



## **Case study of NCT mentoring.**

### Supporting NCT Practitioners

#### **Executive Summary:**

NCT (formerly the National Childbirth Trust) is a large charity which organises courses and services for the time of transition to parenthood. Self-employed education practitioners are trained and educated to foundation degree level. They work with expectant and new parents on behalf of NCT. The mentoring scheme began to be planned in 2012 in response to changing higher education practices and University partners. Mentors are recruited, trained and paid to work with a variety of mentees – to be a mentor is a specific role within the Senior Practitioner body of NCT. They work with mentees who are the self-employed education practitioners. A mentee might be from a routine part of a programme of study, or a practitioner who has had a difficult situation (e.g. a complaint made against them by a client, a challenging assessment of practice, or a period of ill-health), practitioners who are facing challenges of transition or gate-keeping, and any practitioner who wishes to self-fund their own mentoring as alternative CPD.

#### **What are the goals?**

Our ultimate goal is the improvement of client (i.e. expectant and new parents) experiences through services and courses that NCT offers. To do this we need to support our practitioners (NCTPs) through development and transitions, in order to enhance their practice.

#### **Who was involved?**

I have been a tutor for NCT for around 11 years now (around 6 at the time of the scheme beginning) and was the nearest thing they had to an expert on mentoring! I designed the training and wrote the handbook, which has been updated for each of the 6 cohorts of mentors that have been trained so far. My current title is Mentor Tutor and Coordinator, so I train the mentors and coordinate the scheme. I work under the management of the Quality and Support team, headed by the Quality and Competencies manager. She in turn works under the Head of Education, and ultimately the CEO of NCT. Mentors are drawn from our 'Excellent Practitioners' i.e. those who have passed a gate-keeping assessment of their practice that shows they are excellent within their specialisms (e.g. antenatal teaching, breastfeeding counselling, postnatal practitioners, baby massage teachers etc.), and that they are good 'NCT citizens' thus good role models. Mentees are drawn from the probationary or newly qualified practitioner ranks, from those who have had complaints or challenging assessments, those who are identified as struggling in their practice in some way, and potentially, all NCTPs.

#### **Policies, procedures, and processes used in this scheme**

Mentors are recruited, trained and licensed to practise as an NCT mentor. The training involves 3 days of facilitated learning, self-determined learning and undertaking a 'training'

mentoring relationship. This is real, although the mentee is a volunteer and willing to cope with the experimental nature of the mentor's work. Mentors have to then fulfil a certain amount of relevant CPD each year in order to retain their license. This involves an update day at least every two years, and participating in teleconferences which provide peer learning opportunities (these are anonymised), peer and tutor supervision, updates on information and studies, as well as celebrations of success.

Some mentees are approached about mentoring by the mentor coordinator, and others by assessors, tutors or other senior staff within NCT. Mentoring for probationers and for newly qualified practitioners is a compulsory part of their first year of practice. For other mentees, it is voluntary and is offered as part of the support and development package identified after a difficult situation.

### **Describe the system we used or created:**

Mentors' details are maintained on a database by the mentoring coordinator. These include specialism/s, contact details and preferences, and contact times and preferences. Newly qualified (NQ) and probationary mentees fill in a form stating their specialism/s, their contact details and preferences, and their contact times and preferences. I then match mentors and mentees by hand. For other mentees, the particular needs of a mentee are identified, and an email sent to all mentors looking for availability and the particular skill set needed. When a match of any kind is identified, a form letter introducing them to one another is emailed through, along with a mentor-mentee agreement for the mentee to sign and information about 'how to get the most from your mentor'.

Dyads work virtually as NCT is a dispersed organisation, so either by phone, skype, email or even text at times. It is very rare for mentoring to be carried out face-to-face. Mentors fill in a monthly return detailing the mentoring they have carried out over that period. They claim fees through a central purchase management system, administered by office staff, but authorised by the mentoring coordinator, so there is an element of cross-checking. Mentees are invited to fill in evaluation forms at the end of their mentoring relationship, although only around half do so.

### **Challenges:**

Cost is always a challenge as there are limited funds for extending mentoring. Mentors are paid for the work they do within the scheme (although not for any informal work they may do with other local practitioners). The NCT rule is that if it is activity performed can earn money, then the training for fulfilling that activity has to be paid for. Mentors in training can pay up front for their mentor training, or can wait to pay as soon as they begin earning, or they can use their CPD budget to pay for some of their mentoring training.

Working virtually can be a challenge but most people seem to be quite pragmatic about it and some positively welcome it. Expanding the scheme is difficult as the recruitment of mentors is limited and encouraging other practitioners to use mentoring as part of an alternative approach to CPD involves them paying for this support service.

Finding places to train groups of mentors is another difficulty as NCT no longer has a headquarters with a training room available. Obtaining evaluation forms from mentees is an ongoing struggle which is being tackled by the coordinator.

### **Outcome:**

Currently (2017) there are 14 mentors, with another 10 in training. We have worked with around 200 mentees over the last few years, with some mentors working with 10 + mentees

at any one time. The scheme has evaluated well, with the proviso that the missing evaluation forms may mask some inadequacies of the system.

### **Supporting quotations:**

#### **What mentees have said:**

- I am sorry it has to come to an end! I cannot foresee a time when it wouldn't be useful to have a mentor
- Most of all the confidence that my mentor has fostered in me has been truly fabulous.
- In short I feel privileged and lucky to have undergone this mentoring opportunity.
- My mentor made me feel supported and encouraged and was an excellent source of advice if I needed it. Her listening skills were fantastic and most appreciated
- She was very respectful of my needs and even in a short space of time she had worked out a way to support me to the best of my ability

#### **What mentors have said:**

- It's giving me a new perspective on my own practice, and the training has helped me develop my listening skills to a new level.
- I found the mentoring course to be meticulously planned, effectively carried out and a very enjoyable experience.
- We've created a really supportive group of practitioners
- Gaining a real insight into life for the new practitioners which is helpful in terms of context. Has often made me think about my own facilitation.
- I don't really like to just be kind of plodding along. I'd much rather be doing something that's a bit challenging, and certainly some of them are quite challenging, so that I quite enjoy – something to kind of get my teeth into a little bit.