

# FINAL REPORT

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## A REVIEW OF MENTORSHIP EFFECTS ON YOUTH IN CANADA

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*This paper looks at the effects of formal and informal mentoring on youth outcomes. It reviews the characteristics of effective programs, the benefits that such programs can potentially offer to Canadian youth, and public policies that can encourage participation in mentoring programs.*

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Wayne Dye**

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## Executive Summary

Youth mentoring, generally defined as a relationship between an experienced non-parental adult and a young protégé, is often used to help young people address the challenges they face, such as barriers to education and employment, and risky behaviour. The literature on mentoring refers to informal (or natural) and formal mentoring.

- Informal mentoring is a mentoring relationship that develops naturally between a young person and a non-parental adult in their social network.
- Formal mentoring is a more structured and organized relationship that develops through matching of mentor and mentee by a third person. Guidelines are usually provided on the role of mentor and mentee in the relationship, the interaction terms, the predefined goals and objectives of the relationship, and duration of the relationship. These relationships usually have very specific purposes, such as career progression, improved academic performances, business start-up or growth, easy transition to postsecondary education, easy transition from academia to work, and so on.

This paper presents a synthesis of the empirical evidence on the effects of mentoring on youth outcomes, such as the characteristics of effective programs, the benefits that such programs can potentially offer to Canadian youth, and the public policies that can encourage participation in mentoring programs. There were three significant challenges in completing this paper. First, due to time constraints the literature review was restricted to easily accessible work done by recognized experts in the field over the last ten years.

Another challenge was not being able to find research that precisely fits the definition of youth as between the ages of 16 and 24. Instead, studies were selected that had some overlapping with this age group. Third, empirical research on mentoring is sparse in Canada and therefore the literature used in this report is mainly U.S.-based.

Over the past two decades there has been a growing body of research, especially in the U.S., that examined the effectiveness of youth mentoring relationships as it relates to the challenges faced by young people. Most of this research looks at formal mentoring, although more recently the effectiveness of informal mentoring relationships has also been investigated. The current research shows agreement and understanding among practitioners and researchers of the necessary practices that make mentoring programs (i.e., formal mentoring) work. Researchers agree that formal youth mentoring works best when the relationship lasts for at least one year. Informal mentoring, though less researched, has also been showed to positively influence youth outcomes. And as with formal mentoring, this result appears to be associated with the length of the relationship.

Given this, the best practices for effective youth mentoring are centred around recruitment and training for mentors and mentees, matching strategies that will increase the odds of a sustained relationship, ongoing monitoring and support of the relationship, and avoiding abrupt endings to the mentoring relationship. For Indigenous youth, additional strategies such as including engagement of elders, using group settings, and making sure that the mentoring program is part of a larger community commitment to youth are identified as practices needed for successful outcomes.

Conversely, the research has showed that youth who are involved in mentoring relationships that end prematurely or are less than three months long can be worse off when compared to those of non-mentored counterparts. In other words, they may have fared better if they did not participate in the mentoring program. Regrettably, one of the constant challenges faced by mentoring programs is that about half of mentoring relationships tend to last beyond a few months. Another caution, though not widely mentioned in the papers examined is that some program participants may experience unintended negative effects such as increased risky behaviour caused by pressure from program peers and weakened parental bonds due to their close ties with another adult.

Notwithstanding, the general consensus is that mentoring programs help, and effective programs are dependent on having good matches that result in lasting relationships. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that having a large diverse group of motivated mentors is paramount. Therefore, policies that can encourage participation in mentoring programs such as an education campaign to help raise awareness on the benefits to the mentor and mentee and remuneration or recognition of mentors, such as a mentor category for Canada's Volunteer Award, are all worth consideration.

Most importantly, more research is needed to determine what works for different segments of the Canadian youth population and how, given the growing interest in youth mentoring but scant research on the subject in Canada. This is significant, especially if mentoring is used to support the youth population of Canada.

## Section 1: Introduction

There is growing interest in mentoring as a means to promote individual growth and positive outcomes among young people. Research in mentoring and the evaluation of mentoring programs, especially among youth, continues to grow and help bridge the gap between theory, research, and practice. More and more mentoring programs are designed with empirical evidence in mind or are being evaluated to assess their effectiveness or to learn from failed attempts to help the people for whom they are intended. This paper discusses results from such research.

The purpose of this paper is to present empirical evidence on the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs, the characteristics of effective programs, the benefits that such programs can potentially offer to Canadian youth, and the public policies that can encourage participation in mentoring programs. This report is expected to add to a growing dialogue on how the Government of Canada can demonstrate its commitment to youth. The issues of youth empowerment, youth employment, and youth engagement are priorities for the Government of Canada. To demonstrate this, it has put in place a range of programs to support youth in their transitions from education to employment, to provide them with the tools they need to meaningfully participate in society, and to leverage their diversity.

This paper should be considered a first level scoping exercise, given the time constraints. With a longer timeframe a more extensive literature review could be possible. The information presented here was sourced from easily accessible quality research work done by recognized experts in the field and by reviewing the results in meta-analysis reports that addressed the questions of interest in this report. More specifically, this paper was informed by literature that was published in the last 10 years. This includes published books and publications of organizations whose primary focus is to gather and disseminate international empirical research findings on mentoring to educate fellow researchers, practitioners, and policy makers on the most recent developments on the subject. The majority of these documents were sourced from the centres of research on mentoring in the U.S. and two informative publications – the Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring: A Multiple Perspectives Approach (2010) and the Handbook of Youth Mentoring (2013). Both publications provide a cross-disciplinary compilation of research papers by subject matter scholars.

Finding research that precisely fits the definition of youth between the ages of 16 and 24 was a challenge. The youth mentoring literature covers children, adolescents and older youth, but mostly mentoring of children and adolescents, and rarely presented disaggregated results by age group. As such some of the results presented do include younger age groups. Further, while the various studies seem to lead to similar broad conclusions, in most cases the results for each study cannot be generalized to other types of mentoring given the parameters of the research.

The paper is organized in five sections. After this brief introduction, Section 2: Background presents concepts and definition on the topic of mentoring to frame the issue. In so doing it examines the different types of mentoring relationships (i.e., formal and informal) and the typical components of the

mentoring relationship. Section 3: The Impact of Mentoring on Youth presents the results from the literature review on the effects of mentoring on the youth population, especially in the area of education, and transition to employment. It also discusses best practices and the empirical research results on why some mentoring relationships do not work. Section 4: Policy Implications presents possible public policies that can encourage participation in youth mentoring. Section 5: Summary provides a summary of the report.

## Section 2: Background

As the practice of formal mentoring grows, more and more research and evaluations are being conducted to examine the different aspects of mentoring. These investigations are much more prevalent in the U.S. than in Canada and have provided evidence that mentoring, whether informal or formal, can indeed lead to positive outcomes for some young people. They also provide evidence as to the conditions under which mentoring appears to be most effective, the necessary characteristics of mentors and mentees, and activities that are associated with positive results.

The notion of youth mentoring is typically characterized by the relationship between a young person and a more experienced adult mentor. Mentors can help young people prepare for their educational goals, professional careers, be entrepreneurs, or partake in civic engagement. They often help them set career goals and develop a plan for reaching them. They can also help them increase their social network. Normally, the mentor is an unrelated adult or older youth who provides guidance and support in one or more areas of life such as academics, career, and in emotional, physical, and general well-being. Mentors are typically volunteers. The mentoring relationship can happen organically or by design, and in different settings, such as at school, work, community, and now virtually. Further, the provision of guidance usually occurs over an extended period of time as opposed to being momentary.

Eby et al (2010) provided an illustration of how mentoring is similar or different from other interpersonal relationships, which is depicted in Table 1. While similar in many respects, this table clearly demonstrates that mentoring is different in one or more ways. It also shows that a component of mentoring is a role-modelling function, yet overall the two are distinctively different. Role modelling does not require any support, interaction or relational closeness, which are necessary for effective mentoring.



**Table 1: Comparison of mentoring with other types of interpersonal relationships**

Type of Relationship	Relational Dimension						
	Context	Primary scope of influence	Degree of mutuality	Relationship initiation	Relational closeness	Interaction required	Power of difference
<b>Mentor-mentee</b>	Academic, community, workplace	Academic, social, career, personal	Low-high	Informal or formal	Low-high	Yes	Large-small
<b>Role-model-observer</b>	Academic, community, workplace	Academic, social, career, personal	None	Informal or formal	None	No	Large-small
<b>Teacher-student</b>	Academic	Academic, career	Low-moderate	Formal	Low-moderate	Yes	Moderate-small
<b>Advisor-advisee</b>	Academic	Academic, career, personal	Low-moderate	Formal	Low-moderate	Yes	Large
<b>Supervisor-subordinate</b>	Workplace	Career	Low-moderate	Formal	Low-moderate	Yes	Large-moderate
<b>Coach-client</b>	Workplace	Career, personal	Low	Formal	Low-moderate	Yes	Large

**Source:** The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring: A Multiple Perspectives Approach Notes: The grey shading shows where these relationships are similar.

The literature on mentoring refers to informal (or natural) and formal mentoring. While there appears to be inconsistencies in the general literature around these definitions, they are most commonly defined, including in the youth mentoring literature, as follows:

- **Informal mentoring** is a mentoring relationship that develops naturally between a youth and a non-parental adult in their social network. Consequently, it is also referred to in the literature as natural mentoring.
- **Formal mentoring** is a more structured and organized relationship that develops through matching of mentor and mentee by a third person. This can occur with or without input from the mentor or mentee. Formal mentoring programs usually provide guidelines on the role of mentor and mentee in the relationship, the interaction terms, the predefined goals and objectives of the relationship, and duration of the relationship. These relationships usually have very specific purposes, such as career progression, improved academic performances, business start-up, easy transition to postsecondary education, easy transition from academia to work, and so on. The research has shown that the parameters and boundaries of formal mentoring relationships can affect the outcomes (Eby et al, 2010).

There are several types of mentoring relationships (Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring, 2009). This includes:

- One-on-one - one adult is matched with one young person;
- Group – one adult is assigned to up to four young people;

- Team – several adults working with small groups of young people, with usually a one adult to four youth ratio;
- Peer – a youth mentoring another youth (it is recommended that the youth mentor be older by at least two years); and
- E-mentoring – using electronic media (email, Skype, and so on) to mentor.

Other types of mentoring relationships that appear to have been given little focus in the literature is reverse (or intergenerational) mentoring, and reciprocal mentoring (i.e., two-way mentoring). The typical mentoring relationship pairs an experienced adult with a young protégé, but in the case of a reverse or reciprocal mentoring relationships the younger person also takes on a mentoring role. Such a mentoring relationship has mostly been offered as a way to bridge the gap between the technology and social media savvy millennial (i.e., individuals born between 1982 and 2004) and older generations who are less adept with technology. Anecdotally, reports in newspapers, news and opinion journals mention cases where such role reversals can be beneficial. However, nothing was found in the empirical literature that was reviewed on youth mentoring that looked at the effectiveness of such mentoring models.

Initiation of and continuing use of most formal youth mentoring programs, whether one-on-one or group, focus on young people at risk for poor outcomes in areas such as academics, risky behaviour, or those in care (e.g., foster care or juvenile facilities). As such, mentoring is being used to a large extent as an intervention strategy.

In Canada the most prominent community-based mentoring organization for young people is the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada (BBBSC) organization. BBBSC describes its objectives as follows:

- It provides a role model and a friend for girls/boys and young men/women;
- It promotes the importance of staying in school and healthy relationships with family and peers;
- It instils trust and self-confidence in order to make healthy decisions;
- It encourages leadership skills and independent thinking; and
- Above all, makes a difference while having fun.

BBBSC has been in operation since the early 1900s and has now expanded into school-based mentoring programs. Its focus appears to be serving children and adolescents from the age of six to 18. The objective of being a role model coincides with the information in Table 1, which illustrates role modelling as a function of the mentoring relationship. As with other formal mentoring programs, the BBBSC organization also requires other relational dimensions such as frequent interaction and developing a relational closeness, functions that are not necessary for a role modelling relationship. A number of recent reports have been published on the evaluation of its programs, with highlights provided in Section 3.

Recent developments on mentoring research and evaluation in Canada include a national conference on mentoring, held for the second time in 2016. Conference organizers stated that the aim was “to advance the unique contributions of mentoring to the well-being of children and youth” (National Mentoring Symposium 2016).

Meanwhile in the U.S. there are at least two well-known research centres on mentoring. MENTOR (mentoring.org), the National Mentoring Partnership that champions youth mentoring has been in operation for just over 26 years. This year MENTOR held its seventh national conference. MENTOR “serves the field by facilitating an open and efficient exchange of youth mentoring research among researchers, practitioners and policy makers in a variety of ways.” MENTOR aims to make these findings accessible to researchers and practitioners and thus bridges the gap between theory and practice and increases the knowledge base for evidence-based practices and policies. Consequently, MENTOR established the Evidence-based Mentoring Center at the University of Massachusetts Boston that in turn established The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring, an online resource to share new findings on youth mentoring.

A second research centre on mentoring is located at the Portland State University – PSU Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring Research. The PSU Center and MENTOR hold an annual Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring that brings together top mentoring researchers and practitioners to discuss theories and research on youth mentoring.

It is therefore no surprise that a much larger body of research on youth mentoring exists in the U.S. compared to Canada. At the same time though, the research on youth mentoring appears to be heavily focused on children and adolescents rather than on young adults. However as will be discussed later, the current research indicates that the salient factor that affects the mentoring results is the strength, duration and integrity of the mentoring relationship.

## Section 3: Impact of Mentoring on Youth

This section presents the results from the literature review on the effects, intended and unintended, of mentoring on the youth population. The typical mentoring model posits that a strong and meaningful relationship between the mentor and mentee will be cultivated by them working on goal-oriented tasks. This strong and positive relationship and the guidance provided by a mentor are expected to be the catalyst in helping the mentee interact more effectively with the world around them and in their different spheres of life, leading to positive outcomes. Some of the factors that appear to affect this relationship include: the youth's personal history including family and community context, social aptitude, and developmental stage; the length of the mentoring relationship; the frequency and type of support the mentor and the mentoring relationship receives from the program (Eby et al, 2010). Review of the literature, which included results from one-off qualitative and quantitative evaluation studies, randomized control trials, and meta-analysis that have been conducted over the last 25 years, particularly in the U.S., provides evidence that many young people tend to benefit from both formal and informal mentoring. At the same time though mentoring programs do not work for all and there can be unintended negative effects for some.

### Effects of Informal Mentoring

While research on formal mentoring is much more prevalent, there are emerging studies on informal mentoring. A number of studies from the U.S. have shown that informal mentoring relationships can be just as beneficial for the youth as formal mentoring. For example, Miranda-Chan, et al (2016) looked at longitudinal data for a national representative sample in the U.S. to examine the long-term benefits of such a relationship for adolescents transitioning into adulthood; they found that having a mentor during adolescence was positively correlated with educational attainment, self-efficacy and optimism in adulthood. It also lowered the likelihood of being involved in criminal behaviour. This and other U.S. studies on informal mentoring (Chang E. S., et al, 2010; Hurd N. M., et al, 2012; Hurd N. M., et al, 2016) demonstrate that as youth transition into adulthood having non-parental adult support in their lives can help improve their educational attainment.

Hurd et al (2016) looked at the effects of informal mentoring on college dropout for a group of underrepresented U.S. college students.<sup>1</sup> This study found that mentoring was especially important during the first year of college, when dropouts tend to be the highest. The results suggested that compared to those without a mentor, the academic performance for those who had informal mentors improved during the first year, but this was only the case for those with relationships that sustained over the course of that academic year.

Being an emergent research theme there are still many unanswered research questions around informal mentoring and why and how it works. However, one factor that appears to influence the outcome is the duration of the relationship. Hurd, et al notes that informal mentoring relationships tend to last for

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<sup>1</sup> In this case underrepresented refers to first-generation college students, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or students from underrepresented racial/ethnic minority groups that were attending an elite and predominantly white U.S. institution.

many years. It could be that because the mentor and mentee chose each other, they are less likely to experience some of the challenges faced around matching in formal mentoring programs, which often results in the premature ending of the mentoring relationship.

### **Effects of Formal Mentoring**

In general, the results of many studies on the effects of youth mentoring show that it can positively affect several dimensions of a young person's life. Most of the research has shown positive effects on educational attainment and juvenile delinquency, regardless whether it was one-on-one, peer-to-peer, group or team mentoring. In fact, as pointed out by David L. DuBois, et al. (2011) in their systematic review of several published U.S. studies:

“The benefits of participation in mentoring programs are apparent from early childhood to adolescents and thus not confined to a particular stage of development. Similarly, although programs typically have utilized adult volunteers and focused on cultivating one-to-one relationships, those that have engaged older peers as mentors or used group formats show comparable levels of effectiveness. “

DuBois, et al. (2011) also examined whether there were differential effects for samples with a higher proportion of boys and found that effects were more favourable for samples with a larger percent of boys. However, since this technique is not equivalent to a direct comparison of boys versus girls, the results are not conclusive. In fact such results may be associated with other characteristics of the sample. On the other hand, other school-based studies (Bernstein, et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2007) reported greater improvement by girls, compared to boys.

One caution of DuBois et al (2011) is that these effects are sometimes quite modest and there are hardly any long-term follow-up studies to determine whether the positive effects of mentoring are long lasting. Another caveat is that most of the youth literature on mentoring seems to focus on mentoring effects on disadvantaged populations – juvenile delinquents, children in care, foster children aging out of the system, or underrepresented U.S. college students. For these populations mentoring interventions appear to be effective.

However, this does not imply that mentoring programs are only effective for disadvantaged youth populations. Rather, it appears that because most formal youth mentoring programs are focused on helping disadvantaged youth, the available data and research are almost exclusively focused on this population. E-mentoring has also shown positive results. One example is an experimental study conducted in Germany (Stoeger et al, 2014) for girls 11 to 18 years of age, with an interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The study led to improved participation rates in STEM programs among those with a mentor affiliated with the STEM field, compared to girls with similar STEM interests but no mentor. Several U.S. e-mentoring programs have mentioned seeing positive results among their members, though no research or evaluations of these programs were found in the literature that was reviewed.

Results from several other studies also support these positive findings on formal mentoring (Schwartz, S. E. O., Rhodes, J. E., Spencer, R., & Grossman, J. B., 2013; Stoeger, H., et al 2013; Woods, C. & Preciado, M., 2016). Three in particular are noted here since it was clear that they included youth in the age group of interest and addressed the issues of interest. The first is the evaluation of BBBSC community-based mentoring program that is described as the largest study of its kind in Canada.<sup>2</sup> The study was conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research. According to the results, positive results were observed in mental health for youth participating in BBBSC programming. BBBSC also notes that its mentoring program leads to improved outcomes in employment and civic engagement, when results for mentored youths are compared with that of non-mentored.<sup>3</sup>

The second is a synthesis of research reports conducted by Child Trends (2010), a nonpartisan and non-profit American research organization that studies children at all stages of development. They conducted a synthesis of 31 different rigorous U.S. evaluations (i.e., randomized control trials) that were conducted on well-being that targeted older youth who were transitioning into adulthood (i.e., 18 to 25 years of age). Several of these studies included mentoring as a component of the intervention. The results showed that “mentoring can be an effective technique for improving youth outcomes.” The report also notes that of the programs it examined, the strategy of mentoring was “especially effective on school and employment outcomes” as well as delinquency. Moreover, it found this was especially the case for programs that provided mentoring over an extended period of time.

The third example is from the evaluation of programs that used mentoring to support youth entrepreneurship. Youth Business International (YBI), a London, England- based global network of more than 40 independent not-for-profit organizations helps underserved entrepreneurs aged 18 to 35 with business start-ups and job creation. Futurpreneur, a Canadian organization serving young entrepreneurs, is a member of YBI. One component of the support the member organizations provide to young entrepreneurs is mentoring. In a 2015 report, *Supporting Young Entrepreneurs: What Works?*, a compilation of evaluation results of its programs across the globe, YBI notes that young entrepreneurs with a mentor tend to have more profitable businesses. This report also states that research done by Futurpreneur found that since mentoring became a mandatory component of the services provided to young Canadian entrepreneurs, they have had to write-off much fewer loans. YBI posits that the question is not whether mentoring is effective, but how to make sure it is effective.

The available evidence suggests there is value in support for youth mentoring programs, especially as an intervention strategy for disadvantaged or at-risk youth. However, the results indicate that those results are most likely to occur when certain practices are adhered to: Supported by extensive empirical

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<sup>2</sup> The sample in this study included 997 young people aged 6-17 from across Canada, which means a small, but unknown proportion of them were in the 16-17 age group. About a quarter of the study sample belonged to the 12-17 age group.

<sup>3</sup> BBBSC estimates that for every \$1 invested in mentoring there was a return of \$18 to society. However, the full technical report was not available to make an assessment of objectivity of this finding or whether the calculation methods used met the standard set by welfare economists in determining the economic costs of social programs.

research, the MENTOR's publication Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring (2015) prescribes the six practices listed and discussed further below for successful formal mentoring programs. These are also common themes throughout the formal youth mentoring research literature that were reviewed, including:

- Recruitment of appropriate mentors and mentees;
- Proper screening of mentors;
- Training of mentors and mentees;
- Matching mentor and mentee and initiating the mentoring relationship using strategies that will increase the odds that the relationship will be sustaining and effective;
- Monitoring the relationship and providing support for the duration of it; and
- Facilitating the closure of the relationship.

### **Characteristics of Effective Mentoring Programs**

Youth mentoring is said to work best when the relationship lasts for at least one year. Conversely, mentoring relationships that end prematurely or are less than three months can result in negative effects (i.e., mentored youth performing worse off than those without a mentor). For example, Grossman et al (2012) found that participants in his BBBS of America study with relationships that end prematurely were significantly more likely than controls to perform poorly in school.<sup>4</sup> Their findings also appear to indicate that it is not just the dosage that matters but also the integrity of the match. These findings are intricately tied to the six standards of practice briefly discussed below. MENTOR promotes these for use by youth mentoring organizations as standards required for increasing the likelihood of a successful and effective formal mentoring program.

**Recruitment** – programs with mentors and mentees who understand the program's aims, requirements, challenges, rewards, and expected outcomes are more likely to be successful. As such, successful programs seem to be those that realistically describe these features to the mentor and mentee during recruitment. Unmet expectations of mentors and mentees seem to be one of the contributing factors to premature ending of the mentoring relationship, thus making the case for the right messaging during recruitment (Spencer, R., 2007; Youth Business International, 2015).

**Screening** – As noted by Grossman et al (2012) “interventions that put their resources into carefully screening mentors who can make an enduring commitment as well as maintaining initial matches through training and support, instead of recruiting and training replacements, may be more likely to yield promising effects.” Since most mentors are volunteers, screening is also a security factor in helping to keep mentees safe from abuse.

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<sup>4</sup> This study is of a BBBS of America's school-based program that randomized students in grades four through nine to examine the effects of match length and integrity of the match by looking at re-matching (i.e., assigning a new mentor when the relationship breaks down). Studies on older youth and natural mentoring seem to also imply that match length is important although studies for older youth on match integrity were not found.

**Training** – Successful programs tend to be those that provide some form of orientation training to their mentors and mentees. Training helps set boundaries and expectations for the mentoring relationship and has been found to be related to positive match outcomes.

**Matching** – In order to ensure lasting and effective mentoring relationships, mentor and mentee must be well matched. Matching on similar characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, and common interest is often a recommended strategy. However, according to MENTOR (2015), the research on matching shows few differences when comparing cross-race and same race matches.

**Monitoring and support** – Monitoring and support of the relationship allows program staff to observe and assess whether the goals, rules and guidelines for a successful mentoring relationship are being followed. Through monitoring the program can become aware of challenges that may lead to premature closure of the relationship. According to MENTOR (2015), “when mentors received high-quality support from their mentoring program, they report stronger relationships with their mentees and are more likely to continue the mentoring relationship.”

**Closure** – Because mentoring relationships that end pre-maturely are associated with negative outcomes, having proper procedures in place to officially close the relationship can help the mentor and mentee prepare for this and reduce some of the negative emotions associated with this event.

While these practices should work in general, at least one study shows that among the Indigenous population in Canada there are additional features that are required for a successful mentoring program. The search for empirical evidence on mentoring Indigenous youth yielded very little. While there are several mentoring programs targeting Indigenous youth (e.g., Inuit Student Mentorship Program in universities across Canada) they do not seem to have been evaluated or if they were the results don't appear to be in the public domain. One exception is the evaluation of BBBSC mentoring pilot programs targeted at Indigenous children and youth population in Alberta, which provided some insights on program characteristics that are unique and important for this population.<sup>5</sup> The focus of the evaluation was on learning what would make an Indigenous youth mentoring project successful, rather than looking at the effects of the program. The key finding from the evaluation was that “aboriginal mentoring programs will look different from mainstream programs and as such they will require different supports.” In particular the report states that for this population a group setting is the most effective method, though when working with high-risk youth one-on-one mentoring is important. Also, to be successful the program must be seen as part of a larger community commitment to youth, must have local leadership support, engage the community elders, and be part of a larger Indigenous cultural context (Schissel, C., Wilson, T., 2006).

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<sup>5</sup> While this evaluation was conducted in 2006, it's included because it is the only empirical evidence found on mentoring that targeted Canadian Indigenous children and youth. Three of the four pilot sites appear to have included youth, though a specific age range of participants was not provided in the report.



Another way to examine the characteristics of successful mentoring programs is to look at the research on why mentoring programs fail or where are the challenges. According to the literature on mentoring only half of formal youth mentoring relationships last beyond a few months. As noted before, such premature endings can leave the youth worse off than those who are not mentored. Spencer's 2007 qualitative study on youth mentoring relationship failures sought to understand why this was the case. Six main factors were revealed in this study, including:

- Mentor or mentee abandonment;
- Perceived lack of mentee motivation;
- Unfulfilled expectations;
- Deficiencies in mentor relational skills, including the inability to bridge cultural divides;
- Family interference; and
- Inadequate agency support.

In a similar fashion YBI (2016) notes: "For mentoring to work it needs a structured approach with dedicated and trained fulltime staff. Expectations of mentors and mentees need to be clearly defined and monitored." This is further supported by Andrew Miller (2009), who states that youth mentoring programs need "infrastructure and organizational capacity to plan and operate an effective program."

Another challenge for many mentoring programs is the lack of volunteer mentors and a high dropout rate of mentors. Most programs seem to always have more mentees than mentors and are faced with a long waiting period for a mentor. In an attempt to mitigate these challenges researchers in the U.S. are currently investigating a new model of mentoring called Youth Initiated Mentoring (Schwartz et al, 2013). This approach allows the mentee to play an active role in identifying a mentor by allowing him/her to nominate an adult from their already existing social network of non-parental adults to serve as a mentor. This approach empowers the mentee by allowing and supporting them to be part of the process. One program that builds on this approach is the Connected Scholars program in the U.S., which is a group mentoring program geared towards underrepresented students transitioning to college that "teaches adolescents and emerging adults the skills they need to be able to recruit their own mentors and build other forms of social capital." In essence, it teaches those looking for a mentor the skills for fostering an informal mentoring relationship. Early research has shown that this model has promise and is especially beneficial to first-generation college/university students (Schwartz et al, 2013).

### **Unintended Effects of Mentoring**

In her research paper on formal youth mentoring, Rodríguez-Planas (2014) lists several possible unintended negative effects that may affect some participants of formal mentoring programs. They include the following:

- Mentors may overprotect youth, reducing their costs of engaging in criminal activity and other risky behaviours;
- Mentors may weaken the ties between youth and their parents, breaking important social family bonds;

- Mentoring programs may increase mentees' awareness of their disadvantages, which can lead to disappointment and risky behaviours; and
- Grouping high-risk youth together can expose them to negative peer influences, which are associated with increased substance abuse, delinquency, and violence.

It is unclear what proportion of mentored youth is affected in this way. These were not cited elsewhere as major concerns.

### Knowledge Gaps

- In Canada there is little evidence of research on youth mentoring taking place outside of BBBSC program evaluations or if they are, the results do not appear to be in the public domain. In comparison, the U.S. has several academic peer-reviewed publications and empirical studies with varying at-risk youth populations, in different environments (i.e., school, workplace, college, community, etc.), with steps taken to make these easily accessible to researchers and practitioners via the MENTOR website. There is a general need for high quality research and evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs on Canadian youth. Further, the results need to be made available to practitioners so that their programs can be developed based on evidence.
- Most of the research seems to be focused on disadvantaged populations. However, there are also less well known mentoring programs for other groups of young people such as youth entrepreneurs, young professionals and young scholars, who are not necessarily disadvantaged but could benefit from a mentor as they embark on those endeavours. Evaluations of such programs are also necessary to determine if they work and for whom they work.
- Results of the evaluations that have taken place are not disaggregated by age so it's difficult to tell if what works for younger children and adolescents would also work for older youth who are at a different level of maturity and cognitive development. For example, there seems to be agreement that mentoring relationships of at least one year in duration are the most successful, and less than three months can be harmful. However, these were primarily studies of young children and adolescents. Is it possible that young adults would benefit just as much from a shorter duration? Research samples that are large enough so that results can be looked at by age group would help answer this question.
- Few research studies attempted to calculate the economic benefit of mentoring (i.e., a cost-benefit analysis) to society. And according to Foster (2015) those that do attempt this calculation lack objectivity and tend not to meet the standards of welfare economist.
- The research does not yet seem to have addressed whether formal mentoring is better than informal mentoring (e.g., the magnitude of the effects) or vice versa. It also has not yet looked at whether there are certain groups of youth that are better served by one rather than the other.

## Section 4: Policy Implications

This section will look at how public policies can encourage participation in mentoring programs. The general consensus appears to be that properly executed formal mentoring programs and informal mentoring tend to have a positive effect on youth outcomes. Given this, how can young people be encouraged to seek out and participate in mentoring programs? At the same time, is there a need for more mentoring programs or mentors for existing programs and if so, how can these be encouraged? Four strategies are put forward for deliberation.

- Funding or co-funding of research on mentoring is necessary. If mentoring is to be used to support the youth population of Canada then it is necessary to determine what works and for whom and under what conditions, before they are implemented more broadly.
- The need for more mentors is quite evident. One of the challenges of most mentoring programs seems to be how to attract and keep mentors motivated. Many programs struggle to match every mentee or have long waiting periods to be matched. An education campaign would help raise awareness around youth mentoring and its benefits to mentors and mentees as well as introduce the concept to a diverse population. Most programs tend to match by gender and background (e.g., culture, race and ethnicity) so such a campaign would need to reach a broad and diverse group of people. Cross-gender matching should also be encouraged, where appropriate. However, as noted above, programs must provide realistic descriptions of the expectations and benefits of their mentoring program in order to attract and keep mentors motivated.
- Mentoring programs rely heavily on volunteers to act as mentors. Mentors come from all walks of life. As such program models that encourage collaborations between the public sector, private sector, and communities should be encouraged. For example, the paid or remunerated mentor model should also be considered. This could be in kind or providing paid time off to volunteer as a mentor.
- Another possible avenue for promoting youth mentoring is to use the "Canada's Volunteer Awards", perhaps by creating a specific Youth Mentor category, to reward those who give their time to youth mentoring programs.

## Section 5: Summary

The review of the literature suggests that in general the effects of youth mentoring, whether informal or formal, one-on-one, group or virtual can have positive effects on several dimensions of a young person's life. This appears to be especially the case when mentoring is used as an intervention strategy with at-risk youth and disadvantaged populations. And while the research papers that were accessed primarily examined U.S. data and programs, the BBBSC program evaluations hinted that results would be similar for Canadian youth. These positive results are most likely to be realized when the relationship is strong and lasting, and mentoring programs adhere to the following practices:

- Recruitment of appropriate mentors and mentees;
- Proper screening of mentors;
- Training of mentors and mentees;
- Matching mentor and mentee and initiating the mentoring relationship using strategies that will increase the odds that the relationship will be sustaining and effective;
- Monitoring the relationship and providing support for the duration of it; and
- Facilitating the closure of the relationship.

For indigenous youth in Canada, some additional unique features are required for mentoring programs to be successful. These include a preference for group settings, the engagement of community elders, and must be seen as part of a larger community commitment to youth. However, these positive results are somewhat mollified by the fact that there appears to be hardly any long-term follow-up studies to determine whether the positive effects of mentoring are long lasting. Also, despite the general positive results cited by the U.S. and Canadian studies, mentoring may not work for some, including possible experiencing unintended negative effects. Research using U.S. data show that only half of formal youth mentoring relationships last beyond a few months, which can lead to negative outcomes (Grossman et al, 2012; Spenser 2007). There are six main factors identified by the literature for such premature endings, including:

- Mentor or mentee abandonment;
- Perceived lack of mentee motivation;
- Unfulfilled expectations;
- Deficiencies in mentor relational skills, including the inability to bridge cultural divides;
- Family interference; and
- Inadequate agency support.

Some may also experience unintended negative effects such as increased risky behaviour and weakened parental bonds.

Another major challenge faced by mentoring programs is finding and keeping mentors motivated. As such programs and policies that can help attract and retain mentors are needed. More research is also needed on what works for different age groups and segments of the youth population, if mentoring is to be used to support the youth population.

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