustees, who are encouraged to attend a couple of meetings before deciding on whether to offer their services. Voluntary Action Leeds offers specific Trustee training should they wish to take up the opportunities.

Everyone interviewed felt that their learning at MESMAC was ongoing. Whilst they had autonomy in identifying development needs, these linked well with achieving project outcomes. Professional qualifications and higher level degrees were encouraged with people confirming that commitment to development was strong. **“I have never been refused anything”**. People were clear about what they had learned from development activities and how they had been able to put their knowledge into practice at work.

## **Areas for Continuous Development**

- Consider introducing a performance review procedure to obtain a holistic view of performance and future aspirations drawn from outcomes of the supervisions
- Where people use external facilitators for supervision, consider at least one internal supervision/performance review annually to address anything not covered through the external provision
- Consider increasing opportunities for income generation to further secure the future of the service. This could probably also include providing services outside your current geographical areas of working

## Evaluating the Impact on the Performance of the Organisation

### **An Investor in People can demonstrate the impact of its investment in people on the performance of the organisation**

At MESMAC the training budget is allocated in equal proportions to all members of staff. The amount is generous and not everyone requires this level of investment. What remains is left centrally to be accessed for people whose needs prove to be more expensive. These would mainly be for the higher level qualifications available. It was easy for managers to monitor total spend on development and they also acknowledged other resources such as time, travel and accommodation costs. In addition to achieving (or over achieving) on project outcomes, they felt that a strong commitment to staff development helped to retain staff and encouraged them to feel valued; it facilitated capacity building within the organisation and knowledge could be disseminated more widely in the sector through delivery of external development activities.

Evidence demonstrated that people did utilise this money for interventions that linked well to achieving their project outcomes. Earlier in their employment, activities seemed to be around gaining knowledge relevant to the specific project, whereas later, the emphasis was more on external networking, conferences and higher level qualifications in health related areas to take people to a higher level of understanding. Managers feel that personal development is also particularly important for increasing motivation and helping staff retention.

People confirmed that evaluation is constant – the staff meetings provide a regular forum for monitoring progress against all projects and agreeing the way forward. Everyone is involved in this and decision making is democratic and by consensus. Learning and development are routinely discussed with cascade of information a regular feature. One to one discussions with line managers also take place following external development and regular supervision provides another forum for evaluation. **“Evaluation is constant to improve the service. We speak to other networks, pool ideas and knowledge and share information”**. Evaluation forms are requested from delegates attending MESMAC courses and these are positive.

Several examples were given of how people felt they had improved their performance at work. For example by completing the ECDL qualification, the quality of reports has improved and the training packages look more professional; through a website design programme, another employee gained awareness and understanding of how to make the site more available to those with disabilities; through external networking, people became aware of issues which needed to be addressed and usually found ways of doing this through current funding streams.

Improvements seem to be constant, exemplified by: extending the service to deliver a wider remit; introducing part time nursing staff to undertake community based HIV/STD testing and administer injections as appropriate; taking Social Work students on placement; improved financial status with longer term funding streams; more income generating initiatives are now in place, including some collection tins; work is undertaken in schools to educate people at an early age; a new Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) mental health group has been set up and also one

to support offenders in prison is under consideration; continuing to develop external networks such as the Diversity one in conjunction with British Transport Police helping to raise their awareness of homophobia nation wide; input into the Pride celebrations in the region; more input is now encouraged from service users; internal improvements include development of the induction procedure; instigation of the Volunteer Advisory Group and implementation of its recommendations; access to funding for a Youth Worker and plans to employ a Volunteer Co-ordinator; the vision and values are being reviewed and updated and people are awaiting the debate on the outcomes of this work. MESMAC has also purchased its Bradford premises giving it a solid asset which will appreciate in value.

MESMAC is accredited with PQASSO and was short listed for Volunteering England. It is also considering pursuing Investors in Volunteers.

People find MESMAC a good place to work. They confirm that teamworking is excellent. **“You can ring any person in the team and they would give you time and space”**. **“I’m very proud to be part of this organisation – the people you work with really respect you”**. **“It’s a really positive organisation”**. The latter comment can be endorsed by the assessor who was impressed with the dedication and enthusiasm of everyone interviewed and she would like to thank them for their contribution.

#### **Area for Continuous Development**

- Continue to monitor and evaluate progress to inform future direction involving staff and volunteers from all areas of operation