

## BC's Capital Region's Mentorship Task Force

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### • *Challenge* •

People living on low income, struggling to make ends meet, can feel overwhelmed and have difficulty coping with their circumstances. Through an inclusive community process undertaken by the Quality of Life CHALLENGE in BC's Capital Region, mentoring was identified as an important tool for people who are moving toward a sustainable income.

Mentors can provide support simply by lending a sympathetic ear to people as they describe the challenges they face and explore possible coping strategies. The Quality of Life CHALLENGE, Vibrant Communities' convenor organization in the region, developed a mentorship task force to investigate the usefulness of mentorships as a tool to help people move out of poverty.



### • *Strategy* •

Task force members determined that they could best promote mentorship by supporting existing programs in the region. They invited mentorship program managers from employment and other service provider agencies to a joint vision-creating session, after which it was decided that the need in the region was the formation of an umbrella mentorship organization. This new organization, dubbed “Mentorship Victoria” in its current planning phase, will focus its efforts on sharing information with member organizations, offering mentorship training opportunities, recruiting new task force members and raising public awareness of the value of mentorship. Once operational, Mentorship Victoria will no longer be part of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE.

The increasing proportion of service provider agencies among the mentorship task force's membership, many of which assist people with physical disabilities and with addictions, has affected a shift away from mentorship simply for employment. Because service providers have many clients who live on low incomes, Mentorship Victoria's activities will be directed more toward supporting quality-of-life issues. Employment agencies will continue to be encouraged to participate.

### • *Impact* •

People who are mentored benefit both from attaining personal objectives (for example, achieving economic self-sufficiency, improving their quality of life) and from the general sense of well-being that is a byproduct of a supportive relationship.

Six months after a half-day training workshop hosted by the mentorship task force in April 2005, five of the seven participating agencies reported that the skills they had developed and information they had received had improved their mentorship programs. One agency stated that the training had helped them achieve better matches between mentor and client, with the result that three clients had secured employment.

Building an effective mentorship relationship is time consuming and though programs can be slow to grow, the impact on individual lives can be considerable. Evidence suggests that people who enjoy a strong mentoring relationship, particularly one that matures over a period of time, continue to thrive even after the specific objective of the relationship has been achieved and the mentorship has ended. Mentors report that their lives are also enriched by the experience of helping others.



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