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## OUR 2015 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT & MENTOR SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE

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### Mentee

## Suzanne Connolly-Andrews

CEO, Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services

### **CAN YOU GIVE US AN OVERVIEW OF YOUR ROLE AS CEO GURRINY YEALAMUCKA HEALTH SERVICES?**

I have led the Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services in Yarrabah, Northern Queensland since 2012 following the transition from government to community-controlled management of the service. With 70 staff, the majority of which are local Yarrabah residents, I oversee the provision of Primary Health Care and Wellbeing services. Services include women and men's health, child and maternal health, social emotional and wellbeing, home medication review and chronic disease management. The key focus is preventative health care and early intervention.

### **WHAT WERE YOUR KEY OBJECTIVES OR EXPECTATIONS OF THE MENTORING PROGRAM?**

When I applied for the scholarship I was looking to further build my knowledge bank. What were the leadership skills I needed to expand? How could I be more confident in decision making? How do I continue to build the organisation's foundations?

### **HAS THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP MET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?**

I actually did not know what to expect from the program when I applied, but I knew I was looking for someone to build and support my current knowledge and experiences as a CEO. Someone who could basically tell me how it is and not hold back, the mentoring was exactly what I needed and what I was searching for.

### **WHAT ASPECTS HAVE BEEN MOST VALUABLE?**

What I found most valuable was that I was able to share my experiences with my mentor, and she was able to give me feedback on my progress, helped me look at things differently, able to have an honest conversation and look at decision making from a different perspective.

I love the fact that my mentor was someone outside my family, friend or even the health arena and that sometimes when we met I was able to just "dump and burn", have a rant and she was able to pull me back to reality.

### **HAS IT BEEN A GOOD MATCH?**

From our first session we just hit it off. McCarthy Mentoring sure did match the right mentor for me.

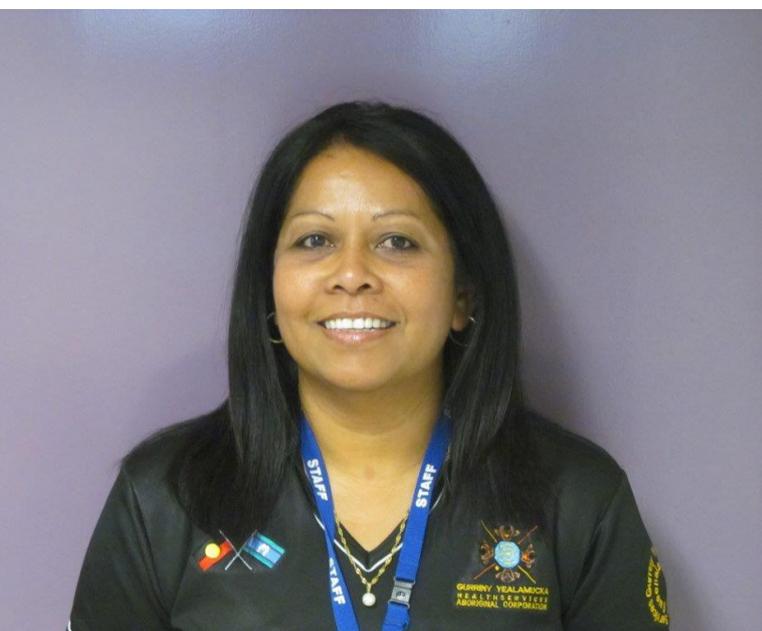
### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR YOU AND YOUR ROLE?**

It has been an exciting yet challenging time so it's wonderful to have been given this mentoring opportunity. It has been invaluable to have an advisor, outside of my community, to offer new perspectives and help me reflect and build on my leadership skills. Having to run ideas and thoughts by Marg and look at decision making from a whole new angle, really helped me to take a step back and also think about myself and my own personal goals.

### **WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THE PROGRAM?**

If you're stepping into a new leadership position, I would recommend having an external mentor. A mentor helps set the foundation of your new role.

If you've been in a leadership position for some time, the mentor can challenge you and expand your thinking as sometimes we become comfortable and stop being dynamic about how we do our jobs.



SUZANNE CONNOLLY-ANDREWS

Mentor

## Marg O'Donnell AO

Chair, National Breast Cancer Network of Australia and Griffith Law School Visiting Committee. Past Director-General of three Queensland Government Departments

### WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT BEING A MENTOR?

I enjoy the relationship that develops. It's like a friendship but it's focused on the needs of the mentee. I like putting my own issues to one side and concentrating on someone else's world. It's not advice giving either...it's about creating an environment where the mentee feels free to be creative about resolving their own problems.

I like the interplay of ideas that comes when we are working our way through a problem. I enjoy also learning about new work content. I am constantly amazed at the often innovative and creative approaches to the challenges they face. I find I learn so much from the exchange.

### HOW DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE ASSISTED SUZANNE IN HER ROLE AS HER MENTOR?

Through our discussions and through my visit to her workplace, I have gained an understanding of the issues and challenges that Sue has to deal with. I have helped her by getting her to reflect on what has happened, exploring the motivations of workers around her, suggesting alternative strategies, reinforcing and affirming her work and applauding her very real achievements.

### HAS IT BEEN A GOOD MATCH?

Yes, it has been a very good match. For my part, I have had a good deal of experience working in the Indigenous service area. I have worked in a Community Health Centre and also been a CEO of both big and small organisations, worked with Boards and Chaired boards. This background and experience has enabled me to relate well to many of the issues that Sue has had to deal with. As a bonus, I undertook a considerable amount of work in the Yarrabah community in the early 90's and thus also know many of the local identities and the issues that Aboriginal communities face. On a personal level, Sue and I share a similar sense of humour.

### WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE BENEFITS OF THE MENTORING?

I think Sue has had an external, neutral sounding- board on which to test some of her ideas and plans. She has had a place to consider and reflect in a non-judgmental environment. I have also been able to provide her with insights from my own work experiences.

Sue has also had a good deal of affirmation from me as to the excellent work she is doing as CEO. Often senior managers don't receive that sort of positive feedback... which we all need and treasure. This provides her with a sense of satisfaction and understanding that she is on the right track.

### WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE BENEFITS FOR GURRINY YEALAMUCKA HEALTH SERVICES?

Having a reflective and supported CEO who has our careful consideration on key issues must only enhance the operations and aspirations of Gurriny Yealamucka. A good leader sets the tone and culture of an organisation.

### WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR FUTURE MENTEES?

Embrace your mentoring opportunity. Prepare for mentoring sessions...bring along your ideas, concerns and problems, do your homework. If there is no formal structure in place, seek out possible mentors. Don't necessarily restrict yourself to one mentor alone.

Trust your mentor to be there for you. You will need to confide in them, tell them what you're doing and thinking. There is little you could say that would shock most mentors...we've all been through the mill Try not to be hurt by critical feedback. Take a deep breath ....and see the feedback as a gift!



MARG O'DONNELL AO



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