

Women in Leadership

The YWCA proposes that the South Australian Government establish a broad scale mentoring program similar to the YWCA of Adelaide Young Women's Mentoring Program, in order to provide essential career development support for women to increase participation in management and Senior Executive positions and nominations to private and public sector Boards.

Issue and Impacts

The South Australian Strategic Plan outlined a target to ensure 50 per cent of board members in SA would be women. However, the latest report indicates this target has not been achieved. Recent reports by the University of South Australia Centre for Work + Life confirm the stresses and conflicting demands on young women in the early stages of their career and the impact this has on their future career options.

In order for women to be nominated to Boards, it is essential that they obtain skills and experience in management and Senior Executive positions.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a process built through a pairing, which leads to a developing relationship between a mentor and mentee. The goal of mentoring is:

- to provide opportunities for the person being mentored (mentee) to continually develop skills and knowledge to enhance their success/meet their goals
- use the potential of a mentee who may otherwise not be nurtured
- allow mentors to pass on their knowledge to future business and creative leaders, thus strengthening community ties and ensuring continued statewide economic success for the future.

A mentor assists in the growth and development of another person. A mentor can fill one or more of the roles of teacher, coach, role model, advisor, leader, supporter, friend and challenger. The relationship between mentor and mentee works on a symbiotic level, leading to personal and professional development for both parties and thus having a positive impact on their communities.

Two Degrees of Separation

The YWCA of Adelaide Two Degrees of Separation (2DS) project offers mentoring for young women (16-30 years) from a variety of backgrounds and life situations. The aim of 2DS is:

- to continually develop mentees' skills and knowledge

- to enhance their success in work and life through café style mentoring forums and one to one mentoring matches
- provide an opportunity for professional women to pass on their knowledge and assist others in achieving similar goals.

2DS is a project that came to fruition following a forum in Adelaide in July 2006 called *Shattering Ceilings: Young Women and Leadership*. Shattering Ceilings brought together 100 young women from all over SA to discuss the barriers limiting young women from obtaining leadership positions.

The forum identified three key factors in women becoming leaders: confidence, experience and mentoring.

The 2DS program has been successful with **over 180 young women participating in the past financial year**. Numerous participants have become more involved with the YWCA of Adelaide's programs, and some have been elected onto the YWCA board. Over the past year there has been an overwhelming interest from many prominent women in the community who want to become mentors and contribute to the development of young women. Both the success of the mentees' and the enthusiasm from potential mentors indicates that there is a desire for a more comprehensive system of mentorship for professional women in SA.

The role of the South Australian Government

The YWCA of Adelaide requests that the Government of South Australia:

- recognise that women are systemically underrepresented in Executive positions in SA
- recognise the complex factors at play in young women balancing the demands of life plus work
- establish a formal across-government mentoring program for women to support and encourage more women to apply for management and Senior Executive positions
- ensure women develop and maintain the skills and experience required to nominate for positions on public and private sector Boards.

The YWCA of Adelaide believes the 2DS program provides a suitable model for government and is keen to work with government to share program information and evidence to support the effective implementation of an across-government mentoring program.