

Your leadership example

Within Angus Council, People Directorate, we have developed a dedicated mentoring programme for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) to enable them to meet their PRTL requirements for SSSC registration.

It was a new and creative approach to workforce development as we started the mentoring programme from scratch. It involved collaboration with various key stakeholders - i.e. senior managers, team leaders, NQSWs (current and previously recruited new graduates) and facilitated by the Workforce Development Team.

Our ethos is one of promoting self-leadership and empowering NQSWs - as we have developed peer mentoring groups alongside a more traditional one-to-one mentoring relationship. By the end of the Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) period (12-18 months) we find that NQSWs are keen to become mentors and feel confident in their leadership role around PRTL. This helps us to build internal capacity of new mentors to make the mentoring programme sustainable. We received a "Highly Commended" in 2010 at the Angus Council excellence awards in recognition of our innovative approach.

It is of most benefit to NQSWs who are in their first 'professional' Social Work Post. It supports staff who are frontline practitioners across a wide range of services e.g. community care, Criminal Justice Services (CJS), Children's Services. It gives staff protected time to reflect on their practice (within the mentoring relationship) and feedback on their written PRTL records. Thus, we feel PRTL records have improved and less are being returned as incomplete by SSSC.

However, it also benefits team managers who supervise NQSWs as they have more time to focus on casework with service users knowing that the NQSW is receiving mentoring support with PRTL requirements.

We were aware that NQSWs were struggling to critically reflect on their PRTL records and a significant number were being returned by SSSC as 'unsatisfactory' or returned 'incomplete'. As an organisation we are unable to employ NQSWs who do not meet re-registration requirements. Given this risk we decided to implement a new mentoring programme for all NQSWs regardless of employment status (Permanent, temporary, part-time etc).

Planning and implementing your leadership approach

The mentoring programme gained a 'kick-start' when Workforce Development Team set up a "community of practice" with mentors to establish if there was a need and a willingness to get the programme off the ground. We then engaged with senior managers (operational and strategic leaders) and drew up a briefing paper outlining organisational risks, resources, anticipated outcomes.

We sought collaboration with team managers and NQSWs to develop a mentoring handbook and guidance notes to clarify roles and responsibilities. We researched useful materials and found the SSSC's publication "Guidance for Mentoring in Childhood Practice" a useful source of practical materials.

Workforce Development Team designed and co-ordinated the mentoring initiative. We collaborated with senior managers, (to gain approval) operational team managers (to identify mentors), and NQSWs (mentees). Initially we began with one-to-one mentoring using experienced Social Workers in frontline services as mentors. The WDT provided induction sessions, handbooks and quarterly mentoring forums to support new mentors.

For the past two years we have set out to build internal leadership capacity by developing a peer mentoring group where NQSWs support one another (with facilitation and guidance from WDT). We now have a growing number of former NQSWs with experience of compiling PRTLs and mentoring experiences who are willing to become mentors, i.e., we have a growing pool of new mentors demonstrating good role modelling and leading by example.

- NQSWs choose to apply to Angus Council for Social Work posts due to the support package in place which includes the PRTL mentoring scheme.
- NQSWs coping better with the transition from university to employment better (e.g. good retention rates).
- Fewer PRTL forms being returned for more evidence (more 'pass' first time).
- Increased mentoring capacity (from previously mentored NQSWs).
- Recognition that mentoring needs allocated time and resources.
- NQSWs becoming confident within peer mentoring group and feeling empowered by contributing to the learning of others (leadership role).

Evaluating and learning from your example

- One size does not fit all! Sometimes the mentor/mentee relationship does not work so it is important to offer choice, e.g., another mentor or choice of peer group mentoring.
- Confusion around the purpose of mentoring programme, e.g., line managers expected some mentors to “deputise” or get involved in case management issues. We now have a Guidance booklet for Line Managers and mentors to clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Delays in “getting started” so we now offer an induction training session for all new mentors and mentees as an opportunity to meet one another, complete a mentoring agreement, and review each other's learning styles. (Many of our exercises and materials are sourced from “Guidance for Mentoring in Childhood Practice”).
- This introductory session has helped to kick-start the mentoring process and we now have a strategic yearly planner of mentoring activities, workshops and support forums. This helps us monitor PRTL completion rates and link endings of mentoring cycles to our evaluation and feedback process.

What difference did this practice make for people using services?

Feedback from staff who have been mentored:

“Mentoring has helped me to reflect in depth on my practice and identify situations that went well and what didn't”.

“Peer mentoring group helped me to focus on my learning... I had to write about my practice and reference my source of knowledge which helped me reflect more deeply about my interventions with people using our service”.

“It motivated me - it was not just the “fire-fighting” bit but time to reflect on how I can bring about small changes... I feel it (peer mentoring) has made my practice more holistic and better informed”.

Given this evaluation from NQSWs we believe that people using our services receive an improved service because NQSWs are better informed and more reflective.

Newly-Qualified Social Workers: flowchart: Recruitment & Support Process

