

Community Legal Centres Queensland Pilot mentoring program evaluation

Community Legal Centres Queensland launched a pilot Mentoring Program in February 2013 to help support and strengthen individual workers and Queensland's community legal centre (CLC) sector. It was envisioned that the program would encourage and facilitate mentoring relationships to strengthen and grow the CLC community. The Mentoring Program supported informal 'one to one' relationships and involved matching a new (or relatively new) CLC Manager or Solicitor (**mentee**) to a more experienced CLC Manager or Solicitor (**mentor**). The mentor provides the mentee with advice and direction on a variety of matters from workplace issues to career pathways. This report assesses the effectiveness of the pilot program, and makes some recommendations for improvement.

The pilot and the evaluation

An expression of interest to undertake this pilot Mentoring Program was forwarded to potential participants in 2013 via email and was circulated through their organisation. Community Legal Centres Queensland matched respondents, who then developed a mentoring relationship.

In May 2016, both mentors and mentees were sent a ten minute online self-administered questionnaire to evaluate their experiences and understand the impact (if any) of the mentoring relationship.

Seven of eight pilot project participants completed the questionnaire. Mentees were asked questions such as 'how satisfied were you with the mentoring program?', 'did you feel comfortable seeking assistance from your mentor' and 'would you consider becoming a mentor later in your professional life. Mentors were asked questions such as 'how satisfied were you with the mentoring program', 'how equipped did you feel to undertake the role as mentor?' and 'do you think you gained valuable mentoring skills through the program?' Respondents completed the questionnaire in a 'yes' or 'no' format and by choosing from a three point Likert scale (e.g. 'not satisfied', 'satisfied' and 'very satisfied'). They had the option to write comments if they wanted, and five respondents did.

8 total pilot program participants

4 mentors		4 mentees	
♀ 1	♂ 3	♀ 1	♂ 3

The participants

Participants were community legal centre professionals seeking to build their knowledge or skills (in the case of mentees) or share their knowledge, skills or expertise (in the case of mentors). Mentors in this program were experienced Managers or Solicitors with at least ten years of experience in CLCs, while the mentees were relatively new solicitors/managers.

Program satisfaction

Respondents showed a high degree of satisfaction with the pilot mentoring program. Two of the three mentors expressed they were 'satisfied' with the program while no mentors expressed dissatisfaction. All mentors agreed to gaining satisfaction from being a mentor. Likewise, all mentees responded positively to the program, with 50% expressing satisfaction and 50% expressing great satisfaction with the program.

All respondents would recommend the program to friends/colleagues, and all mentees agreed that they benefited in their own jobs through their mentors. All mentors agreed to gaining extra knowledge in their field by undertaking the role as mentor. This suggests that both mentors and mentees perceive the program as value-adding. Two mentees gave feedback to continue the program and involve more people in the program. Three of four mentees expressed a desire to become a mentor later in their professional life



**Community
Legal Centres
Queensland**

Community Legal Centres Queensland Inc.
PO Box 119, Stones Corner QLD 4120
Tel: 07 3392 0092 ABN 71 907 449 543
admin@communitylegalqld.org.au
www.communitylegalqld.org.au

Suggestions

Mentors suggested improvements to the program:

- “May be useful for mentors to get together periodically to discuss how they are going and what sort of things they are doing and what kind of support they are providing. Really the project has been **more about "joining" people together rather than active support** (noting the limits in terms of resources and time are a challenge) so this at least would provide some formality to the project’
- “I think **keeping and maintaining contact was the hardest thing with 2 busy people**”



Two of the four mentees had suggestions for improving the program:

- ‘Suggest a time period - e.g. 6 months - then **review to see if need to continue**’
- ‘The documentation is too serious - **we didn't keep a mentoring record or do a Development Plan**, but I can see that for some people that would be necessary to avoid just chatting.’

Recommendations for improvement

Review the mentor-mentee relationship regularly

To better understand the impact that the program has on work performance, it is important to *conduct regular reviews depending on the duration of the program (e.g. if a two year program every six or seven months)* to assess if any changes are needed to improve the relationship between the mentor and mentee. With regular reviews, any issues can be addressed (e.g. difficulties in maintaining contact between mentors and mentees) and attempt to eliminate them as soon as practically possible.

Using questions to guide and explore issues

One way to facilitate a more supportive environment in which the mentors can discuss their roles and the mentoring relationship (see ‘suggestions’ above), is getting mentors together for a group discussion to *ask questions to explore their situation in depth, to gain a greater understanding of it, reflect and draw conclusions, and actions to move forward*. Examples of different types of questions are provided below:

Reflective	Getting the mentors to say more about an issue and to explore it in more depth	“You said... can you explain in more detail why you think this?”
Hypothetical	Introducing new ideas and/or to get the mentor to consider how an action would be received by others.	“What about...” “What if...” “How do you think X would react?”
Justifying	Obtaining further information on reasons, attitudes and feelings	“Can you describe what makes you think/say that?”
Exploratory	Discovering motivations, feelings and hidden concerns	“What do you perceive is the cause of this?”; “When did you first experience that”
Checking	Establishing whether others have understood clearly	“Are you sure about that?” “Why do you feel this way?”

Periodic meetings (e.g. every two to three months) could help mentors to assess for themselves the kind of support they are providing to mentees and if they are achieving the shared goals as a mentor.

Negotiating expectations and goals at first meeting

It is essential that contact be maintained throughout the mentorship. The level of time commitment should be discussed and negotiated between the mentor and mentee. Participants could meet at least six times over a tenth month period (repeat over the next ten months). *Participants should plan for the next contact together at the end of each meeting*. If either party needs to reschedule, the mentee should immediately give the mentor a list of *three or four alternative times and locations*. This process also enables both mentor and mentee to keep a record of their activities should decisions need review.

A second round of expressions of interest will be sought later in 2016