



# Raising the Profile Report

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## BACKGROUND

In its role as a leader and advocate for youth mentoring in Canada, the newly-created MENTOR Canada is undertaking exploratory research to better understand Canada’s current state of youth mentoring. Exploring the experiences of both mentors and mentees, as well as the mentoring program landscape in Canada, this study is a critical piece of foundational work to inform quality improvement and decision-making around future directions for the field. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the practice and delivery of youth mentoring programs and services across communities in Canada.

MENTOR Canada was launched in 2019 with funding from the Government of Canada<sup>1</sup> and BMO Financial Group. MENTOR Canada is a coalition between the Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP), the Ontario Mentoring Coalition (OMC), and Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada (BBBSC) and is affiliated with a network of academic experts in the field of positive youth development and mentoring in Canada and the United States. The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is the research partner contracted to carry out the research project.

This research project – *Understanding the State of Mentoring in Canada* – represents a collective effort across key mentoring organizations and stakeholders to replicate similar survey studies from the US through an exploratory study comprised of three main streams: **Mapping the Gap**; **Capturing the Landscape**; and **Raising the Profile of Mentoring** in Canada.

**Mapping the Gap** — Building on a similar study in the US from MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, this stream of research aims to understand access to and experiences of mentoring from the perspectives of youth 18-30 in Canada. With the goal of reflecting the diversity of perspectives and youth in Canada, this stream includes a nationally representative survey panel and extensive survey outreach within the mentoring network to reach underrepresented youth, as well as in-depth qualitative interviews with youth.

**Capturing the Landscape** — Through a national survey of mentoring service providers, this stream of research explores the mentoring program landscape in Canada. Building on similar work undertaken in the US, this stream aims to explore the prevalence, scope, structure, services, strengths and challenges of mentoring programs and services across Canada. This stream also serves as a key mechanism for MENTOR Canada to grow the mentoring movement in Canada and build the national network by identifying and engaging with many organizations delivering mentoring or near-mentoring programs and/or services.

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<sup>1</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada

**Raising the Profile of Mentoring** – Through a nationally representative survey of adults living in Canada, as well as in-depth qualitative interviews with current mentors, this stream of research increases our understanding of adults’ attitudes towards mentoring and youth needs in Canada. The objectives are to explore the interest and capacity of adults in Canada to become mentors as well as the barriers and facilitators to mentoring from the perspectives of current and former mentors, and those who have never been a mentor. The ultimate aim is to use this information to help grow the number of mentors across Canada.

Findings from all research streams will provide critical information for MENTOR Canada related to quality improvement of mentoring programs and decision-making, whether for the assessment of existing mentoring practices and alignment with standards of practice already shown effective in the US research and practitioner-informed literature, or supporting improvement and innovation of youth mentoring service delivery in communities across Canada. This study will guide the efforts of MENTOR Canada as it sets out to attract new partners, advocate for increased investment, support existing programs and services, and develop a long-term strategy to enhance youth mentoring in Canada.

We report here on research activities related to **Raising the Profile**. This work was guided by the following stream-specific research questions:

- What are adults’ motivations, barriers, willingness and attitudes about mentoring young people and what are their thoughts and opinions about the role that mentoring plays in Canada’s future?
- How might engagement in mentoring look differently across demographic groups, in particular those groups that may be underrepresented within formal mentoring programs, such as men, Indigenous, rural and remote, and racialized individuals?
- What perceptions and opinions do adults in Canada hold about mentoring and youth generally, including how these predict engagement in the mentoring movement?

## METHODS

### Survey administration and analysis

The survey was administered between September and November 2020 to adults living in Canada above 18 years of age. Respondents were sampled to match the age and gender profile across all provinces of the Canadian census. In addition, oversampling was used to reach a greater number of people with Indigenous identity. Due to the overall similarity with the Canadian census sample, results were not weighted.

Primarily descriptive statistics were employed to capture the distribution of responses. Results were also split according to whether respondents indicated they were currently serving as mentors or had mentored young people in the past (current or past mentors). Additionally, all respondents shared their likelihood of mentoring a young person within the next five years on a 10-point scale. Respondents who indicated a 6 out of 10 or higher (somewhat likely to extremely likely) were coded as being ‘likely to mentor’. Chi-squared tests were used to compare the distribution of both of these key indicators (i.e. current/ past



mentors and likelihood of mentoring in the next 5 years) with a range of demographic and identity characteristics. Statistical significance from these tests was assessed at the 95 per cent level ( $p < 0.05$ ). For all other comparisons, differences between proportions were reviewed, but these differences may not necessarily be statistically significant.

## Qualitative interviews and analysis

We sought to recruit adults (18 years of age and older) with previous experience either working or volunteering as a mentor for youth in a Canadian setting. SRDC distributed an email to contacts who had previously participated in the national survey of service providers to request their assistance in identifying mentors interested in participating in a research interview. MENTOR Canada also assisted with recruitment – specifically for the Francophone interviews – by connecting with contacts in its existing network. Contacts were asked to distribute a recruitment poster through email. Mentors who received the poster were invited to contact an SRDC researcher directly for further information. When contacted by interested participants, SRDC researchers distributed an information letter and coordinated through email to schedule an interview.

Interviews were conducted using Zoom videoconferencing software. Sharing video was optional. Interviews were roughly 45 minutes in length and were recorded. Researchers followed a semi-structured interview guide, which was continually refined based on insights gathered during the initial interviews. A total of 16 interviews were conducted in English and 2 in French. Participants received a \$25 gift card from a retailer of choice (either online or sent through mail) as an honorarium.

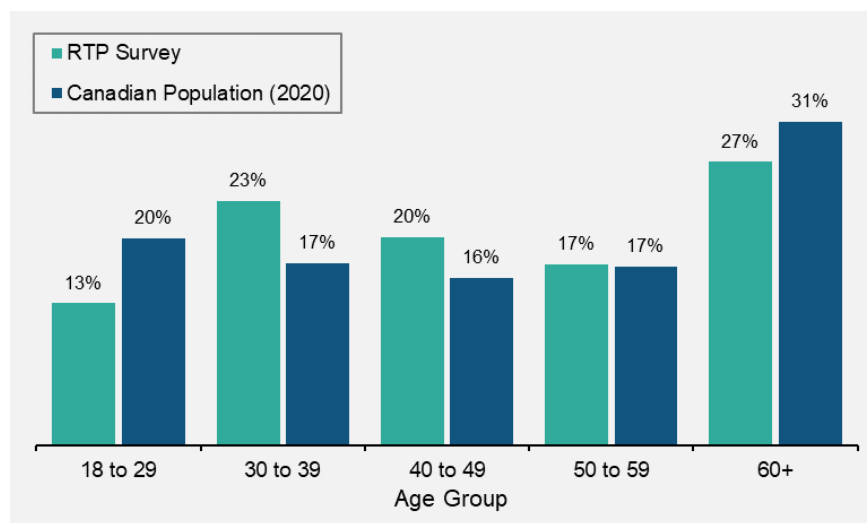
Analysis of qualitative data was aligned with a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) based in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory allows themes to emerge inductively, grounded in data that is systematically collected and analyzed. An SRDC researcher created a summary table to condense raw data according to a series of overarching themes, which were focused according to the pre-established research objectives. The table included themes and subthemes, descriptions, and illustrative quotes from participants. The researcher then used this summary table as the basis for creating a written narrative account of the qualitative findings, presented here in this report. The summary table is included in Appendix A.

# RESULTS

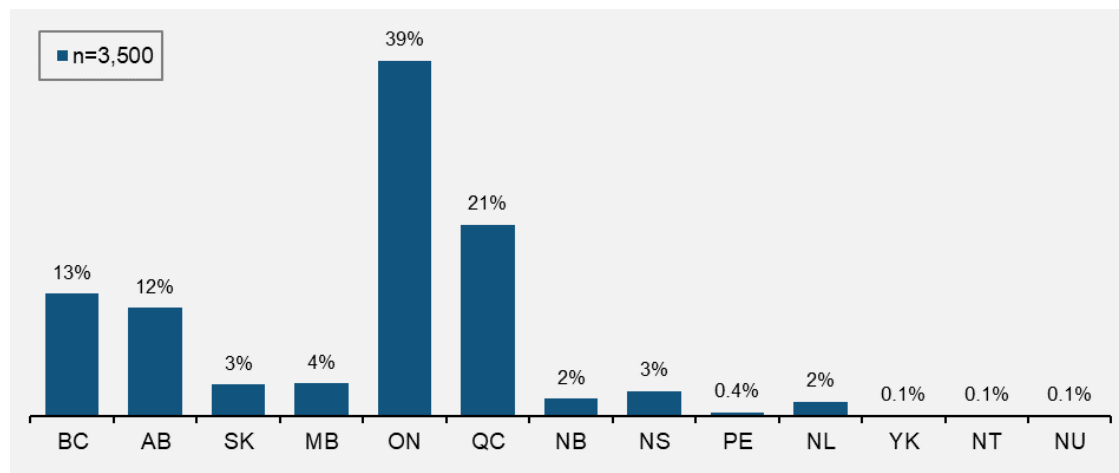
## Survey respondents' profile

3,500 people across the country completed the survey. The mean age of respondents was 47.7 (median 46) years. While the sample had a higher average age compared to the overall national population, the age distribution of the sample was similar to the Canadian population of adults (ages 18 and older). Respondents also came from across Canada, including some responses (n=9) from the North. See Figures 1 & 2.

**Figure 1** Age distribution of survey respondents compared to Canadian population.



**Figure 2** Distribution of survey respondents from across Canadian provinces.



218 (6.2 per cent) of respondents reported having an Indigenous identity. Moreover, 544 (15.5 per cent) of respondents indicated they had a diverse ethnocultural identity, the most common being Chinese (5.9 per cent of the total sample), South Asian (2.9 per cent), and Black (2.2 per cent). A total of 568 (16.2 per cent) of respondents came from an immigrant background, but of these, only 110 (3.3 per cent of the total sample) were recent immigrants who came to Canada within the last 10 years. Complete demographic and identity characteristics of survey respondents are shown in **Table 1**.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1**      **Demographic and identity characteristics of respondents.** ‘Prefer not to say’ or ‘unsure’ responses are not shown but were used to calculate percentages of total (n = 3,500).

Characteristic	No.	%	Characteristic	No.	%
<b>Age</b>			<b>In care</b>		
18 to 29	469	13.4%	Spent any time before age 18, in care of govt. services	148	4.2%
30 to 39	808	23.1%	<b>Relationship status</b>		
40 to 49	688	19.7%	Never legally married	1,084	31.0%
50 to 59	599	17.1%	Legally married	1,545	44.1%
60+	936	26.7%	Separated, but legally married	80	2.3%
<b>Gender Identity</b>			Divorced	248	7.1%
Woman	1,806	51.6%	Widowed	128	3.7%
Man	1,648	47.1%	Common-law partner	415	11.9%
Non-binary	20	0.6%	<b>Annual Household Income</b>		
Indigenous or other cultural gender minority	6	0.2%	Less than \$25,000	325	9.3%
<b>Indigenous Identity</b>			\$25,000 to less than \$35,000	247	7.1%
First Nations, Métis, or Inuk (Inuit)	218	6.2%	\$35,000 to less than \$50,000	359	10.3%
<b>Ethnocultural Identity</b>			\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	585	16.7%
South Asian	100	2.9%	\$75,000 to less than \$100,000	583	16.7%
Chinese	205	5.9%	\$100,000 to less than \$125,000	385	11.0%

<sup>2</sup> Note that recruitment parameters prioritized for this sample were limited to age, geographic location, and Indigenous identity. Our final sample has fewer respondents who identify as having a diverse ethnocultural identity or as being an immigrant, compared to national census data. We suspect this is because newcomers may be harder to reach for recruitment. This is a limitation of our study.



Characteristic	No.	%	Characteristic	No.	%
Black	77	2.2%	\$125,000 to less than \$150,000	260	7.4%
Filipino	36	1.0%	\$150,000 or more	306	8.7%
Latin American	33	0.9%	<b>Education</b>		
Arab	29	0.8%	Completed high school	3,348	95.7%
Southeast Asian	35	1.0%	Pursued further education	2,946	88.0%
West Asian	14	0.4%	<b>Current employment</b>		
Korean	17	0.5%	Full time study in education	196	5.6%
Japanese	23	0.7%	Part-time study in education	97	2.8%
White	2,640	75.4%	Part-time work	426	12.2%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>			Full-time work	1,532	43.8%
Heterosexual	3,073	90.8%	Retired	822	23.5%
LGBTQ2S+	311	9.2%	Not employed outside the home	145	4.1%
<b>Transgender, trans, or within the trans umbrella?</b>			Unemployed - looking for work	176	5.0%
Yes	55	1.6%	Unemployed – not looking for work	130	3.7%
<b>Immigrant status</b>			<b>Volunteering activities in last 12 months</b>		
Recent immigrant (10 years or less)	114	3.3%	Volunteering my time	1,026	29.3%
Immigrant to Canada (within any time period)	568	16.2%	Monetary support	1,416	40.5%
<b>Disability status</b>			Donation of materials/ supplies/ other items	855	24.4%
Health condition affecting functional ability	1,197	34.2%	No volunteering in the past 12 months	1,485	42.4%
Diagnosis for disability or disorder	798	22.8%			

## Interview participants' profile

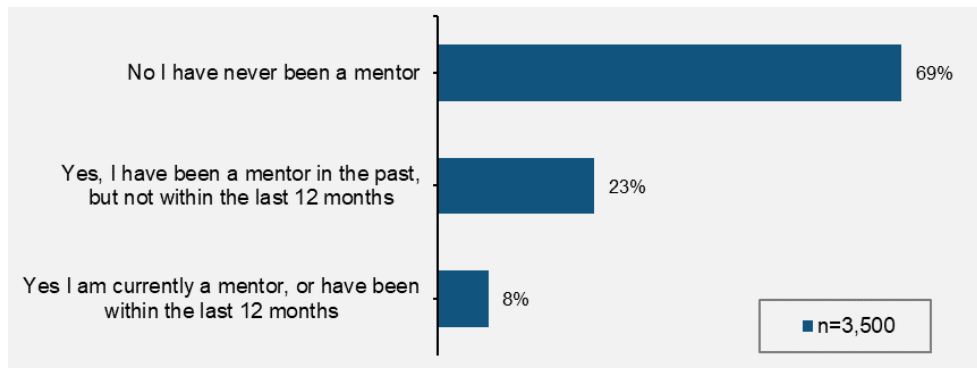
In total, we interviewed eighteen mentors – five men and thirteen women. Mentors were of diverse ages and backgrounds. Several mentors were young adults currently completing post-secondary programs or early in their careers; several other mentors were retirees or self-described 'empty nesters'. Most participants were living in urban areas. Two participants were living in rural areas and had experience mentoring in this context. Two participants were newcomers to Canada. Interview participants were not specifically asked about their cultural, ethnic, or religious identities, but several participants did describe these aspects of their identity over the course of the interview. Two participants were Indigenous, one participant was Muslim, and one participant self-identified as a person of colour. One participant indicated that she had a chronic health condition and another participant indicated that she had severe social anxiety and PTSD.

The mentors we interviewed had experiences providing mentoring in the following types of contexts and settings: faith-based mentoring; in-school mentoring; community-based mentoring; online e-mentoring; mentoring for newcomer families; and mentoring through Indigenous-specific organizations and programs. Most participants had experience mentoring in a formal, structured program offered through a community-based agency. However, two participants specifically had experience both as formal and informal mentors.

## Mentoring experience and likelihood of mentoring in the future

Survey respondents shared whether they were currently a mentor to a young person or had been a mentor in the past. Of the entire sample, 1,080 (30.9 per cent) indicated that they were either a current (266, 7.6 per cent) or past mentor (814, 23.3 per cent) to a young person (**Figure 3**).

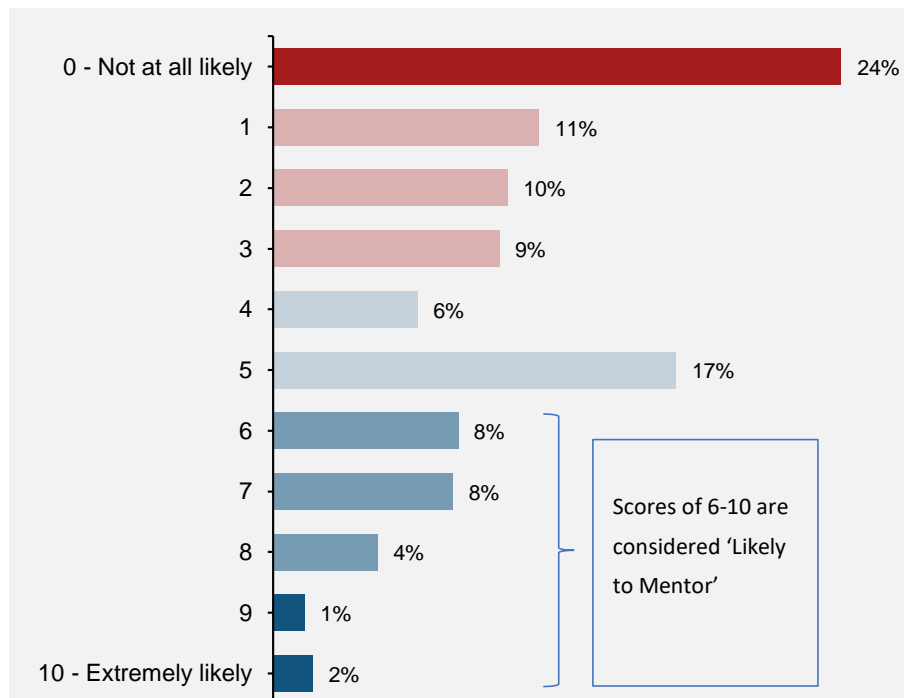
**Figure 3** Since turning 18, have you ever been a mentor to a young person?



Of the entire survey sample, 266 (7.6 per cent) respondents were currently serving as a mentor and 814 (23.3 per cent) respondents had served as a mentor in past. Informal (rather than formal) mentoring experience was more common among current and past mentors. Note these categories are not mutually exclusive: a past or current mentor could have experience as both an informal and a formal mentor. Among current mentors, 204 (76.7 per cent) respondents had experience as an informal mentor in the past year, and 85 (32.0 per cent) respondents had experience as a formal mentor in the past year. Men were more likely than women to have been formal mentors in the past year (37.4 per cent compared to 27.1 per cent). Among past mentors, 638 (78.4 per cent) respondents had experience as an informal mentor, and 253 (31.1 per cent) had experience as a formal mentor. Women were more likely than men to have had past experience as a formal mentor (34.1 per cent compared to 27.5 per cent).

Respondents who were not currently mentoring a young person were asked about their likelihood of mentoring a young person within the next five years. This question was asked on a 10-point scale. Almost a quarter of respondents (771 or 23.8 per cent) indicated that they were not at all likely to mentor in the next five years (i.e., selecting a 0 on the 10-point scale). On the other end of the spectrum, almost a quarter of respondents (734 or 22.7 per cent) indicated they would be likely to mentor a young person in the next five years (i.e., selecting a 6 or higher on the 10-point scale). However, of this group, few respondents (97 or 3.0 per cent) indicated that they were extremely likely to mentor (i.e., selecting a 9 or 10 on the 10-point scale) (**Figure 4**).

**Figure 4** How likely is it that you will be a mentor to a young person in the next 5 years? Question was only asked of respondents who are not currently mentoring (n = 3,234).

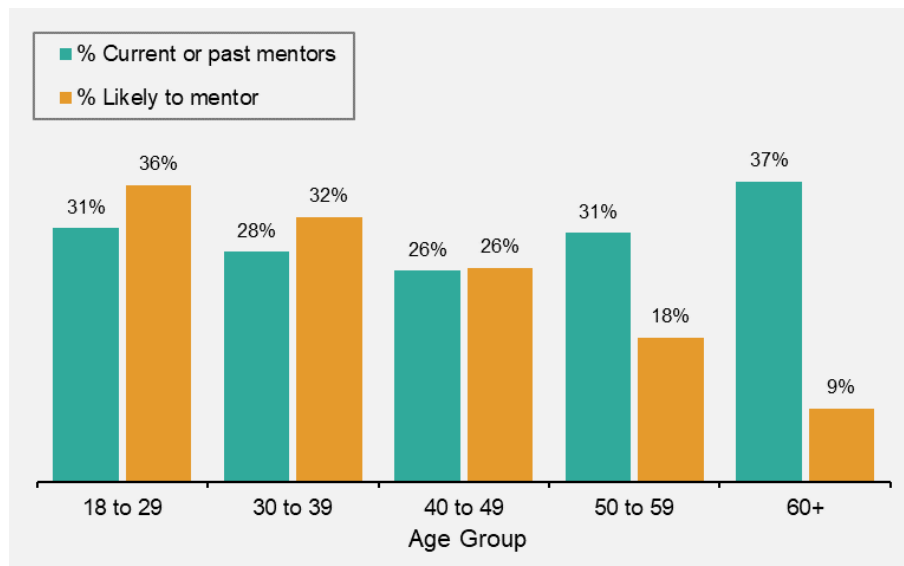


These two questions related to 1) previous mentoring experience and 2) likelihood to mentor in the next five years were used as key indicators to compare the distribution of all survey responses. That is, we explored how responses vary between people who have a history of mentoring compared to those who have never mentored before; and how responses vary between people who do not currently mentor but would be likely to mentor in the next five years, compared to those who do not currently mentor and would be unlikely to mentor a young person in the next five years.

## Characteristics of mentors

Among survey respondents, comparing the distribution of mentoring experience and likelihood to mentor in the next 5 years with demographic and identity characteristics showed that age is an important factor associated with mentoring. Older age respondents (60+) were significantly more likely (Chi-squared,  $p < 0.001$ ) to have had previous experience mentoring (36.9 per cent) than people between the ages of 18 to 29 (31.1 per cent) or between ages of 40 to 49 (25.9 per cent). Furthermore, 36.4 per cent of younger age respondents (18 to 29) who were not currently mentoring indicated they were likely to mentor a young person in the next five years, which was significantly more (Chi-squared,  $p < 0.001$ ) than respondents between the ages of 50 to 59 (17.7 per cent) and 60+ (9.0 per cent). See Figure 5.

**Figure 5** Proportion of respondents indicating they have mentoring experience and proportion indicating they are likely to mentor a young person in the next 5 years, by age group.



A comparison of other demographic and identity characteristics also showed an association with previous mentoring experience. Respondents who identified as Indigenous, Transgender, Trans, or under the Trans umbrella, having a functional disability, and having been a youth in-care were significantly more likely to be current or past mentors than those respondents who did not have those identities (Chi-squared,  $p < 0.001$ ). **See Figure 6.**

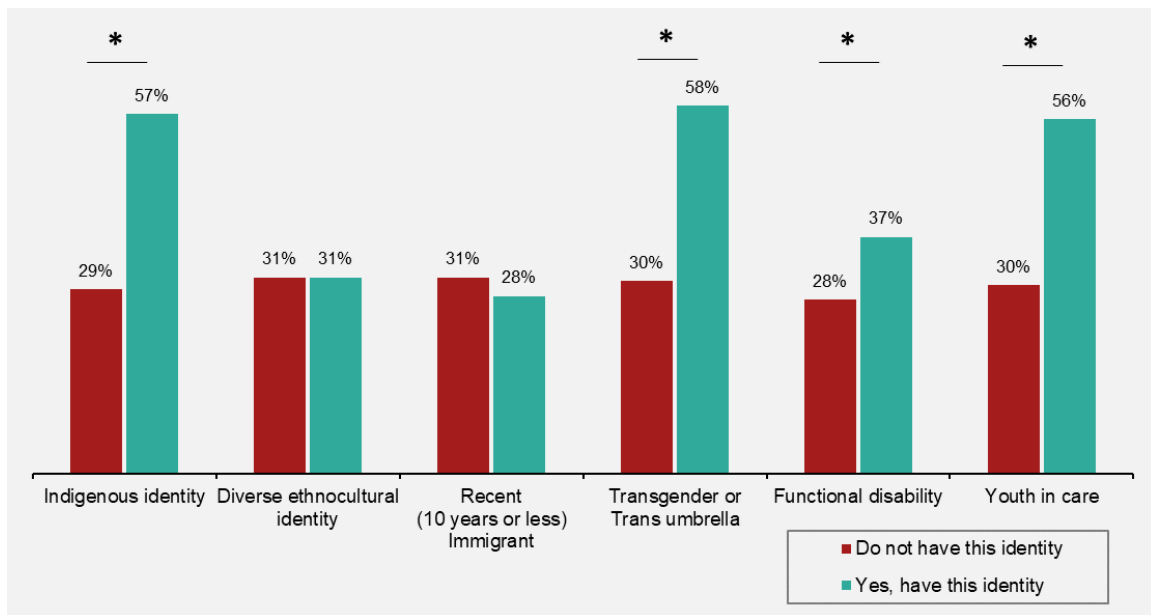
Similarly, respondents who identified as Indigenous, having a diverse ethnocultural identity (i.e., non-White), recent immigrants, Transgender, Trans, or under the Trans umbrella, and those who had spent time as youth in-care were significantly more likely state that they were likely to mentor a young person in the next five years (Chi-squared,  $p < 0.001$ ). **See Figure 7.**

Other characteristics including relationship status, household income, highest level of education, and engaging in volunteering activities also had statistical (albeit varied) associations with mentoring experience and likelihood of mentoring in the next five years. **See Table 2.**

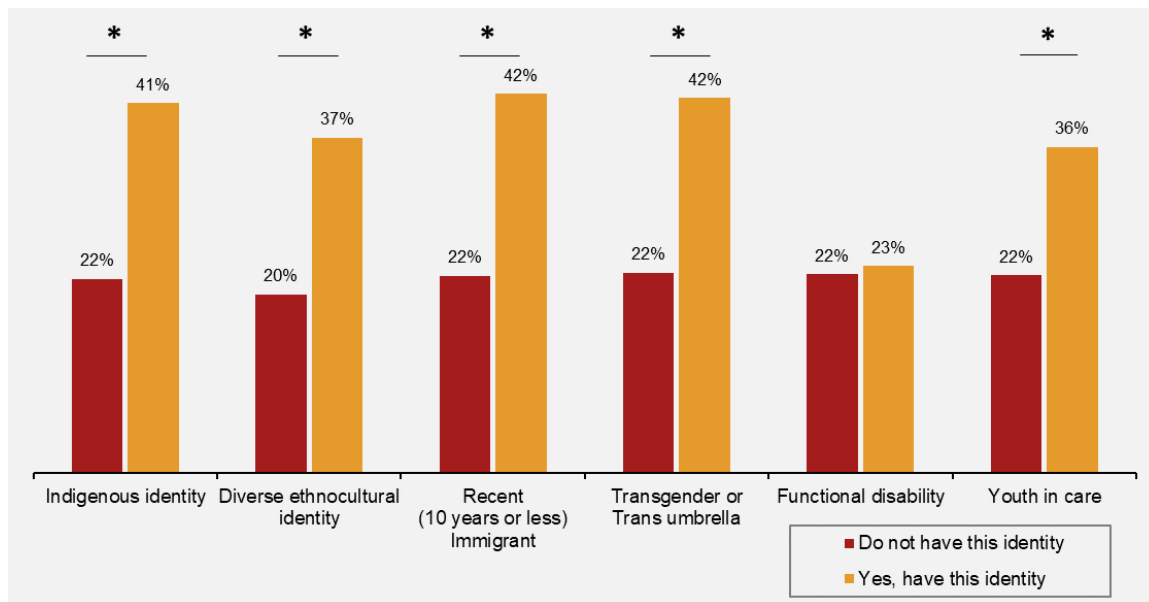
Gender did not show a notable association with mentoring experience. Roughly the same proportion of women (31.1 per cent) as men (30.4 per cent) indicated that they were either a current or past mentor. A Chi-squared test showed no statistically significant differences between women and men.

A higher proportion of men (23.5 per cent) compared to women (21.6 per cent) indicated that they would be likely to mentor in the next five years (i.e., selecting a 6 or higher on the 10-point scale). The difference between men and women on the likelihood to mentor variable is statistically significant (Chi-squared,  $p < 0.05$ ). The biggest gender difference appears to be among respondents who indicated that they were in the middle range (i.e., selecting a 4 or 5 on the 10-point scale). More women (24.8 per cent) fell on the middle range of the likelihood to mentor scale than men (20.7 per cent). See **Figure 8**.

**Figure 6** Proportion of respondents currently mentoring or have mentored in the past, by demographic and identity sub-group. Statistically significant factors indicated.



**Figure 7** Proportion of respondents indicating that they are likely to mentor a young person in the next 5 years, by demographic and identity sub-group. Statistically significant factors indicated.

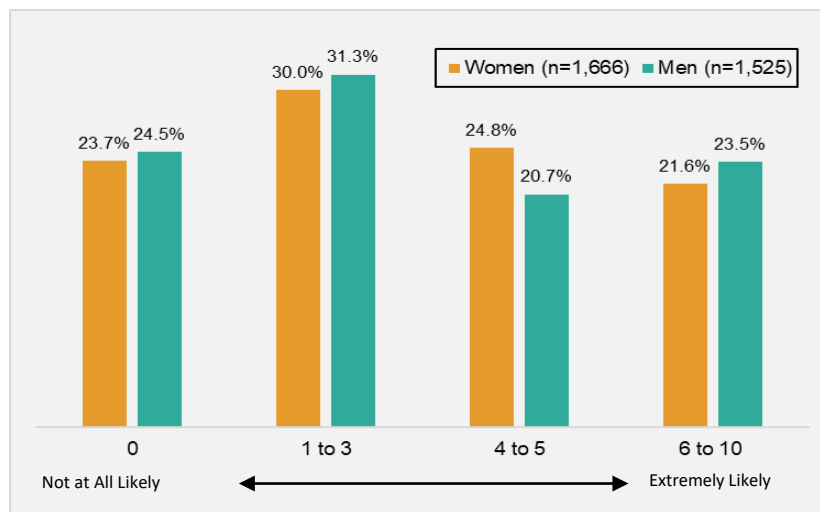


**Table 2**      **Proportion of respondents currently mentoring or have mentored in the past and likely to mentor by different characteristics.** All characteristics had statistical association of unequal distribution (Chi-squared). Responses with less than 10 in any category are shown as N/A.

Characteristic	% Current or past mentors	% Likely to mentor	Characteristic	% Current or past mentors	% Likely to mentor
<b>Relationship status</b>			<b>Annual Household Income</b>		
Never legally married	24.8%	25.8%	Less than \$25,000	24.6%	18.1%
Legally married	34.8%	21.3%	\$25,000 to less than \$35,000	31.2%	25.7%
Separated, but legally married	37.5%	31.5%	\$35,000 to less than \$50,000	22.6%	19.4%
Divorced	35.1%	20.9%	\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	27.7%	22.4%
Widowed	38.3%	N/A	\$75,000 to less than \$100,000	34.1%	24.9%
Living with a common-law partner	25.8%	23.3%	\$100,000 to less than \$125,000	35.3%	23.8%
<b>Highest level of education</b>			\$125,000 to less than \$150,000	36.2%	28.7%
Certificate of Apprenticeship	33.1%	25.9%	\$150,000 to less than \$250,000	34.2%	24.0%
Other trades certificate or diploma	29.0%	18.9%	\$250,000 to less than \$500,000	45.6%	27.5%
College, CEGEP or other non-university	25.5%	19.1%	\$500,000 or more	N/A	N/A
University diploma or certificate BELOW Bachelor's	43.9%	26.6%	<b>Participated in any volunteering activities</b>		
Bachelor's degree	31.6%	25.1%	No	18.9%	18.2%
University diploma or certificate ABOVE Bachelor's	42.2%	26.7%	Yes	39.7%	26.3%
Professional degree	55.2%	27.3%			
Master's degree	41.1%	29.6%			
Doctorate degree	59.1%	32.0%			



**Figure 8** Proportion of respondents indicating that they are likely to mentor a young person in the next 5 years, by gender.



Although qualitative interview participants generally stated that anybody could be a mentor, they did identify important characteristics and traits, including a strong moral character, patience, good intentions, compassion, trustworthiness, authenticity, openness, and the ability to be flexible and adaptable. One participant explained, “Personal character, moral character, values. That’s the essence of leadership, mentorship. The person you are mentoring has to be able to look up to you somehow. This is the currency of the mentorship. How you practice your faith, live your life, put it together to be a good family man, who gives back to society.”

Some mentors may have previous volunteer experience or career experience relevant to their role as a mentor. However, prospective mentors need to be told that this is not a pre-requisite. Some participants had doubted that they had anything to offer as a mentor and needed reassurance that they did. For example, one participant explained that as a young woman in her early twenties, she finds it important to know that a mentor does not need to be an ‘end result’ role model – they can be someone in their early career stages in the midst of building their own career path.

One participant remarked that mentoring is like holding up a mirror – it is important for a mentor to be comfortable with themselves before they start mentoring. Another participant continuously emphasized the importance of mentors’ own personal healing journeys, especially among male mentors. He felt that a man cannot be an effective mentor to others until he himself has reached an important point in his own personal growth. Otherwise, he risks passing on problematic ideas about masculinity and emotional unavailability to his young mentee.

## Matching mentors and mentees

Interview participants shared stories of how to effectively bring youth and mentors together and initiate a connection. Several participants emphasized the importance of a shared project – for example, bringing youth and prospective mentors together to

work on a common cause, like a humanitarian or community service project – and then letting a mentoring connection evolve organically with some ‘light touch’ supports from a program to reinforce emerging relationships. They suggested programs should look for opportunities to bring people together and then promote joking, talking, friendships and bonding in an informal way. In the early days of building a connection, participants said that it was important to share meals together, or to simply go for a walk and ask open-ended questions, finding common ground with one another. One participant imagined a ‘virtual coffee shop’ where youth and prospective mentees could come together to chat online, even amidst pandemic restrictions.

Several participants said that a match is about relatability and finding a mentor who has gone through the same experiences and is able to share their knowledge and wisdom back with a mentee. Common interests, like sports or hobbies, can be a helpful place for a connection to start. However, several participants emphasized the value in an unexpected match and pointed out that they could adapt even if interests did not align. Mentoring was a way for both the mentor and mentee to be exposed to a different worldview than their own. One mentor pointed out that the concept of ‘matching’ applies not just between the mentor and mentee, but also with their broader families.

Interview participants thought that age could be an important matching criterion. One younger mentor explained that his mentee “doesn’t look at me like his parent – I don’t look like a parent or a boss, I’m a friend. I’m physically able to do the things he wants to do, and I have the same interests, like video games.” Another young mentor considered herself more approachable to mentees, who would not worry she would judge them in the way other adults do.

Gender was also considered an important factor in a mentoring match. One female participant with a female mentee explained that her mentee was in need of a female role model after losing her mother. One participant explained that as a woman in science, it is important for her to match with young female mentees so that she can prepare and support them as they navigate issues like discrimination and gender-based harassment in a male-dominated field. Another participant who mentored young men said, “Gender bonding is important. Young people look up to people differently. There is an importance of having young men have male mentors to look up to, that brotherhood bond, that male bond. Looking at who they are going to become.”

One participant spoke about mentoring specifically for men. He talked about the pervasiveness of toxic masculinity and a lack of emotional intelligence among men in Canadian society. He viewed it as critically important for men to heal and overcome these issues in their own lives before entering into mentoring relationships, where they could risk imposing harmful views to young men.

## Cultural and contextual considerations

Several interview participants discussed considerations for mentoring in specific cultures or contexts. One participant shared his views on mentoring in a faith-based community, explaining that mentoring was considered an honourable pursuit and part of a sacred duty to give back, aligned with religious teachings like serving mankind and brotherhood, and supporting the moral and spiritual development of youth. He explained that it is helpful for young people to receive mentoring from people who have shared experiences – in this case, young Muslim men growing up in the West, learning how to reconcile and observe their faith in a different society, and balancing success in their career and family with their own spiritual life and well-being.

Another participant who lived with a chronic health condition and faced physical limitations said that mentoring programs need to be more inclusive by offering flexibility in their programming – for example, the opportunity to do virtual mentoring. Programs should celebrate the value that people with different abilities can bring to the mentoring role, including exposing youth to diversity and promoting a welcoming approach.

Several participants talked about cultural considerations for mentoring in an Indigenous community. One non-Indigenous mentor paired with an Indigenous mentee noted that she had not received cross-cultural training and that culture had been largely ignored in the program. She said she had doubts at first about whether she might cause harm or interfere with her mentee's culture, but she was relieved to find that did not occur and she felt largely confident in the success of the mentoring relationship overall. One Indigenous participant said that she was proud to bring her knowledge of the land into her mentoring practice, even with non-Indigenous mentees. She emphasized the role of mentoring in Indigenous culture, saying that historically, Indigenous communities had raised children collectively. She explained that way of life had been lost due to colonization, but now was being revitalized through mentoring programs. Another Indigenous participant said that cross-cultural mentoring was a positive thing and that it was important not to assume that Indigenous youth need extra support solely on the basis of their Indigenous identity. She thought mentoring should incorporate Indigenous teachings and should be universal and normalized for all.

## The meaning of mentoring

In describing mentoring in their own words, interview participants explained that a mentor is an adult figure who serves as a positive role model, sets an example to follow, and offers guidance and support to a young person. Participants emphasized friendship and brotherhood/sisterhood as the basis for the mentoring relationship. They explained that a mentor is not a parental figure and that a mentoring relationship does not include discipline, judgement, or authority. Instead, mentoring is about 'just being there', listening, answering questions, being a shoulder to lean on, and having fun together. A mentor brings a neutral, external perspective and can involve exposing a young person to a different worldview. Mentoring provides a safe place for a young person with trust as the foundation. Mentors have a close connection based on deep concern and love for their mentees. Mentoring can look differently depending on contexts and settings, but the common denominator is being intentional – defining a goal at the beginning and then being flexible about how that goal is achieved.

One participant explained that although ideally, a mentor may inspire their mentee or change their life in some way, these are lofty goals and should not be an expectation for every mentoring relationship. This participant described feeling defeated and having a sense of failure about her mentoring relationship. She explained that for her, mentoring is really about showing up for the journey, rather than focusing on the destination. Definitions of mentoring should reflect this reality and avoid setting up unrealistic expectations for mentors/mentees.

## Opinions on mentoring and its benefits

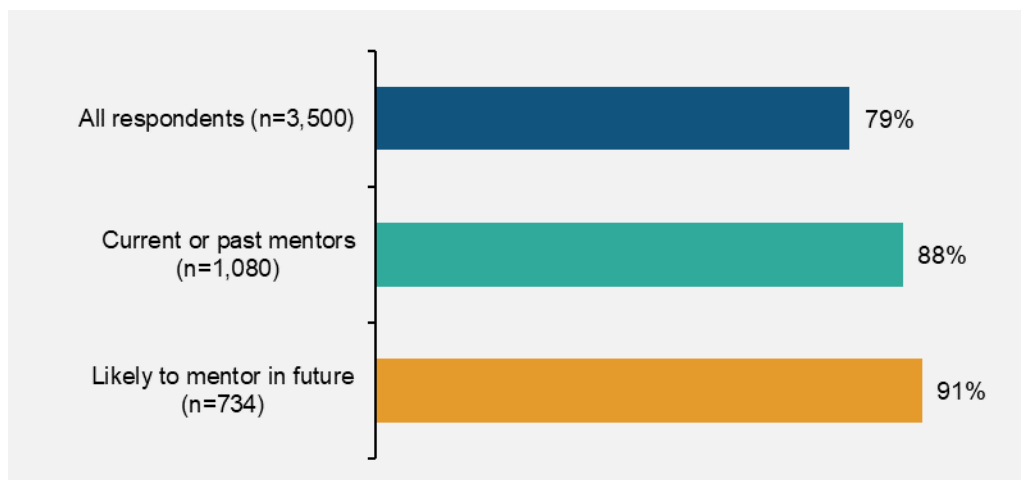
Among all survey respondents, 149 (4.3 per cent) indicated that they had been part of a formal mentoring program, while 628 (17.9 per cent) indicated that they had informal mentoring relationships during their youth (i.e., 22.2 per cent reporting overall

they had some type of mentoring). Among people who were current or past mentors, a much higher 47.0 per cent (n=507 respondents) reported having some type of mentoring while growing up.

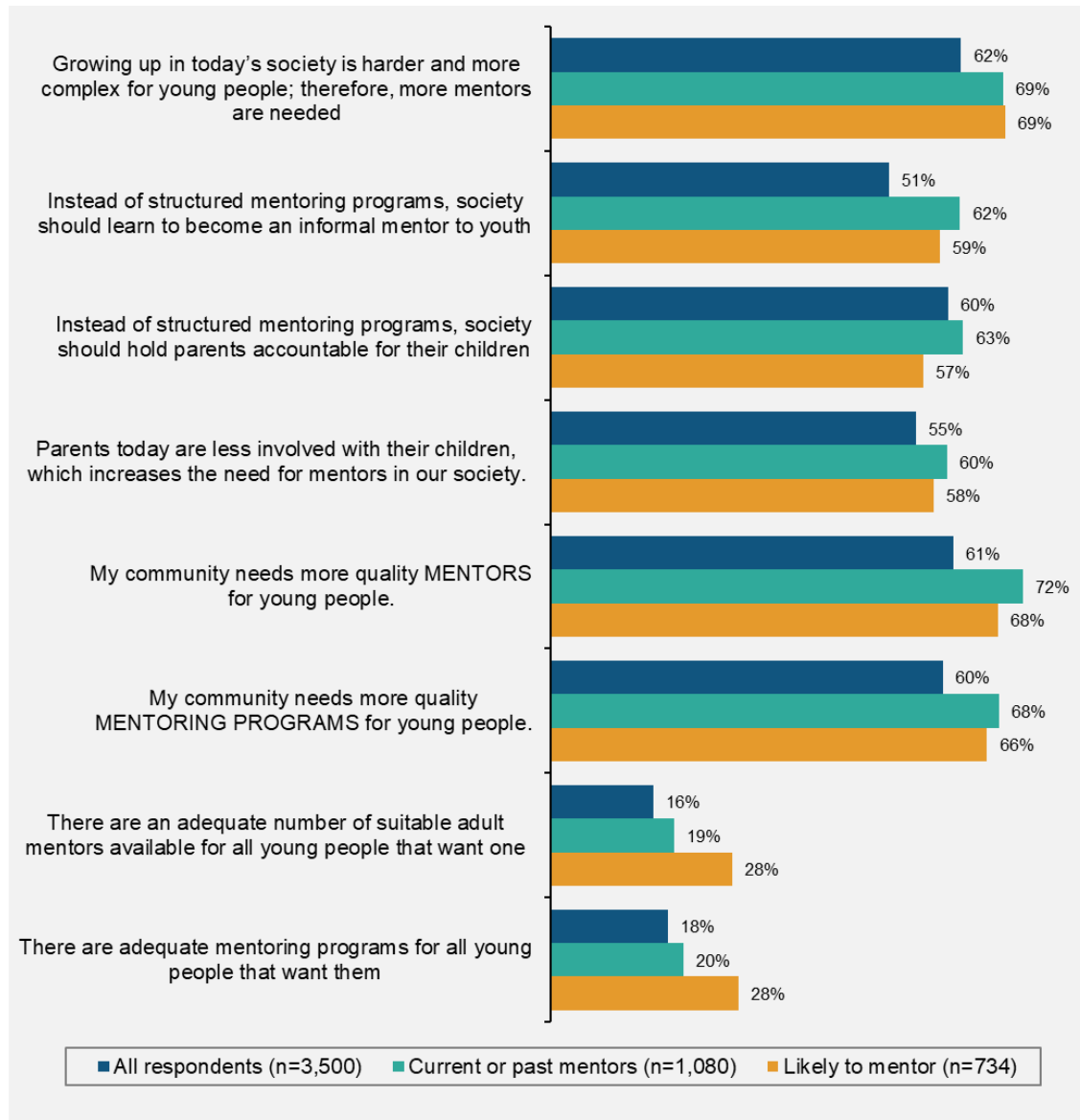
Despite only about one fifth of the respondents indicating they received mentoring during their own youth, an overwhelming majority of respondents (n=2,762, 78.9 per cent) felt that mentoring relationships outside of the immediate family were important to young people growing up (**Figure 9**). Furthermore, 2,834 (81.0 percent) stated that they thought young people needed either somewhat or significantly more mentoring supports to help maximize their success in adulthood.

All respondents further shared their opinions on the availability of mentors and mentoring programs in their communities (**Figure 10**) and their opinions about how Canadian society as a whole may benefit from young people receiving mentoring (**Figure 11**). Generally, most people indicated that in their opinion there was a need for more access to mentoring and that mentoring can be of benefit to society and to young people. The most commonly-endorsed benefits were reduced violence and anti-social behaviour; improved mental health; and promoting healthy relationships from one generation to the next.

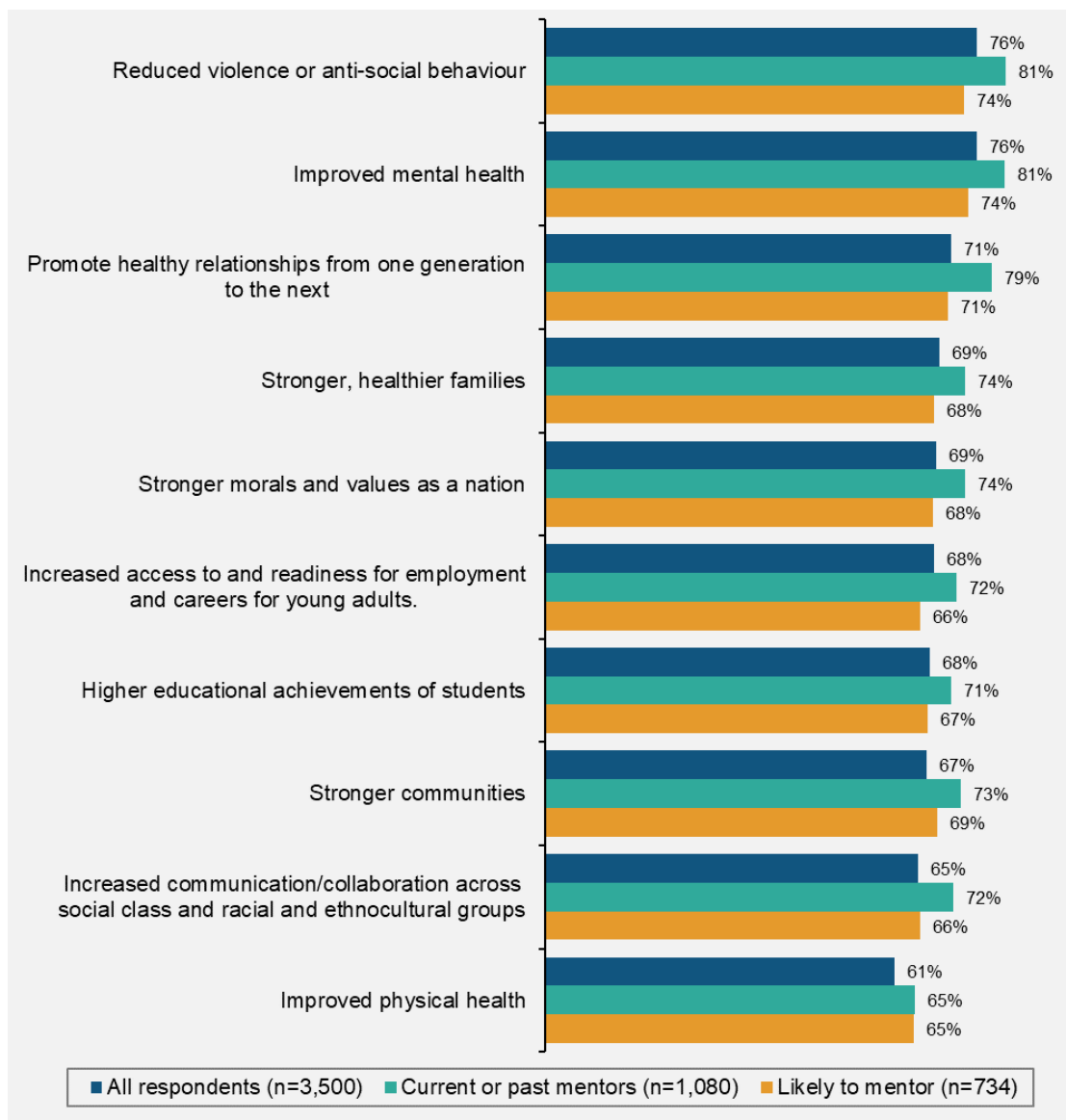
**Figure 9** Importance of mentoring relationships (outside of family) for young people growing up. A score of 6 or above on a scale of 1-Not at all important to 10-Vitally important was coded positively.



**Figure 10**      **Opinions on mentoring availability.** Percentages indicate respondents who answered ‘somewhat’ or ‘strongly’ agree.



**Figure 11** In which ways do you think Canadian society can benefit when young people receive mentoring?  
Percentages indicate respondents who answered 'large benefit'



Interview participants similarly described **mentoring as a critical part of today's society**. They explained that in our busy world, we are often missing a sense of connection. Mentoring was often described as filling a void – providing something to youth that they may not otherwise have access to in their family lives or in school settings. One participant said, “Mentoring is important especially the way society is now, we don’t spend as much time with extended families, and if we do everyone is so busy there

isn't just that quiet time where two people connect, not doing anything, just being together. There doesn't seem to be the time or structure in society anymore." Mentoring was described as beneficial for any and all youth, but especially important during times of transition, like moving from high school to post-secondary education, or when arriving as a newcomer to Canada.

Mentoring was seen as an investment in the next generation and an important way to ensure young people are successful in their own lives as well as in giving back to others. One participant explained, "If we want to improve society, we need to look closely at the development and nurturing of our youth, and mentoring is a big part of that." Another participant explained that the benefits of mentoring extend to both mentors and mentees, saying, "Although the key to building a productive society relies on furthering the well-being of children through mentoring, its inadvertent positive effects on the mentors makes this a dual approach to improve community connection. This eventually leads to benefits that spill into all aspects of thriving town, province, country, and world."

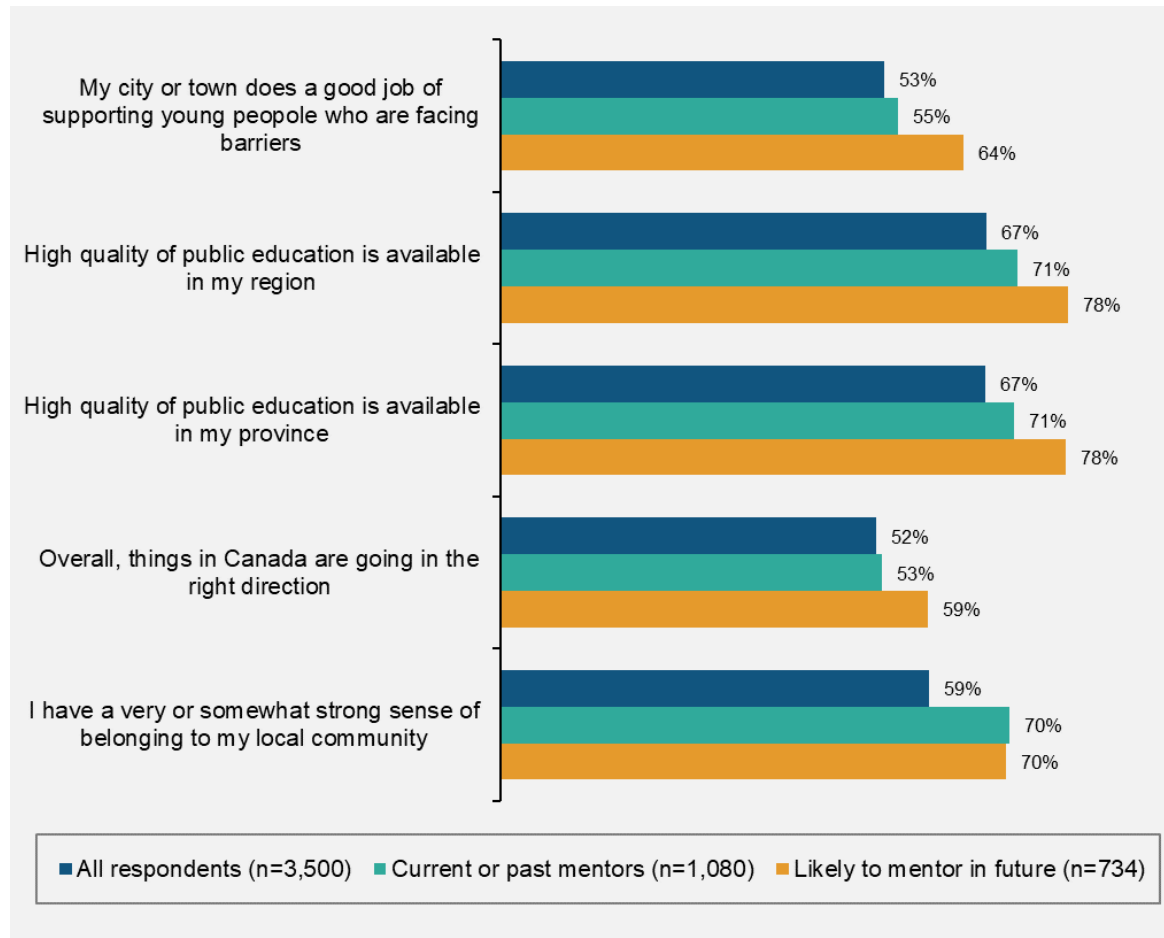
One participant shared her concerns for the future of mentoring in our society. She noted that there are fewer opportunities for informal mentoring, with neighbours interacting less and fears about safety overriding opportunities to connect. She said, "I wish society allowed mentoring to happen more. There are lots of safety concerns, rules and regulations – you can't touch or hug a kid, can't be alone in a room with a student, especially for men. My husband is so cuddly toward kids in our lives but sometimes, it's so indoctrinated, I tell him oh, be careful. But there is such a need for little boys and girls to have an adult male to trust."

## Opinions on society

Survey results indicated that people who have mentoring experience or are likely to mentor in the next five years tended to have more favourable opinions about different aspects of society. *Note for statements asking opinions on a scale of 1 to 10, responses that indicated a score of 6 or above were coded as positive (i.e., likely to mentor).*

**Figure 12** Opinions of respondents based on their mentoring status and likelihood of mentoring in the next 5 years.

Percentages indicate respondents who answered positively.



## Motivations to mentor

Respondents with current or past mentoring experience were asked further questions about what motivated them to mentor and their experiences mentoring. The most common reason for mentoring indicated by both current and past mentors was the desire to pass on knowledge, wisdom, experience, and skills to young people (62.0 per cent of current mentors and 58.5 per cent of past mentors). Many mentors also indicated that mentoring reflects their values of service, equity, and social justice.

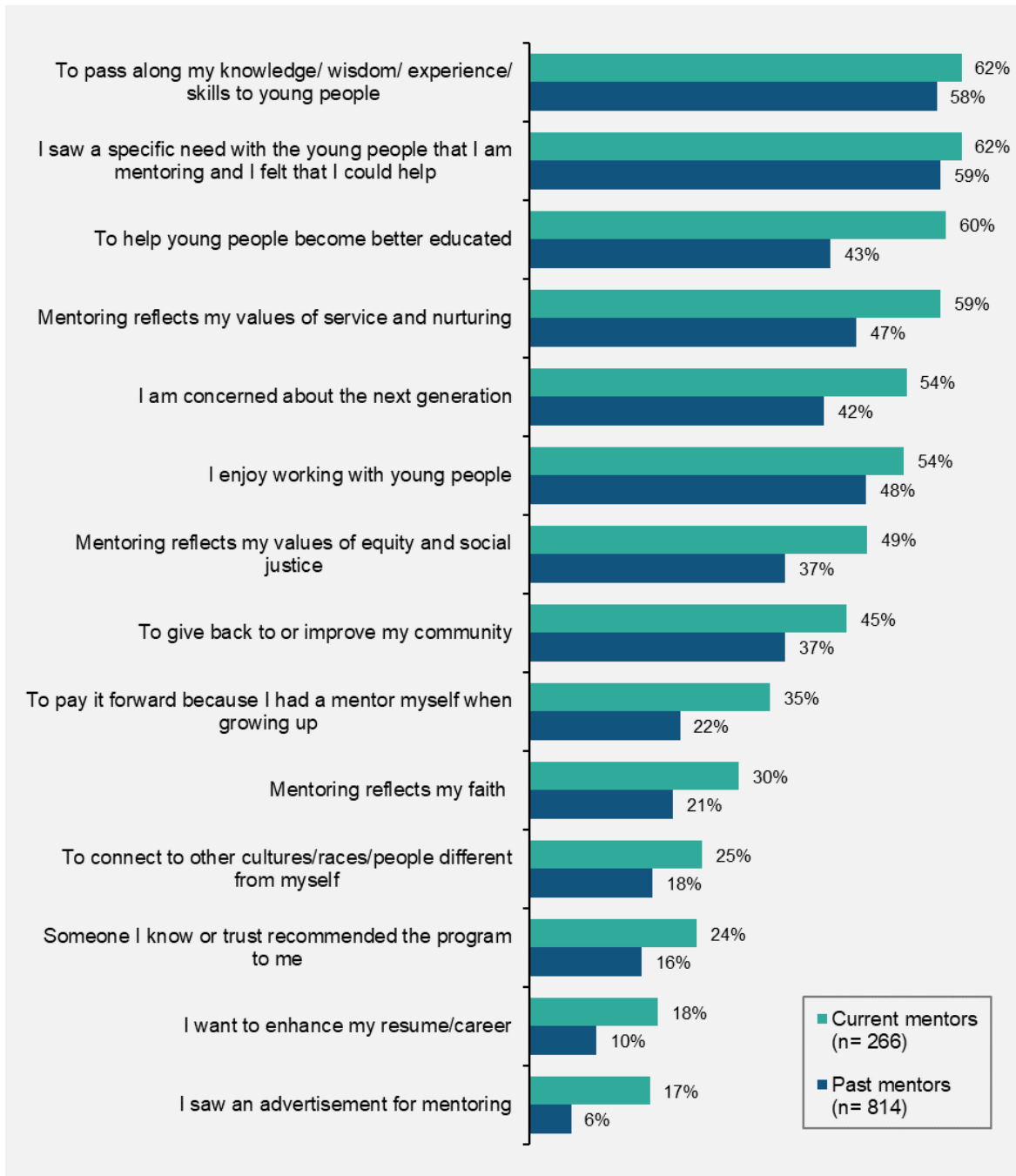
See Figure 13.



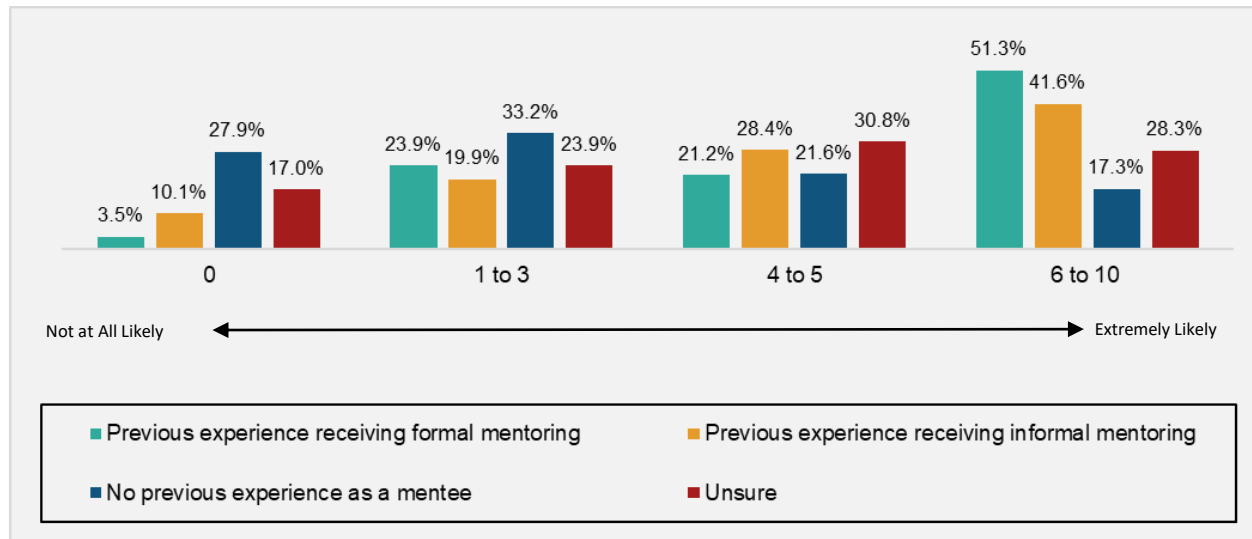
A considerable number of respondents (35.0 per cent of current mentors and 22 per cent of past mentors) indicated that they were motivated to mentor as a way to pay it forward because they themselves had been mentored growing up. This theme was also reflected among respondents who indicated that they were likely to mentor in the next 5 years (i.e., indicated a 6 or above on the 10-point scale). 51.3 per cent of respondents who had received formal mentoring growing up were likely to mentor in the next 5 years, as were 41.6 per cent of respondents who had received informal mentoring growing up. This is compared to only 17.3 per cent of respondents who did not receive mentoring growing up and 28.3 of respondents who were unsure. See **Figure 14**.

Among past mentors, two notable differences (i.e., a differential of more than 10 per cent) were found between men and women in terms of motivations to mentor. Women were more likely to indicate that mentoring reflects their values of service and nurturing (53.6 per cent compared to 39.2 per cent of men). Women were also more likely to state that they enjoyed working with young people (54.7 per cent compared to 41.3 per cent of men). For all other reasons to mentor, no notable gender differences were found.

**Figure 13** What motivates/motivated you to mentor? Percentages indicate respondents who selected ‘major reason’.



**Figure 14** Proportion of respondents indicating that they are likely to mentor a young person in the next 5 years, by previous experience receiving mentoring growing up.



Interview participants shared their own personal reasons and **motivations for becoming a mentor**. Some participants explained that they love kids – describing them as a ‘breath of fresh air’ – and wanted to do something fun or were looking for an ‘adventure buddy.’ Many participants sought out mentoring as a way of giving back and serving others, especially if they themselves had benefited from being a mentee when they were younger. One participant explained that she saw herself in her mentee, saying, “I feel bad for all these kids I see that don’t have stable homes, it’s so tragic. I lost my mother quite young so I know how that feels.”

The desire to give back was also attributed to family upbringing and to one’s personal faith. One participant said that after experiencing his own personal healing journey, he was compelled to share with others. Being there for others was described as a way to ‘get you out of an insular state’.

Some participants explained that they had a space to fill in their life, for example during retirement when their identity was changing or when their own children were leaving home. Two participants said that they were unable to have their own children and that this motivated their decision to mentor. Several participants compared and contrasted between their working careers and mentoring. For example, some participants saw mentoring as an extension of their vocation, such as nursing or teaching. Others saw mentoring as a completely different activity, a chance to do something that was new and unique from their paid work. One mentor explained that mentoring young women in science was a way for her to stay connected to that field of interest, given that her own career was not science-related any more.

One participant acknowledged that her reasons for becoming a mentor were not realistic and that mentoring did not go as she had planned. She had wanted to find a young person who shared the same interests as her so that they could do specific activities together. However, her mentee did not really share the same enthusiasm for these types of activities, so as a mentor, she needed to adjust her expectations and ‘become comfortable doing nothing’, accepting that just spending time together was enough.

## The focus of mentoring relationships

Survey results indicated that current mentors most commonly support their mentee to simply have fun (69.9 per cent of current mentors), to learn life skills (66.9 per cent of current mentors), to learn new career/job-related skills (58.3 per cent), and to talk about relationships with friends (58.3 per cent).

As described by interview participants, mentors and mentees spend time together engaging in a wide variety of activities: cooking and baking, arts and crafts, reading, outdoor past-times like flying a kite or collecting rocks, sports like badminton, swimming, rock climbing and dance, music, gaming, and practicing English as a second language. Some participants stated that it was important to try new things with their mentee, even participating in activities that pushed them outside of their own comfort zone, so that they could show an example to their mentees. When spending time together, participants said that they talked with their mentee about spirituality/religion, education and career paths, school and homework, relationships with friends and family, significant others/dating, and body image and health.

Several interview participants pointed out that the focus of the mentoring relationship should always be fun. One participant explained that her mentee had some behavioural issues, so he was often being disciplined by his mom or his teachers. By contrast, as a mentor, she could allow him the freedom to let loose and did not try to tell him ‘no’ or contain him. Boundaries in a mentoring relationship were seen as important. One participant discussed how she was mindful that mentoring was not therapy. Although she talked about her mentee’s family issues with him, she avoided ‘going too deep’. Another participant pointed out that she was not a parent – so it was okay if her mentee ate ice cream for dinner with her once in a while.

Several interview participants emphasized the importance of being consistent and reliable as a mentor, following through on all commitments. When a young person has experienced an absent parent or has been treated unfairly by adults in the past, it is important that a mentor work to regain that trust. Mentors cannot be late and cannot cancel meetings without notice.

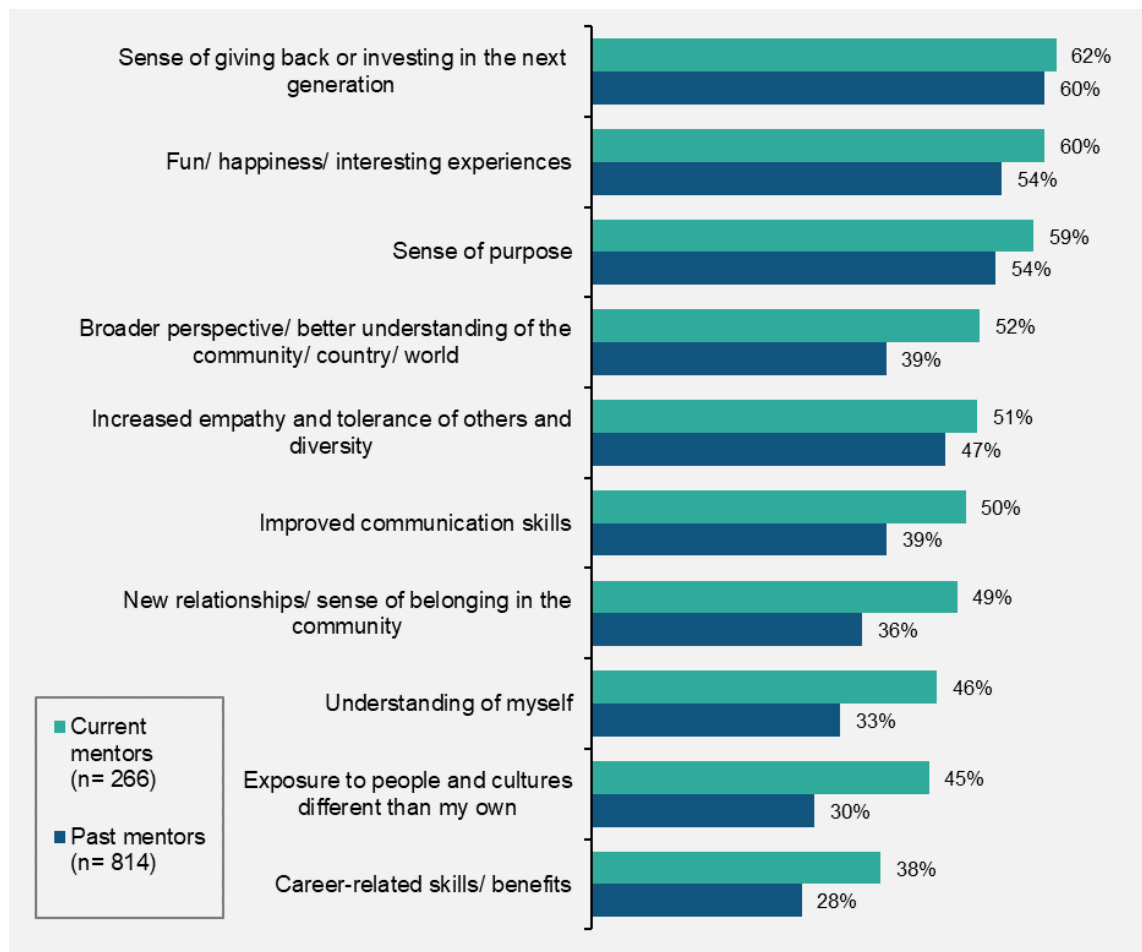
## Benefits of mentoring

Survey respondents with a history of mentoring shared that their experience provided them with many benefits. Foremost among both current and past mentors was the sense of giving back to the next generation (61.7 per cent current mentors and 60.1 per cent past mentors). More than half of the current mentors also indicated mentoring a young person has helped them broaden their perspectives of the world and increased their empathy of others from diverse backgrounds. Less than one-third of past mentors indicated that mentoring provided them major benefits for their career. **See Figure 15.** Three notable differences (i.e., a differential of more than 10 per cent) were found between men and women in terms of reported benefits of mentoring. Women were more likely to indicate that mentoring provided them increased empathy and tolerance of others (52.8 percent compared to 40.5 percent of men). Women were more likely to indicate mentoring provided them new relationships and a greater sense of belonging (41.5 per cent compared to 29.6 percent of men). Finally, women were more likely to indicate that mentoring provided them a sense of purpose (58.5 per cent compared to 48.2 per cent). For all other benefits, no notable gender differences were found.

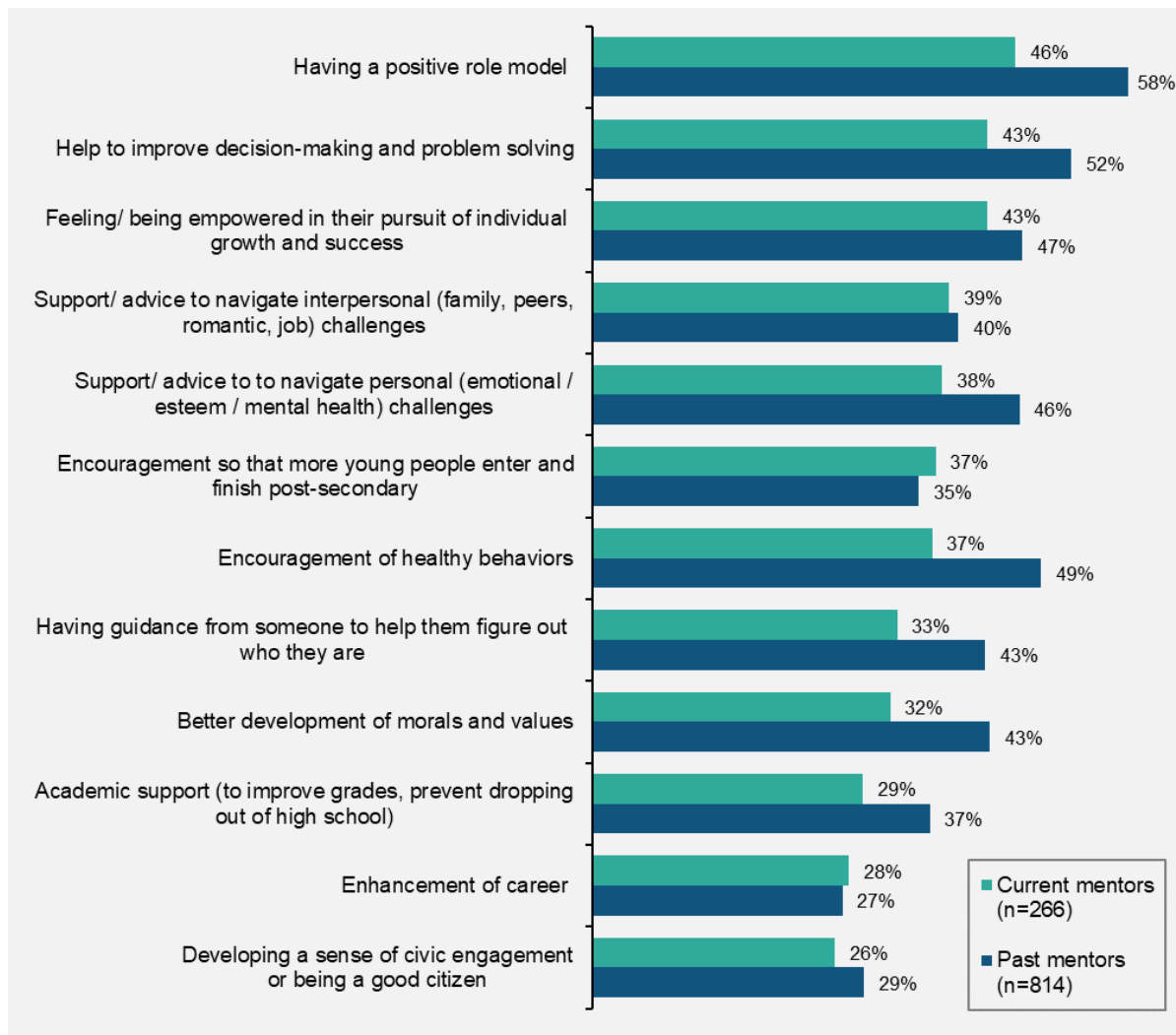
Current and past mentors were asked about what the biggest benefits had been to the youth they mentored. Overall, a general trend showed that past mentors were more likely to endorse more items on the scale – they identified many major benefits to youth. The most common benefit mentors identified was that mentoring provided their mentees with a positive role model (45.9 per cent of current mentors and 58.1 per cent of past mentors) and helped young people improve their decision making (42.9 per cent of current mentors and 52.0 per cent of past mentors). **See Figure 16** for full results.



**Figure 15** What are the benefits you gained from your experience(s) as a mentor? Percentages indicate respondents who selected 'major benefit.'



**Figure 16** How do you think young people you mentored benefited from mentoring? Percentages indicate respondents who selected ‘major impact’.



Interview participants also described many **benefits of mentoring** both for mentors and mentees. One participant explained the benefits of mentoring by saying, “The value of mentorship cannot be overstated... Helping people and changing lives brings satisfaction and meaning and mentoring is one of the most powerful ways to do that. I’ve been so blessed that a little bit of mentorship from my side has gone a long way in their personal development, and they say that to me. A little bit of mentorship can lead youth to gain perspective at a younger age, gain a sense of connection.”

When describing **benefits for mentees**, participants described mentees were described as being happy to see their mentor (“he told his teacher I’m his favourite adult”); having someone to talk to and open up to; and having an outlet for fun and ‘doing cool stuff’. One mentor talked about how he had encouraged his mentee’s interest in illustration and comic books and that he could now see that interest flourish. Mentees experienced positive changes like gaining confidence, becoming more talkative, overcoming shyness, becoming more receptive to learning, having better school attendance, becoming more honest and strengthening relationships with parents, choosing a career path, making better friend choices and resisting negative peer influences, and getting better at making friends. Through mentoring, mentees become more trusting. One participant explained, “The world has let them down, they don’t trust, they test people and try to push them away. Mentoring is a way to rebuild that.”

Regular check-ins were described as helpful because they allow mentors to hear from their mentee about how things are going and how they may have been impacted by the mentoring relationship, sometimes in ways the mentor might not be aware of. One participant said that her mentee filled out her yearly review form by saying, “Sometimes kids at school are mean to me and having a mentor made me feel better.”

Although experiences were positive overall, several participants acknowledged that their mentoring relationships were not perfect and that sometimes they felt a sense of failure or defeat. They felt that during difficult periods, it was important to emphasize the journey and not the destination.

When describing the **benefits for mentors**, interview participants said that mentoring gives them something to do and adds structure to their week; provides a chance to do activities they enjoy; makes them feel good; brings ‘youthful energy’ to their life; and is ‘wholesome’. Mentoring was considered rewarding, like a ‘ray of positivity’ for a mentor to enjoy. One participant said the best part of mentoring was, “Just having a little guy to love” and another said that mentoring “nurtures my spirit and enriches my life with the joy of seeing a little one run toward you to share their day.” Participants said they gained transferrable skills like communication and relationship-building through mentoring and that it furthered their career development (e.g., building toward a career as a teacher). Mentoring led participants to develop a strong sense of community, continuity, and a better work-life balance. One participant said that being a mentor was a healing experience for her after a history of trauma.

## Challenging experiences in mentoring

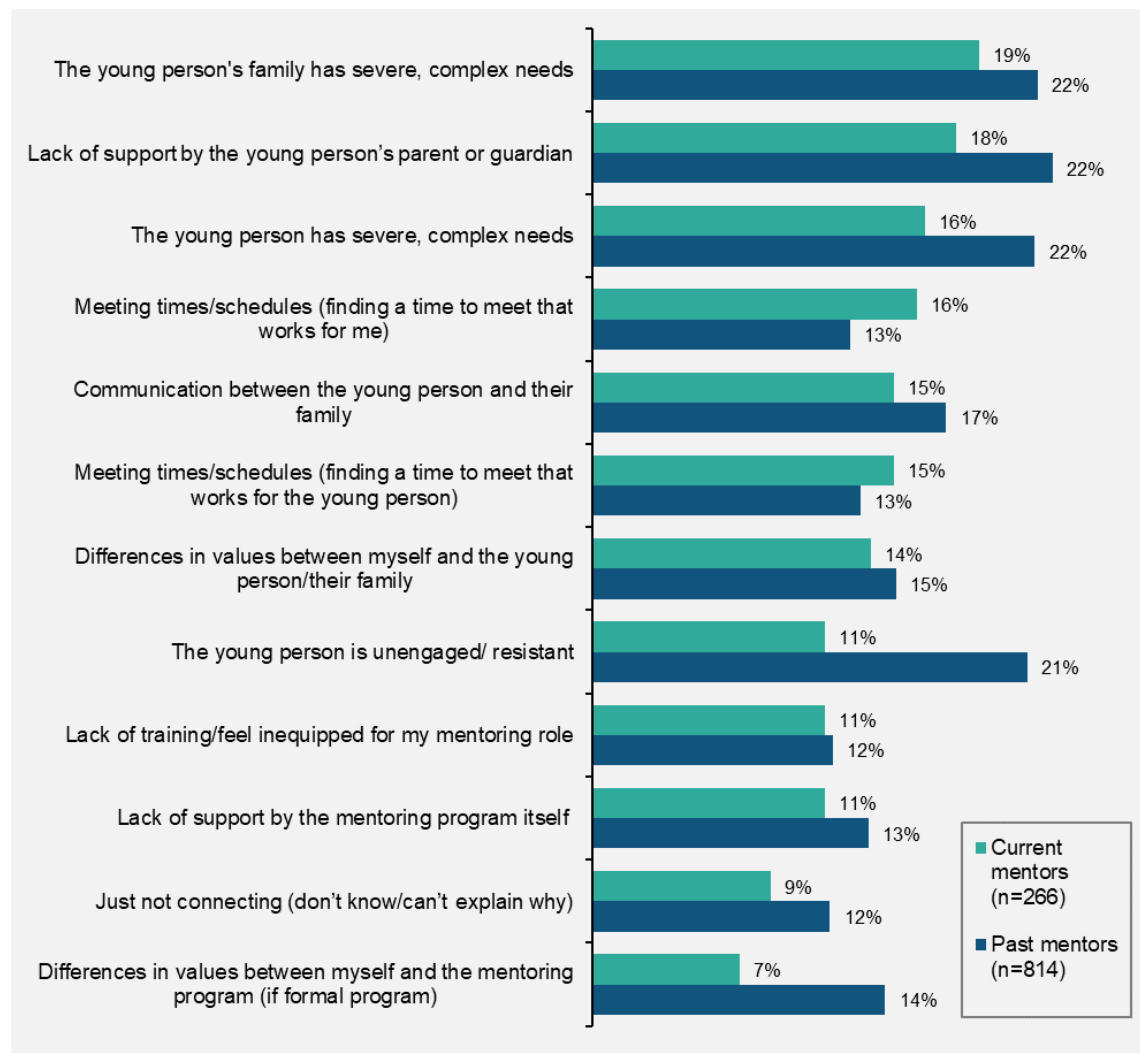
Survey respondents with mentoring histories shared challenges they may have experienced. Overall, no major challenge was experienced by more than one quarter of mentors. Past mentors were more likely to indicate challenges than current mentors.

**See Figure 17.**



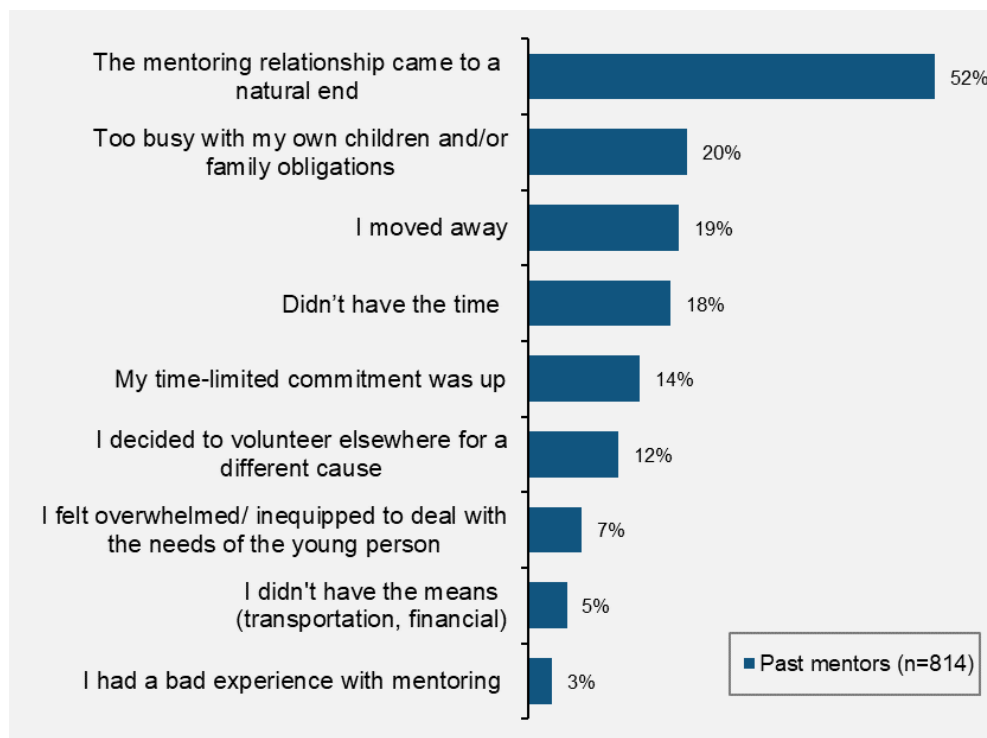


**Figure 17**      **What challenges did you experience while being a mentor?** Percentages indicate respondents who selected 'major challenge'.

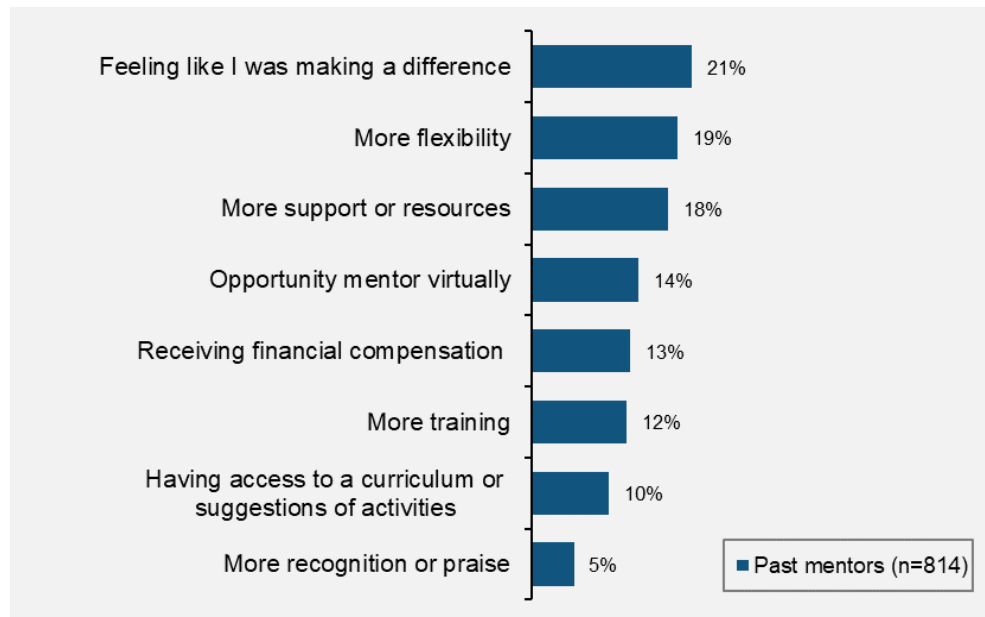


Past mentors were asked additional questions about their experiences. More than half (52.3 per cent) stated that the reason why they stopped mentoring was because the relationship came to a natural end. About one fifth (20.4 per cent) indicated that they got too busy with their own family obligations to continue mentoring. **See Figure 18.** While the majority of respondents indicated that little could have been done to retain them as mentors (since the relationship just came to an end), some past mentors did indicate that having more flexibility (18.8 per cent) may have helped them continue on. 20.8 per cent stated that they would have stayed in the mentoring relationship if it had helped them feel like they were making a difference. **See Figure 19.**

**Figure 18** What is the best explanation(s) for why you stopped mentoring?



**Figure 19** Is there anything else that could have convinced you to continue mentoring?



When reflecting on the challenges faced as a mentor, several interview participants commented on the issue of time. Mentoring was seen as a significant time commitment, which could be challenging if a mentor or mentee has a busy schedule. Several participants wished they could spend more time with their mentees. In some cases, they were concerned that visiting their mentee more often meant that the mentee might miss out on in-school time or recess.

Other challenges faced by mentors included encountering complicated dynamics in the mentee's family; experiencing their mentee 'test them' during the early trust-building phases of the relationship by being closed off or difficult; maintaining boundaries and not assuming a parental role; feeling guilty or unable to meet all of their mentee's needs; and navigating a mentee's complex needs like a learning disability or mental illness. Although these things were challenging, participants talked about rising to the challenge. One participant explained, "When you've been through it, and see you the youth go off course, it's about how to bring them back in a way that doesn't push them away from you. That has to be done through wisdom, kindness, warmth, sometimes humour. I enjoy that aspect."

Two participants had negative experiences where they felt that the mentoring organization was poorly equipped to support them. In both cases, they reached out to the mentoring coordinator for support when a mentee was experiencing a crisis, only

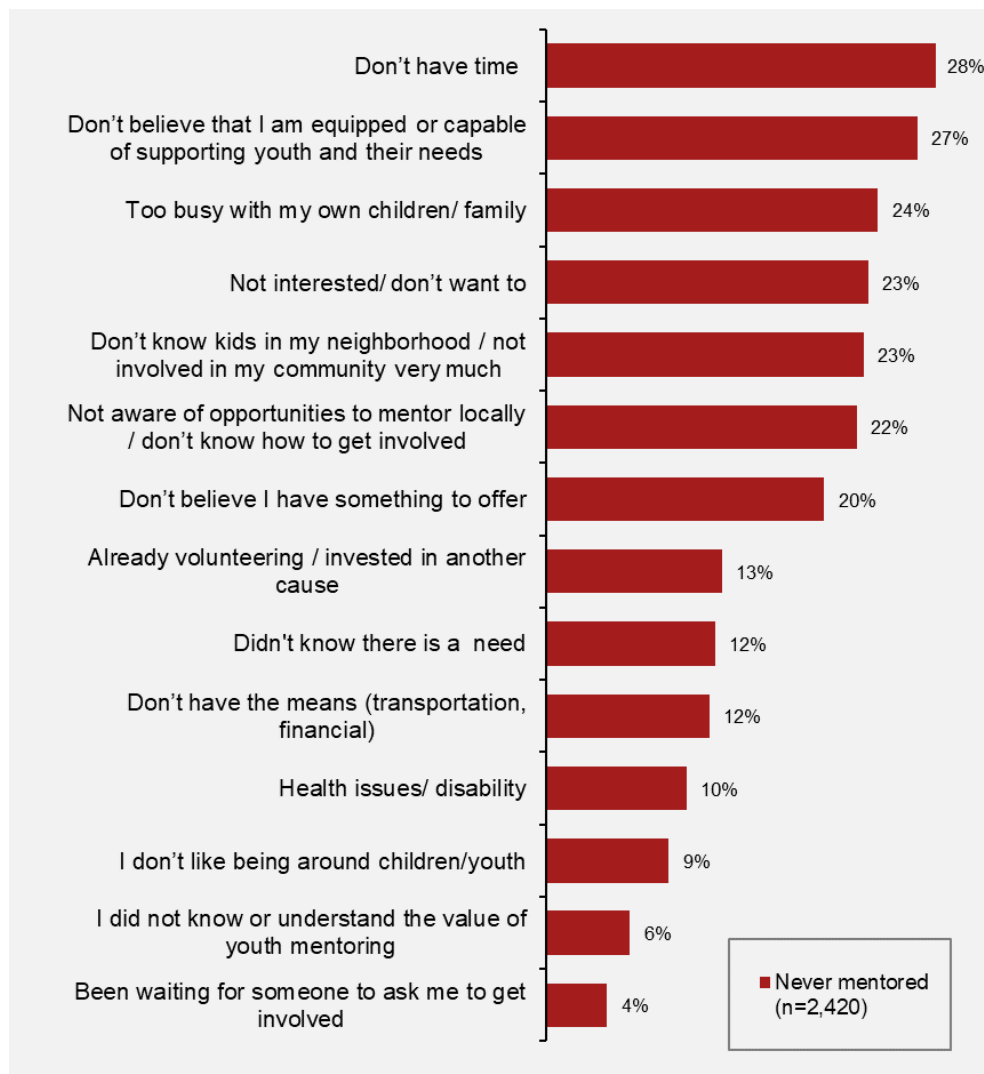
to find that no one was there to answer their call. The situation fell solely on the mentor's shoulders, leaving them to try to connect their mentee to additional supports, and compromising the boundaries they had established.

One mentor recalled her mentee being sullen and withdrawn, saying, "When this started to occur, the program was not responsive enough, the new coordinator was going through the motions but was not truly engaged, and the supports fell through." The situation culminated in a breakdown of communication between the mentee's parent, the program, and herself as the mentor. The mentee was placed on 'suicide watch' and was not supposed to be alone at any time, but the mentor was not informed, and allowed her to visit the bathroom unsupervised, compromising her safety.

## Enabling future mentors and mentoring opportunities

Among survey respondents who had never mentored, a lack of time (28.1 per cent) and busyness with their own family/children (23.9 per cent) were one of the most common barriers for not mentoring. However, more than a quarter of people who had never mentored (26.7 per cent) also stated that they had not mentored because they felt they did not have the skills to be able to support young people and their different levels of need. **See Figure 20.** When asked what would motivate them to mentor, the most commonly-endorsed reasons were being asked by a young person directly (50.5 per cent), seeing a specific need and feeling like they could be of help (44.1 per cent), and being asked by a parent or guardian to mentor a young person (39.0 per cent).

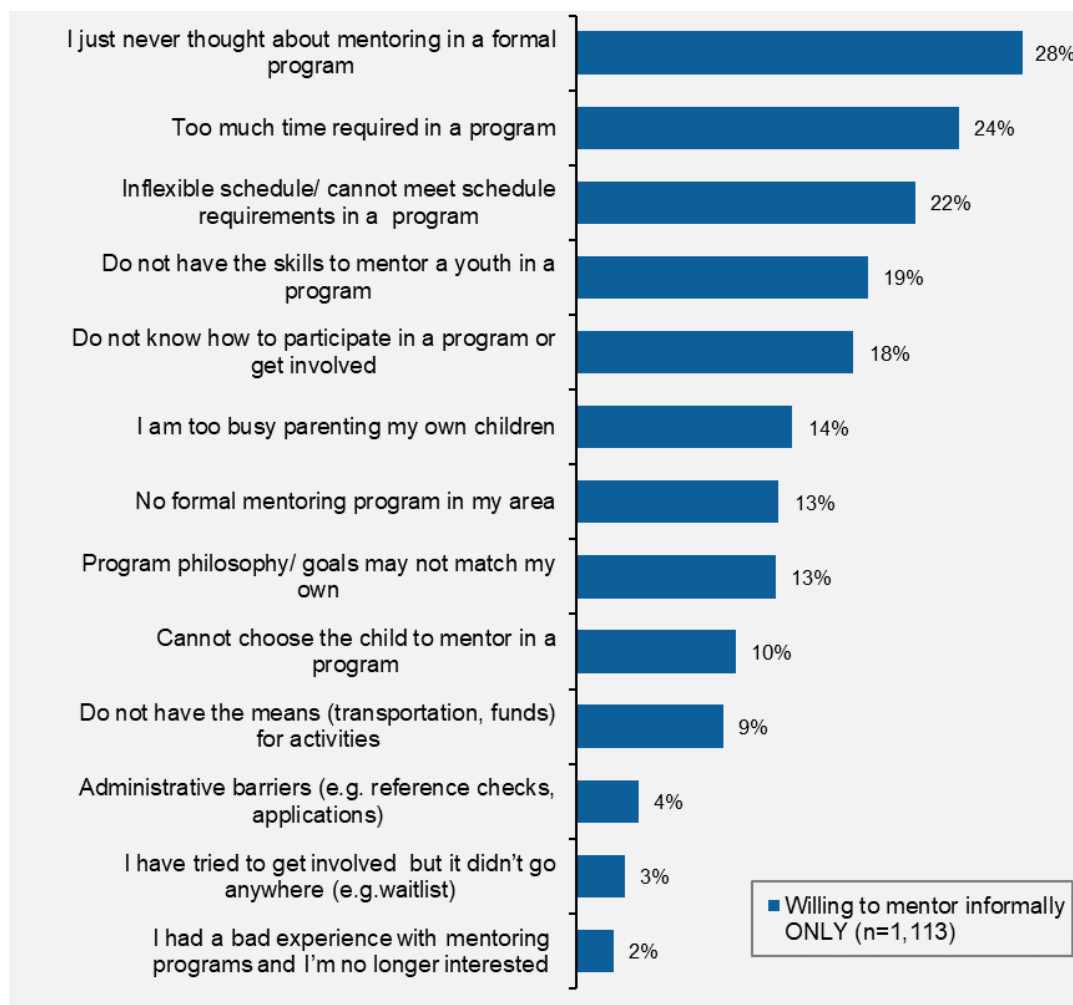


**Figure 20** Why have you not been able to participating a mentoring program or mentor a young person?

While 734 (22.7 per cent) of survey respondents indicated that they are likely to mentor a young person in the next five years (i.e., indicated 6 or higher on the 10-point scale), any person who indicated 4 or higher was additionally asked which type of mentoring they would be willing to participate in if they were to mentor. Of these people, 88.9 per cent stated they may be willing to informally mentor a young person, and 34.5 per cent stated they may be willing to participate in a formal program.

People who responded that they would only be willing to informally mentor a young person but not in a formal program provided reasons for this preference. Lack of awareness of formal programs and a lack of time were commonly-cited reasons. See Figure 21.

**Figure 21** Why would you be willing to mentor a young person informally, but not through a formal program?



Most interview participants had experience in a **formal mentoring program** – some specifically said that they preferred the structure and protections of a school-based setting, which was insured and credible – while others had experiences with informal mentoring. One participant had started her own science-focused YouTube channel and informally connected to young people who wanted to talk to her about a career in the sciences. Another participant had been approached by a mother in her faith-based community who asked her to mentor her daughter, because her daughter looked up to her. Reflecting on the differences between informal and formal mentoring, one participant said that structure can be beneficial but also limiting, and that informal mentoring is more general and less goal-driven than a formal program.

Some mentors value the structure of a mentoring program. Suggestions for conversation prompts and a loose schedule are helpful. One interview participant explained, “Formal guidelines in the program are important to me. Boundaries are important. In the past in my job I didn’t always keep my boundaries, I went out of my way to help people after work and I always found they were starting to suck me dry and take advantage of me. It’s better for me an institutional setting like a school where I can keep that objective empathy.”

Interview respondents requested **training and resources** on the following topics: what mentorship means; how to build relationships with mentees’ families; how to interact with young children; strategies for difficult conversations; how to navigate transitions and goodbyes/ending a mentoring relationship; recognizing signs of abuse or neglect; bias awareness; understanding stressors of poverty; suicide intervention; and diversity training.

Similarly, survey respondents shared that all of the following would be useful tools and resources that they would find helpful when it comes to mentoring a young person in the future (>80.0 per cent for each):

- Guides on navigating difficult conversations
- Connections to other local resources, programs, and supports for the young person
- Guidance on how to handle the ups and downs of the relationship
- Activity ideas
- Guidance on how to change my mentoring approach depending on the young person's age
- Access to articles and information about new research on mentoring young people
- Guides on navigating cultural differences or strengthening our cultural competencies
- Guidance on partnering with/managing relations with the family of the youth I mentor

Although interview participants were sensitive to issues of confidentiality and were not interested in ‘labelling’ or ‘diagnosing’ their mentees, several did say that it would be helpful to have more information about their mentee so they were more prepared. Sometimes, a mentor feels like they are ‘walking in blind’ or only told ‘the tip of the iceberg’ when matched with a mentee.

Several interview participants said that as a mentor, they wanted opportunities to come together as part of a **broader mentorship community**. They wanted to have peer support opportunities with other mentors, attend conferences or workshops together to share ideas, and to get together as a group with both mentees and mentors to do shared activities.

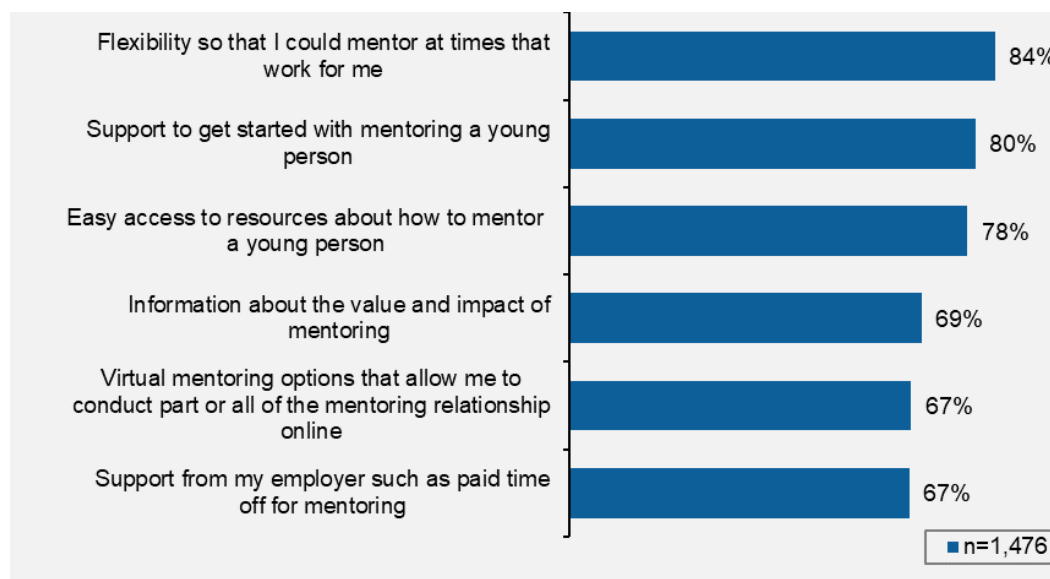
These participants desired a one-on-one mentoring relationship nested within a whole mentoring community. One participant explained that mentoring works best when a mentor is not on their own – when they have other mentors they themselves can look up to if they have an issue or challenge, and they can refer their mentee to another mentor who has that specific experience or has traversed that specific challenge. It is important for mentors to have collective resources, to ‘share the load’.

In a mentoring program, the coordinator plays an important role in supporting mentees. A good coordinator is described as intuitive, energetic, and responsive. They should be in regular contact with mentors through email, phone, and text. Monthly and annual check-ins were seen as helpful. It can be disruptive to mentors when there is turnover in the coordinator role, so continuity is important, as is institutional memory and a built-in framework to ensure that mentor supports are not dropped when a coordinator leaves their role.

It is critically important to have **supports available on-call** when a mentor needs it. Mentoring programs should be prepared to handle emergencies – like a mental health crisis or suicidality – so that a mentor is not left on their own in times of need. When a mentor encounters a serious issue, even if they are equipped with training and resources to handle it themselves, they may prefer not to because it would violate their boundaries with their mentee and compromise their overall mentoring relationship.

Survey respondents also shared different factors that would **incentivize** them to participate in mentoring (**Figure 22**). **The most common factors that would influence the decision to mentor in the future were flexibility, support to get started, and easy access to resources.**

**Figure 22** What factors would influence your decision to mentor a young person in the future? Percentages indicate respondents who selected either ‘somewhat’ or ‘much more likely’.





Reflecting on how to effectively **reach and recruit new mentors**, interview participants suggested that it was important to first dispel myths about mentoring. They said that some people might think mentoring involved babysitting, teaching, or tutoring, when in fact this is not the case. It would be helpful to emphasize that mentoring often involves doing activities that the mentor is interested in, too. Participants thought that many people are intimidated by the time commitment of mentoring, so it is important to showcase options like e-mentoring or in-school mentoring, which can involve as little as one hour per week.

Participants noted that mentoring organizations should be aware of the fears and misconceptions of mentoring that might disincentivize men from participating – specifically, concerns around allegations of pedophilia and a negative public perception of male relationships with children. One man said that mentoring organizations should provide reassurance and talk about this issue openly, so that it is not seen as a secretive ‘taboo’.

Several participants had become involved in mentoring as part of community service learning placements when they themselves were in high school. They explained that these placements were a great way to attract new mentors, but that it would be helpful to have a way to transition into a longer-term community-based mentoring program once they graduated. In some cases, age was a barrier, because a mentor may have started when they were 17, but a community-based program is limited to those 18+. Some participants explained that they would like their current mentoring program to help them connect to another mentoring opportunity in a new city when they moved for post-secondary or their career.

Many participants recalled encouraging their friends and family to mentor, given their own positive experiences. It may be possible for programs to ‘tap’ existing mentors’ networks in this way. Other recommendations for how to reach mentors included booths at school events, e-newsletters through professional networks (e.g., women in science), radio stations (especially in small towns), word of mouth, and tying mentoring to course credit in some way during high school or university. Based on their experiences, interview participants said that sharing personal success stories is a compelling way to reach new prospective mentors by convincing them that they can make a difference in a young person’s life.

Several participants explained the importance of following through on whatever is advertised as part of the program. One participant recalled that the mentoring organization had promised workshops and community events, but then never offered these once she had joined. She was disappointed because it was important to her to be part of an organization, not just to mentor in isolation. Another participant was disappointed to find that once she signed up to mentor, the program actually did not have any mentees recruited. She waited a full year to be matched a mentee. She felt this was inexcusable, given the known need among young people in the community.

## Advice from one mentor to another

Interview participants shared pieces of advice that they would give to other mentors. To be successful, mentors need to establish their own support network and reach out when they need help. Participants emphasized the importance of honest, genuine communication; being non-judgemental; validating a mentee’s feelings; asking open-ended questions and giving a mentee time to speak; following through on promises; maintaining boundaries; meeting a mentee where they are at and not



pushing too hard; and being open-minded and allowing mentees to chart their own path in life, rather than taking a prescriptive approach.

One participant described his advice for others by saying, “Give your mentee your time, give them the undistilled version of yourself, everything you have in your heart, give that to them in full measure and create such a strong bond with them, that they will always know that when this person speaks to me or tells me something, it is utterly sincere and it is for my best interest. The way to do this in my opinion is to be so sincere, to feel for them from the bottom of your heart, and then it will all happen.”

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

In reviewing the findings from both the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews, and drawing comparisons between these findings and previous ones reported as part of Mapping the Gap and Capturing the Landscape, we present the following key takeaways for consideration by MENTOR Canada and its network:

### Who mentors?

- Survey findings shed light on the **mentoring across the lifespan**. The likelihood of a person's willingness to mentor in the future decreases steadily as an individual ages. The likelihood of having mentorship experience (i.e., being a current or past mentor) follows a U-shaped curve. People are most likely to be current or past mentors when they are younger (18-30) and again when they are older (50+). They are least likely to be current or past mentors during middle age (30-50), presumably due to life circumstances like raising a family and pursuing a career, which may make it difficult to mentor.
- Willingness to mentor is generally high across many different **demographic groups**. However, when it comes to actually serving as a current or past mentor, groups of people that face systemic barriers and have been historically marginalized in society – including Indigenous peoples, people who identify as trans, former youth in care, and people with a disability – are more likely to be giving back to our society by mentoring. When recruiting new mentors, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of these groups, while also being mindful not to overburden them. Mentoring programs may continue to investigate why rates of mentoring are lower among certain target groups. For example, newcomers may be less likely to mentor during times of transition when they themselves are settling in a new country. However, programs may want to investigate ways to remove barriers to mentoring for this group.
- Generally, the higher an individual's **income**, the more likely they are to be a current or past mentor. However, some lower-earning groups may be more likely to serve as mentors than others – for example, some survey respondents indicating low income may be post-secondary students, who may nevertheless participate in mentoring opportunities during their school years.

### Views and opinions

- Survey findings indicate that a more positive or optimistic view of society was found among current and past mentors and people who are willing to mentor in the future. Current and past mentors appear to have more awareness about the lack of mentors in our society and to acknowledge the needs for mentoring where they exist. They are also more likely to see the value and recognize the benefits of mentoring.
- The most common benefits of mentoring to be identified by survey respondents were reduced violence/anti-social behaviour, improved mental health, and promotion of healthy relationships from one generation to the next. These findings may underscore the importance of using a strength-based approach (rather than a deficit focus) when raising awareness of mentoring, in order to change perceptions that might otherwise stigmatize mentees. Several interview participants stated that mentoring should be normalized and offered on a universal basis, rather than targeted toward particular groups of youth.



## Motivations to mentor

- Among survey respondents, current mentors were more likely to endorse common mentoring motivations than were past mentors. Perhaps this means that the motivations to mentor are more front of mind for current mentors than past mentors, who may benefit from targeted messaging to remind them of their original motivations for becoming a mentor.
- The most common motivations for mentoring were: passing along knowledge/wisdom/experience to others; seeing a specific need in a youth and responding to it; providing education; and mentoring reflects values of service and nurturing. These findings suggest that mentoring programs could target their messaging to increase adults' confidence and belief that they have something to offer. How can we prime people to see themselves as someone who has something valuable and unique to share with young people? Interview findings suggest this messaging may be most important for certain groups of people, such as young women early in their careers or people with a disability.
- Survey respondents who had never mentored indicated that they could be motivated to mentor if they saw a specific need in a young person or were directly asked or called upon to mentor. Similarly, interview participants described instances when they were motivated to mentor a specific youth – for example, being approached by a young person's parent and being asked to mentor; relating to a young person's situation on a personal level; or knowing that a young person was missing certain supports in their home life. Highlighting specific, individual needs – rather than a more general demand for mentoring, and conducting targeted outreach seeking a mentor for one specific youth at a time may be ways of reaching and resonating with people who have never mentored before.
- Current mentors were more likely to endorse more of the benefits of being a mentor, while past mentors were more likely to endorse more of the benefits to mentees. This suggests that perceptions of the benefits of mentoring may change over time. To retain mentors, mentoring programs could target messaging toward current mentors to help show them the difference they are making in their mentees' lives. Qualitative interview findings suggest this could be accomplished through regular check-ins where the program coordinator asks mentees to give feedback to their mentor. To re-engage past mentors, mentoring programs could remind them of the benefits they themselves can experience as a mentor. Qualitative interviews suggest that this could be accomplished by sharing first-hand success stories from current mentors.
- The most common benefits of being a mentor that were endorsed by survey respondents were sense of giving back; purpose; and fun/happiness/interesting activity. These findings are in line with the qualitative interview results.
- The most common benefits of being mentored that were endorsed by survey respondents were having a positive role model; decision making and problem solving; and feeling empowered in their pursuit of individual growth and success. These findings are in line with the qualitative interview results, although interview participants also acknowledged that while these benefits are real and important, mentors should 'focus on the journey, not the destination.'

## Challenges facing mentors

- Past mentors recalled more challenges than current mentors, perhaps suggesting that their perceptions of mentoring had paled or that memories of challenges loomed larger with the passage of time. The most common challenges that were endorsed by survey respondents were: family with complex needs; lack of support by parents; severe and complex needs of mentees.

- Survey respondents also reported that a common challenge was encountering a young person who is unengaged/resistant. In the qualitative interviews, participants talked about encountering growing pains during the early stages of a mentoring relationship when building trust with a young person who may ‘test’ them. Mentoring programs could focus on preparing mentors for this difficult early stage, so that they understand that this phase is challenging but with patience, persistence, and effective trust-building strategies, they can overcome and move past it.
- Drawing across all sources of data in our overall mentoring study, it is clear that adults, youth, and service providers all acknowledge instances of unmet youth needs. How can mentoring programs be equipped to set parameters around their scope of practice to preserve the nature of a mentoring relationship, while ensuring that youth with high, complex needs are connected to other community and clinical services that meet their needs? Qualitative interview participants discussed the importance of boundaries and made it clear that it is not beneficial for a mentor to overstep their role.
- Encouragingly, when asked about reasons for stopping mentoring, most survey respondents indicated that relationships came to a natural end. A smaller proportion cited obligations within their own family, moving away, or a lack of time. These challenges were also outlined by qualitative participants. Only a small proportion of survey respondents indicated that they stopped mentoring because they felt unequipped or had a bad experience. Only two interview participants suggested that they were considering discontinuing their mentoring relationship due to a bad experience (in one case, feeling unsupported while a mentee was in crisis, and in the other case, feeling like the mentee did not need mentorship or was not a good match for the program and mentor).

## Enabling mentors

- Survey respondents said that they could be prompted to continue mentoring if they felt they were making a difference or received more recognition or praise; if the program allowed more flexibility; or if the program provided more support and resources. The idea that mentors want more flexibility and the chance to mentor on their own terms was also reflected in the reasons that informal mentors gave when explaining their preference for informal rather than formal mentoring.
- Survey respondents who had never mentored indicated that their reasons for not mentoring were time; not feeling equipped and capable or having something to offer; not interested; and not aware of opportunities. Qualitative findings suggested that it is important to screen and recruit mentors who are in an emotionally healthy place in their own lives, in order to ensure that they are able to provide effective support to mentees and set a positive example. Pervasive societal problems, like toxic masculinity, must be acknowledged.
- Both survey respondents and interview participants outlined a list of desired training and resources that mentoring programs could provide in order to better prepare and support youth mentors.

# APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS WITH MENTORS

## Defining mentorship

### *The meaning of mentoring*

Having a deep concern and a deep love for the other person; brotherhood, friendship; constant and repeated connection; being a role model, setting an example, offering a guide; someone a mentee can come to when there is a problem to solve it together; a safe place, a shoulder to lean on; a back-and-forth, someone to bounce ideas off of, a sounding board. Mentors are neutral, providing an external perspective; no authority or judgement. Mentoring is built on trust.

- “I’m not there for any other role, just there to be with him as an individual, to focus on him, to have fun together.”
- “There’s different types of mentoring and it doesn’t have to be prescriptive, there are lots of different ways to accomplish it. The common denominator is being intentional. Define your goal at the beginning about what you’re trying to get out of it, but then be flexible about how you go about it.”
- “A mentor is an adult figure who is not parental, it’s a chance to have fun, there is no discipline, it’s based on a strong connection, someone who helps youth develop their interests.”
- “I took it seriously this idea of inspiring them – and in that sense it doesn’t feel like a success ... it’s a lofty goal or destination when really it’s about just showing up for the journey. The influence is great if it happens, but to set that out as a goal is not realistic.”

### *The role of mentoring in Canada’s future*

Mentoring fills a void in our busy society, parents lack time, families are disconnected. Improve society by supporting youth; raise good, moral young people who are successful in their own right in their own lives, and are also successful at contributing and giving back. Mentoring is important during the transition from high school to adulthood, and to help newcomers settle. Every young person can benefit from a mentor. Importance of finding ways for men to be emotionally whole, opportunities for healing, if we don’t have healthy men they can’t become mentors.

- “If we want to improve society, we need to look closely at the development and nurturing of our youth, and mentoring is a big part of that.”
- “I wish society allowed it to happen more. There are lots of safety concerns, rules and regulations – you can’t touch or hug a kid, can’t be alone in a room with a student, especially for men. My husband is so cuddly toward kids in our lives but sometimes, it’s so indoctrinated, I tell him oh, be careful. But there is such a need for little boys and girls to have an adult male to trust.”



- “Mentoring is important especially the way society is now, we don’t spend as much time with extended families, and if we do everyone is so busy there isn’t just that quiet time where two people connect, not doing anything, just being together. There doesn’t seem to be the time or structure in society anymore.”
- “Mentoring introduces you to other people outside your own world, different worldviews, you are exposed to people with different experiences – this is important conditioning that school doesn’t always offer, fresh perspectives.”
- “Although the key to building a productive society relies on furthering the well-being of children through mentoring, its inadvertent positive effects on the mentors makes this a dual approach to improve community connection. This eventually leads to benefits that spill in all aspects of thriving town, province, country, and world.”
- ‘Every child needs a ‘one.’”

### Becoming a mentor

#### *Reasons, motivations for becoming a mentor*

Love of kids; just to have fun; recognize a need; seeing oneself in a young person’s situation; filling space in one’s own life (e.g., unable to have own children, own children leaving home, identity changing in retirement); to give back; have time to spare; also volunteer elsewhere; a chance to do something either related to or completely different from career; realizing the power to make a difference; own experience as a mentee; believe in the organization’s values; experienced one’s own healing journey and want to share that with others.

- “It started with my own connection to my faith... I learned more about my faith and those things moved me, I experienced an amazing change in myself, my worldview, my habits, I felt strong and uplifted and that drew me even more to my community. I myself received mentoring from remarkable people.”
- “I love spending time with kids, they are a breath of fresh air. Serving others gets you out of an insular state.”
- “I was originally looking for an adventure buddy, I wanted to keep myself busy, I had a whole list of activities to try with my mentee. But then that wasn’t realistic, it didn’t go as anticipated. My adventure buddy wasn’t very adventurous. I had to become comfortable doing nothing, I had to accept that just spending time together was enough.”
- “Our world is only as strong as our most vulnerable and if we all took a little time to support them, the world would be a better place.”

#### *Approach to recruiting mentors*

Mentoring is not babysitting or teaching. Age limits can be a barrier for young mentors. Mentors want support transitioning from one program to another when they move. Mentors recommend mentoring to their own friends and family; personal stories are compelling; word of mouth is powerful. Advertise mentoring in post-secondary settings, offer course credit; distribute newsletters in specific fields/careers like science; advertise on the radio in small towns. Offer low-barrier e-mentoring that is accessible for mentors with health issues.

- “Mentoring is a chance to enjoy all the best parts of a kid without the drawbacks of being a parent, like disciplining them or telling them when to go to bed.”



- “People are intimidated, they think they are going to have to watch or look after this kid, babysit. I would tell them, it’s not a big deal. Also, that you get to do the activities you are interested in too.”
- “Tell them this is the place to be if you want to give back to your community and make a difference in someone’s life.”
- “It was deflating to find that the organization was advertising for mentors but then when I signed up, I waited a year, because they didn’t actually have enough mentees. There is no reason that should occur because I know the need is there.

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### ***Initiating a mentoring relationship/bringing youth and mentors together***

Community service projects, humanitarian causes, offer a formal volunteer structure to tie people together, a shared cause/work. A virtual coffee shop where people can come together to chat. Informal mentoring was initiated through YouTube presence. Parents may approach a mentor. Informal mentoring is less goal driven, more general; formal structure is beneficial but also limiting.

- “In school seemed the safest way to do mentoring. You’re protected by the organization, insurance, credibility to go in the school.”
- “Early on during the trust building phase, go for a walk, ask open ended questions, find common ground.”

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### ***Who is a mentor?***

A mentor should be patient; kind and compassionate; trustworthy, have good intentions; authentic; adaptable; be responsible, on time, and follow through on commitments, especially for young people who have been let down by adults in the past. A mentor may have previous career or volunteer-related experience.

- “Everybody can be a mentor, it doesn’t take a special person.”
- “You don’t need to be the ‘end result’ as a role model – you can be someone in the midst of building your own career, in early career stages – I was doubtful about that at first.”
- “Personal character, moral character, values. That’s the essence of leadership, mentorship. The person you are mentoring has to be able to look up to you somehow. This is the currency of the mentorship. How you practice your faith, live your life, put it together to be a good family man who gives back to society.”
- “You have to have a passion for it, a calling, it’s in your heart.”

## **Dynamics of mentoring relationships**

### ***The focus of mentoring relationships***

Talk to mentees about education, career, family, marriage, friends, romantic relationships, weight and health; help with resume writing, finding jobs, picking a field of study; do activities together like art, crafts, reading, music, drawing, cooking and baking; sports like badminton, swimming, rock climbing, dance circle, outdoor things – digging up rocks, flying a kite; gaming, Minecraft; help with homework; practice English as a second language. Emphasize fun and never be the disciplinarian; try new things like tackling your fear of heights to show an example. Travel time is a useful time, good talks can happen in the car. Form relationships with parents, get to know the broader family

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- “I focus on giving people encouragement, it is such a strong thing, it makes people feel good, gives confidence, they get a warm feeling being around you and that facilitates everything. If you can do that for people, mentoring follows from that. When you believe in some one, that’s the ultimate booster and motivator.”
  - “I’m really careful about not going too deep into family issues when we talk – I always keep in mind it’s not supposed to be therapy, so I keep it fun.”
  - “Formal guidelines in the program are important to me. Boundaries are important. In the past in my job, I didn’t always keep my boundaries, I went out of my way to help people after work and I always found they were starting to suck me dry and take advantage of me. It’s better for me an institutional setting like a school where I can keep that objective empathy.”
  - “I think it would help if I build a stronger relationship, if I had more of a strong relationship with his family, but it’s hard to find the time because the parents are busy.”
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### ***Matching mentors and mentees***

Bring youth and mentors together in a group, with something in common (e.g., all members of the same faith community), and allow matches to happen naturally. Hang out, have food together, share a meal together, go on a trip – these are ways to promote bonding, joking, talking, friendships at the foundation. The bonding happens, then the mentoring automatically takes place, different people gravitate together, allow people to pair up without actually assigning a match. From time to time the leader will get everyone together to reinforce these emerging relationships. Age is important, as is gender (e.g., role models, women underrepresented in science), shared interests or goals. A match evolves over time, what started as a good match might not be one in a few years.

- “It’s about relatability, people who have gone through the same experience sharing their knowledge and wisdom back.”
  - “He doesn’t look at me like his parent, I’m physically able to do the things he wants to do, we have same interests like video games, I don’t look like a parent or a boss, I’m a friend.”
  - “Sometimes it’s valuable to be matched with someone you might not have thought you would be a good fit with.”
  - “As a high school student, the children don’t see me as an adult, they don’t have those judgments of me, I’m more approachable.”
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### ***Positive supports that make being a mentor easier***

Bringing large groups of mentors/mentees together, have mentoring take place in a broader community, organization –collaboration and cross pollination – have the one-to-one relationship nested within a broader network; foster a community of practice, conference, workshops, Facebook groups; have collective resources; share the load. Regular check-ins and frequent, responsive communication with program coordinator, debriefs, annual evaluations. Flexibility and freedom. Training and support around transitions, where to direct mentees if they need more help, conversation prompts, a schedule, signs of abuse or neglect, bias awareness, suicide intervention, understanding the stressors of living in poverty, diversity.

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- “The perfect level of support from a program coordinator is just enough that if they need you, you’re there, but it doesn’t become a burden.”
  - “I feel supported, I know I can call at any time. That’s a big thing, a mentor needs to know they have back-up, they are not flying solo out there by themselves.”
  - “I needed more information and more insight into what was really going on, like why this youth was recommended for mentoring.”
  - “My mentor has a learning disability and I treat her the same as anybody else, I don’t want to label her, but at the same time, would be helpful to know her needs more, help prepare.”
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### ***Challenging parts of being a mentor***

Program coordinators are too busy trying to get funding, maintain the basics, that they don’t have capacity to support mentors; coordinator transitions are difficult, the whole program can change. Time: don’t want to take the mentee away from something that’s necessary during class time; would like more time together; difficult for mentor and mentee to find time every week. Initial trust-building phase can be challenging, takes time. Boundaries, feeling bad whenever time was up and time to leave, feeling tested, learning to hold back and not take on a parent role.

Walking into a situation you don’t know about what you’re getting into, the tip of the iceberg— family situations that were more complex – support was there but was not available as quickly as needed — having the experience of calling but no one was there – important that the mentor doesn’t cross that line and isn’t forced to go beyond their role as a mentor in order to provide necessary support – the mentor has the experience and knows how to help but it would have violated their boundary – sacrificing that gentle boundary. Mentee with serious mental illness, needs intensive supports, suicidal, very sullen and withdrawn – when this started to occur, the program was not responsive enough, the new coordinator was going through the motions but was not truly engaged, the supports fell through. When the mentor reached out, the organization didn’t have a lot to offer around suicidality, was forced to reach out to community supports on her own in this very delicate situation. Line of communication broke down between mentor and parent – was not told she was on suicide watch, the mentee told her that off the cuff ‘I’m not supposed to be alone’ while out in the community, unsure whether she should let her go to the washroom. Jealous, seeing how other mentors/mentees have that fairy tale ending, feeling defeated.

- “When you’ve been through it, and see you the youth go off course and it’s about how to bring them back in a way that doesn’t push them away from you. That has to be done through wisdom, kindness, warmth, sometimes humour. I enjoy that aspect.”
  - “Hard to take up this role when you have your own family, it’s a big time commitment. Our system is a give back system ingrained from our youth, understand that when it’s your time to give back, you prioritize because you realize that you became who you are as a result of the mentors you had.”
  - “It took us a while to get comfortable, in the first couple of months he gave me some challenges and I could see him looking out of the corner of his eye, looking to see you know, am I going to stick around, punish him, do something to him?”
  - “I have to stop mentoring because I’m moving, embarking on my career.”
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## Outcomes associated with mentoring

### *Benefits for mentees*

Making better friend choices, getting better at making friends, resist negative peer influence; helped mentee be honest with her mom, encourage her to share with her mom, which is a tough relationship for her; improvement in attending school – “you’re the only reason I go to school”; motivational tool, someone believes that they can do great things; show mentee that connections to others is a good thing, she can trust adults; once helped a child who was suicidal, helped connect him to supports, give him a safe space to talk.

- “The value of mentorship cannot be overstated... Helping people and changing lives brings satisfaction and meaning and mentoring is one of the most powerful ways to do that. I’ve been so blessed that a little bit of mentorship from my side has gone a long way in their personal development, and they say that to me. A little bit of mentorship can lead youth to gain perspective at a younger age, gain a sense of connection.”
- “He comes from a big family with young parents. It’s just nice for him to have an adult to focus just on him and have fun with him.”
- “He’s happy to be with me, I can see it on his face and the teachers say he is happier after seeing me and is more receptive to learning.”
- “I can get him to talk a little bit. He told his teacher I’m his favourite adult.”
- “The world has let them down, they don’t trust, they test people and try to push them away. This is a way to rebuild that.”
- “Went from shy to being outgoing, now he’s interested in a lot of the things that I’ve been interested in and introduced him to.”
- “My mentor told the program coordinator, ‘Sometimes kids at school are mean to me and having a mentor made me feel better.’”

### *Benefits for mentors*

A chance to make an impact; bring youthful energy into a mentor’s life; doing fun activities; rewarding, helpful, feels good, positive experience; inspiring; develop a sense of community; improve transferrable skills – people skills, communication, conflict resolution; overcome your own traumas on your healing journey.

- “Just a little guy to love.”
- “Gives me something to do, a structure to my week.”
- “Seeing his face light up.”
- “I’m more compassionate.”
- “A wholesome part of my life.”
- “Every time I leave, I feel good.”
- “It’s important to gain experience relating to a younger generation – if not for mentoring I wouldn’t have much contact with young people.”
- “It gives me a life outside of work.”
- “A ray of positivity.”

- “You are going to grow as a human, watch someone else grow and blossom, use the things you have injected into their life in a way that benefits their life.”
- “I learn how to make friends and make a bond with someone younger, can transfer that to making connections with people of all ages.”
- “It’s an eye opener, you can help your community in this small way, you don’t need to have everything figured out, it’s enough to just be there.”
- “It nurtures my spirit, enriched my life, the joy of seeing littles running to share their day with you excitedly.”

### **Advice**

Honesty, genuine communication; be confident that you have something to offer; open-mindedness; listen, rather than telling the mentee what to do; plan a support network; don’t break promises; set boundaries.

- “Give your mentee your time, give them the undistilled version of yourself, everything you have in your heart, give that to them in full measure and create such a strong bond with them, that they will always know that when this person speaks to me or tells me something, it is utterly sincere and it is for my best interest. The way to do this in my opinion is to be so sincere, to feel for them from the bottom of your heart, and then it will all happen.”
- “Let them figure out their own boundaries, unless it’s running in traffic.”
- “Don’t push too hard, understand it can be scary and intimidating for the mentee, meet them where they are at and do what is comfortable.”

### **Adapting to the pandemic**

Difficult transitions – “it was just ripped away”; adapting to virtual; miss the physical contact and being together in person; online meetings are hard for the parents to coordinate; difficult to maintain boundaries; youth attention spans are short.

- “I really miss him.”
- “He is going to have an app, the school will get him set up with it – it will be fun, he can teach me.”
- “Make sure you maintain structure, like a weekly time to get together online.”
- “Try to do a shared activity, maybe even dropping of supplies in advance.”

## **Cultural and contextual considerations**

### **Faith-based communities**

Mentoring helps in the moral and spiritual development of youth, religious teachings like serving mankind, brotherhood, giving back to society; honourable, sacred duty to give back – tied together by religious affiliation, which cross ethnicity, race, culture; matching mentors/mentees who have a shared experience - Muslims growing up in the West, how to reconcile and observe faith in a different society, how to excel in your career and your life, as well as your spiritual life. Faith based settings are an opportunity because people are already coming together, there is a structure, and a strong sense of morals.



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**Newcomers**

Interpretation help is important to understand family dynamic and background, also training on how to help improve language skills.

**Disability**

Mentor with physical limitations – make sure you advertise in an inclusive way, celebrate their contribution, show them that they are welcome – e-mentoring is an option – helpful for youth to see people with various abilities.

**Indigenous communities**

Important to offer food to bring people together, share cultural teachings. Historically, pre-colonization the Indigenous community raised children collectively, children learned from their neighbours, but then that way was lost, now it's coming back and being revitalized. Indigenous mentors bring knowledge of the land, will spend time teaching mentees and connecting to outdoors, the earth, bringing awareness to the land and teaching to respect the land. Cross cultural mentors are a good thing – to share Indigenous culture with non-Indigenous youth. Don't force programs on Indigenous youth or assume they need help just on the basis of the fact that they are Indigenous. Be aware that some Indigenous kids do not have trust for the school system or adults. Normalize mentoring, offer it to everyone.

- “Am I going to interfere with his culture? Is it going to be okay? But it's gone well and reminded me that I don't have to worry that much about the cross-cultural stuff. He will talk about having gone to a sweat lodge or gone to visit family on reserve.”
  - “I didn't get any cross-cultural training, it's been ignored.”
  - First in family to go to university (mentee) vs. someone coming from a university family (mentor), being flippant about cost of tuition or choice of institution – “They have pressures and stressors that I didn't experience myself.”
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