



The Mentoring Effect:

Newcomer Youth



Mentor Canada

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Mentor Canada's Mapping the Mentoring Gap study, which surveyed over 2,800 young adults aged 18 to 30 across Canada, determined that young people who had access to mentorship while they were growing up were more likely to report positive outcomes related to their mental health, education, and careers as young adults compared to their peers who did not have access to a mentor.¹ These findings build other studies which have shown that supportive relationships with adults, such as mentoring relationships, play a critical role in fostering young people's positive development and building their resilience.²

Alarming, our study also found that far too many young people in Canada are not able to access mentorship when they most want and need it. Almost half of the 417 newcomer respondents we surveyed indicated that they did not have a single person they would consider a mentor in their life during their childhood or adolescence.

Among the 417 young adults surveyed who immigrated to Canada during their childhood or adolescence, 27% immigrated by the year 2000, 42% between 2001 and 2010, and 31% since 2011. More than three-quarters of newcomer respondents were racialized with about one-fifth identifying as being of East Asian descent, 16% South Asian, 12% Black, 9% Filipino, 8% Latinx, and 6% Arabic. Over 90% of newcomer respondents lived in urban areas and 10% in rural or remote areas. Half of the newcomer respondents were women, 48% were men, and 2% identified as gender diverse (e.g., non-binary, third gender). Just under 1 in 5 newcomer respondents identified as belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community and over one-third identified as persons with disabilities.

Mentoring relationships can provide positive childhood experiences and offset some of the adversity experienced by newcomer youth, considering that approximately one-third of newcomer respondents reported at least two adverse childhood experiences. Mentoring is an effective intervention to ease the settlement process of newcomers of all ages. Organizations serving newcomers youth across Canada frequently provide mentoring opportunities. However, critical gaps prevent far too many newcomer youth from reaping the benefits of mentoring.

¹ Our analysis determined that there was an association between having had a mentor and positive outcomes (correlation) but could not determine if having a mentor caused or led to these positive outcomes. See Church-Duplessis, V., Hackett, C. (2021). *The State of Mentoring: Mapping the Mentoring Gap*. Mentor Canada.

² Resnick, M. D., Harris, L. J., & Blum, R. W. (1993). The impact of caring and connectedness on adolescent health and well-being. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 29(Suppl. 1), S3-S9. Werner, E. E. & Smith, R. S. (1992) *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*. Cornell University Press.



Where do newcomer youth find mentors?

Just over half of newcomer respondents (55%) had at least one mentor at some point between the ages of 6 to 18. Most of those who had a mentor developed natural mentoring relationships with caring and supportive adults in their surroundings. A small number (approximately 16%) participated in a structured mentoring program and developed a relationship with a formal mentor. Of note, two out of five mentored newcomer respondents reported that their most meaningful mentoring relationship was with a mentor outside of Canada.

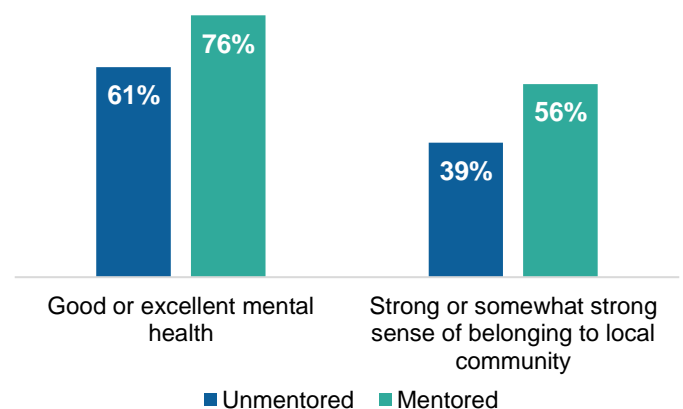
Schools and youth programs are important sources of mentors for newcomer youth. Close to one-quarter of newcomer respondents who were mentored reported that their most meaningful mentor was a teacher or member of school staff and 11% reported that a sports coach, scout or guide leader was their most important mentor. Communities also provide many mentors. Several mentored newcomer respondents reported that their most meaningful mentor was a family friend (13%) or an elder or auntie (9%).



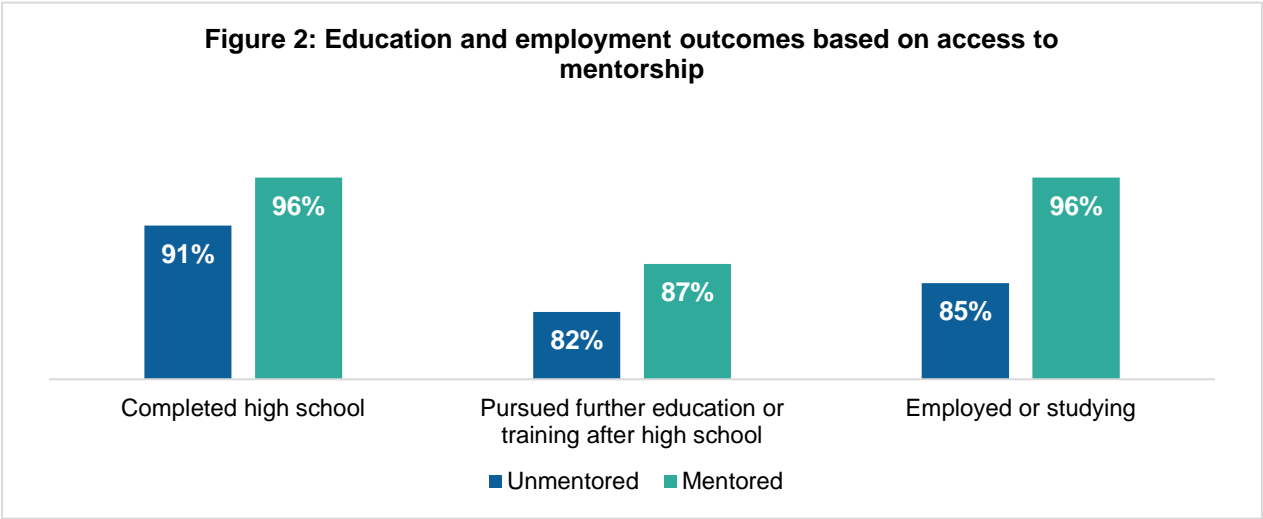
What is the mentoring effect for newcomer youth?

As young adults, newcomer respondents who were mentored growing up reported positive outcomes related to their mental health and belonging at higher rates than their peers who did not have access to mentorship (see figure 1). Mentors may be particularly effective at fostering a sense of belonging, a crucial contributing factor to newcomers' well-being. Indeed, our analysis of the overall responses provided by all 2,838 survey participants found that mentored respondents were over twice as likely to report a strong or somewhat strong sense of belonging to their local communities than unmentored respondents.

Figure 1: Well-being outcomes based on access to mentorship



Mentoring influences and supports newcomer youths’ education and career pathways. Mentored newcomers reported being employed or studying in higher proportions than their unmentored peers (see figure 2).



Mentors are uniquely positioned to tailor the support they provide based on the individual needs of their mentees. A closer look at how mentors supported newcomer adolescents highlights the versatility of mentoring.

Roughly 2 in 5 newcomer respondents indicated they had at least one person they consider a mentor in their life at some point between the ages of 12 to 18. Interestingly, many respondents who had experience with mentorship indicated having had more than one mentor. On average, respondents reported having between two and three mentors during their teen years.

Since mentored newcomer respondents were likely to have had more than one mentor, our analysis focused on their experience with the person they considered their most meaningful mentor. The responses newcomer youth provided clearly demonstrate that mentors can provide important support by joining and expanding a young person’s world.

Mentors helped mentees navigate interpersonal relationships. Half of newcomer respondents who were mentored during their teen years indicated that they talked about their relationships with their parents or caregivers with their most meaningful mentor and 44% discussed their relationships with their friends. Importantly, more than 2 in 5 respondents reported their most meaningful mentor helped them connect to their culture.

Mentors frequently expanded youths’ social worlds. More than one-third of respondents reported their most meaningful mentor helped them connect to services and supports. A similar proportion helped build community connections by participating in community events with their mentees. Mentors helped youth develop social skills: 62% reported their most meaningful mentor helped them develop their leadership skills and 60% helped them develop skills for building relationships. By building connections with culture and community, mentors foster young people’s sense of belonging and expand young people’s social worlds, important outcomes for newcomer youth.

Importantly, mentors fostered young people's emotional well-being and provided opportunities for respite. Indeed, nearly half of newcomer respondents indicated that one important way in which their mentors supported them was by spending time having fun together. Mentors exerted a significant influence over their mentees' development of a positive sense of self:

- 79% of mentored newcomers reported their most meaningful mentor influenced their confidence in their abilities;
- 72% reported their mentors influenced their hope and optimism for the future;
- 62% reported their mentors influenced their sense of pride and self-esteem.

By bolstering newcomer youths' self-confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness, and optimism, mentors helped build an important foundation for their mentees' psychological well-being and resilience.

A large percentage of newcomer respondents indicated their most meaningful mentors provided critical support to ease their transitions and settlement experience. For example, 36% of newcomer respondents who were mentored during their teen years reported their mentor helped them adapt to a new school and 29% to a new community. Close to one-third of respondents indicated their mentors helped them apply to post-secondary programs or trade schools. Over one-quarter of mentored newcomer respondents reported that their mentor helped them get their first job.

Mentors also exerted a significant influence over newcomer youths' life trajectories. Indeed, 58% of newcomer respondents reported their mentors helped them find out where they wanted to go in life and one-third reported their mentors helped shape their career aspirations. Many mentors helped newcomer youth acquire academic skills (47%), life skills such as cooking or budgeting (45%), and job-related skills (44%).



How does the mentoring gap impact newcomer youth?

Almost two-thirds of newcomer respondents did not have a single mentor during their adolescence. Moreover, over half of newcomer respondents recalled a time when they were growing up when they wanted a mentor but did not have access to one.

Approximately one-third of newcomer respondents reported barriers to accessing mentorship during their teen years. Among those who faced barriers accessing mentors, 58% indicated that they did not know how to find a mentor, half stated that they did not understand what mentoring is or its value, and 29% indicated that no mentoring programs were available. One in five newcomer respondents who encountered barriers indicated that their parents or caregivers were not interested in mentoring.

“So I think a big challenge is definitely being aware, especially if your parents, you know, don’t necessarily speak English or they’re not from Canada. There’s no way for them to even know certain things exist [unless] someone else tells them. [...] So, definitely figuring out ways to get messages across to first-generation immigrants. It’s a big way to help solve things.”

Interview Participant

How can we address the mentoring gap?

Mentor Canada's research clearly demonstrates that newcomer youth reap important benefits from mentorship. Early intervention to tackle the mentoring gap and enable more newcomer young people to access mentors in their communities and through mentoring programs is critical.

Multilingual public education and outreach campaigns to raise awareness about the value of both natural and formal mentoring relationships can begin to address cultural and linguistic barriers restricting newcomer youths' access to mentorship. Furthermore, the terms "mentor" or "mentoring" may not resonate with newcomer communities. Increasing awareness of the various forms mentoring takes and of the characteristics of mentors could help more young people identify and recruit mentors among the caring adults or older peers who offer support and guidance and who they can count on.

To tackle the mentoring gap, it is also essential to increase the number of caring adults who are willing and able to step up and mentor a young person. Fortunately, young adults who had access to mentorship growing up are keenly aware of the value of mentoring and committed to paying it forward. Indeed, two-thirds of newcomer respondents who had been mentored were interested in becoming mentors themselves in the future and over one-third of them had already served as a mentor.

Schools, settlement and community organizations, policymakers, and communities must work together to address the barriers impeding newcomer youths' access to mentoring opportunities to support their settlement and transition to adulthood.

Policymakers, schools, settlement and community organizations, and communities must work together to address the mentoring gap. Coordinated efforts will help ensure newcomer youth can count on caring and supportive relationships, including natural mentors in their communities and formal mentors in dedicated programs, to ease their settlement experiences and support their transition to adulthood.

About Mentor Canada

Mentor Canada is a national organization dedicated to convening, supporting, and building capacity, to strengthen the field and increase quality mentoring opportunities, especially for equity deserving youth across the country.

By working alongside governments, the private sector, schools, funders, employers and community organizations at local, provincial, and national levels, Mentor Canada is building and strengthening the field to accelerate and scale world-class mentoring in Canada.

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