



# #CanadaWeWant #leCanadaquenous souhaitons

NATIONAL YOUTH MOVEMENT | MOUVEMENT NATIONAL DES JEUNES



# MENTOR CANADA

## Building a Mentoring Movement in Canada

Conference Report April, 2021



**The Students  
Commission**  
*Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement*

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**Canada**



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## Acknowledgements

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Youth participants' names and regional representation:

Jaymee (ON), Meghan (ON), Juliette (QC), Jaylyn (PEI), Elsie (PEI), Chi (BC), Christy (MB), Disha (NB), Cassandre Dion Larivière (Facilitator) (QC) & Cat Delaney (Facilitator) (ON).



## Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Building a Mentoring Movement in Canada theme team from the 2021 #CanadaWeWant Virtual Youth Conference held in March, 2021. This conference theme team focused on exploring mentorship and, specifically, looking at what mentorship means to youth across Canada. The facilitation team used the SCC's Young Decision Makers (YDM) process to study and discuss mentorship. During these discussions, the team described the difference between formal and informal mentorship, positive and negative mentorship experiences, skills and characteristics of a mentor, and elements that they believe should be taken into consideration in a national mentoring movement.

It is important to express that thoughts surrounding the development of this theme team and the mentoring movement have been underway since 2018, when over 200 young people from across Canada (mostly those who identify as furthest from opportunity) were invited to share their voices with the Youth Employment Strategy (YES). These youth participants articulated that the needs and desires for mentorship opportunities are present and that mentoring should be part of an ever-evolving conversation for youth to thrive. It is noteworthy that many of the ideas from the youth in 2018 were also shared among the youth from this theme team in 2021. This demonstrates that the need to define what is required in a national mentoring movement is higher than ever.

Through the conference, youth participants identified common characteristics and skills that ideal mentors possess and reflected on what a good mentor looks like. The theme team used the #CanadaWeWant Youth Movement's Four Guiding Lenses to explore and ground the issue by addressing: The Rural and Remote Youth Experience, Structural Racism, Truth Leading to Reconciliation, and Children's Rights.

The team concluded that the #CanadaWeWant is a Canada that supports youth in feeling safe, accepted, and supported. We firmly believe that mentoring is a key ingredient in ensuring those qualities are present for youth. To support this vision, the theme team and other youth participants at the conference identified recommendations that fell under the following themes or categories: (1) gap and room for innovation, (2) youth

panels or advisory committees, (3) diverse perspectives, (4) education setting, (5) training for mentors, (6) focus on informal mentorship, (7) proactive mentorship opportunities, and (8) adaptive mentors.

## The 2021 #CanadaWeWant Conference

This year's #CanadaWeWant Youth Conference was a virtual gathering that took place online from March 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 (it was adapted to follow the public health guidelines in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Over the course of the week, youth participants and adult allies from coast to coast to coast came together online to share their stories, their perspectives on societal issues, as well as a wide range of ideas that they believe contribute to making Canada a more inclusive and diverse space.

Youth participants began the conference experience by attending Opening Ceremonies. Youth participants were invited to select one of eight theme teams to explore throughout the week. They joined their respective theme teams and began to connect with their peers and work through the issue guided by the facilitators who followed the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement's (CEYE)'s YDM process. Some groups explored their topics more broadly; discussing the issues and challenges that young people face and identifying possible solutions. Other teams were tasked with working directly on specific questions or on various creative products and deliverables that were brought to them by different organizations or government departments who were eager to hear directly from the youth. By the end of the week, all theme teams arrived at a set of recommendations that would help achieve the #CanadaWeWant. These recommendations were presented at the virtual National Showcase Event hosted by RBC's Future Launch Strategy to an audience of community stakeholders, policy makers and decision makers. All teams also created a theme team report, such as this one, to present their process and contextualise their recommendations regarding their theme and issue.

## Conference Days

### Conference Preparation

It is important to consider the work of the facilitators leading up to the conference. It was our objective to create a safe space where youth would feel comfortable to share personal experiences, be open and honest about their struggles, and feel empowered to work with their peers to identify potential solutions. Establishing this environment requires a mix of intentionality, experience and strong faith in the process. Facilitators for this theme team spent the week prior to the conference brainstorming ways to engage youth with the issue at hand, as well as laying down a foundation on which the group could build a safe space. The role of the facilitators is largely as it sounds: to facilitate and accompany the youth participants throughout the week while

adapting to  
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might need  
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Prior to  
the youth  
participants  
would make  
Building a  
Mentoring



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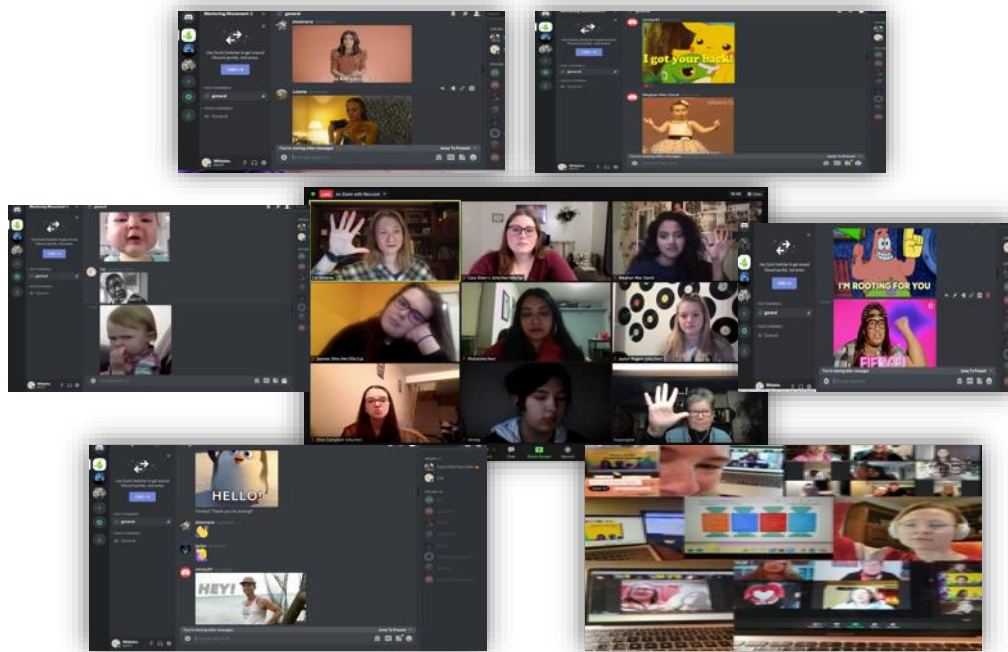
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Movement theme team, the facilitators reviewed the Young Decision Makers model, decided on community building activities to begin the session with, and chose ways in which they planned to deal with unpredictability. The initial activities were selected on the basis that they would allow for both the introduction and deeper exploration of the concept of mentoring. While the process is unpredictable at times, the facilitators felt strongly about intervening only in ways that would allow them to foster and maintain the safety of the space and uphold the Four Pillars: Respect, Listen, Understand, Communicate™.

## The Process

The Building a Mentoring Movement in Canada theme team at the #CanadaWeWant Conference was made up of seven youth participants and two facilitators. The group came together every day throughout the conference week to build trust and community, not only for the duration of the conference but also with the intention of maintaining a relationship for the foreseeable future. The end of the week culminated with the participants and facilitators calling each other family and rushing to follow each other on every imaginable social media platform.

Team members participated in a series of check-ins/check-outs, activities and games to establish this family mentality and to build trust with one another throughout the week.



Overall, youth participants were able to create a strong sense of rapport with one another by establishing both trust and a sense of community. In order to keep in touch with one another throughout the week outside of conference hours, the group created a Discord Server which they used as their main form of communication. Youth participants and facilitators messaged each other on the Discord chat every day, to share how their day was going, what they were working on, what they were eating, and even what the weather was like where they were. Discord was used for the entire duration of the conference as it allowed the theme team to capture and mimic interactions that might have occurred in settings in-person; for example, shared feelings about the Talent Show and the Plenary Sessions. As mentioned previously, youth participants and facilitators also added one

another on various social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok in order to stay connected and in touch beyond the conference.

The theme team was also joined by two members of the SCC Elders Council for a portion of the conference week. Their presence helped initiate deep, meaningful and often vulnerable discussions among the group. Facilitators were happy to see participants feel comfortable enough to step up and help our elders with different technology-related problems that they were having so they too could feel more engaged in the different games and activities.

In order to guide discussion, the theme team spent a lot of time developing a safe space (more information on the intentionality behind the safe spaces can be found in the next section). This time ensured group cohesion and shared understanding of the SCC's Guiding Lenses as well as the Four Pillars, as these concepts are referred to as key themes throughout the conference week. Spending time on the SCC definitions of these concepts, as well as on each members' personal experience and understanding of them made it so that youth could utilize them in accordance with their own experiences and thoughts and apply them to the topic of mentoring.

Any mistakes made by youth participants or facilitators were also brought into conversation with an emphasis on the importance of transparency in accordance with The Four Pillars. This process was built around the idea of "calling in" rather than "calling out", which became a very much appreciated learning experience for everyone in the group. The concept of mentorship was explored in depth through a process in which youth participants were encouraged to share their feelings and personal experiences with it. Youth participants were also in charge of guiding the discussion with the facilitators provided prompts to help initiate further discussion.

The SCC National Youth Conference's main strength has been living and breathing our Four Pillars with youth and adults from every province and territory who reflect Canada's diversity.

- Respect: For young people and their capacity to change the world through their active engagement in the conference process. Respect for all people and the unique gifts and strengths they bring.
- Listen: In small theme teams and in large group plenary sessions. Listening by exploring issues from the individual, social and systemic level. Listening to take in diverse viewpoints and to really see things from the perspective of others.
- Understand: Understanding all aspects of the issues being explored in theme teams. Understanding viewpoints that may be completely different from your own. Understanding to build a better country with folks who are different from you.
- Communicate: Using the conference process and experience to communicate the changes you wish to see in the world. Continuing to work together through the year-long youth movement to make sure these changes happen.

## Safe Space

The creation of a safe space was critical across the entirety of the conference but emphasis on safe spaces and comfort was considered highly by the theme team facilitators in this group. As mentioned previously, The Four Pillars acted as the primary means to foster this safe space and formed the basis of how conversations and interactions took place within the theme team. This began on the very first day of the conference. Facilitators ensured that young people shared what each of The Four Pillars meant to them and that all were on the same page with one another. Facilitators made it a priority to respectfully and discretely identify technological needs and requirements, as well as language and accessibility needs. They noted that experiences and stories could be shared within the chat feature on Zoom, over private messages on Discord or through text message if they wanted to share thoughts on the matter but were not able to or did not yet feel comfortable to do so in the group context.

Activities to develop and maintain a safe space were essential for the process and youth participants always had the choice to opt out. Facilitators made it clear that cameras were optional, and that youth participants could get up to grab a snack, stretch, or attend to any other needs that they may have. It also became clear that for a safe space to be fully established, facilitators would need to meet youth participants where they were, in terms of levels of engagement, as well as physical, mental and emotional energy. This meant that if after a long day at school or work, youth participants wanted to have a 10-minute break mid-session, the group would do exactly that. If participants wished to have their cameras off for a certain period of time, that was their choice, and if they wanted to just eat and chat or rant, that also was an option. Facilitators felt that this was more important than to rush through the topic in a forced or crammed way.

Overall, the largest consideration was fostering a safe space before and after group sessions throughout the week. There were several days where facilitators spent extra time after the conference, ensuring that youth participants were confident and comfortable with how things were going throughout the week. The process of the conference was always presented as one which was flexible and open to any changes based on the youth's experiences. It became clear that the magic of the conference would manifest itself when a safe space was achieved, and that the most valuable aspect of the conference was not the structure, but rather the flexibility and the ability to exist authentically with one another.

## Cross-National Diversity

Another key strength of this theme team was the rich diversity in perspective and experience that occurred naturally thanks to the outreach of the SCC and the #CanadaWeWant movement. The youth in this group reflected youth from West, Central and Eastern Canada but more specifically, they represented individuals from

various identities, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as youth with unique experiences. The Building a Mentoring Movement in Canada theme team participants and facilitators represented diverse groups ranging from BIPOC youth, immigrant youth, international students, members of the 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous and First Nations youth, as well as youth from rural communities and with a wide range of age, genders, and languages spoken at home. Given these unique experiences and perspectives, the emphasis on safe spaces became of even greater importance. Throughout the conference, youth participants shared how these unique perspectives informed their perceptions and experiences with mentorship and what was beneficial for them, as well as what they wished had been done differently, on a national level, to help them flourish.

## Key Findings

Throughout the conference, there were multiple topics surrounding mentorship that arose naturally in conversation. Different viewpoints, perspectives and considerations, allowed youth participants to discuss multiple issues within their community that impact them. The following discussion sections seek to demonstrate how youth defined and explored the concept of mentorship.

### Discussion

#### Studying the Issue:

The Building a Mentoring Movement in Canada theme team dedicated time to studying and discussing mentorship opportunities for Canadian youth. Some questions that were posed by facilitators pertained to defining mentorship and exploring personal experiences, and linking these experiences to expectations, hopes, and dreams about mentorship by asking questions like: What is mentorship? What are our experiences with mentors (as facilitators and participants)? What are young people's experiences with mentors? Can you describe positive and negative experiences with mentoring? What made them positive or negative? What would you have liked to be different? What is a formal mentor, and what is an informal mentor? How are they different? Which one is best for which needs? How can the mentoring programs in place now meet your needs?

The discussion that came from these broad questions revealed that youth participants had mentorship experiences. Some mentioned that they had never thought of certain relationships as mentoring relationships, but that discussing this topic made them realize that they were or could be. Others seemed to have a quick answer when asked who their mentors were. Notably, one Indigenous youth mentioned that their grandmother was a mentor for them as well as for other members of their community who valued her perspective as an elder. Overall, the youth participants seemed to be unaware of where to find mentoring opportunities, which suggested that more awareness as part of the movement would be beneficial.

## Discussing the Issue:

One thing that was established early on within this theme team was that youth want mentors who are similar to them in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity. They want mentors who have practical experiences in life skills; specifically, skills that could assist youth in understanding their own struggles or those which could be beneficial to their future. Some youth participants described that an ideal mentor would also have career goals aligned with their own and be successful in achieving their goals. Youth participants expressed wanting mentors who could be realistic role models, individuals who were not perfect and who were continuously growing but who had wisdom and experience to share with them. This is similar to the sentiments expressed by the youth participants who shared their voices with YES back in 2018. The former youth participants “suggested that providing opportunities to engage with mentors of similar backgrounds/experiences to promote empowerment and capacity-building among youth furthest away from opportunity, [allows for a] relationship [that] could provide insights into overcoming barriers”.

On the other hand, it is also important to note that youth participants also expressed their desires for mentors who may be different from them, and who would support them in learning different skills and understanding different perspectives. This became prevalent among the prompts included to guide discussion about this topic; one of which were laid-back drawing sessions with music where individuals were asked to draw their ideal mentor in a way that captured their identity, as well as characteristics that cannot always be seen physically. Youth were also invited to annotate various types of presentations and boards, engage in open discussion, Zoom and Discord chat discussions and contribute their ideas in a shared Google Doc.

Through Discord, youth participants discussed these questions in more depth. One participant described their vision and understanding of what their ideal relationship and dynamics between mentees and mentors would be: Mentor-mentee relationships have to be equal; mentors wear many different hats; mentors are trusting and open and so are the mentees – the relationship must be based on them being authentic; a mentor cares for their own mental and physical health; a mentee can look up to the mentor; and the mentee is resilient, and the mentor can see that – they may remind the mentee of this fact.

In regards to the #CanadaWeWant movement, the experiences youth participants described that they have had with mentors were relatively similar across the theme team. Youth participants described having mentoring relationships with counselors, professors, and coaches. As discussed earlier, many mentors can have a positive impact on a young person’s life, but it is also possible that youth may have negative experiences with mentorship. Facilitators made it a point to acknowledge this and to spend time identifying what made negative experiences negative in order to derive what makes them good. Youth participants were open about this and shared experiences that showed that not every mentor has the right training or skills to create a positive beneficial relationship with their mentees.

There was also discussion of undesirable favouritism with past mentors. When discussing these positive and negative experiences with mentors, youth participants touched upon concepts of informal and formal

mentorships and what this means for them. Herrbach et al. (2011) explain the differences between informal and formal mentorships as well as how they can be integrated into different parts of a person's life. On one hand, informal mentorship is a naturally occurring mentorship that is not organized or structured; formal mentoring, on the other hand, is structured and usually managed by an organization (Herrbach et al, 2011). As was supported by the literature and agreed upon by the youth participants in this theme team, both formal and informal mentoring were perceived as having similar commitment strengths in regards to building mentoring relationships, but in relation to the effectiveness of this commitment, informal mentoring relationships seemed to be stronger (Herrbach et al, 2011) and more likely to last beyond one's involvement in any given organization.

Within the Discord discussion, youth participants were often invited to take more time to reflect on their previous realizations and discussions and to elaborate on what an ideal mentor does or should do (i.e., education, occupation, what you do together; for example, casual conversation or formal guidance etc.). Youth participants were also invited to reflect and comment on where and how one should meet their ideal mentor. They were asked to reconsider their understanding of formal and informal mentorship and the idea of whether they might desire to meet someone organically and/or be introduced to someone more formally. Participants' answers to these questions revealed a deep understanding of mentorship on their part. Youth participants recognized that depending on what they are seeking, the ideal mentorship relationship might look different; they might wish to have mentors who have a similar level of education as they aspire to, both formal and informal mentors at once, mentors with whom they do activities as friends would, and mentors with whom the relationship is more professional.

The most important conversation to come out of these prompts was that youth participants would like to be offered an opportunity to choose their mentors and to explore the qualities of mentoring relationships that most benefit them. They recognize that all youth are different and that mentoring relationships should be established on a case-by-case basis.

*"My ideal mentor is an open person of any walk of life and any role (formal/informal,) who is transparent, helps me confront negative thoughts, and is in a place to be a solid mentor."*

*- Youth Participant, March 2021*

Furthermore, the activity in which young people were invited to draw their ideal mentors resulted in a discussion between all participants (as well as facilitators and elders) about how they hoped their mentor would be like them in certain aspects of their identity but also different from them in their skills and knowledge (so that they could learn from them and be led by example). Some youth participants expressed that their ideal mentor was someone that is already in their lives as a mentor and others even drew themselves (or themselves in the future). One of our elders expressed that she herself was who she is because of her mentors and that this

made herself her own ideal mentor. These conversations were vulnerable and emotional for everyone involved at times and the group bond became even stronger following this activity.

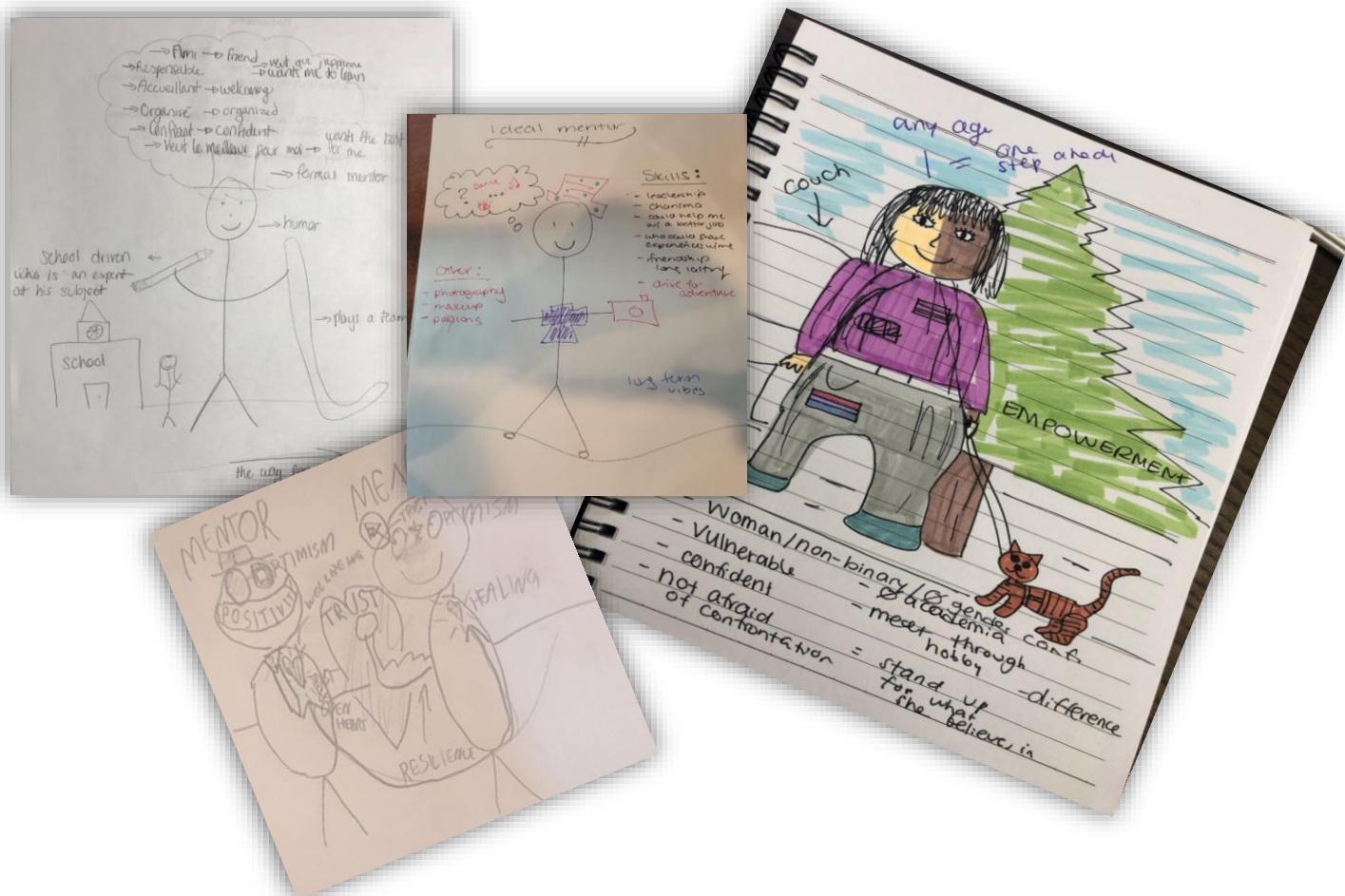
In this process, young people were asked questions related to the skills mentors should possess. Overall, young people demonstrated that their ideal mentor has a number of skills which touched on the following aspects:

- A person who can offer guidance to learn and grow.
- An open and understanding person who is prepared for continuous learning.
- Someone who understands and relates to BIPOC and/or 2SLGBTQ+ related challenges.
- Someone who understands mental health.
- A person who is an avid activist with a drive for advocacy surrounding these issues.
- Someone that is deeply caring, driven, encouraging, non-judgmental, expresses vulnerability themselves, reliable, inspiring, outgoing, trustworthy, and follows their dreams.
- A person who allows for growth in diverse ways.
- Someone with similar qualities and identities as the mentee.
- Could be one of a number of mentors who reflect diversity and collaboration.
- A mentor is resourceful, goal-oriented, empowering, and has an understanding heart.

*"I would want to be influenced by someone who values the lives and wellbeing of others so much that they dedicate their career and education to it."*

*- Youth Participant, March 2021*

Included below are some of the drawings group members and facilitators produced during the drawing activity. Youth participants agreed to share them within this report. These drawings were prompted by the question of what their ideal mentor looks like. The characteristics mentioned above were illustrated through the drawings.



*"I think [a mentor] should help/ guide you to be a better person no matter what that means to you and help you learn and grow."*

- Youth Participant, 2021

## Guiding Lenses

The #CanadaWeWant Conference relies on Four Guiding Lenses to explore conference topics and to frame recommendations. These lenses were selected based on recurring themes that emerged during previous youth conferences and seek to encourage young people to take an intersectional approach to understanding and tackling their topic area in a way that considers youth with unique experiences.

## Addressing the Rural, Remote and Northern Experience

The Building a Mentoring Movement in Canada theme team is made up of diverse youth from across Canada. From small-town PEI, to small-town Ontario, this group demonstrated their positionality and experiences through the perspectives that they shared.

On the Government of Canada website, the Department of Justice discusses rural and isolated areas, as well as the challenges pertaining to youth justice within these areas. They describe that the young people living in these isolated areas have suffered poor quality and inadequate depth of services (Government of Canada, 2015). This is most certainly relevant to mentoring within Canada as well, as youth in these smaller communities do not have the same access to services as youth from suburban communities do, thus furthering inequality and promoting unequal access to opportunities. As stated above, positive mentoring experiences can be very influential and beneficial within a young person's life and everyone should have equal access to them.

This consideration for unique experiences of youth from rural, remote and northern communities led directly to the theme teams' second recommendation. This recommendation expressed that organizations need to implement mentorship programs and to create a youth advisory panel, but the panel must be inclusive. It must accommodate youth who may live in rural, remote and northern communities.

## Addressing Structural Racism

Structural racism was a topic that came up a lot in discussions within the theme team and across the conference as a whole. There were members of this group who identified as BIPOC, as well as international students and immigrant youth.

A portion of the conference was outside of the small theme teams, where participants had the opportunity to attend Plenary Sessions. Conference participants heard from SCC members and other conference participants in regards to their experiences with structural racism as Indigenous individuals, Asian youth and other racialized youth. The SCC Network Facilitator, who is also one of the conference leads, KD Voss, spoke about growing up in Thunder Bay, and how it is notorious for various types of systemic racism and homophobia. They expressed how these experiences led them to begin their leadership journey and ignited a desire to help tackle issues like these.

Elder Bernard said, in one of these plenary sessions, that: *"racism includes violence, oppression, and it poses further barriers on racialized and Indigenous youth"*. Throughout the #CanadaWeWant Conference, it was mentioned that this drive for change is one that requires group effort and collaboration. It was made clear that addressing structural racism begins with all of us having a role and duty to be actively anti-racist, bringing together intergenerational partnership to engage in dialogue, and reflection, learning, and action that seeks to address issues. As will be demonstrated in the Dream Tree below, no young person wants to feel unsupported or feel unsafe because of their background, race, gender, abilities, ethnicity, or background.

The guiding lens of Addressing Structural Racism is important in mentorship, as it is critical to have mentors who share this duty of being actively anti-racist and who respect and consider experiences of those who may be different from them. Bimper (2017) wrote about how racialized individuals need strong mentorship in order to be led onto a successful and positive path to adulthood. Bimper (2017) uses the example of Black students in a predominantly White school, and how a strong support system that encourages and uplifts Black or other racialized individuals can give them opportunities they need to meet their full potential. When racialized youth have access to an active leader, collaborator and role model, such as their white peers have access to, they are able see their full potential. Speakers at the conference stated that failure to have access to resources and to a safe space led to negative experiences which now motivate them more than ever to work towards a better future.

*"We continue to live in a country where existing systemic racism includes violence, oppression, and it poses further barriers on racialized and Indigenous youth."*

- Kwaku Agyemang (Nobody is Born a Racist 2.0 and Conference Lead)

## Truth Leading to Reconciliation

An integral part of fostering a safe space is to allow for acknowledgement without immediate action. It was a priority in this group to acknowledge and recognize the true impact of colonization and the genocide, which makes up an important part of Canada's history, while refraining from jumping to excuses or seeking to only focus on what had been done to work towards reparation and reconciliation. In this way, it is the philosophy of the SCC, to consider truth *leading to* reconciliation.

Throughout the week, the Building a Mentoring Movement theme team made sure to acknowledge, despite the virtual nature of the conference, that all participants and group members were joining from Indigenous lands and territories, whether they be governed by treaties or unceded. For some youth participants, this was both new information and a new practice to adopt in gathering. Resources were shared with all members in order to ensure that all could find out more about the land they lived on. Facilitators and group members made sure to explain why this is important and to encourage everyone to carry this practice into other areas of their lives and into other groups they belong to. As we have learned through our collaborations with Indigenous organizations, we have made a point to ensure that the land acknowledgements were done in complete sincerity, as well as by non-Indigenous folks to avoid placing further burden on their shoulders.

One of the youth participants in this theme team was Indigenous and although they were not able to be present for the entirety of the conference, the experiences and perspectives that they shared stayed with the rest of the group throughout. We were also fortunate to have Grandmother Kathy Bryant, a member of the SCC Elders Council, to join us for one of our sessions. Her presence, as well as the experiences that she shared with the group about her upbringing and mentorship, were very valuable in being guided by this lens.

## Children's Rights

Throughout the conference, the theme team advocated for representation and a value-based platform to conceptualize mentorship in a way that sought to promote outcomes that are in the best interest of the young people. As mentioned in article 29.1 of the Convention of the Rights of a Child, children have the right that through education they *"shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential"* (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1991, p.7). In order to uphold this right and foster youth's full potential, the theme team advocated for youth voices, particularly those who are furthest away from opportunity, to be a main priority and key contributor in the initial stages of developing programs.

Another key argument made during the conference was that mentorship programs provide youth a safe space that maintains the health and well-being of Canadian youth. Included in the UNCRC, Article 27 1. states "the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1991, p.8). When discussing the health of youth, it is important to take a holistic approach in order to recognize the multitude of factors that constitute one's health, including social determinants of health. This directly coincides with the theme team's initiatives to maintain health among youth by providing a space free of harm and judgement, while also allowing youth to speak their minds, express themselves, and cultivate skills associated with social capital. During the conference, a youth participant directed the group's attention to the importance of ensuring vulnerable groups have access to quality mentorship relationships. The vulnerable groups discussed include youth in juvenile detention centers, immigrant youth, impoverished youth, as well as youth with disabilities.

*"We need youth in the driver's seat, creating and making spaces that support their wellbeing".*

- Youth Participant, March 2021

## Dream Tree

The Dream Tree is a tool that is used to synthesize young people's ideas into a youth-friendly logic model for a given topic. When building a Dream Tree, the roots represent the foundation; the inputs, resources and values that are needed to work towards a goal. The trunk of the tree represents the activities that are needed, while the leaves are the outputs and indicators highlighting what we will see as a result of the activities. The fruit represents the desired outcomes (the dream!). The visual below represents the Dream Tree that the theme team worked on.

## FRUIT: THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE (OUR DREAM)

- Students electing individuals to properly represent them → Adults TRUST DEEPLY that youth can be part of big decisions and allow spaces and provide support (MENTORSHIP!!!), so that they will rise up to the challenge and beyond.
- Younger voting ages and ability to enter into the political sphere
- Framework or emphasis on strong relationships between youth and adults (mentee-mentors) - so there is exchange of knowledge, to understand the needs of each other
- FOR NO YOUNG PERSON TO FEEL UNSUPPORTED OR NOT SAFE BECAUSE OF THEIR GENDER, RACE, ETHNICITY, BACKGROUND, ABILITIES
- Properly allocate funding/resources to assist young people to create the world they seek.
- What youth value and prioritize is also what the government values - i.e. More jobs. Alignment of young people and perception of government

### LEAVES: OUTPUTS & INDICATORS

- Equal opportunity
- Everyone feeling comfortable, supported and safe (emotional and physical) in their communities
- Community involvement/engage young people in various panels - BIPOC panels, LGBTQ+ panels - completely a collective... intersectionality! Provide a place to be completely and utterly heard. More than just a flag or an icon.
- Everyone's basic needs are met
- Very clear opportunities to speak directly to ministers about policies

### Trunk: Activities (What we need to do)

- Including diverse voices in decision making processes
- More programs/ groups and services for youth
- Youth committees in every aspect of government
- Experience building
- Shadowing opportunities
- Teacher training/professional development needs revamping → mandatory inclusive and accessibility training, policies
- Student leadership and development opportunities run by young people → Youth led programming in the education system!!!!
- Programs or initiatives within companies or organizations (mentor, interns etc.) to learn Less dependent on grades and more about the actual process of engagement - paid!
- Easy access to these types of learning opportunities
- Action/value and change focused/driven based groups - we want both
- Could we have Real-life problem-solving opportunities as part of the curriculum - given guidance and mentorship there → we need to hear about this in school

### LEAVES: OUTPUTS & INDICATORS (HOW WE KNOW IT'S WORKING)

- Amount of funding and resources available for student-led groups
- Transparency in training and operations.
- Guaranteed action from recommendations and criticism (even and especially from minority and marginalized groups)
- Amount of time spent with understanding the user - feedback and involvement

### ROOTS: INPUTS (RESOURCES) AND VALUES

- Inclusion, Access in tech and physical spaces, Funding, Resiliency, Safe spaces, Perseverance, equality and equity, non-judgement, diversity, knowledge, community,

## Vision for Change – Theme Team Recommendations

In order to build the Canada that youth want, both individuals and organizations must contribute to the creation of a system that supports all youth in feeling safe, accepted, and acknowledged. Young people believe that youth-adult collaboration and mentoring relationships are a significant factor in engaging youth from all different backgrounds and experiences in the creation of the Canada that youth want.

Youth participants who took part in the conference and were part of this theme team brainstormed what this would look like as well as the more concrete steps that can be taken to achieve this ideal society.



Following this brainstorming session, youth participants came up with eight recommendations which are outlined in the section below. The hopes for these recommendations are that they will not only give youth the rights and opportunities they believe they deserve, but they will also help contribute to the change youth would like to observe in society in terms of youth receiving support and thriving.

*\* Note that the recommendations in the following section were outlined and written by the youth themselves. Context was added in to translate these recommendations into more concrete statements.*

## Recommendations

1. **The first suggestion is based on a gap, and room for innovation: Youth in Canada deserve to have access to mentorship programs that cover practical and life skills. Equity and inclusivity should be guiding factors in ensuring the health and wellbeing of Canadian youth. Youth participants recommend mentorship programs be made available to youth to cover content valuable to their personal development such as life and practical skills.** This means that youth would like to see increased access to mentoring opportunities that are catered to their practical life skills, specific identities, and perspectives in a way that allows for the creation of relationships that extend beyond a focus on academic or career goals. To ensure the health and wellbeing of Canadian youth, intervention should revolve around principles of equity and inclusivity to ensure it is encompassing, appropriate, and reflective of all Canadian youth. To accomplish this goal, it is essential to create mentorship opportunities that reflect relevant and unique experiences of youth in different contexts including the foster care system and juvenile justice system, in addition to youth from disabled, immigrant or impoverished backgrounds.
2. **Youth recommend that mentoring organizations consider expanding to include youth advisory panels. Youth advisory panels would HAVE TO acknowledge principles of equity, diversity and inclusion such that they should include youth from all different identities and experiences.** This focus on equity, diversity and inclusion would also ensure that everyone has access to mentoring opportunities, including individuals with disabilities as well as individuals who live in rural, remote and Northern communities.
3. **It's critical to involve youth across diverse perspectives from the beginning of the program development process as opposed to engaging youth towards the end of a project to "confirm" that it caters to youth's needs. Youth voice is essential for speaking to the action, purpose, advocacy and other core needs of the programs.** In order to develop a truly impactful resource for youth it is important to include youth that reflect diverse populations of youth and develop programs that cater to their individual differences. In order to do so effectively, it is essential for youth to be present in the process of developing decisions that precede implementation of projects. In order to fulfil this goal, it is important that youth feel a genuine sense of belonging and build rapport with other youth and adults through membership. This will allow for youth to feel empowered to meaningfully participate in decision making as well as make them feel welcomed, secure, and supported within the environment. Through this, youth will access opportunities to take initiative as well as agency in their own lives by contributing directly to the creation of spaces that serve their best interests to help them achieve their full potential and carry the change successfully into adulthood.

4. **Youth believe that it is crucial that mentorship happens within public education settings, though they feel this should be led by organizations which facilitate mentorship opportunities working in partnership with schools.** In order to develop youth's social capital, it is essential for youth to be exposed to mentorship and rapport building early on in their education. By exposing youth to skills such as hands-on leadership within a setting they are regularly exposed to, it may potentially ease the transition and encourage involvement by making youth feel more comfortable and open to the idea of joining a movement focusing on mentoring or any other movement that is advocating for rights pertaining to their unique and diverse experiences and perspectives.
5. **Youth encourage organizations considering mentorship programs to educate and train mentors and teachers. Through such training, mentors will be able to learn how to create a safe space that is inclusive and supportive of both the mentee and mentor.** In doing so, teachers and mentors will have increased knowledge on how to utilize their spaces to appeal to youth in terms of safety or inclusivity and make them feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. In particular, a judgement-free zone would protect those who identify with the BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ community. In doing so, this space will mutually benefit both mentee and mentor.
6. **Focus on informal mentor relationships to develop greater rapport between mentee and mentor.** By setting the grounds for a more informal and casual relationship, the pressure to act and fill in a role in specific expectation-based ways is alleviated. This would allow for both the mentee and mentor to be their genuine and authentic selves. This is beneficial as it allows individuals to open up and be honest about their personal feelings or experiences, allowing mentors to get a deeper understanding of mentees and vice versa to develop a trustful relationship. By building a relationship, youth will be more likely to respect, value, and respond to the guidance given by the mentor. This focus should take place in addition to existing formal mentoring opportunities as well as in parallel to formal mentoring relationships as these are able to naturally evolve into informal mentoring relationships.
7. **Initiate proactive mentorship opportunities.** Rather than providing youth safe spaces to seek assistance and guidance for a mentor in times of distress, programs should focus on catering to preventing youth hardships by providing resources so youth can reach out before situations arise. This will contribute to the normalization and destigmatization of mentor-mentee relationships and help promote mentoring relationships.
8. **In certain cases, mentors should be prepared to adapt to youth in a way that allows for respect of their privacy.** Youth can be hesitant to reach out or feel uncomfortable when opening up and sharing vulnerable, personal, or emotional aspects of their lives. For this reason, despite needing help, youth may feel obligated to minimize their situation in scenarios where their issues and concerns do

not feel important. It is for this incentive that there should be infrastructures in place that set up access to mentors that adapt an online presence where youth can remain anonymous while still receiving help and guidance through a mutual relationship. Through this, youth can then build a rapport, get a sense of what the program is like, and become comfortable so that joining is a less intimidating task.

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