



OANHSS

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF
NON-PROFIT HOMES AND SERVICES
FOR SENIORS**

Healthy Work Place

Mentor Team Program Resource Guide

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Project Overview

The objective of the SJHC Demonstration Site Project was to test and disseminate practical ways to address barriers to the recruitment and retention of nurses in long term care in the following three areas:

1. Healthy Work Place
2. Shared Resources
3. Leadership Development.

The project was divided into five phases:

1. Research and Literature ReviewMarch to June 2008
2. Design of Deliverables.....June to September 2008
3. Delivery/Testing of DeliverablesOctober and November 2008
4. Evaluation/Modification of Deliverables.....December 2008 to February 2009
5. Dissemination of DeliverablesMarch and April 2009

The information collected during the research phase indicated that the following programs were most likely to meet the professed needs of registered staff and their managers in each of the three project areas:

1. Healthy Work PlaceFacility-wide Mentor Team
2. Shared ResourcesTwo part-time jobs at two sites → one full-time job
3. Leadership Development.....“Excelling as Nurse Leader in LTC” training program.

Information about all three programs is available on the OANHSS web site: www.oanhss.org.

Disclaimer

The ideas and information presented in this resource guide are designed to be flexible, based on the particular circumstances of the LTC homes introducing the Mentor Team program to their facilities. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the contents at the time of publication, the project partners do not give any guarantee as to the accuracy of the information contained herein, nor do they accept any liability with respect to loss, damage, injury, or expense arising from such errors or omissions in the contents of this resource guide. The views expressed in the materials are the views of the project partners and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province of Ontario.

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Mentor Team Resource Guide

A. Introduction

“This program is very helpful to new staff when they come to a new working place. If they meet any problems, they know where they should go for help.”

Purpose of Resource Guide

This resource guide is designed to provide you, as a manager at an LTC home, with all the information and tools you need to create an effective, enthusiastic Mentor Team at your facility.

Contents of Resource Guide

It contains a description of the process used and the lessons learned at other LTC homes that have created Mentor Teams. It includes a checklist of steps to follow in setting up your Mentor Team.

Samples of the documents used by other homes in setting up their programs are provided in the appendices as Word files so that you can modify them to suit your own needs. PowerPoint slides for Mentor Team training are also included in the appendices.

Please note that this resource guide is just that — a guide. It is *not* the definitive description of how to set up a Mentor Team because it cannot take into account all the variables at play in different LTC homes. The ultimate expression of the Mentor Team program in each facility will be shaped by its own circumstances. The evolution of the program in each home should be an organic, dynamic, and unique process. You know your home best and are therefore the best judge of how to create and sustain your Mentor Team.

B. The Mentor Team Program

Objectives of the Program

The Mentor Team program is designed:

- To create a supportive environment in which all new staff can become effective contributors to the organization’s goals and objectives more quickly
- To create a healthy work place by reducing the natural stress that comes from the fear of being in a new environment
- To create dynamic, supportive relationships that will help make work meaningful, fun, and rewarding for new staff.

“Our new staff were very pleased with the program. They felt very connected to all levels of staff right from the get-go.”

Scope of the Program

All employees who have been employed for a minimum of two (2) years are eligible to become mentors. The rationale for this criterion is presented in the Mentor Team criteria set out on page 9.

“The project had a positive impact on the staff and helps promote happiness in the work place.”

All new employees participate in the program because they are assigned a mentor. Employees who transfer into the facility are considered new employees for the purpose of this program.

Why Create a Mentor Team?

A facility-wide, multi-disciplinary Mentor Team extends the positive influence of orientation beyond the first few days of employment because it is linked directly to the facility’s orientation program and matches the most sincere and enthusiastic current staff with new employees.

Assisting new arrivals in the work place can enhance the already positive feelings new employees have towards the organization. In addition, it will sustain their commitment to the organization, thus greatly improving retention because of the healthier work place that is created when an employee is effectively supported in a new environment.

“Mentors are functioning as a self-directed team. Very positive morale booster! Staff have shown great sense of ownership in the project.”

Mentor Team members become key contacts for new employees as they settle into the routines at the home. When new employees have questions or need information, support, or encouragement, the mentors are available to help them gain quickly the knowledge and experience they need to perform effectively.

Sometimes the “buddy” system teaches new staff some behaviours and attitudes that are inconsistent with organizational values. In contrast, the Mentor Team ensures that new employees learn how the home functions according to its policies and procedures, as well as the highest intentions of its Mission, Vision, and Values.

“We found that one person needs to have responsibility as the key contact person.”

The Mentor Team enables new employees to feel at home and develop good relationships in their new jobs and work environment more quickly. As a result, the stress of starting a new job is reduced and everyone’s comfort level is enhanced.

The Mentor Team helps knit all the departments of the home into a cohesive whole because its members are available to all staff who may have questions and because all members of the Mentor Team know who the newest employees are and can introduce them to others.

What is a Mentor Team?

The Mentor Team is a self-directed team representing all departments of the facility. Team members become known throughout the home as the people who can answer questions about their work area – or help their colleagues find the answers.

“Staff have expressed their enthusiasm for the program. It will gain momentum with time as mentors gain experience.”

The Mentor Team is a permanent feature in the facility. All staff are welcome – and, indeed, encouraged – to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of any member of the Mentor Team, not just those in their own work area.

What is a Mentor?

A mentor is a staff member who provides general guidance, counsel, and support to colleagues who are new to the job and to the facility. In addition, every mentor is available to all staff throughout the home, regardless of how long they have worked there, to answer questions related to the functioning of the department in which the mentor works.

“The program will benefit from more recognition throughout the home and our centre.”

If the mentor and the assigned new employee work in the same unit and on the same shift, the mentor may also help that new employee to learn job skills and routines. However, a mentor is *not necessarily* a new employee’s “work buddy” or “unit buddy” – that is, someone who provides *job-specific* guidance or instruction aimed at the development of skills and performance.

Mentors in other departments may not work directly with the new employee, but they are available to answer questions and offer assistance as needed.

Although membership in the Mentor Team will inevitably change over time, the team itself is an enduring part of the facility. All staff, whether new or long term, are welcome to avail themselves of the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of the mentors at any time.

Is a Mentor Team Right for This Home?

The first question to ask is whether your home has an effective orientation program. Such a program is a necessary prerequisite for the creation and implementation of an effective Mentor Team program.

“I’ve seen nothing but smiles on new employees’ faces when working with their mentors.”

The Dementia Education Needs Assessment (DENA) tool offers an in-depth way to assess whether your home is ready to institute a Mentor Team. Although the purpose of this tool is obviously to help professionals such as yourself make decisions about continuing education programs related to dementia, the framework is widely recognized as applicable to any decision about capacity-building and continuing education for staff.

It is important to keep in mind that continuing education can take many forms. It can include informal opportunities (such as “teaching in the moment” and case-based learning) or formal initiatives (such as courses and workshops). The Mentor Team program obviously encompasses both formal and informal learning.

“In implementing this program, we needed to give people permission that it not be perfect from the start, but that it could be a work in progress. This approach will help the Mentor Team take ownership of the program, because they will be involved in improving and sustaining it.”

While a hard copy of the DENA tool is available, it is recommended that you use the online version (available at www.denatool.org) because it offers an easy way to go through the tool and not miss any steps.

Managing the Mentor Team Program

To be successful and effective, the Mentor Team program should be managed by a senior manager, perhaps the DOC or equivalent. The responsibilities of this role are as follows:

- Assess operational readiness (policies, procedures, etc.)
- Manage the communication process
- Manage the selection process for members of the Mentor Team
- Assist in training the mentors
- Connect new staff members with appropriate mentors and with the whole Mentor Team
- Manage any conflict that may arise in the program
- Manage any issues that may arise during the implementation phase
- Manage the ongoing evaluation of the program
- Keep written records of all steps in implementation.

“This is a huge home, and this program is really helpful in reducing the impact of that on a new employee.”

Some homes found it useful to create a master binder of all documents used in creating, launching, and monitoring the program.

A sample Table of Contents for a Mentor Team master binder is provided in Appendix A.

C. Introducing the Mentor Team Program

“The Mentor Checklist provided by the consultants was a useful guide in developing and launching the program.”

Develop the Implementation Timeline

Use the checklist provided to ensure that all the necessary steps are accounted for. Assign people and dates to each of the tasks listed. Modify the timeline as circumstances require and keep everyone involved aware of these changes.

A complete checklist of the steps involved in creating a Mentor Team is provided in Appendix B.

Develop Terms of Reference for the Mentor Team

Terms of Reference for the Mentor Team will give you an easy way to show people what the program is designed for and to ensure that, as time goes on, the program stays true to its original intent and does not stray from its mandate unintentionally.

A sample Terms of Reference, based on those created by other homes, is provided in Appendix C.

“The program creates permission for new employees to ask questions, which leads immediately to a trusting relationship and a bond with the mentor.”

Clarify Roles

For the program to be successful, the roles of the new employee and the mentor must be clearly defined. One option is to include these in the Terms of Reference. The roles should also be emphasized during the orientation sessions.

- a) Role of the Mentor:
 - To make contact with the new employee assigned to her/him
 - To maintain weekly contact (at a minimum) with the assigned new employee during the first month of employment
 - To provide information, support, and encouragement to the new employee
 - To assist the new employee in completing the orientation program, including orientation checklists
 - To be available for questions from all new employees
 - To be available for questions from all current staff
 - To make recommendations regarding improvements to the program.

- b) Role of the New Employee:
 - To accept the mentor and her/his role
 - To complete the orientation requirements, including orientation checklists

- To co-operate with the mentor in gaining the knowledge and experience necessary to perform effectively in her/his new environment
- To take the initiative to approach members of the Mentor Team as needed
- To approach all unfamiliar situations in a spirit of inquiry.

“Every Mentor Team needs one of its members to be the leader, the spark plug.”

Develop Policies and Guidelines

Having policies and guidelines determined before the program is launched will assist in clarifying roles, responsibilities, and options for all parties. It is recommended that the following areas be covered:

- Staff replacement during training of mentors
- Schedules for meetings (keeping in mind operational requirements)
- Back-up for scheduled mentoring
- Unplanned mentoring contact.

Develop a Conflict Resolution Protocol

If your home already has a formal protocol for resolving conflicts, review it to ensure that it meets the needs of this program and revise it if necessary. If your home does not have such a protocol, this is an excellent opportunity to develop one.

“As mentors, we believe the program will have a positive impact not only on new employees, but on all staff.”

New employees will inevitably encounter conflict in the line of duty. Mentors should not only share their experiences in how to deal with these situations, but should also receive additional training in your formal conflict-resolution protocol.

Conflict can also occur between the mentor and the new employee. The protocol should address this possibility as well.

Some homes have a Communications Charter and a Conflict Charter that applies to the whole home and in which all staff have been trained by an external facilitator. These can be useful tools for mentors to refer to when dealing with challenging situations that may arise.

Develop a Communications Plan

The long term success of any new program depends on how well it is understood and accepted by all staff. A thorough, well-crafted communications plan lays the foundation for this understanding and acceptance.

There are three distinct stages to this program and each stage should have its own communications plan.

“The Mentor Team helps new staff deal with the complexity of a large home that is part of an even larger organisation.”

a) Before the Launch Period

There should be an announcement to all staff covering the following topics:

- The goals and objectives of the program
- The selection process and criteria for selection
- A brief description of the Mentor Team program, highlighting the roles of the mentor and the new employee.

b) During the Launch Period

There should be a monthly update to all staff covering the following:

- A brief description of each member of the Mentor Team
- The progress of the program
- What participants are saying about the experience.

c) After the Launch Period / Ongoing

A final report on the test should be communicated to all staff, covering the following:

- Overall findings and recommendations regarding the program
- What modifications, if any, will be made to the program
- Future plans for the program
- Written testimonials from mentors and new employees

“We need to make sure all staff are aware of our Mentor Team — not just new employees.”

A sample communications plan used by other homes is provided in Appendix D.

Create all the documents identified in the communications plan. Here is a list of possible documents:

1. Announcement of Mentor Team Program – Flyer
2. Announcement of Mentor Team Program – Posted Memo
3. Announcement of Mentor Team Program – Newsletter
4. Program Guide for Managers and Supervisors
5. Program Guide for Potential Mentors
6. Letter from CEO to Selected Mentors
7. Memo to Selected Mentors
8. Announcement of Mentor Team Members – Posted Flyer and Newsletter
9. Announcement of New Staff – Posted Memo

Samples of these documents created by other homes are provided in Appendix D.

D. Creating A Mentor Team

Synopsis of the Process

The following five points describe *in brief* the steps to take in setting up your Mentor Team:

“There are many advantages for me as a mentor. First of all, I get to help new staff. And it gives me an opportunity to stop and think about what it means to be new to a job and to help to instill my pride and sense of legacy in this home in someone else.”

1. Determine the appropriate size and composition of your Mentor Team, based on the characteristics of your home (see the chart below for sample teams).
2. Identify staff in all departments who would be suitable members of the facility-wide Mentor Team, according to the criteria set out below.
3. Obtain the consent of those individuals to serve on the Mentor Team.
4. Schedule the half-day mentor training; include the mentors’ supporting managers in the training session.
5. Incorporate the Mentor Team into the orientation program.
6. Support the members of the Mentor Team in their role.

Size and Composition of Mentor Team

The Mentor Team includes representatives from *all* departments: for example, Nursing (both RNs and RPNs), PSWs, Housekeeping, Dietary, Maintenance, Recreation, Administration, and so on. You and your colleagues will determine the size and composition that best suits your facility.

The following chart indicates the variety of options currently in place in the homes that participated in the demonstration-site test.

Department / Position	243 Beds	140 Beds	100 Beds	80 Beds ¹
RN	2	4	—	1
RPN	2	1	1	1
PSW / HCA	6	1	4	4
Dietary	5	1	3	2
Housekeeping/Laundry	1	1	1	1
Recreation/Activation	2	1	1	1
Occupational Therapy	1	—	—	—
Environmental Services/ Maintenance	—	1	—	(see below)
Administration	3	1	—	1
Spiritual Care	1	—	—	—
Volunteer Coordinator	1	1	—	—
Totals	24	12	10	11

“Mentors can be a bridge from staff the new employee has met to the ones she or he doesn't know.”

1. Housekeeping includes Maintenance. Recreation includes Rehabilitation, Day Services, and Social Work.

“Inviting certain staff members to join the Mentor Team gives us a way to foster the leadership skills that we’re already seeing in these individuals.”

“I’ve had new staff outside my department come to me because they knew I was on the Mentor Team.”

“The Mentor Team helps new staff find answers to their ‘why’ questions readily because they have someone specific to ask.”

Criteria for Selecting Mentor Team Members

Candidates for your Mentor Team are those staff members who share the majority of the following characteristics:

- Have demonstrated their commitment to the Mission, Vision, and Values of the home
- Are known for promoting a positive and healthy work environment
- Are good performers in their jobs
- Are highly knowledgeable about their own departments
- Have a good understanding of the roles, processes, and positions in their own department, as well as in other departments
- Enjoy sharing their knowledge and expertise
- Have a positive attitude
- Are caring individuals
- Are team-oriented
- Respond well to pressure
- Are effective communicators
- Are creative problem-solvers
- Manage their time well
- Are passionate
- Are nurturers and teachers
- Are good leaders.

For all these reasons, it is strongly advised that those selected to be on the Mentor Team have **at least two years of service** at your home.

Invite Participation of Staff

Send out an announcement to everyone working in your home about the creation of the Mentor Team, including its purpose and the time frame for implementation, along with an invitation to anyone who is interested to volunteer to be on the Mentor Team. This is important to ensure that all staff feel that the process of selecting the members of the Mentor Team is fair and open, whether or not they choose to participate.

Nonetheless, don’t be surprised if no one responds. That was the experience of managers at the homes where the program has been implemented.

So, at the same time, invite your senior managers to identify current staff who fit the criteria given above. Once the announcement has been distributed, the appropriate managers can approach the identified staff, invite them to join the Mentor Team, and answer any questions they may have. (At the other homes, all those who were invited to join the team were flattered to have been asked.)

Select the Mentor Team Members

Although mentors are volunteers, it is important that candidates for the Mentor Team be interviewed individually using a set list of questions that relate to the established criteria, just as if they were applying for any position. This has several benefits:

- The same criteria will be applied to all candidates.
- The same questions will be asked of all candidates.
- Those not invited or selected will feel that the process is open and fair.
- Management will know, through the interview process, whether a candidate grasps the concept of being a mentor.
- Candidates will have a formal opportunity to ask questions before committing themselves to joining the Mentor Team.
- Successful candidates will feel that they have been given special acknowledgment and recognition.

“Staff who were approached to become mentors were honoured.”

This last point is especially important because the reward for work well done is so often just more work, which then becomes perceived as unfair. For the same reason, it is important that, as a manager, you are committed to giving the Mentor Team public recognition through your employee recognition and awards programs. If you don't already have such a program, the Mentor Team offers a great place to start.

Notify the successful candidates officially with a letter of congratulations, welcoming them to the Mentor Team. Be sure to notify the unsuccessful candidates, if any, as well.

Manager Education

Hold a session to ensure that all managers understand the purpose of the Mentor Team and the role and activities of the mentors. This session should also be attended by the direct managers of the mentors so that they understand what is being expected of the mentors and why they need to allow time at work for mentoring to take place.

“We can already see a positive ripple effect throughout the culture of our home.”

Mentor Training

Once the members of the Mentor Team have been selected and officially notified, the first formal meeting of the team takes place at the half-day training session. You may decide to include the direct managers of the mentors in this session as well so that they will have a more immediate understanding of what the mentors are learning and the kinds of concerns they have.

“This is a very worthwhile project. But it needs time to develop and to work out the kinks.”

The curriculum includes:

- Goals and objectives of the program
- Review of terms of reference, policies, and guidelines
- Recruitment and selection process
- Role of the mentor and the team
- How and why mentoring works
- Connection between mentoring and orientation
- How interaction between the mentor and the new employee should work
- Role plays, including dealing with challenging situations
- How mentors are assigned to new employees
- Future training needs.

Should you decide to provide this training in-house, PowerPoint slides and a role-playing handout are provided in Appendix E.

Notes: Managers at other homes believe that, when the kick-off of any new program involves training by an external facilitator, staff perceive it as special, which gives the new program more credibility. Thus, regardless of the abilities of in-house staff as trainers, engaging an external facilitator may prove more effective in the long run.

Suggested additional resource: *Leadership: An Art of Possibility* (video – 2000).

Connect the Mentor Team to the Orientation Program

It has already been noted that the Mentor Team is an extension and long-term enhancement of your home’s orientation program. Indeed, having an effective orientation program already in place is a criterion for successful implementation of the Mentor Team program.

“Now that the trial is over, we can make it permanent formally and have it in place forever!”

1. Develop a script about the Mentor Team and their role to be read at orientation.
2. Invite the whole Mentor Team to the orientation sessions so that new employees can meet them and start to build relationships.

“Why have we waited this long?”

3. Assign a mentor to each new employee and ensure that they meet during the orientation sessions and set a time and place for their first formal conversation.
4. Ensure that your orientation checklists for each department are complete and up to date. Mentors can play a central role in this process.

Sample orientation checklists are provided in Appendix F. The Mentor Team button/logo that appears on three of these checklists was created for and adapted by the Mentor Team at Rapelje Lodge in Welland, Ontario, which has generously granted permission to use it.

At some homes, formal (especially corporate) orientation may take place several weeks after a new staff member has been hired. In such cases, special arrangements must be made at the time of employment to connect the new employee with her/his assigned mentor (as well as unit/work buddy, if this is a different person) and to make the new employee aware of the purpose of the Mentor Team and who all the members of the team are.

E. Continuous Improvement

“In probationary performance reviews, I’m getting positive comments from new employees about the Mentor Team.”

Mentors are the best source of ideas for improving the program. Indeed, as a self-directed team, they should be empowered by management to make changes in areas where they have authority and to recommend changes in other areas. Their span of authority to make changes can be included in the team’s Terms of Reference.

Obviously, ideas for improvements can also come from managers and from new staff who are on the receiving end of the program.

Sample feedback forms for obtaining comments from mentors, new employees, and managers are provided in Appendix G.

F. A Worthwhile Investment

When people join a new organization, they come with a positive and committed attitude. Their experiences in the first three to six months of employment are crucial. If these experiences are generally positive, they will demonstrate superior performance in their jobs and develop a long term commitment to the facility.

On the other hand, if an employer does no more than introduce new employees to their co-workers and provide them with a short orientation period, the risk is high that the employee will feel unsupported, lost, and anxious. These are all conditions that lead to loss of commitment and eventually lead to attrition.

“This is a great program, but we won’t truly know the benefits until it evolves.”

A Mentor Team program such as the one described above, which both pairs a new employee with a trusted, knowledgeable worker and provides longer-term staff with informal access to a well-informed group of colleagues, will only strengthen the commitment of all employees to the organization.

Is the return on investment of the Mentor Team program significant? The answer is an emphatic YES!