

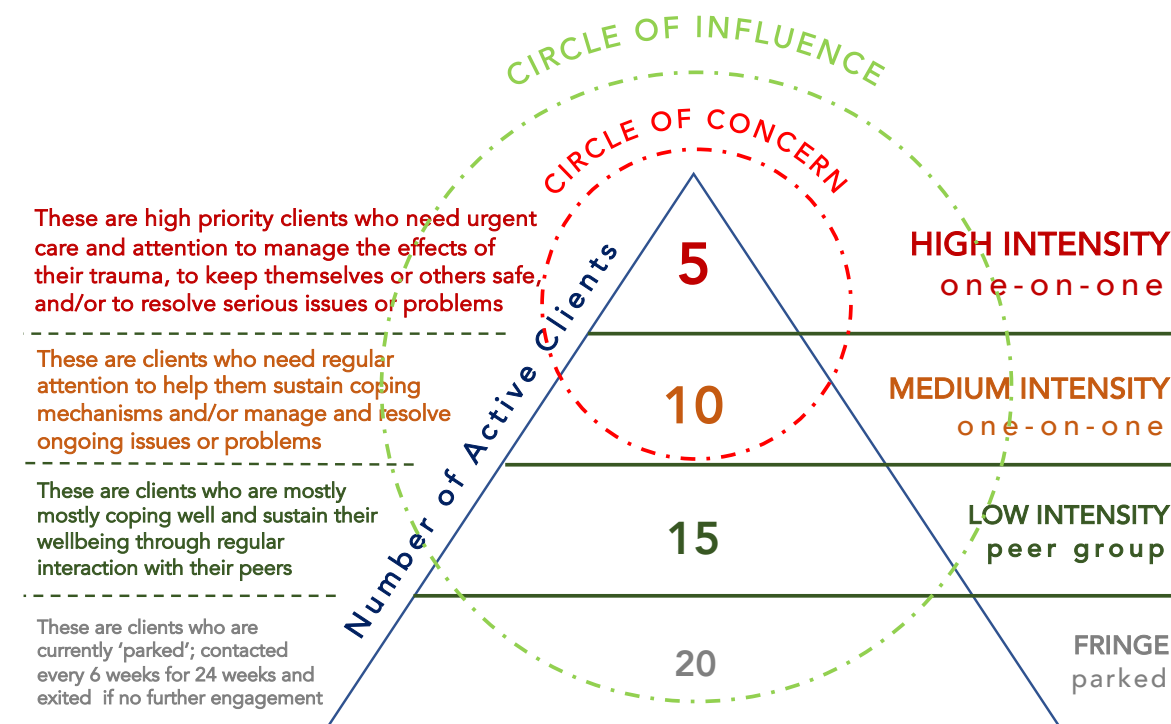
PRACTICE NOTE: Working Well

A group of managers from MSA Member Organisations, who were attending a Reflective Practice training course, took some time out to consider how peer workers could manage their workloads in a manner that enhanced their wellbeing. This Practice Note records the outcomes of their conversations.

Safe Case Loads

Gaining an understanding of the case load that a normal peer worker can sustain, while operating in a safe manner, is important in modelling the resource funding that we need to provide an effective service. It seems reasonable to assume that the sustainability of an individual case load is related to the intensity of the peer relationship. High intensity relationships driven by levels of trauma, urgency, concerns about safety etc., take more time and usually deserve an urgent/primary focus. In contrast, low intensity peer relationships where the peer/client is coping well and where support contact is less frequent are more easily managed.

A potential safe case load model for a peer worker to accommodate up to **50 clients** could be defined as follows:



For a small peer support service staffed by two peer workers, this model suggest that the maximum safe client load is 100 active clients, comprising 10 high intensity, 20 regular (medium intensity) clients, 30 clients in peer support groups and 40 fringe or 'parked' clients (refer Active Clients below). It should be noted that these client load configurations may vary depending on the demographics and geographical spread of the client base. The aim of the model is to establish an indicative case load boundary, especially for one-on-one support services, and not a target – service quality must always take precedence over number of cases managed.

Active Clients

Active clients are loosely defined as clients that remain in contact with the support service. Good practice suggests that if we regard a client as part of our active case load, then we are obligated to maintain a level of contact with that client that enables us to be reasonably assured that they are coping well without needing more regular support. Once a client ceases to need regular one-on-one or group support, they are 'parked' in case management database.

MSA's guideline for managing 'parked' clients requires that they are contacted as a minimum every 6 weeks to ensure that they don't need any further support. If after 24 weeks, the 6-weekly contacts indicate that no further support is required, a parked client become inactive and can be exited from the active client list, but they are retained in the case management data base.

Wellbeing Work Focus

The next question addressed by the MMO managers was - how should a peer support worker operate to manage a safe case load while at the same time sustaining their wellbeing? The following diagram records the suggestions that emerged from the manager conversations.

Typical Working Week Focus					
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	
Wellbeing					
Supervision				1	<i>Professional</i>
Reflective Practice	1		1		<i>one with MMO manager/ one internal</i>
Physical Exercise	2	2	2	2	
Personal Learning	2	2	2	2	<i>Could include cultural supervision</i>
Te Kairaranga		1			<i>Monthly contact</i>
Five hours per week	5	5	5	5	<i>One hour per day</i>
	13%	13%	13%	13%	
Client Contact					
High Intensity 1-1	13	13	13	13	<i>5 clients @ 2.5 hours each</i>
Medium Intensity 1-1	4	4	4	4	<i>10 Clients; 3 per week @ 1 hour each</i>
Low Intensity - Groups	3	3	3	3	<i>2 groups @ 1.5 hours</i>
Fringe [parked]	1	1	1	1	<i>2 contacts per week at 0.5 hours</i>
Twenty hours per week	21	21	21	21	<i>Four hours per day</i>
	53%	53%	53%	53%	
Management					
Client Administration	10	10	10	10	<i>50% of contact time/ 2 hours per day</i>
Group Administration	2	2	2	2	<i>one hour per group</i>
Marketing Relationships	2	2	2	2	<i>two hours per week</i>
Fifteen hours per week	14	14	14	14	<i>Three hours per day</i>
	35%	35%	35%	35%	
Total Hours	40	40	40	40	

Note: Services with remote geographies may need extra group sessions with less medium intensity client loads

Clearly the mix of activities will vary but the intention is clear:

- Take time out during the working day – wellbeing is key to service quality
- Maximum client contact hours should not exceed 50% of available time
- Allow realistic time for management and administration