

Facilitating Career Pathways

Facilitating career pathways for staff is not just about encouraging them to upgrade qualifications for a specific role you have in mind.

Career pathways are about all the learning, work and lifestyle activities in which people participate – from the time they enter the workforce until they retire.

Facilitating the progression of staff along their individual career pathways is therefore more than just helping them to develop in their current job and at their current workplace. Sometimes it can be about helping them to move elsewhere in Aged and Community Care – or even outside the sector.

Although this may initially seem at cross-purposes to effective workforce management, there are good reasons employers help staff to individually develop – despite the fact this may sometimes mean they ‘move on’.

Why would you want to do it?

- People generally perform better in their jobs when they find their work interesting, challenging and meaningful – helping them to upgrade their skills increases their sense of all three!
- People generally stay longer with an employer who demonstrates opportunity for growth and progression – upgraded qualifications create a sense of that, even when promotion is not an immediate option.
- People progressing along career pathways are central to effective succession planning – and they also present opportunities (as part of their learning program) to cover ‘gaps’ caused by planned or unplanned absences.
- People who do leave an employer to further their career – but have developed a sense of loyalty because the employer has facilitated their pathway – often return when opportunities arise (with more qualifications, increased skills and wider experience).

- Even if you do lose staff because they achieve promotion elsewhere, there are still benefits for you. People are generally attracted to work in an industry, sector or organisation that has a reputation for career development – and recruitment is much easier for those known to provide it!

How would you go about it?

Most organisations in Aged and Community Care already provide some form of assistance to staff who ask for help to upgrade their skills and qualifications.

However, facilitating career pathways is more proactive than that. To be effective career facilitators, employers should:

- Communicate opportunities
- Motivate staff to take action
- Help people choose appropriate pathways
- Show commitment to helping them achieve their goals.

Initiatives you could consider

1 Communicating opportunities:

- Don't just assume staff already know about opportunities for development and promotion. If your workforce management and succession planning has identified gaps you have now, or are likely to have in the future, let your current workforce know about it.
- Ensure the communication includes everyone – your kitchen hand or gardener may be very interested to learn next year's building extension will mean four extra positions for Certificate III Care Workers.
- Promote on-the-job and external training opportunities regularly. Life circumstances change for people and your Certificate III Care Workers who weren't interested in extra study for an Enrolled Nurse qualification a year ago, may be interested now the kids are at school.
- Let people know you're prepared to support training and extra qualifications even if they want to stay in their current job. Not everyone wants to ‘move up the ladder’ but most people are interested in learning how to develop new skills in the work they love to do.

2 Motivating staff to take action:

- This isn't about 'pep' talks – motivating people to set personal development goals is part of the general performance review process.
- Motivating people to set long-range career goals can sometimes be about convincing them they're already part-way there. Clearly documented Position Descriptions can often help. How many of a Care Worker's Person Specifications could already be ticked by the Kitchen Hand (Team Work, Communication Skills, etc)?
- Displaying material in the workplace about vocational qualifications (VET) will ensure people know that they can learn on-the-job if they're 'not the classroom type' and ensuring staff understand the Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) process can make a longer course appear less daunting.
- Using workplace newsletters and bulletin boards to congratulate staff who do achieve new qualifications can create a feeling of, "Well, if she can do it..." which is often a great motivator!

3 Helping people choose appropriate pathways:

- When people fail to progress in their careers, it's often because it wasn't 'right' for them in the first place. Some people actually need help to understand the type of role that suits them best. Performance development reviews within their current job can help them understand 'the parts they do best'. For example an Enrolled Nurse with ambitions for management – who's great with residents but unable to delegate effectively – may find a specialist clinical role is a better goal.
- Short 'trials' can be revealing – both for you and the employee. Is there any opportunity for job rotation for a fixed period? If not, is there potential at least for job shadowing? Can you create a 'special project' for a Registered Nurse whose goal is Research and Policy Development?

4 Showing commitment to helping them achieve goals:

- Your commitment can be demonstrated in any number of ways discussed in more detail on other Information Sheets – such as allocating a Preceptor to a group of students or arranging one-on-one mentoring; providing financial assistance for the cost of the course and textbooks; providing paid or unpaid study leave; releasing (and/or paying for) people to attend workshops or seminars.
- The objective is to show them you're 'behind them' and employers who can find no other way can, at a minimum, invite staff in for 'a chat' about the course and their progress or difficulties.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- The *Moira Model* is an example of a rural community working together to create structured career pathways. The *Moira Health Care Alliance*, with representation from four regional hospitals, the local Shire Council and the community, was confronted with a critical regional shortage of staff – and a community that was ageing; had low income and educational qualifications; and was economically crippled by drought. With funding support from the Shire, Victorian State Government, HACC and Veteran's Affairs – and cooperation from Wodonga TAFE and Charles Sturt University – the alliance now offers a career pathway that allows local people to work and study locally, starting from a *Certificate III*, with eventual conversion to a *Bachelor of Nursing*. By collaborating with the RTOs, the Alliance delivers some modules internally and brings trainers to the region rather than students having to travel. Because staff are employed 'from the bottom up', they have the opportunity to 'try' the sector before tackling higher qualifications. The program has been successful – particularly with people 'coming off farms' and the Alliance now often has a waiting list for applicants!

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Creating Learning Opportunities

The 'functional' aspect of job roles is only one component of what staff need to learn – and structured education and training is only one method of guiding the learning process.

Creating learning opportunities for staff is about encouraging holistic growth in their knowledge, capabilities and personal development.

Why would you want to do it?

- Widespread changes in Aged and Community Care's approach to client support throughout the last decade have simultaneously relieved and added to the workload of the staff who deliver that support. The changes and technological advances are on-going – and learning needs to keep pace.
- The continual development of workforce skills and knowledge is not only important for staff to meet the current and future needs of Aged and Community Care, but also for personal job satisfaction – so that they stay working within the sector.
- Offering learning opportunities tailored to individual preferences demonstrates employees are valued and that their preferences are valid.
- The investment employers make in developing a suite of learning opportunities will be returned – not only through increased attraction and retention capabilities – but also through impacts on staff morale and the increased workplace flexibility that comes from having a workforce that is capable and effective across-the-board.

How would you go about it?

Develop a suite of learning options:

There are as many 'preferred learning styles' in any given workforce as there are personalities! Effective learning management is about developing a suite of options so there's 'something for everyone' and then working with staff individually and in groups to access those opportunities. This not only encourages people who may shy away from structured training, it allows even well-qualified staff to explore new learning experiences.

Develop Personal Learning Plans:

This can occur with individual employees as part of their performance development and review process, but it isn't just a Training Needs Analysis which matches current skills to current job functions and identifies gaps. It's a more interactive process that accommodates 'special interest' areas where people are looking for growth. For example, even though a Certificate III CareWorker may not currently have a supervisory role, if the employee has goals in this regard the plan could accommodate some leadership components – or perhaps an Effective Communication component at a higher level than the current qualification.

Develop Team Learning Plans:

Team plans ensure members develop complementary skills and collectively acquire broad knowledge – but you need to build in opportunities for team members to share their new learnings among the group.

Document the plans:

Documenting the plans clarifies what is expected of the employer – and the employee – in terms of commitment. For example, the employer may agree to fund some components of a training course and allow some work time for attending, while the employee may commit to completing other components privately in an agreed timeframe. It's also a useful tool for tracking progress and details such as costs, RTO providers and outcomes.

Evaluate outcomes:

This not only helps you to check that personal commitments were fulfilled; it adds value to the development of on-going learning plans with the participant and contributes information which is useful in developing personal plans with other staff.

Learning opportunities you could consider

Apart from formal learning and qualifications achieved through traditional RTOs or educational institutions, learning opportunities which can appeal to staff in Aged and Community Care include:

- E-learning through an Open Learning Program
- Courses offered by video/workbook
- Mentoring/coaching/job shadowing
- Job rotation for fixed periods (which provides a cross-fertilisation of skills, approaches and attitudes)
- In-house training sessions on specific aspects of job roles
- In-house workshops to develop interpersonal skills (conflict resolution, communication, team building)
- A guest speaker schedule (including inspirational speakers who motivate people to develop personally)
- Conferences/seminars/workshops (which don't always have to be Aged Care focussed)
- Participation on committees/reference groups/work groups on specific projects or policies
- Exchange programs with other organisations (secondments can provide experience and develop knowledge or skills in areas you may not be able to offer)
- Paid leave to volunteer at another organisation (where the voluntary work can add to knowledge and skills).



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- A training and development program introduced by ECH across its South Australian residential care centres resulted in the organisation receiving the 2006 EOWA Business Achievement Award for Outstanding EEO Practice in the Advancement of Mature-Aged Women.

ECH found that its Registered Nurses and Enrolled Nurses in supervisory positions were generally women over 40 years whose previous training had been care-focussed. Their management skills therefore tended to be based on a traditional 'hierarchical' approach and was 'task and control focussed' rather than about achieving quality outcomes.

The organisation introduced a Frontline Management Program for all supervisory Registered or Enrolled Nurses which included 45 hours of paid training. The training gave them a Certificate of Attainment which could be used as credits if they chose to complete a *Certificate IV in Frontline Management*.

ECH found the program empowered their supervisors as people leaders and team builders – and brought behavioural changes which not only enhanced interactions with staff, but also generated new ideas for operational improvement including changes to staffing structures.

- *Stepping Stones* is a Children's Services provider that was a finalist in the Tasmanian 2007 *Employer of Choice Awards*. Although there are 110 staff across 73 locations, *Stepping Stones* was able four years ago to develop and register its own training organisation and now offers free in-house training to all staff in *Certificate III, Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Children's Services*. Expanding the curriculum to include *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment* has meant graduates now go on to train and assess co-workers. Outcomes have included a reduced staff turnover and only an occasional need to recruit externally for more senior positions.
- Although *Whyalla Aged Care Inc* has offered free in-service training sessions for some time in areas such as dementia care, pharmacy updates, diabetic care and pain management, the organisation is also seeking staff input to developing future learning opportunities which are tailored to staff needs and preferences.

Staff have been asked to nominate what they consider to be 'weak points' in their existing knowledge and to suggest topics they would like covered in future free training sessions. The survey also seeks staff

preferences in regard to timing and location of the training sessions – and whether they favour face-to-face lectures or would prefer a more flexible approach such as video and work-book. Using the survey results to develop Whyalla Aged Care's free training program will concurrently reinforce the organisation's commitment to creating learning opportunities and recognise the value of their staff.

- *Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service* offers Australian School-based Apprenticeships to eight students per year from local high schools. The students complete three days' work experience before commencing the *Certificate III in Aged Care Work* and work a supervised eight-hour shift on Saturdays as well as attending during the school's allocated VET afternoon. The program has a high success rate, with many students undertaking *Certificate IV (Enrolled Nursing)* when they leave school.

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Orientation/Induction/Settlement

Most employers in Aged and Community Care have a formal induction process. For some employers, however, this takes place over a single day – while others extend the process over a period of weeks.

This latter group of employers is actually moving through an orientation-induction-settlement process in an interlocking sequence of activities.

Why would you want to do it?

Orientation and Settlement shouldn't be considered the 'nice-to-haves' that sit either side of a 'more important' Induction. The three processes are equally significant.

Together, they not only ensure recruits know what is expected of them in their job, but what they can expect in return. Collectively, the activities involved in orientation-induction-settlement ensure new employees appropriately 'engage' with their organisation. It's therefore a blending of recruitment and retention strategies.

Benefits that can be expected from a more comprehensive process to orient, induct and settle new employees include:

- **A marked reduction in 'early leavers':** Research has shown that people commonly leave new jobs within the first three months of employment. Extending support mechanisms over this period can help these people 'settle in' to their job so they become long-term employees.
- **An increase in job satisfaction:** Other studies have shown the most common reason for job dissatisfaction is 'unrealised expectations'. It matters little whether the expectations were valid or unrealistic. Extending the introductory process gives more opportunity for two-way communication that can help people fulfil their expectations – or change them.

- **A better 'engagement' with organisational culture:** Short induction programs may describe organisational culture and give instruction about appropriate attitudes and behaviours, but people need to 'feel it' to ensure buy-in.
- **Improved workforce morale:** Sustaining morale in your long-term employees is difficult if they are under constant pressure trying to fill the gaps left by continual team exits and providing extra support to a continual stream of new employees. Stability in the workforce team brings its own camaraderie and morale boost.
- **Learning issues are identified early:** Because new employees are supported over a longer period of time, any learning issues can be identified and addressed with additional training or retraining in specific areas – before they impact in the workplace!

How would you go about it?

The various aspects of a comprehensive orientation-induction-settlement process are discussed overleaf.

One way of examining the appropriateness of your current program is to ask:

- Recent recruits about what they liked about your introductory program and what they now think was 'missing'
- Other staff members (not just supervisors) what skills and knowledge people are lacking when they join the team after completing the program
- People leaving you (during their exit interviews) for feedback on the program.

Aspects to consider

1 Orientation:

Orientation isn't just about a 'site tour' for residential facilities or a 'meet and greet' for community-based organisations.

Orientation helps recruits to understand the organisation – what you do, why and how you do it. The overview should therefore include organisational history as well as plans for the future.

Orientation introduces people to the culture and values of the organisation. It helps them to understand how their role 'fits' and how their behaviours impact on others, so meeting other people is important – clients, co-workers and other staff with whom they may need to liaise.

This is also the time when 'expectations' are clarified – not just what is expected of recruits, but what they can expect from the organisation.

2 Induction:

Induction is the process that gives recruits clarity about their job – security about what they will be doing and how they should be doing it.

It's about what they need to know on their first day, during their first week and throughout their first month. The induction process therefore clearly outlines responsibilities and accountabilities as well as providing information about entitlements, facilities, administrative requirements and performance review processes.

Organisational policies, systems and processes should not just be provided in writing, but also discussed – together with consequences that apply when they are not followed.

Induction is also the foundation for future training – so it's an appropriate time to outline personal development opportunities and describe potential career pathways.

3 Settlement:

Activities and the length of time required for the 'settlement' stage will vary according to the age, experience, skills, qualifications and cultural background of recruits – but it's important that it occurs at least to some extent for everyone.

Settlement can include appointing a co-worker to 'buddy' the new recruit or someone more senior to 'sponsor' their adjustment period. (Sponsoring is more about helping people to 'settle in', rather than 'mentoring' their personal development.)

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Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Disability Services Queensland (DSQ)* developed an entirely new induction program by using an extensive consultation and collaboration process to identify firstly the core function of the agency and then the core function of staff commencing work. Collaboration to develop the program involved regional staff, managers, HR practitioners, direct support staff and professional staff. The resultant 10-day induction program includes five 'supported' shifts for direct care workers which provide exposure to DSQ's organisational culture. This culture is then further discussed during remaining sessions in the program. DSQ recommends induction programs are reviewed annually with feedback from participants and other stakeholders included in the review process.
- *The Royal District Nursing Service of SA Inc (RDNS)* links its twelve-week nursing orientation and induction program to recruits' probationary period appraisal. This ensures new staff have not only fully participated in the program, but have been able to transfer the knowledge when performing their work. The generic nursing program is designed to move people quickly into productive activities while providing on-going support – so during the first two weeks recruits receive formal training in various components of their job and also work with a Preceptor in the field. Throughout the program, learning is facilitated through observation and interaction as well as verbal, written, audio visual and computer aided instruction. Orientation includes meetings with staff in all divisions and even administration staff go on nursing rounds and home visits to gain a better understanding of the organisation. All employees receive a 'New Employee Survival Kit' and two-way feedback is encouraged at the end of the program.
- *At Life Care*, orientation consists of a six-month program that extends throughout the probation period. The program uses an interactive process that challenges all new employees to research the organisation, its procedures and culture.

Setting up a Mentoring Program

Why would you want to do it?

A coordinated Mentoring Program has widespread benefits across the whole organisation:

1 Benefits for the Mentees:

- Assists in skill development, increases knowledge and provides an understanding of the organisational perspective
- Addresses feelings of isolation – particularly for community workers – by providing a continuous interactive communication mechanism
- Creates a greater sense of being part of ‘the team’
- Creates a sense of being valued and encouraged to reach their full potential
- Provides an opportunity for ‘non-threatening’ feedback and performance correction.

2 Benefits for the Mentors:

- Coaching and mentoring other staff members is a highly effective management development tool
- Generates new enthusiasm for their job and new pride in their work
- Creates a greater sense of contributing to ‘the team’
- Creates a sense of ‘being valued’ – that their skills and knowledge are important
- Provides a new perspective on the workplace, policies and procedures.

3 Additional benefits for the organisation:

- The benefits listed at left for both partners in the mentoring arrangement increase their job satisfaction and therefore their internal motivation and work effectiveness.
- Increasing job satisfaction in individual team members has a positive impact on workplace culture, reduces absenteeism, increases retention and makes employers more attractive to potential recruits.
- Mentoring is an important component of succession planning and helps prepare staff to fill vacated roles when needed.
- Mentors not only transfer knowledge, but also behaviours and attitudes – that can continue to have an effect on the workplace long after the mentor has left.
- Mature-age staff involved in a mentoring program may delay intended retirement to finish their ‘coaching’ job.
- It can be ‘tricky’ to manage, but ‘reverse mentoring’ – where younger, newer employees mentor more mature co-workers – presents opportunities to introduce new ideas and methodologies to the workplace.

How would you go about it?

Although mentoring can occur informally and spontaneously – evolutionary mentoring – formalising the process can maximise benefits for the mentee, mentor and organisation.

Even if you don’t progress to the written documents outlined overleaf, they make good discussion points during consultation with staff and management if you opt for an informal arrangement.

1 Develop a formal Mentoring Plan:

Writing a Mentoring Plan helps to clarify parameters for the mentoring arrangement and guide its implementation. It should include:

- Exactly what you expect of both parties – how much commitment is required?
- How and when the mentoring will take place – is it intended there will be regular meetings and work-time allocated for discussion? Or are you really talking about a ‘coaching’ role with on-the-job experience, supervision and adjustment?
- What scope does the mentor have to recommend specific training or development activities? Is there a personal ‘contract’ that the mentored employee will participate in these activities?
- What happens if either party decides ‘it’s not working’?

2 Identify appropriate partnerships:

Matching the right ‘pairs’ is critical. Although mentoring partnerships that evolve naturally can work well, benefits will be maximised through planning:

- Personalities need to ‘fit’. This doesn’t mean they need to be the same – just that they can work well together in a situation which requires mutual trust and respect.
- Mentors should have a flexible and progressive management style. Mentoring isn’t just about ‘teaching’ – it’s about nurturing, encouraging, communicating, being responsive and insightful.
- Just because people are good at their jobs doesn’t mean they’re able to develop others to do that job well – your proposed mentors may need training in the role.
- Avoid nominating an employee’s direct supervisor as the mentor. An open and honest mentoring relationship can be impacted by performance management issues or a sense of pressure in the mentee to be ‘impressive’. Smaller organisations may consider using an external mentor.

3 Communicate the arrangement:

- Other staff need to know what’s happening – to prevent conflict, confusion or suspicion within the team.
- Senior management need to be aware – both to support the time needed for both partners in the relationship and also to know it is a resource for workforce development.

4 Keep a record of the mentoring and the mentee’s progress:

- Develop simple templates that can be used to identify clear goals as a type of agreement between the partners; track issues raised and areas to focus on; and record progress toward the identified goals.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- In March 2007, *BlueCare* entered an *E-mentoring* research study to support staff scattered across Queensland and northern New South Wales. Applications were sought across the organisation and partnerships developed to match skills and needs (e.g. a mentee who identified a need to develop management skills would be matched with a mentor who had a management role and expertise). The *BlueCare E-mentoring Program* uses an email system that allows participants to send secure, encrypted emails to each other independent of *BlueCare*. Early findings suggest the email system is effective, but needs to be supported by at least some face-to-face meetings or other communication methods.
- The *Warlayirti Artists* in Western Australia have demonstrated a way for a small remote organisation to provide mentoring support for staff – the Director of the organisation is involved in a telephone mentoring system. Every two weeks the Director has a two-hour telephone conference with a consultant experienced in the management of community organisations. The system has proven effective and the organisation plans to extend the system to include other staff members.

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Succession Planning

Succession planning in the workforce has traditionally been about preparing to cover the expected loss of senior management in an organisation due to retirement.

However, in today's tight labour market – with the consequent tendency for people to be more mobile across industries, careers and employers – succession planning has broadened.

Contemporary succession planning is as much about ensuring continuity in key positions as it is about identifying and developing the talent of high achievers.

Why would you want to do it?

Continuity of appropriate care and support is obviously the key reason for employers in Aged and Community Care – ensuring you have the right people ready to cover positions as they become vacant and to step into new positions created by organisational growth or an expansion in services.

However, there are other very real benefits for organisations that have a well-developed succession plan in place. Having people skilled in various roles provides:

- **Greater flexibility to cover the 'highs and lows' of demand** – for example during periods of high requests for respite care or during seasonal illnesses when clients need more intensive care or for administration staff during budget periods or accreditation reviews and audits.
- **Enhanced workplace morale** – because key staff are able to take the time they need for work-life balance without a substantially increased workload before and after their breaks, or concern about 'what's happening at work'. Morale is also enhanced for those 'in training' because they can see their career pathway ahead and you've demonstrated their value to the organisation.
- **Enhanced team cohesion** – because people know and understand the needs and pressures of other roles and are therefore more willing to ease those pressures when working in their 'usual' role.

- **Opportunity to capture and transfer corporate knowledge** – because succession planning facilitates 'evolutionary mentoring' even if you don't formalise the process.

How would you go about it?

There are a number of different approaches to developing and implementing a succession plan (some of which are mentioned briefly overleaf) but the core steps include:

- **Establishing** current and future organisational requirements
- **Identifying** what you already have in the workforce to meet those requirements and what you will need to 'acquire' either from current staff or in new recruits
- **Assessing** current staff for inclusion in the succession plan – not necessarily the people who are performing well in their current job, but those with an interest and potential to develop into other roles
- **Guiding and supporting** staff on career pathways that benefit them personally and meet organisational needs – through mentoring, training, job shadowing and relieving roles
- **Articulating the business case** for a succession plan and ensuring the commitment of senior managers and line managers
- **Periodically reviewing** the plan to evaluate whether objectives are being achieved and whether organisational needs have changed.

Succession planning models you could consider

1 Nomination by incumbent:

This approach is most often adopted for management positions where the person in a role nominates someone they think may be an appropriate successor and participates in the mentoring and development process.

While it's a simple and easy approach, it presumes the nominated person actually aspires to the role and there are risks of 'corporate cloning' because people often only select 'like personalities' for their role.

2 Creation of succession 'pools'

This model usually involves several managers and supervisors nominating a number of people with potential for progress – who are then assessed by a 'succession task force' to identify a selection suitable for a targeted development program. The successful candidates are then developed as a group.

This approach is 'fairer' because more people are involved in the decision-making process and it creates a 'pool' of people who can relieve in positions or be promoted when required. However, it also has drawbacks because of the signals it sends to the rest of the workforce not in the development group.

3 Bottom-up expressions of interest

This model is based on two-way communication – employers nominate what competencies and skills are likely to be required by the organisation in the future and employees nominate their interest in acquiring them. All employees who nominate then have the opportunity to develop a Personal Learning Plan to achieve the required level of competency, qualifications and experience.

The advantage of this approach is that everyone who wants to, gets to participate – but the personal plans allow more 'talented' people to progress more quickly, so the model effectively has its own in-built selection process.

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Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- Brisbane South Lifestyle Support Service (BSLSS)* identified a need to address succession planning for Coordinator roles which were difficult to fill for absences and turnover. Their approach involved recruiting direct support staff into a Coordinator Training Group (CTG) to undertake a learning program developed in-house. All staff were offered the opportunity to apply, and then assessed against pre-set criteria and referee checks with peers, supervisors and clients. Successful applicants participated during work time in two-hour face-to-face group sessions held six-weekly and completed self-paced learning packages in their own time. Coordinators or Managers mentored the group and participants were 'buddied' with Coordinators during relieving duties. Although the program took time to develop, early indicators suggest the program will be successful. Existing Coordinators have felt more able to take leave; three participants have moved into Coordinator roles; and most participants have reported that the learning program has had a positive impact on their direct care roles.
- Life Care* undertook a qualifications audit to identify employees who required up-skilling and provided training either internally or externally aligned with National Units of Competency. Employees were given the choice to have the training recognised through an RTO. Life Care's succession planning has enabled two of the organisation's current executives to be recruited internally.
- When *Probuild* (a Victorian construction company with 160 staff) undertook a major strategic review of the company in 2005 to ensure they had the appropriate structure and resources in place for expected future growth, the company took the unusual step of involving partners of staff in the fact-finding process. Surveying and interviewing partners gave them valuable information about company activities that put additional pressure on families and relationships. The company won a Rising Star Award in the 2007 *Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry/Business Council of Australia National Work and Family Awards*.
- The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HACC Reference Group* recently held a workshop to address succession planning issues in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HACC workforce. Issues identified included the fact there is only a small proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in HACC middle and senior management compared to the proportion involved in direct care work – but there is limited availability of suitably qualified or experienced Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to fill these roles. Outcomes from the workshop included developing strategies which would help more direct care workers become qualified in the role – such as developing traineeships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HACC workers; adapting Certificate III training to more readily meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs; and adapting Aboriginal Health Worker competencies to include community care.

Study Assistance

Providing Study Assistance to staff has been mentioned in many of the other Information Sheets published in this series – and that’s a clear indication of the importance the initiative holds for Aged and Community Care.

A committed and skilled workforce is the only way the sector can achieve its goals and objectives – so helping people to upgrade their skills and qualifications needs to be a cornerstone of any employer’s workforce planning.

Why would you want to do it?

- Maximising the quality of service delivery to clients:** This may be ‘stating the obvious’, but sometimes it can be overlooked that upgraded skills and qualifications need to occur at all levels of the organisation – and in all departments and work areas.
- Demonstrating to staff that the drive for quality service is a shared commitment:** Staff are continually encouraged to maintain and improve the quality of their service delivery – to update and upgrade their skills and enhance their level of knowledge. Sharing in the cost associated with this – in either time, money, or both – shows you are as committed to this as you expect them to be.
- Recognising staff for their contribution:** Staff recognition has been discussed on other Information Sheets, but it is relevant to again highlight that providing assistance for staff to achieve higher qualifications – even those qualifications not currently required in your organisation – shows you value them and the work they do.

- Improving the public image of Aged and Community Care:** The sector is working hard to present itself as a more attractive option for people seeking a career pathway – and to the general community as a professional, qualified arm of the Health industry. The more people who can be encouraged to upgrade their skills and qualifications, the more these images are projected externally.
- Facilitating recruitment and retention:** Providing staff with Study Assistance can be one of the most important programs employers use in their recruitment and retention strategies – for all the reasons listed at left – and for the job satisfaction that comes from having newly acquired skills recognised in a qualification.

How would you go about it?

Study assistance provided to staff in Aged and Community Care occurs in three primary streams:

- Financial assistance** – which can fund the cost of courses, textbooks and any other associated costs
- Time assistance** – which can include paid and unpaid leave to attend courses, seminars and workshops; or paid and unpaid leave to actually complete the course work
- Facilitation/convenience** – which can be a combination of both the above by providing on-site lectures, workshops and tutorials etc during work time or before and after shifts.

Despite the importance of providing Study Assistance, some employers find it difficult to offer as much as they would like or as broadly as they would like across the workforce. Some options which can be explored to expand the application of the Study Assistance budget are included overleaf.

Initiatives you could consider

Many employers would find the concept of an unlimited budget for Study Assistance incompatible with other operational needs. The following suggestions may be helpful in 'stretching the budget':

- **Consider a 'scholarship' program:** Set a specific amount for Study Assistance and invite staff to submit applications. Successful applicants shouldn't only be those who pass a 'means' test (because of the reward and recognition factor) but it may allow a more even spread across departments and staff members.
- **Investigate Government-sponsored programs:** Most employers in Aged and Community Care would be familiar with the various incentives and grants currently available for nursing roles and some of these pay funds directly to eligible organisations as well as the nurse. However, there are also a number of National and State-run programs which provide a financial contribution to the cost of training or re-training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; migrants; people with disabilities; mature-age people; people who need literacy and numeracy support; and people who have disadvantaged backgrounds. A useful place to begin research is the Australian Government's www.workplace.gov.au website.
- **Establish partnership arrangements with sponsors:** Many major employers outside the Aged and Community Care sector have 'corporate responsibility' budgets and may be attracted to contributing to a scholarship fund (with or without input to the selection process for successful applicants).
- **Consider establishing a 'loan fund':** While some staff may not be able to afford the cost of course fees and text-books up front, a student loan which is repaid through salary deductions may be welcomed – especially if new qualifications lead to a higher income which can offset the cost.

This Information Sheet is one in a series produced by Aged and Community Services SA & NT Inc. It is provided for general information only and does not replace the need for readers to make their own enquiries or seek independent advice.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Clayton Church Homes* has customised its study assistance benefits in response to a need for more nursing staff. Staff undertaking nursing courses individually apply for support and receive assistance as needed – including payment of fees; payment while on placement; or unpaid time off as required to suit study arrangements.
- *Clayton Church Homes* achieved a 'take-up rate' of 22% when it offered all clerical; care; and lifestyle staff the opportunity to participate in *Certificate II, III & IV* programs relevant to their jobs. Each staff member was allocated a full day of paid study time each week, even though there may have been only one to four hours of 'study contact'. The additional paid time provided support for networking, assignments and research – important for staff not familiar with study and experiencing new challenges. Some staff have subsequently undertaken further study and moved into new job roles.
- *Whyalla Aged Care Inc* reimburses staff for the costs associated with Nursing Diploma modules. For staff intending to work at least three years following qualification in a Diploma or Bachelor of Nursing program, the organisation pays an average salary for clinical placements as well as the cost of enrolment fees and required textbooks. The organisation also pays for training considered mandatory for the safety of staff or clients and a number of in-service performance-enhancement training sessions such as dementia care, pain management, palliative care and diabetic care.
- *RSPCA Victoria* has a strong focus on developing and upskilling staff which includes mentoring, coaching, scholarships, job rotation, secondments, conference attendances and participation on committees as well as formal training. In order to fund such a comprehensive program, the not-for-profit organisation took a proactive approach which involved negotiating partnerships with external donors to fund a scholarship scheme. The scheme enables staff to attend high profile conferences and training programs which may not otherwise have been available in a tight budget. The organisation's CEO won the 2006 EOWA Business Achievement Award for *Leading CEO in the Advancement of Women* and this sponsorship initiative was recognised as having contributed to her outstanding performance.