

Questions and Answers

Mettle Women - Mettle Together

Primary Priority Group focus: Vulnerable Women

Project summary:

Mettle Together is a pilot peer-mentorship volunteer program where women who have graduated from Mettle's employment pathways program and moved into stable work return as peer mentors to support women currently experiencing homelessness due to family and domestic violence. The group mentoring model fosters connection, trust, and support between mentors and mentees in a safe setting through facilitated workshops and volunteer activities.

Questions asked after presentation and responses:

1) What were some of the tools you used to overcome mental health barriers for the mentors and volunteers and avoid retraumatizing them?

For the mentoring component, mentors participated in a four-hour trauma-informed mentoring workshop before engaging with participants. The training covered safe mentoring practices, boundaries, active listening, self-care, and strategies to avoid retraumatization when supporting women with experiences of family and domestic violence (FDV).

Activities were carefully designed in partnership with trauma-informed organisations and delivered in safe, supportive environments where additional support could be accessed if needed. The mentors understood both how to support others and how to protect their own wellbeing through clear boundaries and appropriate referral pathways.

2) Was it an expectation to be a mentor or was this an organic journey?

One of the aims of this pilot project was to introduce peer mentoring as part of the volunteering experience; however, it was never a requirement or expectation for participants. The mentoring role developed organically, with mentors acting as a familiar face and safe presence for women participating in activities.

Mentors shared similar lived experiences and offered encouragement, hope, and practical support through their own recovery journeys. As a pilot project, we wanted to explore how group-based peer mentoring could enhance the volunteering experience and support women to build confidence, connection, and community.

3) How did you go about safeguarding the children and families with the tree planting project? (policies, procedures, risk management etc)

The tree planting activity was delivered in partnership with Friends of Clontarf Hill, an organisation that regularly facilitates community tree planting events open to families and children. They already had established policies, procedures, and risk management processes in place for these activities.

Our group participated as part of their existing community event rather than running a separate activity. The event included members of the public, families, and children, and all safeguarding measures were managed under the host organisation's established framework.

Questions and Answers

Mettle Women - Mettle Together

4) How are the women/volunteers cared for? For example, the volunteering may trigger – how are they supported?

Trained mentors were present throughout activities to provide peer support when needed. Activities were facilitated by trauma-informed practitioners, and the Volunteer Coordinator was also present to provide additional support. The Coordinator has formal training in counselling, family and domestic violence, and vicarious trauma.

Activities were carefully selected to ensure they were safe, meaningful, and unlikely to trigger distress. Participants always had the option to step away, seek support, or choose not to participate in activities that did not feel comfortable for them.

5) At what levels of safety were the women at when they were participating? For example, is there a safety assessment? Levels of protection?

Safety was a key consideration throughout the project. During the co-design phase, participants identified the types of volunteer activities they felt comfortable and safe attending. Event information was shared internally, and specific addresses and locations were only provided privately to women who had RSVP'd.

Some activities were delivered in partnership with Orana House's Switch Centre, which provided a secure and supportive environment. We also prioritised group-based and corporate volunteering opportunities, which offered additional safety and privacy.

For public activities such as the tree planting day, participation was voluntary and only women who felt comfortable attending a public event chose to do so. None of the participants required a high level of protection during the project. For women currently residing in refuges or receiving FDV support, existing safety assessments had already been completed by their support services and case workers, who could advise on any additional safety considerations if required.

6) How do you ensure duty of care for your volunteers/mentees when one on one with a not so trained or new mentor?

The mentors remained consistent throughout the project and completed trauma-informed mentoring training before commencing their role. The Volunteer Coordinator was also present during activities to oversee the mentoring component and provide support where needed.

In practice, mentoring occurred primarily within group settings rather than formal one-on-one arrangements. This created a supportive environment for both mentors and mentees and reduced potential risks. We found that participants were generally more interested in engaging in the activities themselves, with mentoring conversations developing naturally.

There were only two occasions where mentors needed to actively apply the safe-sharing and support skills covered in training, and both situations were managed effectively. As Mettle is a social enterprise supporting FDV survivors, staff with relevant professional training were available onsite if additional support was needed. We also maintained contact details for participants' case workers, although it was not necessary to engage these supports during the project.

Questions and Answers

Mettle Women - Mettle Together

7) What is the most important thing to do to include and involve women in your organisation or volunteer program? What creates a safe space for vulnerable women?

Creating a sense of safety, belonging, and choice is essential when working with vulnerable women. The group-based approach, with mentors and the Volunteer Coordinator present, helped participants feel supported while also reducing pressure on individual women.

Peer connection was one of the strongest elements of the project. Women felt understood because they were connecting with others who had shared similar experiences. The presence of mentors with lived experience created hope and demonstrated that positive change is possible.

Providing opportunities for participants to co-design activities, make choices about their involvement, and engage at their own pace helped build trust and confidence. A safe space is created when women feel respected, heard, free from judgement, and able to participate in ways that feel comfortable for them.