

Resolution's mentoring scheme aims to help younger practitioners deal with the stresses and strains of an emotionally demanding job

Sarah Green - National YRes chair, TLT LLP

The world that we practice in has changed significantly over the last 20 years. Gone are the days when you would send a (typewritten) letter and confidently not expect a response for another week. Now, many of us work paper-free, use digital dictation and send emails rather than letters. The speed at which we work has in turn increased and client expectations are higher than ever. Clients have our mobile numbers and expect an instant response to all forms of communication, at any time of day. The impact that has on our practice, and our workplace wellbeing, cannot be ignored. Add business development, marketing, social media and targets into the mix and you're looking at a pressure cooker, sometimes feeling like it's ready to explode.

I expect for many, like me, this has got easier to handle with time, confidence and experience. However, it's not uncommon at the start of your career to think that you have to take on the world, to prove yourself in a limited job pool, and stand out from the crowd in a world where competition is fierce.

Law, whatever your specialism, is a demanding vocation, but the stresses and pressures that come with being a family lawyer are entirely different to those you would find balancing a transactional caseload or a large corporate deal.

We get very little help, support or guidance at the outset to give us the skills to cope with these demands, and are somehow expected to muddle our way through and come out at the other end intact. Often, the support that is available is fairly generic, and not really all that helpful in dealing with the experiences we go through as family lawyers.

The expectation that we will just "suck it up" and get on with it is no longer acceptable. Barely a month goes by when I haven't heard of another junior family lawyer (legal executives, solicitors or, increasingly, barristers) who has quit the profession in search of another equally stimulating job without the same stress or pressure.

A personal low point for me was within my first couple of years of practice. A particularly demanding client regularly expected contact late into the evening. I thought this was to be expected as part of the job and I enjoyed the pressure, to an extent. However, as we got increasingly closer to a hearing, messages started arriving before 7am, followed by further messages demanding a response. Rock bottom was a missed call at 5.55am, followed by voicemails, emails and text messages within the next half an hour. It wasn't until I woke up in the middle of the night, thinking the client was sat on the end of my bed with a knife, that I realised that this was not healthy.

Resolution recently conducted a survey of members with up to 10 years' PQE, to ascertain how much of an issue wellbeing amongst our junior solicitors really is. The message was clear. Of those that responded, 65% felt there was not adequate enough support for family practitioners in the YRes network. Responses to the survey were honest and frank, and we

discovered several members had suffered from bullying in the workplace, mental health issues and breakdowns. Many had taken time off for stress, and sought help from a GP, counsellors and/or other sources. That's quite a lot for anyone to handle, let alone when you're first stepping out into the world of family law.

YRes was not prepared to leave this unaddressed. It's all too easy to sweep these issues under the carpet and hope they will resolve themselves. While many larger firms are recognising the need to provide better support for their lawyers, we recognise that our members work in a variety of practices, with differing support on offer. We don't want our members to miss out on help when they need it most.

As part of the Resolution 1-2-1 member initiative, we have set up a YRes mentoring scheme, so that there is support and guidance available for our YRes members at any time. We have specially trained family law mentors on hand to assist.

The scheme has been established to provide confidential mentoring to YRes members, who may want individual professional support for their day-to-day practice, or for their longer-term career, or learning and development goals.

Areas the mentoring scheme could assist with include (but are not limited to):

- personal or professional support and a listening ear;
- help with professional relationship issues;
- help with complex or complicated client issues;
- self-management;
- career direction;
- advice on making use of Resolution member resources (eg learning and development, use of Good Practice Guides and precedents); and
- help to find other sources of support.

Mental health and wellbeing is very much on the YRes agenda for the coming year, and we will be working hard to increase the support on offer to our junior members. If you feel that you would benefit from mentoring support, please contact 121@resolution.org.uk or the dedicated phone line – 0169 661222. All support is handled in the strictest confidence, and available free as part of membership.

If you work with a YRes member please make them aware of this service in case they need some additional support.

If you're struggling with something, don't suffer in silence be brave and take the first step to seeking some support. Those that have done so already haven't looked back.

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