

NDS Quality information pack

An NDS Quality Team Initiative

Networking, mentoring and peer support



National Disability Services

Queensland

A message from the NDS Queensland Quality Team

The National Disability Services (NDS) Queensland Quality Team is part of NDS's Industry Development and Support activities. It was set up to support disability organisations to implement the new Disability Sector Quality System. The purpose of this information pack written by the NDS Quality Team is to stimulate discussion and debate amongst stakeholders of disability services in the context of implementing the Disability Sector Quality System — it is not intended as a definitive reference on the topic.

For example, this material may be used as a basis for stakeholder workshops or staff meeting discussions. It may also be adapted freely to meet the needs of any intended audience. It is requested, however, that NDS Queensland be acknowledged as the source of the material and that any modifications do not change the intent or compromise the integrity of the original document.

Information packs are also available covering the following topics:

- reviewing and developing policies and procedures
- recruitment and selection
- induction
- training and development
- person-centred planning.

These can be downloaded from the NDS Quality website: www.ndsqldquality.net or you can contact NDS Queensland directly:

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The information pack

This information pack is one in a series designed to help organisations review aspects of management as part of implementing a quality framework. The pack includes a series of information sheets, related questions and a facilitator's session plan that can be used by groups to review current practice and identify improvements. The information sheets are intended to stimulate discussion — they do not go into detail about the topic. There are numerous books, resources, courses, Internet sites and experts that can provide detailed information; some of these are listed in the resources section at the end of the pack. Accessing more detailed expertise will become more important as you move further into review or begin making improvements to practice.

For the facilitator it will be important to familiarise and tailor the workshop to the group and the organisation. The organisation's policies, procedures and any other resources for each topic will be needed to supplement the information in this pack. Similarly if the organisation is using the disability service standards as part of this review each participant will need copies of the standards.

About the topic

A considered approach to networking, mentoring and peer support can help organisations to improve the quality of service provision. Increased access to information, access to new or different resources, sharing resources, sharing skills and knowledge, and exposing the organisation to new ideas or innovative practice can make a significant difference. Most community organisations are involved in networking on some level and peer support occurs informally in most workplaces. However, mentoring is often less commonly used by organisations.

Understanding each of these activities and taking time to think about how the organisation is, or may wish to be, involved in them will help focus stakeholders and improve effectiveness of networking, mentoring and peer support activities.

The contents

This resource will help you to review the way your organisation networks and utilises mentoring and peer support activities and help determine if there are any changes or improvements to be made. The pack contains information covering:

- benefits of networking, mentoring and peer support and some assumptions to challenge
- obligations
- what is networking, mentoring and peer support — what does it look like
- networking, mentoring and peer support (discussion questions)
- sample workshop design and facilitator tips
- other resources.

The information in this pack can also be used to consider how best to include volunteers in networking, mentoring and peer support activities. If you do use it in relation to volunteers please substitute 'volunteers' when reading the word 'staff'.

Benefits of networking, mentoring and peer support and some assumptions to challenge

Information sheet

This sheet lists some of the benefits of, and assumptions about, networking, mentoring and peer support. Participants will probably be able to think of more of these.



Benefits

Some of the key benefits of networking, mentoring and peer support are that they can:

- build the profile of the organisation within the local community and the sector
- help build the organisation's capacity to operate effectively within the local community and provide best possible service to the people with disabilities within that community
- help build the capacity of individuals to contribute to organisational goals and deliver best outcomes for people with disabilities
- build relationships and support networks for individuals — providing protection against abuse and neglect, staff burn-out, feelings of isolation, dissatisfaction and ultimately turnover
- avoid duplication of resources within and across organisations
- support effective problem solving through hearing a range of perspectives and benefiting from the experiences of others
- spreads knowledge-base across an organisation (reducing the impact of turnover)
- ensure staff are up-to-date on theories and models of service delivery and latest resources available
- ensure staff maintain the big picture on service delivery and where it fits into people's lives
- provide opportunities for evaluation at an individual, program and whole-of-service level
- provide opportunities for recognition at an individual, program, organisational and industry level
- support continuous improvement through being constantly faced with fresh perspectives.



Some assumptions to challenge

Some of the common assumptions people have include:

- all networking, mentoring and peer support is effective
- all networking, mentoring and peer support is relevant
- all networking, mentoring and peer support requires face-to-face contact
- that networking, mentoring and peer support is a no-cost activity
- that effective strategies will remain effective forever.



This information sheet is not meant to be a definitive list of the legislative or organisational obligations relating to networking, mentoring and peer support. It is meant to highlight that there are some responsibilities that do need to be addressed. If there are queries or concerns you can get more information directly from the legislation, standard or relevant governing body — it is important to be fully and accurately informed.

The disability service standards

The disability service standards are relevant to this topic. For example, evidence of networking, mentoring and peer support could be used to demonstrate:

- *Standard 5: Participation and integration*
- *Standard 8: Service management*
- *Standard 10: Staff recruitment, employment and development.*

Other legislation

There is no legislation that directly covers networking, mentoring or peer support activities. However, even in the pursuit of current knowledge surrounding legislation, networks will assist organisations to stay abreast of the constant changes. Organisations are now required to keep up-to-date with so many pieces of legislation and understand how they apply to the sector — networking with other organisations facing these same issues makes sense from a resource perspective.

Reducing exposure to risk

It is impossible for organisations to provide enough information for staff to be confident in all situations they face. Having mentoring and peer support programmes provides an avenue for staff members to raise and discuss their concerns about their obligations as they arise. This can be an effective way to reduce exposure to risks.

What is networking, mentoring and peer support — what does it look like?

Information sheet



Networking, mentoring and peer support are all about deliberately building relationships with others to support information sharing, skill development and ultimately, improve the provision of services to people with disabilities.

Networking

Traditionally, networking has been considered a necessary part of doing business in the community service sector. It has been seen as essential for maintaining up-to-date information on available resources and avenues for referral for people with disabilities presenting with multiple needs.

Networking has also been well used by support workers and management in the day-to-day problem solving and information sharing required to deliver services effectively. These networks may be short or long term depending on their purpose and commonly form according to:

- geographical location (particularly in regional areas)
- service type (e.g. advocacy, respite, employment service)
- disability type (e.g. acquired brain injury, cerebral palsy or mental health issues)
- professional group (e.g. therapists, managers, support workers or trainers)
- issue-based, (e.g. access issues, unmet needs or institutional reform).

Mentoring

Mentoring has been defined as a 'deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser (skilled) person grow and develop specific competencies' (Murray, M. 1991). Mentors may come from within the organisation itself (preferably not line managers) or be recruited from outside at a local, interstate or international level. Depending on the roles and responsibilities of the individual, the mentor may be someone from the same sector or, in the case of managers, may come from a broader industry perspective.

Peer support

Peer support offers similar opportunities for debriefing and skill development, however it usually involves people within an organisation with similar roles and responsibilities. It is commonly used as a strategy during induction periods e.g. buddying of an experienced worker with a new co-worker.



According to the Disability Services Queensland *Workforce Planning Kit (2001)* a staff turnover level for support workers (who represent approximately 70% of the sector's workforce) is 33%. Lack of communication, support mechanisms and opportunities for debriefing are frequently cited as a reason for this turnover. Both mentoring and peer support strategies have the potential to improve job satisfaction and reduce staff turnover levels.

What is the purpose or expected gain (at an individual, team, or organisational level)?

Before planning networking, mentoring and/or peer support activities, it is important to be clear on your organisation's mission, value-base and the nature of its core business. Networking, mentoring and peer support activities are not useful unless they are aligned with where the organisation is headed and have the potential to add value. This value may take the form of:

- skill development (individual, team or organisational knowledge/skill base)
- relationship building to help with conducting core business and enhance staff morale
- new contacts or access to resources to assist with conducting core business
- providing a broader perspective or a range of alternate points of view to assist with problem solving and service planning
- raising the profile of the organisation and promoting a positive image of people with disabilities.

What is the most appropriate strategy?

Choice of strategy will depend on a number of factors, including but not limited to:

- **service type:** e.g. a highly specialised service provider may have less need for extensive community networks than an information and referral service but may have more use for mentors with relevant expertise
- **service size:** e.g. a small service is likely to spend less time and have less resources to invest in networking, mentoring and peer support activities
- **resources available:** e.g. allocation of resources in current budget, unfilled vacancies, individual time allocated to non-direct support
- **geographical location:** access to like services, access to internet, teleconferencing, videoconferencing facilities etc.



Who should we involve?

Organisations should consider the needs of all levels of staff in relation to networking, mentoring and peer support activities i.e. direct support, administrative, financial and management. In terms of who to engage from outside the organisation, this will depend on the:

- purpose
- characteristics of the local community (e.g. strong health focus to community service and role of family in indigenous communities)
- availability of specialised expertise if required
- cost of technology to be connected with others
- cost of accessing specialised expertise e.g. guest speakers, restricted libraries, specialised resources.

Should it be voluntary or mandatory?

The expectation that staff will establish and maintain relevant networks and relationships is usually included in job descriptions and, if followed, will ensure the best possible outcomes for people receiving a service. Ideally, however, the individual staff member should have the opportunity to identify and source relevant networks, mentors and buddies with support from the organisation.

What should we have in place before the activities start?

All relevant parties should have a mutual agreement before being involved in any networking, mentoring or peer support activities. This agreement should document the:

- purpose and expected outcomes
- who will be involved
- frequency and duration of activity
- roles and responsibilities of individuals (clear boundaries)
- time for reviewing the effectiveness of the activity.



Important note: Any changes to the agreement need to be negotiated between all parties before they come into effect.



What should we consider in evaluating the effectiveness of the networking, mentoring or peer support strategy?

To adequately review any strategies you should consider:

- frequency and duration of the activity
- cost of the investment
- outcomes from the investment (compared to expected outcomes)
- whether the activity is still aligned with the direction of the organisation and adds value to its core business.

Networking, mentoring and peer support in focus

Discussion questions

These questions aim to help organisations understand how networking, mentoring and peer support in the organisation works and what might need to change. To get the most out of these questions locate a copy of the organisation's policy/procedure (if one exists) and read the information sheet *What is networking, mentoring and peer support — what does it look like?* before answering them.

How it happens now...

- Describe how networking, mentoring and peer support happens here.

- What works really well about the way it happens here?

- What impression does this give of the organisation?

How it relates to what we want to achieve...

- How does this relate to what is written in our policy and procedure documents or if none exist what we want to achieve?

- How does this reinforce our vision, mission and values?

- In what ways does this not reinforce our vision, mission and values?

How can we better align 'how it happens now' to 'what we want to achieve'...

- What could we do to improve the way it works here?

- What could we do to better align the way it happens here with our vision, mission and values?


Sample workshop outline — networking, mentoring and peer support


Information for facilitators


This section of the information pack provides a sample workshop that can be used to explore and plan for improving networking, mentoring and peer support activities within your organisation. For more information on how to conduct the workshop refer to the *Tips for facilitators* information sheet.


To prepare for the workshop make sure all participants have access to at least the *Networking, mentoring and peer support in focus* discussion questions and the information sheet *What is networking, mentoring and peer support — what does it look like?*

You may wish to include volunteers in your review. With a few alterations this session can include both staff and volunteers or you can run separate workshops using this sample outline.

Time	Suggested questions & prompts	Actions	
	Welcome and introductions		
	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Ask individuals to introduce themselves and explain what the organisation means to them (what's their reason for being involved in the organisation).</p> <p>Purpose</p> <p>To review our networking, mentoring and peer support activities.</p> <p><i>Note: any one or all three may be addressed in the one session.</i></p> <p>Alignment question</p> <p>In this workshop/meeting/in-service, we are seeking some alignment (everyone being on the same page), not necessarily agreement on all points.</p> <p><i>Note: To assist with this, ask: 'How can we be more aligned as a group?'</i></p>	Write up the response and refer to as needed to keep group on track.	
	Overview of the session		
	<p>Over the next two/four hours I will be asking some questions to stimulate thinking about the effectiveness of our networking, mentoring and peer support activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What business are we in? ▪ What activities are we engaged in? ▪ Who is involved? 		

Time	Suggested questions & prompts	Actions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the expected outcomes? ▪ What have the actual outcomes been? ▪ Have the activities been relevant and the best value for the resources we have invested? ▪ How could we get better value? <p>If we don't get through all the questions, or if this session raises more questions than it answers, that's OK too.</p>		
	What business are we in?		
	<p>Revisit the organisation vision, mission, values and objectives.</p> <p><i>Note: aim for these to be restated in a form that achieves alignment between group members.</i></p>	Group discussion (large or small groups).	
	What are the benefits of doing networking/ mentoring/peer support well?		
	<p>Debrief points (benefits from the information sheet):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ building profile of the organisation within the local community and within the sector ▪ building capacity of the organisation to operate effectively within the local community and provide best possible service to the people with disabilities within that community ▪ building capacity of individuals within the organisations to contribute to organisational goals and best outcomes for people with disabilities i.e. improved job performance ▪ building relationships and support networks for individuals — protection against abuse and neglect, protection against staff burn-out, feelings of isolation, dissatisfaction and turnover ▪ avoiding duplication of resources ▪ supports effective problem solving through hearing a range of perspectives and benefiting from the experiences of others ▪ spreads knowledge base across an organisation (so the impact of individuals leaving is minimised) ▪ ensures staff are up-to-date on theories and models of service delivery and latest resources available 		

Time	Suggested questions & prompts	Actions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ensures staff maintain the big picture on service delivery and where it fits into people's lives ▪ provides opportunities for evaluation at an individual, program and whole-of-service level ▪ provides opportunities for recognition at an individual, program, organisational and industry level. 		
	What activities are we engaged in?		
	<p>Brainstorm a list of current activities under the headings of networking, mentoring and peer support, leaving a blank column to right side to respond to next question.</p> <p>Check understanding of definitions before commencing.</p> <p><i>Facilitator note: (a) refer to overview page for definitions and (b) if there are currently few or no activities, ask the group whether they would like to submit ideas under each heading.</i></p>	Group discussion with facilitator recording the list.	
	Break (optional)		
2 hrs	Optional activities: who is currently involved in these activities?		
	<p>Map out the various network participants (including name and organisation) on a whiteboard with your organisation at the centre. Draw a coloured line between the centre point and each network participant, using a different colour to represent the strength of that relationship (e.g. use green where a relationship is very strong, blue for OK but could be stronger, and red for a poor relationship). This will identify priorities for relationship building and can be used for comparison at a later date.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do we know what each of these people think of the relationship we have with them? ▪ Where do we get feedback etc. <p>Draw a second line between the centre point and each of the network participants indicating which of these relationships is most important to us. This will further assist with prioritisation.</p>	<p>Add to right hand column of brainstormed activities.</p> <p><i>Note: ideally have one or more of the participants involved in scribing.</i></p>	
	Break (optional)		
	Recap on progress of session to date		
	What are the expected outcomes?	<i>Note: responses may be written against each</i>	

Time	Suggested questions & prompts	Actions	
	<p>Given the picture we now have of our networks and our relationship with each participant, what would we say our expectations from each of these relationships were?</p> <p>Have these expectations been realised?</p> <p>Have the networking activities been relevant and the best value for the resources we have invested?</p> <p>How could we get better value?</p>	<p><i>name/org on the whiteboard.</i></p> <p>Group discussions.</p> <p><i>Note: it is not essential that there is consensus in responses. Record the full range of viewpoints on butcher paper and state that this diversity in perspectives is valued.</i></p>	
	What are the next steps		
	Write up an action plan, indicating the priority, which person is to be responsible and when. Include a review date.		
	Conclusion		
	<p>Check back with group on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ map of relationships in network/mentoring/peer support activities ▪ nature of the relationships ▪ agreed action to improve the quality of networking/mentoring/peer support. <p>Is there anything you wish to change or add?</p> <p>Explain how and when the group will get feedback on what happens next (ideally within two weeks of workshop).</p>		
	Thanks and acknowledgements		

The following tips aim to help facilitators conduct the workshop provided in this information pack.



Important note: The session plan has been written assuming that people from the same workplace (or organisation) are working together on the issue and how it pertains to their organisation. The session plan will need to be altered if this is not the case.

Preparation

- Provide pre-reading information with enough time for the participants to digest it and have a chance to ask questions before the session begins. The pre-reading information will include the information sheets from this information package, the disability service standards and any policy/procedural information that is relevant to the topic.
- Gather information about the room, food, timing and travel requirements of the participants prior to organising the session and venue.
- Familiarise yourself with the session materials and if necessary adapt them to the group's characteristics and experiences for example: break into smaller groups for discussions or activities; think about the time you have for each activity and mark these on your workshop plan in the time column; allow time for extra activities if needed; or use two facilitators if working with a large group).
- Consider covering the associated costs for participants with disabilities e.g. transport, childcare, attendant carers etc.

During the session

- Take care to validate all contributions.
- Be flexible with timing and frequency of breaks. Aim for a break every hour. Allow more time for breaks if the interactions during these breaks are flowing freely (relationship building is the best outcome and worth sacrificing time spent on workshop content).
- Don't start by knowing the answers — participants will pick this up. The intention is to explore the possibilities, not confirm solutions you have already identified.
- When you are recording discussions make sure you label the information as you collect it to make the collation after the session easier.
- Keep an eye on all participants and their level of interaction; follow up with any individuals who may not be fully participating to see if there is any assistance that could be provided to increase their level of involvement.

After the session

- Always thank and acknowledge all participants (including staff) and those who helped organise the session.
- Make sure feedback is provided within two weeks of the workshop (be realistic when you give a timeframe at the end of the workshop).

Tips on conducting the sample workshop

Introductions

- The introduction part of the workshop can be altered to suit the group and the facilitator. The activity listed in the session plan is designed to warm people up to the topic, be a non-threatening sharing activity and to make sure everyone is aware of who is in the room. If people do not know each other you may wish to spend more time on this to ensure all participants are comfortable.
- You may agree on some ground rules for the session. If so these should be recorded and remain in sight of the group throughout the session.

Alignment activity

- This activity is about creating a good atmosphere for the group to work with each other on the session tasks. It is worth spending as much time as is required on this activity before progressing. The outcome will have a huge impact on whether the group will achieve the purpose of the session.
- The alignment discussion is designed to identify individual perspectives and how this will affect the work of the group. The more strongly aligned, the easier it will be to attack the workshop topic.
- One of the keys to successful group work is having an environment where there can be debate, questioning, curiosity, enquiry, disagreement and agreement around the topic at hand without personal agendas preventing all the issues being discussed.
- If people do raise significant concerns about whether they can work together you will need to facilitate a discussion to explore this. If this takes up the entire session the outcome will still be worthwhile.

Overview of the session

- Check with the participants about whether this meets their expectations and spend time clarifying and agreeing on how you will be spending the rest of the session.

What business are we in?

- This activity is designed to provide the context for the discussion. If there is disagreement on the vision, mission and values stop the session and discuss this issue. Agreeing on the vision, mission and values is vital for any of the work outlined in the session plan.

The next few activities (reflection and discussion)

- These require people to have read the pre-reading. If this has not happened you may need to give people time to individually read the information.

Where to from here

- This activity is the planning part of the session. Your role as a facilitator will be to ensure this is recorded and test out the feasibility of the plan. The plan needs to be owned, resourced and be reasonably practical to achieve.
- This write-up is able to be used as evidence of review of practice for the service audits; ensure the documentation is appropriate.

The information contained in this pack will not be thorough enough for more in-depth work on improving your networking, mentoring and peer support programmes. The following list of resources is not exhaustive, however it is a useful place to start.

- *DSQ Workforce Planning Toolkit*: Issued in hardcopy to all services and is available on the internet in more detail at www.disability.qld.gov.au (follow the workforce planning and toolkit links)
- *CCH Human Resource Management — CCH Australia Ltd*: this is a subscription service which is free of charge www.cch.com.au
- *D Clutterbuck (1991) Everyone needs a Mentor: Fostering Talent at Work*: Institute of Personnel Management, UK
- *LA Daloz (1986) Effective Teaching and Mentoring: Realising the Transformational Power of Adult Learning*
- *G Shea (1997) Mentoring — how to develop successful mentor behaviours*: Crisp Publications
- *Karpin Committee (1995) Enterprising Nation*: Karpin Report on leadership and management skills
- *Helen Treston — Study Skills Adviser James Cook University Mentoring*: making a positive difference for individuals and institutions:
www.jcu.edu.au/studying/services/studyskills/research/ment_pvediff.rtf
- *Mentors and Peer Resources Index*: www.mentors.ca/mentorlinks.html
- *Australian Human Resources Institute*: www.ahri.com.au
- *Mentoring Australia*: www.dsf.org.au/mentor/



Please note: These resources were current at the time of publication, however some web site addresses or page links may change without our knowledge.