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# Music Industry Mentoring: An Evaluation of the FReeZACentral Program

Theo Papadopoulos  
*Victoria University*  
Rachel Crossthwaite  
*Victoria University*

*Editor's note: The following is an assessment of the FReeZACentral Program first described to MEIEA Journal readers in the article "Community-Based Education and Training: Creating Pathways into the Music Industry for Youth" by Peter Chellew and Theo Papadopoulos published in the 2004 issue of the Journal.*

## 1. Introduction

FReeZACentral is a Victorian Government [Australia] initiative that provides a structured approach to youth training, aiming to support and encourage young people through a combination of intensive workshops, industry mentoring, and experiential learning, while creating pathways to employment and training in the music industry. The program is delivered by a consortium comprised of industry, university, and not-for-profit entities.

The consortium brings together Australia's foremost independent commercial music industry entity, the Mushroom Group of Companies (through its marketing and development arm Mushroom Marketing); not-for-profit agency The Push, Inc., a leader in providing youth-focused and -managed music events; Victoria University, a dual sector institution and leader in educational pathways that provides music industry education and pathways from certificate to degree level; and the Victorian Council of YMCAs, providing a presence for FReeZACentral in urban and regional communities through their network of YMCA facilities in 120 communities across the state of Victoria. This consortium is built on a common interest in supporting young people to explore pathways to education and employment in Victoria's thriving music and related industries.

The program has three interconnected component stages:

- skills development, delivered through a program of intensive workshops;
- exposure to the music industry, delivered through an industry mentoring program and master classes; and
- participation in event organization and management, delivered through a series of music and cultural events conducted as a tour across the state.

This paper focuses on the industry mentoring program component and the collaboration between industry, academia, and the not-for-profit sector in delivering an innovative training program. The music industry mentoring program is a vital component of the FReeZACentral program and has potential to identify and develop the next generation of music industry professionals. In addition to nurturing new talent, the program provides the opportunity for a wide range of participating industry practitioners to identify young talent suitable for ongoing employment, delivering a vital outcome of the program: vocational pathways. Moreover, it is envisaged that numerous participants will gain the confidence and encouragement to pursue more formal educational in both the TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and Higher Education sectors. Indeed, over sixty per cent of mentoring program graduates have advised that they are subsequently employed in a music industry related business, or are pursuing further education in a music industry related course. As such, it is expected that the research presented herein will be of significant interest to both music industry educators and music industry professionals interested in the opportunities a program such as FReeZACentral may present to their organizations.

This paper provides an evaluation of the music industry mentoring component of the FReeZACentral program and details the achievement of a range of program outcomes as measured against predetermined targets. The paper is organized as follows: Section two provides an overview of the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program and the prescribed key performance indicators (KPI), evaluation methodology, and mentoree selection process. Section three presents results of the summative evaluation, while Section four outlines key findings and program outcomes. Section five concludes with a discussion of recommendations for improvement.

## 2. FReeZACentral Mentoring Program Overview

Of the 374 youth attending the 2004 FReeZACentral workshops, fifty were selected for the mentoring program. In addition to individual performance in the workshops stage, and their subsequent expression of interest, participants selected for the mentoring program have demonstrated their interest in developing a career in the music industry through involvement in FReeZA committees, other training projects, work experience, or through their own music practice. Mentorees were selected against a set of objective criteria as documented in *Evaluation of the FReeZACentral Mentoring* (2005).

Mentorees were individually matched with mentors. In addition to having substantive qualifications and expertise, mentors were selected for their willingness and ability to support young people to plan and deliver each leg of the FReeZACentral tour and to assist them in developing skills in their areas of interest. A mentor induction program, conducted by Victoria University, ensured that mentors were clear about their individual responsibilities in dealing with young people and that they were prepared to act as positive role models in a non-judgmental and supportive manner.

In addition to individually matched mentors, mentorees had additional mentoring opportunities in the planning and delivery stages of the FReeZACentral Tour. Music Industry personnel working on each leg of the tour had the responsibility of mentoring FReeZACentral participants working in project teams on specific tour-related tasks. This ensured that practical, experiential learning activities were built into the planning and operation of each music showcase. Project teams were formed around participants' interests and the four key learning areas: technical support, performance, event management and marketing, and publicity and promotion. Each project team worked on one element of organizing and delivering a music event under the guidance of industry mentors and event management staff.

The FReeZACentral Mentor Program was fully funded by the Department for Victorian Communities, which established a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) that formed part of the contractual obligation and assisted in structuring the program's performance review. KPIs for the mentoring program are:

- A minimum of five streams with ten participants in each stream;

- eighty percent of participants complete a FReeZACentral Tour project and through the process gain meaningful music industry experience in a large-scale production;
- eighty percent of participants derive a sense of friendship with a significant adult; and
- sixty percent of participants develop a vocational pathway in the music industry.

The mentoring program evaluation has been facilitated by the collection of data on the experiences of mentorees and mentors and the encouragement of reflection on this data by both groups of participants. The feedback mechanisms employed include:

- analysis of mentoree and mentor recruitment strategies;
- analysis of mentoring program evaluation questionnaire responses;
- reflective evaluation by mentors; and
- reflective evaluation by youth participants (mentoree focus group).

The inclusion of similar questions in the mentor and mentoree evaluation instruments facilitates a comparative quantitative assessment of mentoree attributes and performance.

### 3. Mentoring Program Evaluation

#### Mentoree Perception of Qualitative Outcomes

In this section we explore a range of qualitative measures of the mentoring program drawn from a survey of mentoring program participants. Each mentoree was asked to complete a questionnaire (*Participant Evaluation of FReeZACentral Mentoring Program*) that explored participant perception of the quality and effectiveness of various aspects of the program. The evaluation tool comprised four elements: measuring the quantum of hours engaged with a mentor; gauging participants' satisfaction with the level of support received from mentors; measuring the impact of the mentoring program on participant perceptions of their readiness to pursue careers in the music industry; and lastly, general feedback on program strengths, weaknesses, and educational or vocational outcomes. This last

element took the form of written feedback on open-ended questions that allowed participants to communicate issues important to their personal experiences. To further explore key themes and issues identified in these written responses, a mentoree focus group was conducted.

Mentoree perceptions of the quality of a range of mentoring program components and activities are presented in Table 1, which presents the mean rating for each qualitative aspect investigated. The mean rating is calcu-

Activity	Mean Rating
My personal mentor demonstrated expertise and current knowledge of the music industry.	4.5
I have received meaningful feedback about my career-planning strategies from my personal mentor.	3.8
My personal mentor was accessible and open to my questions.	4.0
My personal mentor consistently anticipated my needs.	3.5
I was satisfied with the match made with my personal mentor.	4.2
My personal commitment to the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program ensured I got maximum benefits from the opportunities available to me.	4.0
The FReeZACentral Mentoring Program has helped me move toward my educational and professional goals.	4.1
I am very satisfied with the level of support I received in the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program.	4.2
I developed a strong positive relationship with at least one FReeZACentral staff member engaged in the Mentoring Program.	4.6
The FReeZACentral Mentoring Program included activities that were well structured, with clear goals or outcomes established for each session.	3.3
As part of your mentoring activities, did you establish clear goals and move towards them throughout the program?	3.6
The amount of contact time with FReeZACentral mentoring staff was adequate.	3.9

Table 1. Mentoree rating of mentoring program components.

lated on the basis of ratings of 1 for *Strongly Disagree* through to 5 for *Strongly Agree*.

Importantly, 95.7% of participants developed a strong positive relationship with at least one FReeZACentral staff member, recording a mean score of 4.6. These outcomes demonstrate an effective mentor selection and matching process and the achievement of considerable progress towards assisting mentorees move towards their educational and vocational goals.

International benchmarking of mentoring programs suggests that the incorporation of well-structured mentoring sessions, including the establishment of clear goals and outcomes, is a strong indicator of program efficacy (Rhodes, 2004). This element of the mentoring program received a mean score of 3.3, suggesting that individual mentoring sessions could be better structured, and/or that session goals or outcomes could be better communicated.

The need to improve structure and/or communication is illustrated by the following: about 65% of participants indicated that they had established clear goals with their mentors and moved towards these throughout the program. A mean score of 3.6 for this element would suggest that this is an area requiring further review to improve outcomes for mentorees, and is suggestive of the need for more structured activities with clearly defined short-term and long-term goals. This is supported by feedback obtained in the mentoree focus group discussions. Likewise, mentor anticipation of participant needs received a mean score of 3.5, suggesting that these elements of mentor training and pedagogy could be further explored in the induction program. Focus group discussions revealed a divergence of opinion on the role of the mentor, this divergence no doubt feeds into expectations of the nature of engagement and program outcomes. The information session for mentorees may need to emphasize the specific mentoring model being used so that expectations are realistic.

## Mentor Evaluation

All thirteen personal mentors participating in the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program were given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences and perceptions of the program by completing the *Mentor Evaluation of the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program Questionnaire*. These responses were further explored by follow-up telephone interviews. As per the mentoree evaluation, mentors were asked to rate a number of

activities on a scale of 1 to 5. The success of the program in identifying the next generation of music industry professionals is evident with the vast majority of mentors indicating that they had identified a mentoree they would consider employing, recording a mean score of 4.2 for this element. This indeed can be considered a major success of the program. Importantly, mentors described their participation in the mentoring program as a positive experience, recording a mean response of 4.0, and all respondents advised that they would recommend participation in the mentoring program to a colleague. Table 2 presents selected elements of this evaluation.

Activity	Mean Rating
The Mentoring Program was well structured, with clear activities and goals established for each session.	3.6
Did you and your mentorees establish clear goals and move towards these throughout the program?	3.8
The personal commitment of the mentorees ensured they received maximum benefits from the opportunities available in the Mentoring Program.	3.0
Mentorees demonstrated a high level of music industry and general business knowledge.	3.2
I was satisfied with the match made with my mentorees.	4.4
I believe the frequency and amount of contact time with mentorees was sufficient to meet program goals.	3.4
I identified personal experiences shared by my mentorees.	3.6
I identified mentorees with the requisite ability, knowledge and enthusiasm to pursue a career in the music industry	4.0
I identified mentorees that (assuming that there was a job opening) I would consider employing.	4.2
I would describe the Mentoring Program as a positive experience.	4.0
I developed a strong positive relationship with my mentorees.	3.6
I received adequate support from FReeZACentral personnel to facilitate my role as mentor.	4.6

Table 2. Mentors' qualitative feedback on the mentoring program.



Mentor responses reflect a view that increased contact time between personal mentors and mentorees was necessary, with a mean score of 3.4 for this activity. This relatively low rating could be explained by the relatively low average contact hours of 7.7 experienced with personal mentors. Further exploration of this issue during telephone interviews revealed that the majority of mentors believed that the most suitable session duration and frequency was one hour every other week. It is also noteworthy that both mentors and mentorees identified that the season in which the program is run should be moved to a less busy period for music industry professionals, in order to minimize clashes with competing work-related commitments and the holiday season.

### Mentoree Focus Group

The mentoree focus group provided an opportunity to further explore the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities identified in responses to the mentoree evaluation questionnaire. The two-hour session involved five mentorees, with each of the four streams represented. The results of these discussions are presented in the mentoring program report and the key findings documented therein are presented below. The key questions presented to the group were:

- What was the most important aspect of the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program with regards to your personal development?
- Were you satisfied with the number of hours spent with your personal mentor and other key personnel?
- Did you come up against any problems during the program? Was the resolution process suitable and timely?
- Was the program structure adequate for mentoree needs?
- What would be your advice as to the best time of year to run the program?
- If you were responsible for designing next year's program, name one key aspect you would keep, and suggest one element of change?

The focus group discussions confirmed the overall satisfaction with the program as evidenced by the questionnaire results. The group agreed unanimously that a major strength of the program was the ability to form

music industry networks. These networks included both peer group networks and those formed with industry professionals via the mentoring program. It was noted that with initiative, mentorees were able to form contacts with professionals other than their assigned personal mentor. Involvement in the tour event was also identified as a major strength, as it allowed participants to develop skills in a practical context. Again, the importance of personal initiative was emphasized—as was the benefit of the steep learning curve associated with “jumping in the deep end,” namely, being embedded into the production and delivery of a large-scale event.

#### 4. Program Outcomes and Key Findings

Inspecting Table 3 (which presents a summary of performance targets and outcomes), it is evident that the consortium was successful in achieving all but one of the key performance targets.

Performance Targets	Achieved : Outcome
A minimum of five streams with ten participants in each stream.	Yes
80% of participants complete a FReeZACentral Tour project and through the process gain meaningful music industry experience in a large-scale production.	Yes: 94% Completion Rate No: 70% indicated that they gained meaningful music industry experience in a large-scale production.
80% of participants derive a sense of friendship with a significant adult.	Yes: 95.7%
60% of participants develop a vocational pathway in the music industry.	Yes: 65.2%
Participant gains including how qualitative outcomes were delivered and measured.	Yes

Table 3. Mentoring program performance targets and outcomes.

The summative evaluation results are presented in summary form:

- Duration of contact surpassed the minimum requirement of ten hours. Each mentoree experienced an average of 59 contact hours with his or her mentor(s). Over half of this time, 36.8 hours, took the form of one-on-one mentoring. This extension of duration and frequency of contact implies stronger relationships and program effectiveness. International studies suggest that duration may be the single best indicator of youth mentor program effectiveness and impact.<sup>1</sup>
- The mentor–mentoree relationship quality, another indicator of program impact, was found to be very strong with both groups rating this element very highly. 95.7% of FReeZACentral mentorees indicated that they developed strong positive relationships with a mentor, recording a mean score of 4.6 out of 5. This type of emotional closeness is often used as a benchmark of mentor program success. As a predictor of positive outcomes, this element augurs well for the achievement of longer-term program impact.
- The matching process proved successful with 78.3% of mentorees satisfied with their mentor matches, recording a mean score of 4.2. This success was validated by mentors recording a mean score of 4.4.
- Effective and responsive support systems have been established by FReeZACentral personnel. Both mentors and mentorees were very satisfied with the level of support provided by FReeZACentral personnel, recording mean scores of 4.6 and 4.2 respectively.
- The FReeZACentral Tour has improved participant skills and networks, with each element receiving a mean score of 4. An impressive 94% of mentorees completed the tour component of the FReeZACentral program, with 70% indicating that the tour provided a meaningful music industry experience in a large-scale production (recording a mean score of 3.8). This latter qualitative outcome falls short of our 80% target and reflects the divergent experi-

ences of mentorees engaged in smaller, as compared to, larger events (such as PushOver).<sup>2</sup>

- International benchmarking of youth mentor programs suggests that the incorporation of well-structured mentoring sessions, including the establishment of clear goals and outcomes, is a strong indicator of program efficacy. This element of the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program received a mean score of 3.3, suggesting that individual mentoring sessions could be better structured, and/or that session goals or outcomes could be better communicated. Mentoree focus group discussions confirm participant support for the inclusion of more structured activities.
- The success of the program in identifying the next generation of music industry professionals is evident with the vast majority of mentors indicating that they had identified mentorees they would consider employing, recording a mean score of 4.2.
- The program has assisted in the development of educational and vocational pathways with 65.2% of mentorees having commenced employment or formal education within the music industry, following completion of the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program.
- The program has proved to be a positive experience for mentors and mentorees alike. All mentors who participated in the evaluation process advised that they would recommend the program to a colleague. Mentors described the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program as a positive experience, recording a mean score of 4.0.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation documented herein forms one part of the program's continual improvement process, and a number of recommendations have been made to the FReeZACentral Steering Committee and FReeZACentral Management Committee for their consideration. Key recommendations for the possible amendment to the program for its second year of operation are:

- The provision of additional resources for mentors and mentorees outlining their respective roles and responsibilities. This could be achieved by providing a link on the FReeZACentral website to (selected) informative mentoring resources freely available on-line.
- Establish a Virtual FReeZACentral Community to better disseminate and share information and resources and further develop networking opportunities.
- Develop a range of structured activities for mentorees to selectively undertake in consultation with their mentors. These activities should be purposeful and have a connection to the agreed outcomes negotiated in the *Mentor Matching Agreement* and/or the specific pre-production elements of the FReeZACentral Tour.
- Provide opportunities for mentorees to participate in at least one of the larger events (such as PushOver), over and above participation in one of the relatively smaller tour legs. Explore the proposition of bringing all mentor streams together on a single event, held as a celebration and grand finale for the program.
- Develop collaborative mentor team activities and joint stream activities to facilitate the further development of teamwork, bonding, and professional networking. Intra- and Inter-stream and team activities would make a significant contribution to a sense of FReeZACentral Community, as would the strategic positioning of social activities at the beginning, middle, and end of the program.
- Expand the core training areas and mentor program streams to incorporate other key music industry sectors and occupations that reflect the diversity of participating youth interests, as well as preparing youth for a broader range of music-related vocations.
- Develop a more structured approach to the frequency and duration of contact with personal mentors and mentorees, while allowing for mentoree-initiated contact outside of designated times.
- Convene a committee of FReeZACentral staff, mentors, and mentorees to evaluate the timing of each

FReeZACentral component stage in the first year, and to develop a schedule for the second (and subsequent) year(s) that optimizes availability of all program participants by minimizing clashes with other activities and commitments.

The Mentoring Program outcomes documented herein demonstrate that the program has been successful in achieving short-term targets and outcomes. Importantly, using benchmarks of longer-term program impact, namely duration and emotional closeness, we are confident that the FReeZACentral Program has provided an important foundation for the development of rewarding music industry careers for youth. Notwithstanding, this paper identifies a number of areas in need of refinement and improvement, and will inform an action plan to be implemented by the FReeZACentral Management Committee for the second year of the program.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Jean Rhodes, *Gauging the Effectiveness of Youth Mentoring* (researched for Mentoring.Org, 2004) <[www.mentoring.org/program\\_staff/evaluation/program\\_evaluation.php](http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/evaluation/program_evaluation.php)>.
- <sup>2</sup> PushOver is an annual (drug and alcohol free) youth music event that features young Australian bands. Staged at the Lunar Park theme park in Melbourne, the event sold out in 2005 with over 3,000 tickets sold.

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- Papadopoulos, Theo and Rachel Crossthwaite. *Evaluation of the FReeZACentral Mentoring Program*. Victoria, Australia: Report Prepared for the Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities, Victoria State Government, 2005.
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**THEO PAPADOPOULOS** is a member of the Institute of Community Engagement and Policy Alternatives and Program Director of Bachelor of Business–Music Industry at Victoria University, Australia. Papadopoulos is an experienced educator and author of numerous training materials, books, and research articles. He is a member of the FReeZACentral Management Committee and responsible for all program evaluation and reporting requirements to the funding body (Department for Victorian Communities, Australia).

**RACHEL CROSTHWAITE** is a Lecturer in the Bachelor of Business–Music Industry program at Victoria University, Australia. She is a member of the FReeZACentral Steering Committee, and in 2005 was responsible for coordinating the delivery of FReeZACentral workshops statewide. In addition to her academic role, Crossthwaite has worked in the Australian music industry in a number of capacities, most recently as a booking agent at Premier Artists and promoter’s assistant at the Frontier Touring Company.

All correspondence should be forwarded to the first-named author.

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Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association  
1900 Belmont Boulevard  
Nashville, TN 37212 U.S.A.  
office@meiea.org  
www.meiea.org

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