



## OASIS Leading in Practice

Helping people learn and develop

### **Developing a mentoring environment within Housing Associations**

#### **Background to sector**

Housing Associations are the main providers of new social housing. There are over 2,000 housing associations in England, currently managing around 1.45 million homes and housing at least twice that many people.

Registered Social Landlord (RSL) is the technical name for social landlords that are registered with the Housing Corporation. Housing associations are run as businesses but they do not trade for profit.

Housing associations provide housing for many different sectors of the community. They always seek to help the most disadvantaged.

Early in 2001 The Oasis School was approached by one of the largest housing associations in the UK.

Following on from a period of organisational development, which involved a process for senior team and manager development, the need was identified to provide learning mentors for key staff and managers within the organisation. Essentially this was to help sustain and further extend the learning approach gained through the manager development process.

#### **Supporting individual development and learning**

In the first instance, it was thought important to pilot the use of mentors, given that the traditional environment was one where one to one meetings either represented line management supervision or a problem.

The pilot involved two mentees accessing mentoring from outside the organisation. This then moved into matching six managers from within the association with mentors from The Oasis School. These eight one-hour individual sessions began with a day session that brought all mentors and participating managers together to discuss the framework and boundaries of the work, and to develop the initial learning outcomes for both the individuals involved and the pilot as a whole.

Nine months later, the mentors and managers were brought together to review the effectiveness of the process and to discuss areas for learning and suggestions for extending the pilot further, if it was found to be effective.

The mentoring pilot had been well received by both managers and the commissioning group. It was welcomed as a form of support that enhanced self-managed learning and sustained individuals through challenging circumstances.

Further learning ranged from improving clarity around initial contracting and the level of information required by potential mentees to methods of accessing a mentor and consideration of who else might benefit besides managers.

The association is now looking to quantify the value the approach is bringing prior to considering next steps. This is intended to demonstrate the effectiveness to a wider audience than those who have been directly involved so far.

### **Developing In-house provision**

As a result of the success of the pilot the organisation decided to build its own capacity for mentoring as a complementary provision to the mentors from the Oasis School.

A call was put out in 2003 by the training development officer and the managing director for individuals to apply to be mentors. Their role was to operate as facilitators of learning for those facing new roles, transition periods, challenging issues or who simply wanted to harness their individual learning more effectively.

Some of those who had previously been in the mentoring pilot requested places on the mentoring programme. A cohort of eleven participants have now completed the eight day 'Developmental Alliance' programme. The four modules focussed on

- developing the context for learning
- contracting for a development alliance,
- differentiating coaching, mentoring, supervision and counselling,
- the Oasis seven stage model of helping people learn and develop
- working with challenge and choice,
- reviewing and evaluating learning contracts

In addition, each participant undertook peer supported practice with staff in the role of 'trainee' mentor.

The development process evaluated well and the participants are now successfully facilitating the learning of others within the organisation.

### **Spreading the practice**

Since this project, a medium sized housing association has taken a similar route to both piloting a mentoring scheme and subsequently developing their own mentors, with another association piloting the mentor scheme and deciding to sustain external mentors rather than develop its own in-house service.

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