

Growing AOD team leaders and managers

Effective organisational leaders can positively influence other workers' satisfaction, professional growth, and dedication. Developing leaders via formal professional development opportunities was considered essential in [recent research](#). So, in 2023, NADA partnered with the Centre for Community Welfare Training (CCWT) to provide leaders and managers in NADA member services the opportunity to undertake the nationally recognised Diploma of Leadership and Management, with funding from the Ministry of Health, Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs.

Sharon Lee (NADA) spoke to emerging team leaders and managers who successfully applied for the course: David Chivers from the Community Restorative Centre, Aaron More from The Glen, Alexa Robles from WHOS New Beginnings, and Jenna Bottrell from Mission Australia.

NADA: What was your favourite takeaway from the Diploma of Leadership and Management course?

David: I've really enjoyed exploring the importance of coaching in leadership and the different styles of coaching. Learning about staying curious, and asking the right questions, rather than providing people with the answers. Some of the skills are transferable from frontline work with clients, like motivational skills, especially Motivational Interviewing.

Alexa: The course opened my eyes to how much is involved in management. It's not just about managing the day-to-day, but it's more about looking at a broader perspective, across your service and across your team.

Aaron: I've been speaking to my clinical supervisor a lot about developing emotional intelligence in a professional sense. So, emotional intelligence was the best part of the course for me. You know when you're at home, it's okay to slow down, put some music on, and say, 'I'll speak to you about that later. Can we come back to that?' But when you're in a high-pressure situation, it's a whole different ball game.

Jenna: I think my biggest takeaway was around communicating with influence, how to improve workplace communication, and diverse ways we can work with our teams.



Photo: Diploma of Leadership and Management candidates with course facilitator, Peter Watson (CCWT).

NADA: How did the course change your views on leadership and management?

Alexa: The course didn't change my views so much, but it provided me with the skillset to perform the role. Knowing that you need to have your eye on the big picture and what you see in front of you, is not always what's in front of you.

Jenna: I think it helped me, maybe as a leader, put a bit more focus on upskilling myself. When we become leaders, we become focused on developing our teams and training needs that they may have, and we leave ourselves to last. I think it reminded me about taking that time to work on your own skills. I've learned a lot of that over the years, but it was great being in a room full of other leaders from other organisations. You hear a lot of different perspectives, different lessons learned from them. So, learning the lessons of others.

David: It was fantastic to share knowledge with my peers, working on scenarios that are familiar to us all. Like, we might feel that we're confident in dealing with situations in our own workplace, but the course gave me the opportunity to hear about different scenarios and different approaches.

Aaron: Well, it didn't really change my views. Before starting this role, I thought it was going to be challenging, not in a negative sense, but it's something new for me, it's exciting. And the course is challenging in an educational sense, so it falls in line with the role. Peter Watson (course facilitator) acknowledges this.

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NADA: How will this course positively affect you or your team?

Jenna: The course reminded us of checking in with your team, and not just focusing on outcomes and outputs, in terms of quality improvement, but quality improvement in how we can be a better team. We're always giving our teams feedback, but what about feedback for us about how they feel we are as a leader? It's about ensuring that two-way feedback becomes a regular thing and more of a comfortable thing. So, like a culture, you know that open, honest, candid communication back and forth to one another.

Aaron: What I'm learning is already filtering through, particularly the emotional intelligence stuff. Many people have commented and said they've noticed I've slowed down and am thinking about things more. So, it's starting to play out already and affecting the team in a positive way.

David: The course reminded me about the importance of a clear sense of direction across all levels of the organisation. And how every team member should be involved in the creation of that, it should just be imposed top-down. There's been a lot of change with the team I manage over the last few years, and we've not had the chance to pause and reflect. So, I've booked a Team Day in February to review our operational plan. This is time to stop, re-examine our objectives and renew our team identity.

Alexa: Having a holistic view of the team, learning that people work in quite diverse ways, and being more aware that they have unique needs. Like, if you have a team member who's not performing, knowing there might be something going on for them. That and building my skills in project planning and performance appraisal; these are two areas that I didn't really have a lot to do with before.

NADA: What areas of leadership and management would you like to explore further or develop in?

Aaron: I'm looking forward to the lead difficult conversations module coming in a few months. Because in the residential rehab space, we have difficult conversations daily. The way I lead those difficult conversations has changed in the last few months, so building on emotional intelligence with the stuff we're going to learn is exciting.

David: Compassionate leadership and ensuring how to balance with performance management. I think it's often falsely assumed that you can't be a strong leader if you show compassion and empathy.

Jenna: I'd like to explore further and develop the servant leadership model. There's a lot of diverse ways that people take servant leadership, but I think it is about being that flexible leader, leading with empathy, really listening and being there to serve our teams. It focuses on building a thriving team rather than focusing on those KPIs and things like that. That will come if you lead with empathy, tailoring to your team's needs and your individual staff member's needs.

Alexa: I think I would still like to do a bit more work on performance appraisal and developing work plans.

NADA: What would you like to tell someone who is keen to move into a leadership role?

Jenna: If you are moving into a leadership role for the first time, it is important to always be true to yourself, to be a collaborative leader and not stop learning. Your goal should always be to create more leaders. You should never be the strongest in the team forever. You should want to create a team of leaders. Be honest with your team and build genuine trust.

But also, don't forget that it's okay to be vulnerable. I think a lot of people sometimes feel the pressure as a leader to know the answer. You can be vulnerable and promote people to be vulnerable within your team because it promotes open and honest conversations and that's where the real strength is.

David: Mistakes are inevitable, and these are opportunities to learn and grow. Don't be afraid to ask for help and set time aside for reflection. Model self-care—prioritise taking care of yourself and remember that there's so much that's outside of your control. You can be a mentor, as well as regularly reviewing progress and setting clear expectations.

Alexa: It's important to understand all aspects of where you're working. So, if you are set on a leadership role, then perhaps take a sideways move so that you can get across that part. And put up your hand and say, 'Well, I'll step into that role for a bit.' And then get across how that works. So, you have a picture of how all the pieces fit together.

The only other thing that I would suggest is to find a mentor. It doesn't need to be your direct line manager, but somebody in the service who you have seen work with people, and you like their approach or their leadership skills. Get advice, be open to feedback, open to reflecting on that and have accountability. You're going to make mistakes, we're only human.

Aaron: Go for it!