

Mentoring Matters

Volume 1 • Issue 1 • May 2005

Welcome to the first edition of "Mentoring Matters", the Newsletter of Comhairle's Social Mentoring Panel.

We aim to bring you news and views of our expert panel and give you some of the inside stories as told by some of the participants.

HISTORY OF THE SOCIAL MENTOR PROGRAMME... How it all Began...

by Cora Pollard, National Co-ordinator of the Social Mentor Programme

The Social Mentor Programme (SMP) had its beginnings in 1993, which was the EU Year of Older People and Solidarity Between the Generations. It began as a pilot project, supported by the then Department of Social Welfare and the former National Social Service Board (NSSB), to promote volunteering among Senior Citizens. In 2000

Comhairle's new edition of Mentoring Matters is intended as a voice for Mentors and we therefore encourage all our panellists to be as forthcoming as possible in sharing their views with us. We also would like participant organisations, as well, to reflect back their experiences of the Social Mentor Programme and we welcome their contributions in future issues.

If you have any ideas or views you would like to share with us, please contact a member of the editorial team through Cora Pollard, National Co-ordinator (Tel: 01 4620444 email: cora.pollard@comhairle.ie).

Comhairle was established combining the former N.S.S.B. and certain functions of the N.R.B.

In its ten years, the SMP has supported over 100 organisations through its panel of volunteer Mentors, now numbering 35.

The idea is to provide voluntary organisations with an opportunity to work on a specific aspect of their development through the input of an experienced volunteer Mentor. It is the Mentor's task to guide the organisation through a planned programme of work over an agreed time frame.

The pilot project proved to be a resounding success. The SMP proceeded to take its place as a resource to the voluntary and community sector within the

remit of the Training and Development Service of Comhairle.

The services of the Social Mentor Programme extended to organisations within the voluntary and community sector who offer a social service to the community. The programme's value is two-fold; it provides a volunteering opportunity to experienced individuals with expertise to share with organisations. It provides them with an ideal opportunity to work on organisational development issues at no financial cost.

The SMP has operated on a small scale for many years. The recent past has seen it grow and develop as a significant service to the voluntary sector. The SMP is committed to developing regional panels throughout the country. There are panels currently in place in Cork, the South East and Dublin. Mentors come from all parts of the country.

From the Mentor's point of view, the programme provides a volunteering opportunity that is both satisfying and challenging. It exemplifies volunteerism by nurturing a process of contributing and sharing, with the accompanying benefits to both parties.

Organisations who have benefited from mentoring support have ranged from services with a community-based focus to well-established organisations with a national remit. "It is an innovative way for organisations to engage in development work and it doesn't cost a dime," says Alice Murray of Killinarden Drugs Primary Prevention Programme in Tallaght.

Where we are now

The range of organisations using the SMP includes national, regional and community based organisations. There are currently 30 organisations participating in the programme. They are supported by mentors from a wide variety of backgrounds – commercial, public sector, voluntary sector – with an impressive track record in their respective fields.

For the typical needs that organisations encounter throughout their life cycle, the Social Mentor Programme aims to provide corresponding expertise for each one. For example, questions such as:

- How do we become a limited company?
- How do we make the transition from being voluntary, to employing paid staff?
- How do we market our organisation to reach our intended customers?
- How do we meet our funding needs?
- How do we put in place effective communication processes both internally and with external interest groups
- How do we establish effective systems for managing information?
- How do we plan for our organisation's future development?
- How do we complete a strategic plan?
- How do we develop a public relations strategy?

The Social Mentor Panel is a group with specialist expertise to assist in addressing these kind of questions.

How it works

The process of mentoring involves the participant organisation in working with the National Programme Co-ordinator to identify specific organisational needs. A suitably skilled mentor is assigned to the organisation and a programme of work is drawn up setting out the tasks to be accomplished and the time frame for completion. The main focus of the mentoring engagement is the transfer of skills to the participant organisation thereby enhancing their development in the way they function.

Evaluation of the outcomes is an important part of the mentoring process and organisations are encouraged to contribute to this process at intervals during and at the completion of the programme. The SMP is a means of providing a meaningful learning opportunity to participant organisations in a safely challenging and encouraging environment that operates at no financial cost to the organisation.

Social Mentor Profiles

Social Mentor Profiles will become a regular feature in our newsletter. In our first edition we are focusing on the members of the Advisory Sub-Committee of the Dublin Panel.

Bob Gahan

Bob has been with Social Mentor Panel since its foundation. He is a former Deputy Director General of RTE. Apart from a very experienced and distinguished background in top management, Bob has considerable expertise in PR and Marketing and is a Fellow of the Marketing Institute of Ireland.

Ian Hood

Ian is an industrial chemist by profession and retired from senior management at ICI, having enjoyed a successful career. His membership of the Social Mentor Panel dates back to the early days of the Programme. Ian's area of expertise lies in general management and marketing.



Pictured from left to right, Ian Hood, Sally Edwards, Cora Pollard, Sheila Cullen and Bob Gahan

Sheila Cullen

Sheila has enjoyed an impressive career at the UN and NGO's where she worked in Africa for a number of years. Her career path took her to FAS, from where she retired. Sheila has an impressive track record in management and business administration. Her membership of the Panel dates back to when it was first established.

Sally Edwards

Sally has joined the Social Mentor Programme in the recent past. Her work as former National Director of the Irish National Council on Alcohol and

as an independent consultant to numerous emerging and established voluntary agencies has provided her with a strong area of expertise in organisational development and public relations.

HELPING THE HELPERS

BY BOB GAHAN (Member of the Dublin Panel of Mentors)

I was less than one month retired from RTE when I was approached by the NSSB (now Comhairle) to consider participating in the Social Mentor Programme. Frankly, while I was aware of some mentor programmes in industry, I had not heard of the programme under the auspices of the NSSB I agreed to a meeting and learned a little of the support work being undertaken by the NSSB to help the voluntary sector. I soon became aware of the extent of the voluntary work being undertaken by thousands of ordinary people concerned for their communities, for the aged, for children, for the improvement of their environment or for the development of small business projects within their local areas to help foster self-esteem and pride.

From the beginning, it was stressed that the Mentors were not being asked to do the job but rather to help existing bodies to achieve their goals better and more quickly.

There is a great effort by the SMP Co-ordinator to match the talents of the different potential Mentors to the needs of the various projects seeking assistance.

Meetings are arranged between the two sides to discuss the project and assess whether the talents and experience of the Mentor match the needs of the applicants or whether the two parties are compatible. Some of these discussions can be revealing to both sides as it becomes apparent that the real problems of the applicants can be different when examined in detail and may require one or two different Mentors, while the Mentor may discover that s/he is not the person for that particular project.

It is a revelation to know just how many people are sufficiently concerned about their neighbours or some marginalised element of our society to devote their free time and often put their own homes at the disposal of their groups to help improve matters. This becomes a co-operative effort as the Mentor attempts to use his or her skills and apply the knowledge of his or her lifetime in business to guide the work of the local group and to encourage them as they try to overcome layers of bureaucracy or even local inertia.

It is quite a challenge for the Mentor but a very satisfying one when progress is made and a local project takes shape. I would recommend it to any person with relevant transferable skills who can spare a few hours a month to contact Comhairle and discuss the programme with them.

Guest Contributor

MENTORING IN PRACTICE

BY BRIAN DOYLE *(Member of the Dublin Panel of Mentors)*

Mentoring has its origins in very early times and the word "mentor" comes from the Greek meaning "guide, philosopher and friend". The objective of a Mentor is to share wisdom gained from experience and learning.

Mentoring is distinguished from advising, counselling, coaching or training. It deals with management and business processes. It involves vision, mission, listening and debate. Mentors do not have all the answers. A Mentor's focus is to ask questions, to assist and to challenge the Mentoree.

The relationship between the Mentor and Mentoree will differ in every case. Not all are an unqualified success. If the relationship fails, the reason for the failure should be examined carefully and, if appropriate, a new Mentor should be found.

There are many reasons to seek a Mentor. It could be:

- An awareness of a lack of knowledge, skill or experience
- A sense of inadequacy or incompleteness due to dissatisfaction with the progress of a business or enterprise
- A feeling that full potential is not being realised

Alternatively it may simply be a need for a sense of continuity which outside supportive intervention could provide. In other words a need to alleviate a feeling of isolation.

The introduction of a Mentor should support and strengthen the client or voluntary organisation. For the Mentoree there is the benefit of access, without charge, to appropriate experience and expertise to assist in the development of their organisation.

For the Mentor there is the satisfaction of passing on some of their knowledge, acquired over a successful working life.

It is very important that, at the outset, the Mentor and Mentoree should be clear on why a Mentor was sought in the first place and what each expects of the relationship. Unclear or ill-defined expectations will lead to confusion and disappointment. As the relationship progresses it should develop in terms of trust, compatibility and friendship.

It is also advisable that progress should be kept under regular review to ensure continued satisfaction with what has been achieved. A proper review procedure should also ensure that the relationship does not extend beyond its "Sell By Date".

While mentoring, traditionally, has been on a one to one basis, there is a growing appreciation that the principles of Mentoring can also be applied to a committee or Board or indeed any group of people with a commercial or social objective. The same criteria and general methodology works well.

In summary, if expectations are clear from the outset and if progress is carefully monitored, mentoring is a most efficient and effective form of assistance to a business or voluntary organisation. Relationships that start from mentoring very frequently develop into long lasting and mutually satisfying relationships.

I suggest that a book that should help is one that I co-authored with Vincent O'Neill. It is called "Mentoring Entrepreneurs" subtitled "Shared Wisdom from Experience".

Brian Doyle is a chartered accountant and the director founder of the Fobairt Mentor Programme. He is the co-author of the book "Mentoring Entrepreneurs" and is currently chairman and director of a number of Irish privated companies.

Cork Social Mentor Panel

There are currently six members on the Cork Panel with one panellist from Waterford. They include Mary Roche, John Clifford, Jim O'Sullivan, Michael Shields, Frank Houlihan from Cork and Gerry Collins from Waterford. The panel has three members of the accountancy profession, a retired

school Principal and entrepreneur and two members of senior management from the voluntary and statutory sectors respectively. We will be featuring the Cork Social Mentor Panel more fully in further issues.

REPORT ON WORKSHOP EXERCISES FOR MENTORS

BY IAN HOOD *(Member of the Dublin Panel of Mentors)*

Workshops have taken place for Mentors in Dublin and Cork using the "Jump-start" case study. Altogether 16 Mentors took part, and all thought the exercise very worthwhile, and enjoyable. It proved to be a very good introduction to mentoring for new panel members in particular, and was also useful in exercising the skills of experienced Mentors.

The objectives of the Workshop training module are:

- To enhance awareness of the overall function of the Social Mentor Panel
- To understand the work of the Co-ordinator
- To practice and learn the skills of mentoring with, and from others
- To network with other Mentors
- To make social contact with other Mentors

So that we might continue to develop this effective concept we need volunteer Mentors to write several more Case Studies, and for the authors to act as Facilitators for future Workshops. The framework and timetable are already in place, and further guidance in the writing of suitable Case Studies will be provided. Volunteers from outside Dublin would be particularly welcome. Contact Cora Pollard, National Co-ordinator.

MENTORING IN ACTION – A Case History

BY MICHAEL SHIELDS *(Member of the Cork Panel of Mentors)*

In April 2004 I agreed to act as mentor to a voluntary organisation in Cork whose remit is to engage in and to support community development at local level. As mentor, and after some initial briefings with the CEO and Board of Cork CAN, I decided to undertake my work using the following approach:



This approach was to ensure consultation and participation in decision making at all levels, which was the total opposite to previous approaches used, where external consultants were engaged.

The basic framework for the Community Development planning process used was:

THE CORE, consisting of the Board's vision and fundamental aims. THE PLANNING PROCESS, involving four key operations: 1 - Review, 2 - Design (action plan), 3 - Implementation and 4 - Evaluation

The time-frame for completion of the initial planning cycle (review design) was six months, April 2004 to September 2004, with the publication and launch of the Board's Strategic Plan for 2005, to take place in early November 2004.

Scope of the Review

It was agreed that a full-scale in-depth review of all aspects of the board's work was a major undertaking (within the agreed time-frame) and, accordingly, it was not necessary to complete such a review before commencing on the planning process proper.

Accordingly, an initial review took place, to identify a small number of key areas that would benefit from an immediate specific review.

Areas identified were: Communications, Research/ Development and Resources (physical/human).

The review instruments included: Surveys of Relevant Data, Questionnaires, Interviews and SWOT Analysis Forms.

The outcome of the review was (1) Identification of needs; (2) Prioritisation, followed by Design, producing a Draft Development Plan for 2005 and (3) the Implementation Phase, with built-in effective monitoring and evaluation procedures.

My colleague and fellow Social Mentor Frank Houlihan also contributed to the process by facilitating a review of the financial procedures of the Board, together with advising on a suitable template for budgetary planning and monitoring, complimenting and becoming an integral part of the planning process for 2005.

The process used was, essentially, a collaborative one, drawing across the whole community in shaping the Board's future role in promoting community development.

Finally, in early November 2004, the Board's Strategic Plan for 2005 was launched by the Right Hon. Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr. Sean Maher, in the presence of all the partners and stakeholders. The good work of Comhairle mentors was acknowledged and recorded in the formal Plan.

Social Mentor Panel Library

The Library is located in the Tallaght Office, and has been in operation for about 12 months. We have some avid readers, but would like to see more take advantage of the facility.

What books does it have?

It currently holds 37 books. All publications cover topics pertinent to mentoring. They can be a useful aide-memoir for specific mentoring sessions. The Sunday Times reference books, which constitute the main section of the library are designed as a complete reference source for entrepreneurs in the small business category, and can be equally useful for Mentors.

How can I find the book I would like to borrow?

A list of book titles, and their reference numbers, from which you can make a selection is provided below. Further details of the selected book content is provided in an additional list that can be accessed through the Office.

How do I borrow a book?

Visit (or telephone) the Tallaght Office and ask Dolores for the Library Register. If the selected book is available you need to enter (or have entered) the book number, your name, telephone number and date. You may then take the book on loan, and return it to library as soon as you have finished with it. On returning, enter (or have entered, if returning by post) the return date in the register.

Who can borrow from the library?

Only Mentors and Comhairle employees may borrow books, and all must complete the register entry. In

special circumstances where a Mentor requires to borrow a book for a Client, the Mentor, who shall be responsible for the care and prompt return of the book, must complete the register entry in his/her name.

I've read all those books; don't you have any more?

Several of our books have been kindly provided by Mentors. We will continue to expand our library, and would also welcome further donations of reference books whose subject matter is relevant to our activities.

Sunday Times Reference Book List

1. Communication at Work
2. Taking Minutes of Meetings
3. How to Write a Business Plan
4. Stay Confident
5. Developing Your Staff
6. E-Business Essentials
7. Making Innovation Happen
8. Performing Appraisals
9. Improving Employee Performance
10. How to Run a Successful Conference
11. Successful Project Management
12. How to Beat Your Competitors
13. Empowering People
14. Writing Effective E-mail
15. How to Generate Ideas
16. Improve Your Communication Skills
17. Team Building
18. Using the Internet Smarter and Faster
19. Develop Your NLP Skills
20. How to Motivate People
21. Organise Yourself

22. Successful Presentation Skills
23. How to Manage Organisational Change
24. Business Etiquette
25. How to Write a Marketing Plan
26. Make Every Minute Count
27. Make That Call!
28. Write That Letter!
29. Be Positive
30. Develop Your Assertiveness

Blackhall Publishing "Being Successful in..." Series

31. Report Writing
32. Customer care
33. Budgeting
34. Patents, Copyright and Trade Marks
35. Making Brilliant Presentations

Individual Reference Books

41. *Finnish Academies of Technology - The Pathmaster Guidebook*
42. Brian Doyle and N Vincent O'Neill's Mentoring Entrepreneurs

Competition Corner

To enable the Co-ordinator to easily identify the skills of individual Mentors the following designations might be considered:

Accoutre-Mentor: Never seen without pen, notebook, phone etc.!

Case-Mentor: Can become unhinged if not feeling secure! (Arch.)

Compli-Mentor: A bit patronising for most clients!

Escape-Mentor: Always punctual!

Escarp-Mentor: Permanently on edge!

Experi-Mentor: Repeatedly tries out quick fixes for clients' problems!

Fer-Mentor: Sits on tasks so long they begin to go off!

Fila-Mentor: A Mentor with a glowing personality!

Firma-Mentor: Has head in the clouds most of the time!

Imple-Mentor: Gets things done!

Supple-Mentor: Keeps adding to existing tasks!

Tor-Mentor: An annoying mentor!

Further written suggestions to complete the list should be sent to Cora Pollard, National Co-ordinator, at Comhairle, Hainault House, The Square, Tallaght, Dublin 24. Acceptable suggestion/s will be published in the next edition, and there will be a modest prize for the most original. Please return by July 2005.