



Silver jubilee for invaluable mentor service

TOM HOOPER



In all good business communities there are the hidden gems – the quiet, low-profile people who just get on and help others. In Christchurch and nationwide, these qualities can be found at Business Mentors New Zealand.

For 25 years this group, made up of highly experienced business experts, has been helping a huge number of local businesses on a philanthropic basis.

These individuals provide their expert services free of charge and the parent organisation charges only a nominal fee to cover administration.

For the past 25 years the Canterbury branch of Business Mentors has operated via Canterbury Development Corporation (CDC) and currently they are co-located in our Cashel St offices.

CDC are strong advocates because of the experience and innate value that dedicated mentors provide to start-up and existing businesses throughout the region.

Mentors come from a variety of professions but they are all experienced business leaders in their own right. Their desire to give back to the community and share their wisdom is a fantastic asset to have access to.

Over those 25 years, an average of 25 mentor and business matches have been made every month, meaning some 7500 engagements with different organisations in that time.

Currently there are 338 active mentors working with businesses here in Canterbury, contributing a minimum of six hours of guidance for up to a year.

Using a conservative value of their time, this delivers in excess of \$270,000 of value to businesses each and every year.

Each mentor is dedicated to supporting the success and growth of small businesses through their knowledge and experience. They act as a critical friend to challenge ideas and concepts, support innovation and champion governance and process to meet

the unique needs of each individual business.

Business Mentors are also an integral part of the Regional Business Partners (RBP) programme which is operated in Canterbury in partnership between CDC and the Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce.

RBPs specifically match business clients with mentors who have the right experience and skill sets.

In the 2015/16 financial year, Canterbury had the highest net promoter score of any region (+68 per cent), due in no small part to the hard work of the mentors.

Despite the ever increasing nature of change globally, some challenges remain constant. It's hard to start a business, cashflow is always critical, it's always more difficult than you think it will be (and lonelier) and good

entrepreneurs do not always make good chief executives.

Using mentors as experienced, wise counsel can ensure mistakes are not repeated and can help small enterprises to avoid pitfalls while maximising growth opportunities.

Since its inception in 1991, Business Mentors New Zealand have supported more than 70,000 small and medium-sized enterprises nationwide.

Canterbury has been a significant contributor to this success due to the support of our mentors, demand from the region and the huge efforts of the regional

manager, Jill Tairaroa, who is also celebrating 25 years of service.

I see a bright future ahead for Business Mentors and look forward to the next 25 years.

■ Tom Hooper is chief executive of the Canterbury Development Corporation.

Starting a business is always more difficult than you think it will be (and lonelier).



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It can be a lonely road without the help of those who have been down that way before. PHOTO: ISTOCK