

Raising the Profile of Mentoring: Recruiting more Mentors across Canada

Executive Summary

The State of Mentoring in Canada
March 2021



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MENTOR Canada is a coalition of organizations that provide youth mentoring. Our goal is to build sector capacity to expand access to mentoring across Canada. Our work is focused in four areas: research, technology, public education and development of regional networks. It was launched by the **Alberta Mentoring Partnership, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada**, and the **Ontario Mentoring Coalition**.

The **Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC)** is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies. Since its establishment in December 1991, SRDC has conducted over 400 projects and studies for various federal and provincial departments, municipalities, as well as other public and non-profit organizations.

MENTOR Canada would like to acknowledge the generous intellectual contribution of **MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership (USA)** to the execution and success of The State of Mentoring Research Initiative. All three studies conducted as part of the *Initiative* are inspired by similar studies previously undertaken by MENTOR (USA).

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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Executive Summary

Many of us can recall a time when an adult, who was not a parent or even a close family member, took us under their wing, counselled us or helped us learn new skills that we still carry with us today. Yet, until now, we knew little about the individuals who step up to mentor youth across the country, the details of their involvement, their motivations for getting involved, and the benefits they – and their mentees – reap from these relationships.

For the first time, we have evidence to show just how important adults in Canada think mentoring is for our young people and our society. Raising the Profile of Mentoring is one of three research studies conducted by MENTOR Canada as part of *The State of Mentoring Research Initiative* – the first ever pan-Canadian study on youth mentoring. Its main objectives are to:

- Measure adults' engagement in mentoring relationships outside their immediate families;
- Identify motivations and barriers to engaging in mentoring, and;
- Examine opinions about the role of mentoring in Canadian society.

This study has allowed us to answer the following questions:

1. What place should youth mentoring have in Canadian society?
2. Who mentors?
3. Why mentor?
4. Who could be persuaded to mentor?
5. What keeps adults from mentoring?
6. How can we increase the number of adults who mentor?

Below, you will find summary answers to all of these questions.

10 Key Findings

- 1.** 4 in 5 adults believe that young people need more mentoring supports to help maximize their success in adulthood.
- 2.** More than three-quarters of adults believe that improved mental health is a major benefit of youth mentoring for Canadian society.
- 3.** 4 in 5 adults agree that government should invest in youth mentoring programs.
- 4.** Close to 1 in 3 adults has mentored a young person at some point during their life but only about 10% of adults have mentored a young person through a formal program.
- 5.** Over 60% of adults who mentor report that a major benefit of their experience is having a sense of giving back or investing in the next generation.
- 6.** 3 in 5 adults with experience as mentors got involved because that they saw a specific need and felt that they could help.
- 7.** 62% of adults who currently mentor got involved to pass along their knowledge, skills, or wisdom.
- 8.** The most compelling reasons that could motivate adults who have never mentored to do so would be if a young person or a young person's parents asked them to do so.
- 9.** Two-thirds of adults who might be willing to mentor state that support from their employers (such as paid time off) could incentivize them to step up and mentor a young person.
- 10.** Only about 1 out of 4 adults not currently mentoring stated that they are not at all likely to mentor a young person in the next 5 years.

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The findings clearly show that adults in Canada believe that mentoring is a key tool to help youth fulfil their potential and an effective strategy to improve our communities. **Yet, as our Mapping the Mentoring Gap study has shown, more than two in five young people in Canada grew up without the support of a mentor.** It is MENTOR Canada's hope that the findings from the **Raising the Profile of Mentoring** study can help communities across Canada identify strategies to increase the number of adults who step up to mentor youth and, ultimately, allow more young people to reap the benefits of mentoring relationships.

Study design

The lack of research on youth mentoring in Canada is an important barrier to generating evidence-based policies and practices which have the potential to improve the effectiveness and reach of mentoring for young people across the country. To address this barrier and collect essential data about youth mentoring, MENTOR Canada launched The State of Mentoring Research Initiative in 2019 with support from the Government of Canada's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy and BMO Financial Group. MENTOR Canada worked with the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) – a non-profit research organization with 30 years' experience providing high-quality research and evaluation support for evidence-informed decision-making – to carry out the research. As part of The State of Mentoring we consulted extensively with every critical stakeholder group of the sector: youth, mentors, and mentoring service providers.

“Although the key to building a productive society relies on furthering the well-being of children through mentoring, its inadvertent positive effects on the mentors makes this a dual approach to improve community connection. This eventually leads to benefits that spill into all aspects of a thriving town, province, country, and world.”

- Interview participant

Between September and November 2020, 3,500 adults in Canada participated in a nationally representative online survey. To supplement the survey findings, we conducted 18 interviews with adults who had previous experience mentoring young people. **Raising the Profile of Mentoring** uses the information collected through the survey and interviews to shed light on adults' perspectives on the place youth mentoring should have in our society and their personal experiences as mentors, or non-mentors.

Question 1: What place should youth mentoring have in Canadian society?

Even if only about one in five adults in Canada have been mentored during their youth, the overwhelming majority show strong support for youth mentoring:

- Almost four in five survey respondents feel that mentoring relationships outside of the immediate family are important for young people as they are growing up;
- Four in five respondents believe that young people need more mentoring supports to help maximize their success in adulthood.

Furthermore, four in five respondents believe that mentoring benefits not only young people but also Canadian society as a whole. They recognize that mentoring has a myriad of societal benefits, including:

- 76 percent who endorse reduced violence or anti-social behaviour as one of mentoring's major benefits;
- 76 percent who believe improved mental health is a major benefit;
- 71 percent who endorse healthier intergenerational relationships;
- 68 percent who believe increased access to and readiness for employment is a major benefit;
- 68 percent who endorse higher educational achievement;
- 65 percent who think that one of the major societal benefits of mentoring is increased collaboration and communication across social class and racial and ethnocultural groups.

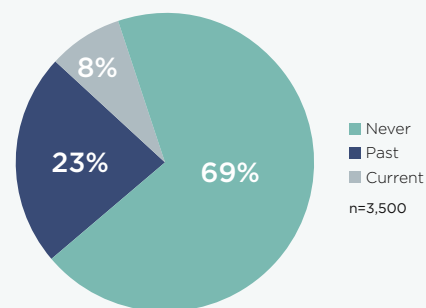
More than four in five respondents agree that federal and provincial governments should invest in youth mentoring.

The respondents' conviction that mentoring plays a crucial role in supporting children and youth's development is also borne out in their view that government should support mentoring. Indeed, more than four in five respondents agree that federal and provincial governments should invest in youth mentoring.

Question 2: Who mentors?

A meaningful number of adults in Canada are engaged in mentoring young people, both in and out of programs. 8 percent of respondents indicated that they are currently mentoring a young person, or that they had done so within the last 12 months. Another 23 percent of respondents reported that while they are not currently mentoring a young person, they had done so in the past. Respondents who currently mentor, or had done so previously, are more likely to have been mentored growing up: 47 percent of them were mentored.

Figure 1
Proportion of respondents who have mentored a young person since turning 18.



Respondents who are or had been mentors are more likely to have mentored informally through naturally occurring mentoring relationships. Just under one in three mentors has experience as a formal mentor in a mentoring program, that is equivalent to approximately 10 percent of all respondents.

Roughly the same proportion of women (31.1 percent) as men (30.4 percent) said that they currently or previously mentored a young person. However, respondents with certain demographic characteristics or identities are more likely to mentor youth:¹

- Respondents aged 60 and over are more likely to have previous experience as mentors than younger respondents (see figure 2);
- Indigenous respondents are more likely to have mentoring experience than non-Indigenous respondents;
- Transgender respondents are more likely to have mentored than respondents who do not identify as transgender;
- Respondents who have a functional disability² and respondents who have been in government care are also more likely to have mentored than respondents who do not have these experiences.

Question 3: Why mentor?

There are many reasons why adults choose to mentor children and youth. Three in five respondents who have experience as a mentor indicated that one of the major reasons why they got involved is that they saw a specific need and felt that they could help the young person. Another commonly endorsed reason for mentoring is to pass along knowledge, skills, or wisdom (62 percent for current mentors and 58 for past mentors). Values, including service and nurturing, equity and social justice, giving back and paying it forward, are also common motivators.

Overall, adults who mentor are more likely to be motivated by altruistic motives than self-interested ones. Fewer than one in five respondents with mentoring experience indicated that they are motivated by the desire to enhance their careers or resumes.

Over 60 percent of current and past mentors reported that having a sense of giving back or investing in the next generation is a major benefit of their experience.

The survey confirmed that mentoring is a reciprocal relationship that provides many benefits for mentors as well as for mentees:

- Over 60 percent of current and past mentors reported that having a sense of giving back or investing in the next generation is a major benefit of their experience;
- More than half of current and past mentors indicated that having fun or interesting experiences is a major benefit;
- Roughly half of current mentors reported that mentoring helps them broaden their perspectives of the world, increases their empathy towards others, and provides them with a sense of belonging in their community;
- Over one-third of current mentors also indicated that their experience provides them with career-related skills or benefits.

Mentors perceive many benefits for their young mentees, including:

- Having a positive role model (endorsed as a major benefit by 58 percent of past mentors and 46 percent of current mentors);
- Help to improve decision-making and problem-solving skills (52 percent of past mentors and 43 percent of current mentors);
- Feeling or being empowered in their pursuit of individual growth and success (47 percent of past mentors and 43 percent of current mentors);
- Support or advice to navigate personal challenges (46 percent of past mentors and 38 percent of current mentors) and interpersonal challenges (40 percent of past mentors and 39 percent of current mentors).

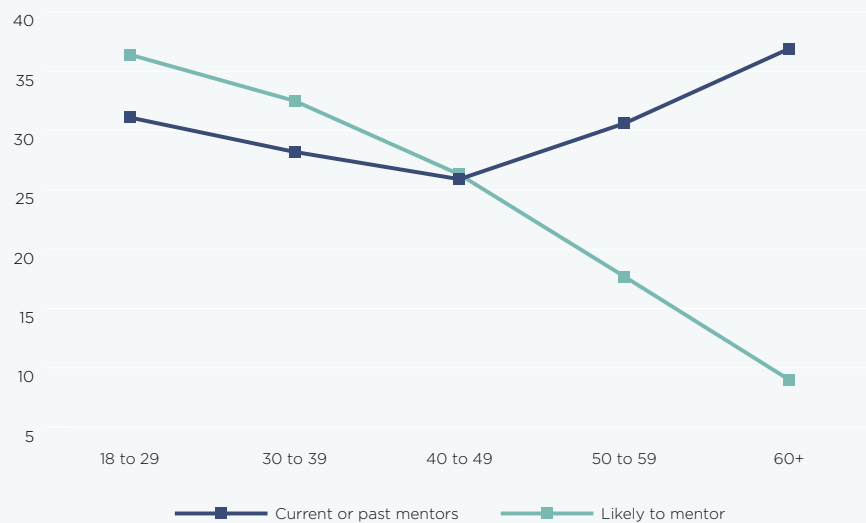
Question 4: Who could be persuaded to mentor?

Close to a quarter of adults who are not currently mentoring a young person would be likely to do so in the next five years.

Close to a quarter of adults who are not currently mentoring a young person would be likely to do so in the next five years (selecting 6 or higher on the 10-point likelihood scale). However, only 7 percent of respondents indicated that they are very likely to mentor (selecting 8 or higher on the 10-point scale) and almost one in four respondents indicated that they are not at all likely to mentor.

Respondents' likelihood to mentor in the next five years decreases steadily with age (See figure 2). Respondents aged 18 to 29 are statistically more likely to indicate they would be likely to mentor than respondents aged 50 and over.

Figure 2
Mentoring experience and likelihood to mentor in the next five years by age



Individuals belonging to certain groups have greater odds of reporting that they are likely to mentor a young person in the next five years:³

- 41 percent of Indigenous respondents indicated that they are likely to mentor compared to 22 percent of non-Indigenous respondents;
- 37 percent of racialized respondents stated that they are likely to mentor compared to 20 percent of White respondents;
- 42 percent of respondents who have immigrated to Canada within the last 10 years reported that they are likely to mentor compared to 22 percent of Canadian-born or non-recent immigrant respondents;
- 23.5 percent of men said that they would be likely to mentor a young person in the next five years compared to 21.6 percent of women;
- Transgender respondents and respondents who had spent time in government care during their youth also have greater odds of reporting that they are likely to mentor than respondents who do not have this identity or experience.

Question 5: What keeps adults from mentoring youth?

Only a small proportion of adults in Canada are not interested in mentoring children and youth. Most adults who do not mentor young people cite obstacles that fall into three main categories: lack of time, lack of awareness, and a belief that they lack the abilities to do so.

- 28 percent of respondents who have never mentored said they do not have the time. 24 percent reported that they are too busy with their own family;
- 27 percent reported that they do not believe that they are equipped or capable of supporting youth and their needs. 20 percent reported that they do not believe that have something to offer;
- 22 percent reported that they are not aware of opportunities to mentor locally or do not know how to get involved. 12 percent of respondents who have never mentored reported that they did not know there is a need.

Mentoring tends to be a time-consuming commitment and overcoming the lack of time barrier may be challenging. However, public awareness campaigns can begin to address the public's lack of awareness and often misplaced belief that they do not have the skills required or have nothing to offer.

The great majority respondents who would be more or less likely to mentor (selecting a 4 or higher on the 10-point scale) in the next five years reported that they would be willing to do so in an informal capacity. Only about one in three of those likely to mentor said that they would be willing to participate in a formal program. Respondents cited a lack of time and a lack of awareness as some of the main reasons why they would be willing to mentor a young person informally but not as part of a formal mentoring program.

“You don’t need to be the ‘end result’ as a role model – you can be someone in the midst of building your career, in early career stages – I was doubtful about that at first.”

- Interview participant

Respondents who would be likely to mentor reported that they could be motivated to do so if they were asked either by a young person directly (51 percent) or by a young person's parents or caregivers (39 percent).

Question 6: How can we increase the number of adults who mentor?

When it comes to the reasons that would motivate a person to become a mentor, personal values are often less important than specific needs and individual requests. Indeed, less than one in three respondents who has never mentored indicated that they would be motivated to do so to give back to their community or because mentoring reflects their values. Instead, many reported that they could be motivated to mentor if they were asked either by a young person directly (51 percent) or by a young person's parents or caregivers (39 percent). 44 percent of them also reported that they could be motivated if they saw a specific need with a young person and felt that they could help.

According to respondents who are not currently mentoring, other factors that could incentivize them to get involved include:

- Flexibility to mentor at times that work for them (84 percent);
- Support to get started with mentoring (80 percent);
- Easy access to resources about how to be a mentor (78 percent).

Two-thirds of respondents also reported that support from their employer such as paid time off could incentivize them to become a mentor. The same proportion indicated that the ability to conduct at least part of their mentoring relationship virtually could persuade them to get involved.

How can we encourage mentor retention?

Survey respondents who had previously mentored indicated that they may have been persuaded to continue their involvement if they felt like they were making a difference (21 percent) or if they had more flexibility (19 percent).

Interviewees who participate in mentoring programs value support from the program, including check-ins with staff and tools and resources to respond to their mentees' challenges. They also emphasize that peer support and the ability to participate in a community of mentors play an important role in building their confidence.

Implications for policy and practice

Highlighting specific, individual needs - rather than issuing a more general demand for mentoring - may be a more effective strategy to encourage more adults to become mentors. A high proportion of survey respondents and interview participants shared that responding to a specific need or being directly asked to mentor a young person are compelling reasons to start mentoring.

There is a critical opportunity to increase the adults' engagement in mentoring through public awareness campaigns. Many of the reasons non-mentors cited for their lack of involvement revolve around a lack of awareness about opportunities to mentor or about youth's needs and/or a lack of confidence in their own abilities. More adults may be convinced to step up and mentor a young person if we provide them with sophisticated information about mentoring, including the needs, opportunities, and impacts. Public education campaigns could also help overcome some adults' lack of confidence in their own abilities by explaining how it is possible to learn the skills needed to be a good mentor.

Finally, our survey has shown that certain demographic groups that face systemic barriers and have been historically marginalized - including Indigenous peoples, people who identify as transgender, former youth in care, and people with a disability - are more likely to serve as mentors. It is important to acknowledge the important contributions of these groups while being careful not to overburden them through mentor recruitment strategies.

MENTOR Canada worked with youth representatives and key stakeholders from the mentoring sector to co-create a set of calls to action to increase support for mentoring and encourage more adults to mentor young people in their communities. [Read the State of Mentoring: Areas for Action.](#)

Learn more

MENTOR Canada has released a complete [Raising the Profile of Mentoring](#) report. The report expands on the study's methodology and its findings.

MENTOR Canada has also published the results from *The State of Mentoring Research Initiative's* two other studies:

- **Mapping the Mentoring Gap:** This study seeks to understand young adults' access to mentors and the barriers to accessing mentors they may have encountered during their childhood and adolescence. The study also explores young people's experiences of mentoring and the effect of having had access to a mentor on their current lives.
- **Capturing the Mentoring Landscape:** This study seeks to better understand the prevalence, scope, structure, strengths and challenges of youth mentoring programs and services across Canada.

Help close the mentoring gap today:

Visit [becomeamentor.ca](#) to learn more about volunteer mentor opportunities in your community and beyond.

Are you a mentoring service provider? Visit [mentoringcanada.ca](#) to increase your recruitment and visibility to potential mentors by listing your programs in the MENTOR Connector, a free online platform that links mentors and youth to mentoring programs across Canada to learn more.

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Endnotes

¹ Results reported here are statistically significant with at least 95% confidence – this means there is at least a 95% chance the results are not arrive at by chance.

² Self-reported functional disability refers to reduced activity and does not require a professional diagnosis.

³ Results reported here are statistically significant with at least 95% confidence – this means there is at least a 95% chance the results are not arrive at by chance.