



# The Mentoring Effect: Youth in Rural and Remote Communities



## The Mentoring Effect: Youth in Rural and Remote Communities

Supportive relationships with adults, including mentoring relationships, foster young people's positive development and can provide significant psychological protection in the face of adverse life circumstances.<sup>1</sup> In the winter of 2020, Mentor Canada surveyed 2,838 young adults in Canada to learn more about how mentors supported them while they were growing up. Among respondents, 15% indicated that they were from a rural community and 2% stated that they were from a remote community.<sup>2</sup> Over half (55%) of the respondents from rural and remote communities were women, 42% were men, and 3% identified as non-binary or as having another gender identity. About 4% identified as trans and 21% reported belonging to a sexual minority. Close to one-fifth (18%) identified as Indigenous, 19% identified

as having a diverse ethnocultural background, and 8% as newcomers or immigrants.

Mentoring relationships can play an important role in supporting young people's successful transition to adulthood and in offsetting some of the adverse life circumstances children and youth face. Overall, 46% of young people from rural communities who participated in our survey reported facing at least 2 risk factors during their teen years compared to 39% of all respondents. However, 47% of rural respondents reported that they did not have a single mentor between the ages of 6 and 18. Early intervention to help more youth from rural and remote communities access mentorship opportunities is critical.

# What is the effect of mentoring on rural youth?

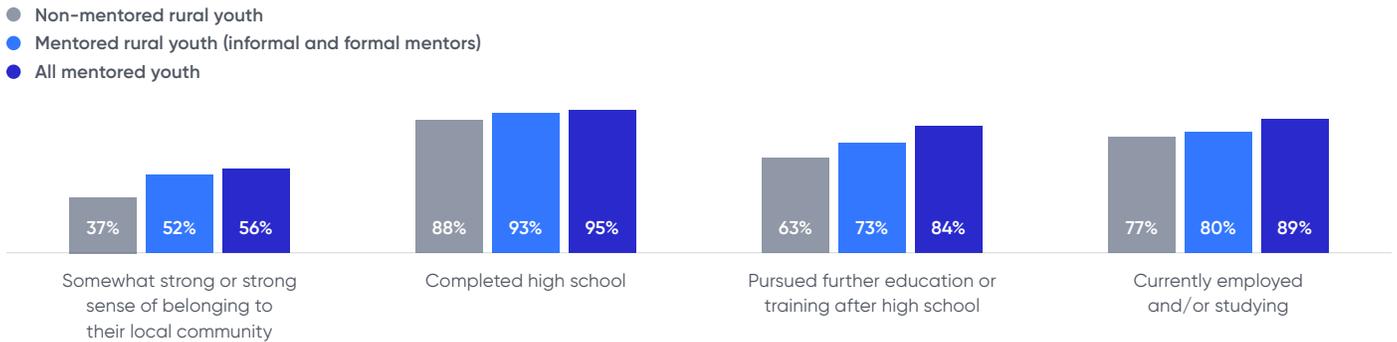
The Mapping the Mentoring Gap study determined that survey respondents who were mentored growing up were statistically more likely to report several positive outcomes as young adults compared to their peers who did not have a mentor.<sup>3</sup>

Just over half of rural respondents (53%) had at least one mentor at some point between the ages of 6 to 18 compared to 56% of all survey respondents. Youth in rural or remote communities were not statistically more or less likely to have access to mentors compared to youth in urban areas. However, access to formal mentors through mentoring programs was more limited for youth in rural areas. A smaller proportion of rural youth indicated that their most meaningful mentor during their teen years was a formal mentor with whom they developed a relationship through a structured mentoring program: 14% for rural youth

compared to 20% for all respondents. Informal mentoring was more prevalent for rural youth. Rural respondents indicated that their most meaningful mentors were often informal or natural mentors with whom they developed a mentoring relationship organically, such as teachers or other school staff, family friends or non-parental adult relatives, coaches and youth program leaders such as Scouts leaders or Girl Guides leaders.

Youth in rural and remote communities who were mentored growing up reported positive outcomes related to their mental health, belonging, education, and employment in greater proportion than their peers who were not mentored. However, they reported these positive outcomes in slightly lower proportions than all the survey respondents who had access to mentoring.

## Rural youth's outcomes based on access to mentorship



Despite the widespread idea that rural communities are tight-knit, a large proportion of survey participants indicated that their sense of belonging was weak. Relationships such as mentoring relationships play an important role in fostering young people's sense of belonging.

Furthermore, formal mentors may have an important influence on the life trajectories of young people in rural and remote communities. For example, 76% of rural youth who had a formal mentor through a structured mentoring program reported good or excellent mental health compared to 65% of non-mentored rural youth. Formal mentors may also influence young people's educational journeys since 88%

of rural youth who had a formal mentor pursued further education or training after high school compared to 63% of unmentored rural youth and 68% of rural youth who only had informal mentors.

Formal mentoring programs, such as Rural eMentoring BC, can expose rural youth to opportunities beyond their communities and help provide them with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to identify and pursue their educational and career aspirations. Fostering rural youth's sense of belonging and their educational journeys can encourage their return to their communities after their studies.



## How do mentors support teens in rural and remote communities?

Over a third (39%) of rural youth had at least one mentor at some point between the ages of 12 to 18 compared to 41% of all respondents. Youth from rural and remote communities reported that their mentors supported several areas of their development in meaningful ways. Their most meaningful mentors helped them manage interpersonal relationships, acquire essential skills, build connections, and navigate the transition to adulthood.

Mentors support the development of young people's social skills and help them manage interpersonal relationships. They offer a listening ear and about half of the respondents from rural and remote communities reported that they discussed their relationships with their parents or caregivers (52%) and with their friends and peers (48%) with their most meaningful mentor during their teen years. Over half (56%) of respondents also reported that their mentor helped them develop leadership skills. Respondents also acquired important life skills that fostered their autonomy such as cooking or handling money (44%) or obtaining their driver's license (26%) with the help of their most meaningful mentor.

Mentors support rural youth's educational and career journeys in important ways. They often had an important influence on young people's self-awareness and their ability to set life goals. Close to two-thirds (64%) of respondents from rural and remote communities reported that their most meaningful mentor during their teen years helped them know themselves better and 58% reported that their mentor helped them determine where they wanted to go in life.

Close to half of respondents (45%) from rural and remote communities who were mentored during their teen years acquired academic skills with the help of their most meaningful mentor. Importantly, over half (53%) of respondents from rural and remote communities reported that their most meaningful mentor had a significant influence on their interest in staying in school, and 30% reported that

their mentor helped them stay or go back to school. Mentors can support young people's transition to post-secondary education or training by offering information, advice, and encouragement.

Mentors play an important role in easing young people's transition from a rural to an urban environment and helping young people deal with the culture shock they might experience in larger settings. For example, over a quarter (26%) of respondents reported that their most meaningful mentor helped them adapt to a new community. Mentors fostered connections for their mentees. Youth from rural communities reported that their mentor helped them connect to services and supports (39%), participated in community events with their mentor (39%), and connected to their culture with their mentor's support (37%).

Mentors increase young people's exposure to various career opportunities, including careers that are less common in their rural communities. One-third of respondents from rural and remote communities who were mentored during their teen years reported that their most meaningful mentor helped shape their job or career aspirations. A good number (42%) also reported that they acquired job-related skills with their mentor's help.

Finally, mentors can exert a significant influence on strengthening young people's psychological well-being and resilience, which, in turn, support young people's success. Close to three-quarters (72%) of respondents from rural and remote communities who were mentored reported that their most meaningful mentor during their adolescence has a significant influence on their confidence in their abilities. Two-thirds of them also reported that their mentor influenced their sense of pride and self-esteem as well as their hope and optimism for the future. By strengthening young people's self-confidence, self-esteem, and optimism, mentors contributed to their mentees' resilience.



## What prevents youth in rural and remote communities from accessing mentors?

Over half (53%) of rural and remote respondents could recall a time between the ages of 6 to 18 when they wished they had a mentor but did not have one.

Approximately one-third of rural youth faced barriers to accessing mentors during their adolescence. The top barriers they faced were:

- Not knowing how to find a mentor;
- Not having access to a mentoring program;
- Not understanding what mentoring was or the value of having a mentor.

The lack of access to mentoring programs is a bigger obstacle for youth in rural and remote communities than for all respondents. Proportionally, 10% more rural youth indicated that this was a barrier they encountered compared to all respondents.



## Closing the mentoring gap for youth in rural and remote communities

Schools, communities, mentoring programs, and policymakers must work together to address the barriers youth in rural and remote communities face in accessing mentorship opportunities.

Empowering more caring adults in communities to step up and mentor young people around them can help address the gaps. Informal mentors such as teachers, coaches, and extended family relatives play an important role in supporting young people's positive development and fostering their sense of belonging in rural and remote communities. In addition to mentors from rural communities, young people may also benefit from mentors from urban backgrounds who bring different perspectives and experiences.

Increasing rural youth's access to relevant mentoring programs and opportunities is critical. A greater proportion of rural youth faced barriers to accessing mentoring programs than all respondents. Virtual mentoring opportunities may help rural youth access more mentoring opportunities and help them connect with people from outside of their communities to gain different perspectives. However, digital barriers, such as limited connectivity, can prevent some youth in rural and remote communities from fully participating in virtual programs. Schools can play an important role in reducing digital barriers by embedding mentoring programs in their offering and giving students time to participate during school hours.

Additionally, schools, community organizations, and community leaders have an important role to play to

foster buy-in for mentoring opportunities and encourage community members to participate as mentors and mentees. Recruiting mentors for formal mentoring programs is often a challenge. Adults in rural communities may be motivated to volunteer because they wish they had access to mentoring programming in their youth whereas others are motivated to do so because they benefited from a mentor themselves and are committed to paying it forward. Many respondents from rural and remote communities who benefited from the support of a mentor indicated that they are interested in becoming mentors themselves:

- 68% of rural youth who had a mentor growing up are interested in becoming mentors in the future;
- 38% of them have already mentored another young person.

However, barriers such as the lack of time or feeling that they are not qualified or experienced enough can prevent former mentees from becoming mentors in turn. Working with program alumni to overcome these barriers and show them that they have something to offer is a promising way of recruiting more mentors for rural and remote young people.

Intentional and targeted investments by government, philanthropists and communities in youth mentoring programs are necessary to help close the mentoring gap and the digital divide and ultimately bring more opportunities to youth in rural and remote communities.



## About Mentor Canada

Mentor Canada is a coalition of organizations that provide youth mentoring. We are working together to build sector capacity and expand access to mentoring to empower every young person to reach their potential. Mapping the Mentoring Gap is one of three studies conducted by Mentor Canada as part of the State of Mentoring Research Initiative. Between January and March 2020, we surveyed 2,838 young adults aged 18–30 about their mentoring experiences growing up and their current lives.

Learn more about Mentor Canada and our research at [MentoringCanada.ca](https://mentoringcanada.ca).

In partnership with

## Rural eMentoring BC



Rural eMentoring BC (ReMBC) is a free online mentoring program where rural high school students prepare for their future with the support and advice of a mentor. Our dedicated mentors are post-secondary students in a variety of programs throughout BC. Learn more at [ementoringbc.com](https://ementoringbc.com).

- 1 Resnick, M. D., Harris, L. J., & Blum, R. W. (1993). The impact of caring and connectedness on adolescent health and well-being. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 29(Suppl. 1), S3–S9. Werner, E. E. & Smith, R. S.(1992) *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*. Cornell University Press.
- 2 For the analysis, responses from rural and remote youth were combined. As such, in this brief we often refer to youth who reported living predominantly in rural or remote communities as rural youth.
- 3 Our analysis determined that there was an association between having had a mentor and positive outcomes (correlation) but could not determine if having a mentor caused or led to these positive outcomes. See the [Mapping the Mentoring Gap](#) study for more details.