



# VANTAGE

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## Leadership and Mentoring



Just a snapshot of some of the participants in the WPN mentoring program over the past few years

### THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WOMEN'S PLANNING NETWORK

Over the cold and dreary months of winter, the WPN committee and a few involved in the programs we run have been asking themselves about mentoring and leadership - what makes a leader? What is mentoring? How does it benefit us all? And how are we all leaders and mentors in our own fields and lives?

This issue of VANTAGE focuses on leadership and mentoring. Lecki Ord, current WPN committee member and treasurer reflects on leadership.....

The recent discussion about leadership has got me thinking... Leadership at work is important, but I believe that those qualities flow out of a wider context.

Leadership includes an ability to listen, to seek out views, to analyse issues and to articulate a plan of action. And then to take responsibility for seeing that the action is implemented. This is true from the position of leading the country to representing your colleagues at work.

Does this process sound familiar? As I was writing it I realised that I was describing the planning process. Ergo planners must be in a good position to provide leadership in many different situations. Of course the key is taking responsibility, and having the skills to carry out the plan. These we can work on individually and collectively. No one has all the skills, but working together, delegating and coordinating, leadership is making sure that each piece fits into place and that an outcome is achieved even if the plan has to be modified on the way.

We can bring these leadership qualities to all aspects of our life - within the family, the wider community and in our work. One of the joys of being on the WPN committee, compared to many organisations in which I've participated, is that ideas flow freely and everyone takes responsibility for some part of the action. This gives a sense of collective responsibility and achievement. The wide range of experience, skills and personalities leads to lively discussion and lateral thinking.



## Genevieve Overell and Kathy Mitchell

**On Tuesday 2 August 2005, in the intimate surroundings of the Phoenix Bar, fellow WPNers and guests enjoyed hearing about Genevieve Overell's and Kathy Mitchell's career highlights and the role that mentoring and leadership have played in their careers.**

Genevieve is Deputy Secretary Built Environment within the Department of Sustainability and Environment, but until recently she worked as a property lawyer at Sparke Helmore lawyers.

Kathy is the current Chair of Planning Panels Victoria, as well as being the president of VPELA. Bronwen Hamilton from the WPN committee chaired this interesting event.

In her current role as Deputy Secretary, Genevieve leads around 640 people with a multi-million budget, spanning both statutory and strategic planning, including working closely with local government organisations and Heritage Victoria. Genevieve has primarily worked as an advisor and advocate (both in private and public sectors). She has lead multi-discipline teams, predominantly in property law, thus interacting with planners.

After completing an Arts/Law degree Genevieve undertook her articles and by the age of 29 years was a partner in a national firm. Genevieve revealed that most often throughout her career she actively sought informal mentors for their wisdom, hints and network opportunities, and found her inspiration amongst partners, peers, and leaders from peak bodies and businesses. Maintaining networks was a valuable way of identifying and testing her ideas with others.

Genevieve recognises the importance of mentoring one's career and, perhaps as a sign of its importance in her life she has recently initiated formal meetings with a colleague. Over the years she has also seen the benefits of being a mentor and helping others to articulate and analyse their issues in developing solutions. The mentoring relationships that Genevieve has been part of have enabled her to hear different perspectives and approaches in analysis, and tap into issues of currency; giving her lessons to take away.

Kathy describes her current role as Chair of Planning Panels Victoria as the best job in the best workplace... but her beginnings on a farm in South Australia's Yorke Peninsula are a long way from Nauru House!

After growing up on the farm Kathy moved to Adelaide and undertook a town planning degree in Adelaide and she described her first life defining moment as being when she found an ad for a graduate diploma of sociology at Swinburne in Melbourne - this precipitated her move to Melbourne, which became permanent not least once children came along! After working in Melbourne for some time Kathy enjoyed another life defining moment when Roz Hansen suggested to her that she apply to become a panel member and offered to be a reference.



**Genevieve Overell talked about the importance of mentors in her career development**

## On mentoring, leadership and their current roles

Kathy recognises the need for 'sounding boards' and has valued her mentors for their ideas and advice on strategies. In addition to Roz, Kathy's mentors have included David Whitney, Helen Gibson and a range of people involved with VPELA. She has also been inspired by some 'fabulous women' who have made a difference, especially those she came into contact with following the Women's Planning Network's inception and since she joined the VPELA board (when she joined she was the only woman, now there are two more).

Kathy recognises the advantages of working in the planning profession, describing it as a career that one can combine with other things, such as raising a family. The potential for flexibility within her career was highlighted when, following the birth of her first child she was given the opportunity to work from home, slowly increasing her workload as the demands of the new baby lessened.

Following the thought provoking presentations by Genevieve and Kathy the floor was opened to the audience for questions and comments. The ensuing discussion with the audience focused around:

- Identifying the factors that mitigate against women staying in the planning profession (and using the law profession's work to inform strategies such as encouraging networking and developing guidelines for mentoring and progressing women);
- Recognising women for volunteering to take responsibility as 'doers' in planning committees: their involvement provides leadership and strategic thinking opportunities with some challenges in balancing voluntary, work and other commitments;
- The need for improving the perceptions and level of understand of the community about planning, especially with respect to their dealings with local government's 'front counter';
- The need for better connections between what is taught at university and real life practice, and assisting smoother transitions for graduates into their first job;
- Promoting planning to school students and getting geography taught at senior levels of secondary school.

The WPN Committee would like to thank both Genevieve and Kathy for so freely sharing their time and for so comfortably and honestly recounting experiences and perspectives on their careers; the importance of mentoring in their professional lives and how it has helped them to become inspiring leaders.



**Kathy Mitchell  
shares her  
experiences**



**Members  
and friends  
enjoying the  
evening at  
Phoenix**

## Mentors share their experiences.....

### Chris Gallagher

How do you fit yet another thing into your already busy life? If you are an experienced planner you can do it by taking on a "mentee" and you'll find the rewards of mentoring can add some bounce to your busy life.

If the industry has served you well the chances are that you've probably not had a formal mentor, but made your own way, possibly with the help of informal mentors, supportive employers and/or sheer hard work.

But life is getting harder for young planners and they need support if the profession is to retain the best and brightest.

Workplaces are becoming tougher and young planners can do with external support in grappling with issues such as:

- career path planning;
- job applications and CV writing;
- managing upwards;
- work/life balance;
- professional development choices;
- networking; and
- handling difficult situations at work.

Providing support and guidance is not difficult for people who've come through years of successfully tackling these sorts of issues themselves.

But what's in it for us? Apart from the cliché of putting something back into the profession, mentors find the role stimulating and rewarding. Having worked with 7 mentees through the WPN program I've found the mentees often extraordinarily talented and with great potential.

The relationship can become one where you remain in touch after the program concludes and love to hear about career goals being realised..... and share a little bit in the pride.

The ongoing friendship can also retain a mentoring flavour. All in all, being a mentor can be good fun and a good and useful diversion in our busy lives.

One of my former mentees once said after a few years "was this really meant to be only a 6 months program"? That planner, now turned project manager/finance whiz, is now doing fantastic things in the property industry in the UK – drawing on career planning and new networks developed through the mentoring relationship – and still phones or emails regularly with updates so I can share vicariously in her successes.

*Chris Gallagher - Chair of the Heritage Council and Director The Strategy Shop*



**Chris Gallagher and Roz Hansen have been involved as mentors over many years with the WPN Mentoring program. Here they tell us what they have learnt and shared as mentors by participating in the program.....**

## Roz Hansen

'Surviving' in the planning system these days can be tough. As a consultant you can face the venom of angry objectors or implacable developers. As a local government planner you can be overridden by political ambition or tightly squeezed almost to suffocation point between the applicant, objectors and the councillors. As a state government planner you may not be able to voice an opinion at all until your boss has spoken!!!

Planners need support – intellectual, emotional and moral – as well as the opportunity to nurture skills and expertise in a challenging yet rewarding work environment. Many of us have experienced the hard knocks of refusal of a drawn out application, a VCAT decision which made 'no sense' from a planning perspective or a cross examination as an expert witness which made you so stressed that you had to indulge in a stiff whisky, a drag on a cigarette and/or an early night's sleep to get over it.

I decided to participate in the WPN/PIA mentoring program when it first started in the late 1990s. After being my own boss since 1986 and doing time before then in the public sector I made a brave leap into the consultancy world of uncertainty and job insecurity. After 20 years of being a planner I wanted to put something worthwhile and useful back into the planning profession and the mentoring program created that opportunity. It has been a wonderful journey every time.

For me mentoring is about many things – listening to the rights and wrongs of a workplace environment, the setting of goals and ambitions and paving a path of action to realise them; of how to deal with difficult people, difficult situations and difficult planning issues; and fostering a friendship where it is never too late to call and talk or to meet at short notice to re-work a CV, engineer a possible job opportunity/ promotion or talk about a holiday to energise the mind, body and soul.

I would strongly encourage others to participate in the WPN/PIA mentoring program as the men and women who have shared their time, insights and perspectives either as a mentor or mentee have proved to be priceless. For me it is well worth the time and energy. To not only reap from the myriad of benefits that this program can offer ( I too have learnt so much from my mentees) but to feel satisfied that you can make a positive difference is part of putting something back into the future of the profession. I have seen my mentees gain confidence, knowledge, strength and 'savoir-faire' and for these outcomes I say thankyou to WPN and PIA.

*Roz Hansen  
Managing Director, Hansen Partnership*



## Tales of a mentee/mentor pair ..... Lucinda and Sarah's regional connection

**Lucinda Petersen and Sarah McMaster are a current mentor/mentee pair in the 2005 Mentoring Program. Here they share some of their experiences with the program so far...**

**Sarah** - Working as the sole strategic planner at the Council in the far south-west corner of Victoria was always going to offer a challenge. In this environment, networking with other planners and sharing experiences (the backbone of every planner's sanity and professional development) was going to be an enormous challenge for a graduate planner. In the face of a 5 hour car trip (or a shorter trip if one has the nerves for small aircraft!), it was easy to overlook the importance of getting involved in the active planning network that exists in Melbourne.

This is where the WPN mentoring program has been an excellent way to encourage and foster professional networking and development. From a mentee's perspective, the program has offered me the chance to develop a close professional relationship with an experienced planner. I am now happy to ask Lucinda almost any 'stupid' question. When I recently changed jobs, she was also able to offer advice from an outsider's perspective, yet from the perspective of somebody who knew me, my original and my new workplace.



Lucinda (left) and Sarah (right), enjoying the recent WPN regional planners dinner

**Lucinda** - From a mentor's perspective, the mentoring program is a welcome distraction from the day to day challenges in the office and provides an opportunity to meet up with someone who is keen to broaden their planning horizons, which is so refreshing! Mentoring is a great learning process too, learning the art of listening, sharing knowledge and experience, opening my eyes to what else is going on, meeting other mentees and mentors and broadening my network of planning contacts.

**Sarah** - In addition to this relationship, I have also benefited from meeting the other mentors and mentees in the program. The excellent two-day session that kicks off the program helped to establish a welcoming environment and gave an insight into each of our experiences, and our styles of interaction. The program provided us with ideas about how to get the most out of the program, so that our discussions could involve some direction if needed.

**Both** - We have found that living and working in regional Victoria has been no impediment to us obtaining experience and connections through the mentoring program. This is even despite the geographical distances that separate us. We have had a great time meeting up in cafes around the South-West of Victoria- from Hamilton to Port Fairy, Port Campbell, to Warrnambool to Ballarat

Although we do not meet up as regularly as our urban colleagues, we make very frequent use of the telephone and of email. Anyone living in regional areas will be used to relying on this type of communication! The key is to be organised, establish an arrangement that suits us both (ie. we meet every 3 to 4 weeks) and use a diary to keep track of things we were both going to follow up.



Also, as luck would have it, each of our jobs are now associated with the other. So in addition to what we actually talk about when we meet, we are each able to see the other's work in progress on a day to day extent. As a mentee, this is a fantastic way to understand and question the practical realities of planning. As a mentor, the questions a mentee often raises sometimes challenges the way you've done things for a long time, and can stimulate a fresh approach.

Overall, the mentoring program has been a really positive experience for us, and is something that we'd easily recommend to other planners, especially if they are in rural or regional Victoria.

## Affordable Housing for Women-October Forum

As avid readers of Vantage will know, WPN is currently undertaking a research project on affordable housing for women. It was decided by the WPN committee to initially undertake a scoping paper to determine where there is or is not information on affordable housing for women and how this would direct the next stage of the project. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) at RMIT was commissioned to provide the scoping paper and to include recommendations on areas and ways in which the next stage might be conducted.

A forum on the scoping paper will be held by WPN on Wednesday 12 October 2005 with a 3 person panel and facilitator. This is a preliminary notice only - further details will be circulated closer to the date.

The WPN committee members are very excited about this research and the ways in which it may help form policy-making which affects all women.

**Please put this date in your diaries now -  
Wednesday 12 October.**

## Mentoring Program 2006

**While the 2005 Mentoring Program is in full swing, we should not forget that early next year, a new program will begin. If this edition of VANTAGE has inspired you to focus on developing certain skills and goals next year, why not join the program!**

The 2006 WPN/PIA Mentoring Program will commence early in the new year, and we are always interested in hearing of potential mentors and mentees – yes! It could be you!

Mentoring is a powerful form of personal and professional development for both mentees and mentors.

**Mentees** – you will grow and develop with the focused attention of your mentor. You will meet with your mentor regularly (commonly for an hour or 2 each fortnight) and you will surprise yourself with what you learn and how you change.

**Mentors** – you will reap the benefits of watching the development of your mentee, you'll feel valued and may even rethink and refine your style, skills and methods.

The program is available to all planners and associated professions and is open to people who may want to form a mentoring partnership with a similarly-placed peer. It benefits from a wide range of participants and different professional backgrounds and skill bases often contribute to the best learning opportunities within the pairs. The Program brings people together and benefits participants more than any other professional development program. The focused attention and targeted assistance of mentoring will help you achieve success your way.

If you or someone you know is interested in participating in next year's program, please contact the WPN office on [admin@wpn.org.au](mailto:admin@wpn.org.au) or phone 9347 4622 to register your interest.



## Calendar of Upcoming Events

### September 22

#### • WPN Annual General Meeting

Acquum, 364 Victoria Street, Melbourne  
Guest Speaker, planning barrister Susan Brennan.  
Contact the office for further details.



### October 12

#### • Research Project Forum

A discussion on the issues of women and housing being investigated by WPN for the current research project.

### November 16

#### • Planning Week Breakfast

One of our most popular events each year - not to be missed!

### December

- Christmas Cocktails
- Mentoring celebration

Keep an eye on our website and email updates for further details.....

Women's Planning Network Victoria Inc.

G05/60 Leicester Street,  
Carlton South VIC 3053

t 9347 4622  
f 9347 2900  
e admin@wpn.org.au

www.wpn.org.au  
ABN 96 918 478 928

The **SPRING** edition of **VANTAGE** will be out before Christmas, and will focus on women in planning interstate and abroad. So if you have anything you would like to contribute, please drop Cindy a line at the WPN office. All contributions welcome!

## Welcome to our new Administration Assistant

You may have noticed in your recent contact with the WPN office that we have a new Administration Assistant, Cindy Bedgood.

Cindy joined us in July, and we warmly welcome her to the Network. Cindy's office hours are Wednesday 9 am - 4:30pm and Fridays 9am - 5pm.

## WPN Membership

Why not become a WPN member?

#### Benefits of being a WPN member include:

- Discount rates to attend WPN events
- Up to 40 % discount on professional development courses
- Priority to attend PD courses
- Vantage Newsletter printed version by postal mail
- Updates/Bulletin sent by email
- Eligible to vote at AGM
- Entitled to join WPN general committee of management
- Eligible for WPN Award nomination (dependant on fulfilling other selection criteria as set by Committee)
- Eligible to be nominated for representation on non-government boards/committees
- Networking opportunities

Memberships are valid for the financial year (1 July 2005 - 30 June 2006)

#### Membership Category

Full time students/concession card holders	\$33.00
Individual	\$75.00
Company: Less than 8 employees	\$150.00
Company: More than 8 employees	\$280.00