

YOUTH VOICE REPORT

Mentoring as a Catalyst for Youth Employment



Mentor Canada

The Students
Commission
of Canada
Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement



La commission
des élèves du
Canada
Le centre d'excellence pour
l'engagement des jeunes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines young people's perspectives on mentorship and its role in supporting their journeys toward meaningful employment. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data from multiple youth-focused initiatives, the findings highlight what youth value most in mentorship, the outcomes they are seeking, and where current supports fall short.

Overall, young people expressed a strong interest in mentorship and viewed it as an important contributor to their employment, education, and personal development. Relationship quality emerged as a critical factor, with youth prioritizing mentors who are trustworthy, good listeners, non-judgmental, and genuinely invested in their growth. Youth emphasized the importance of mentorship that balances emotional support with practical guidance.

Career and life skill development were central to youth mentorship goals. Youth sought support with resume building, interview preparation, career exploration, postsecondary navigation, and professional networking. They also highlighted the value of mentorship for building confidence, improving mental well-being, and developing life skills such as financial literacy, time management, and self-advocacy.

Culturally responsive mentorship was especially important for racialized youth, including Black, Indigenous, and newcomer youth. Youth reported positive experiences with mentors who respected their cultural backgrounds, fostered identity pride, and showed interest in their lived experiences. Representation and cultural understanding helped strengthen trust, belonging, and confidence.

Youth often preferred peer-to-peer mentorship models, particularly those offered in community-based settings. Mentors who were slightly older and had relevant lived experience were seen as relatable and credible, while school-based supports were often viewed as inconsistent or impersonal.

Across all groups, youth identified a lack of consistent, individualized mentorship, especially during key transitions from high school to post-secondary education or employment. These gaps were most significant for youth with limited family support, first-generation students, and newcomer youth.

Overall, the findings underscore mentorship as a holistic and essential support for young people. Mentorship that is relationship-driven, culturally responsive, flexible, and sustained over time has strong potential to improve youth confidence, skill development, and pathways toward meaningful employment.



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INTRODUCTION

As part of Mentor Canada's initiative Mentoring as a Catalyst for Youth Employment, this report summarizes youth perspectives on the role of mentoring in supporting their employment journey and transition to adulthood. It is based on the principle that it is vital to centre youth voices and lived experiences in the development of mentoring practices and systems-level responses. This work is grounded in the understanding that effective and equitable approaches to youth employment must be informed by young people's perspectives, aspirations, and realities.

To that end, Mentor Canada partnered with the Students Commission of Canada (SCC), a trailblazing and leading national organization in youth engagement. The SCC purposely works with others to help create a world where young people are valued and heard, and their ideas for improving their lives, those of their peers and communities are put into action. The goal of this report is to highlight young people's visions, goals, and priorities related to how mentoring must support and enhance their journey toward meaningful employment. In doing so, it contributes to an evidence base intended to inform both practice and policy across the mentoring and youth employment sectors.

This report draws on findings from SCC's youth engagement activities and its Research and Impact Measurement platform data, as well as a national research study – Unlocking Doors – conducted by Mentor Canada and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. Together, these sources support the identification of key trends, emerging needs, and systemic considerations relevant to mentoring and youth employment.

By grounding this work in youth voice and shared learning, the report advances a responsive and inclusive approach to mentoring that ensures young people's lived realities meaningfully inform the development of employment-focused mentoring approaches across Canada.

METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this report draw on multiple sources of SCC's youth-generated and youth-informed data. These include perspectives gathered during the early phases of the project through national engagement initiatives such as the 2025 and 2026 #CanadaWeWant Conference and Make Your Mark 2025, as well as insights derived from SCC's Research and Impact Measurement platform, Sharing the Stories.

Unlocking Doors: Research on Mentoring to Strengthen Skills & Support Career Pathways

[Find out more about the study here.](#)

Findings extracted from the Sharing the Stories platform drew on two main datasets, including qualitative and quantitative data from youth programs working primarily with Black, Indigenous, and other equity-deserving youth. (See Appendix for more details)

Youth were also engaged to review and provide feedback on the findings to ensure they accurately reflected their lived experiences. We also supported youth at the #CanadaWeWant conference in reviewing and providing feedback on the findings to ensure they align with their experiences.



To complement the findings from SCC's youth engagement activities, this report weaves in testimonies and findings gathered through Mentor Canada and SRDC's 2025 Unlocking Doors study. As part of the mixed-methods research study, 3,110 young adults in Canada participated in a national survey and 23 youth participated in interviews. The study examined how mentoring can strengthen transferable skills – or Skills for Success – and support BIPOC youth's access to meaningful early-career employment across Canada. The study provided important insights into how racialized youth experience mentoring, what qualities they value in mentors, and how programs can be designed to meet their needs.

THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP

Findings from SCC's youth engagement revealed that mentorship is a critical support as young people navigate transitions into post-secondary education, work, and adulthood. Participants emphasized the need for support that is accessible, individualized, and responsive to their lived realities.

Many participants emphasized the value of trusted adults outside their families who genuinely root for them. They often identified community-based spaces, such as youth resource centres, as places where these relationships could develop.

***"The mentors are very supportive, and they're always available to answer any questions I had."
– Youth participant (SCC)***

Youth identified a lack of access to mentors and positive role models as a significant gap. Many youth expressed that having consistent guidance from mentors, particularly those with professional or lived experience, would help them better navigate career decisions, workplace expectations, and long-term planning. This need was especially pronounced among youth without reliable support systems at home. Additionally, youth expressed a need for sustained mentorship that begins in high school and continues into post-secondary education and early adulthood. The discontinuity of supports during these transitions was seen as a barrier to sustained progress toward employment goals.

"I didn't start seeking mentorship until very recently. I think the barrier would be that I didn't even know they existed. I never knew of any mentorship opportunities, but if they came knocking at my door, I would have signed up for them." – Youth participant (Unlocking Doors)

CAREER READINESS AND HOLISTIC SUPPORT

Youth surveys and consultations conducted by SCC underscored that young people are seeking mentorship that is practical and future-focused, supporting their preparation for post-secondary education, training, and long-term career goals.

Young people most frequently identified real-world career and life skill development – for example, communication, professionalism, time management, and financial literacy – as key supports mentors could provide to help them transition into adulthood. They described seeking support to build professional skills and workplace readiness, including increased confidence and assertiveness, critical thinking and adaptability, teamwork and collaboration, sector-specific exposure, and



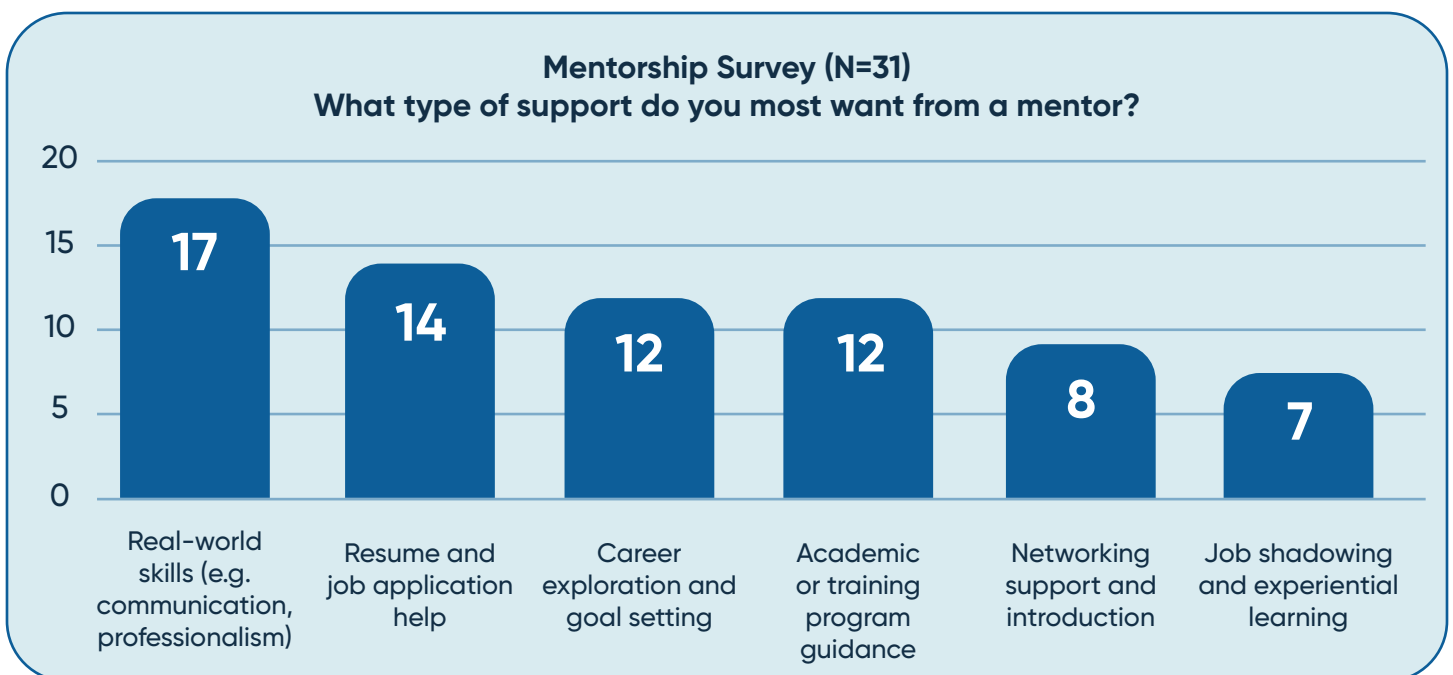
practical or technical skills. Relatedly, youth emphasized the importance of opportunities to develop transferable skills, such as communication, leadership, and problem-solving, across varied settings beyond formal education environments. Mentorship was seen as a key mechanism for developing and applying these skills in real-world contexts.

Youth also spoke about how mentors could help address the significant challenges they face in finding employment. Limited availability of part-time jobs, increasing competition for entry-level roles, resume requirements, and financial pressures related to housing and education were all cited as barriers that mentorship could help address.

Young people reported seeking mentors who were supportive, caring, and accessible, able to help them build peer and professional connections and expand their networks. They emphasized employment preparation goals such as resume building, job readiness, skill-matching to meaningful placements, and exposure to new types of work, alongside guidance on work-life balance and creative fulfillment. Youth valued mentorship that could translate abstract career advice into actionable steps and personalized guidance.

"Helped me make relationships with others...broadened my network." – Youth participant (SCC)

Youth who participated in the 2026 #CanadaWeWant conference expressed a strong interest in career-related mentorship support to develop practical skills, job application skills, and career and education exploration and goal setting.



Youth also identified financial barriers and a need for greater time management and financial literacy support as part of their mentorship needs. Key concerns included understanding tuition costs, navigating financial pressures related to permanent residency, using credit responsibly, and managing the financial demands of postsecondary education. Youth who would be first-generation university students noted that limited family experience with higher education made mentorship particularly valuable in filling these knowledge gaps.



In addition to career-focused goals, youth expressed a desire for **personal growth**, particularly around boundary-setting and self-awareness. **Emotional support**, such as having someone who listens and is consistently there for them, was also highly valued, underscoring the importance of mental health and well-being. Taken together, these findings highlight that effective mentorship must **balance practical skill-building with emotional and relational support**, reinforcing the importance of strong, personal connections between mentors and youth.

TRANSITIONS: POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

For youth preparing to enter post-secondary education or full-time work, mentorship is part of the scaffolding that helps them build the skills, confidence, and resilience needed to thrive. For students heading into post-secondary education, mentorship must be structured and skill-based. These youth face steep learning curves: balancing heavy course loads, managing multiple deadlines, and operating with far less oversight than they're used to. Time management, organization, and self-discipline are not innate – they must be taught, modelled, and reinforced. A mentor who walks alongside a student through this transition, helping them plan, prioritize, and reflect, becomes a critical anchor.

“Looking back at my journey, I think, yeah, a mentor would have actually helped me in making a fast decision about what I’m actually going to be doing after high school like, am I going for engineering or architecture? Because it took me a long time to process that.”
– Youth participant (Unlocking Doors)

For youth entering full-time work or vocational training, mentorship must be experiential. Youth need opportunities to shadow professionals, engage in apprenticeships, and build real-world skills. Financial literacy and independence are especially urgent – budgeting, saving, and navigating housing are unfamiliar but vital tasks. Without mentorship, these students risk entering the workforce unprepared and unsupported.

“As soon as I started working, post-graduation, I would have benefited from a mentor to help me with my career trajectory, having a consistent, successful person in my life to help me get on a good track.” – Youth participant (Unlocking Doors)

ATTRIBUTES OF GOOD MENTORS AND MENTORSHIP EXPERIENCES

Findings from SCC’s youth engagement indicate that while practical considerations matter, connection, relatability, and communication are central to effective mentoring relationships. Youth expressed a preference for mentors with relevant lived or professional experience in the areas where support is needed, and who are slightly older (approximately five years), allowing for relatability while still offering guidance. Key interpersonal qualities included being a good listener, nonjudgmental, and trustworthy. They also emphasized flexibility in the mentoring structure, preferring a combination of regular, fixed meetings and as-needed appointments tailored to their evolving needs.



"In terms of being a successful mentor, I think she was really good at understanding what my goals were and rather than imposing like her ideas or goals, she would always listen to what I wanted to do, talk through all of my options and help me come to a conclusion as to what I should do next."- Youth participant (Unlocking Doors)

For some – although not all – young people, shared identity or cultural background are the top priority. This finding underscores the importance of representation and culturally relevant support, especially for those who consider these shared characteristics essential.

COUNTER EXAMPLE: NEGATIVE COACHING BEHAVIOURS

Youth who participated in the Sport and Mental Health theme team at the 2026 #CanadaWeWant Conference illustrated how adults in positions where they could, in theory, naturally develop mentoring relationships with youth may sometimes lack the skills and knowledge to do so and even cause harm.

Participants reported that negative coaching behaviours – such as high-pressure expectations, favouritism, public criticism, and lack of support – negatively impacted their confidence, mental health, and overall experience in sport. Many youth, particularly young women, noted that they discontinued participation and emphasized that they likely would have continued if supported by more positive, empowering coaches.

To address these challenges, youth recommended implementing training programs for coaches designed to foster supportive, inclusive, and empowering coaching styles that prioritize psychological safety, skill development, and sustained engagement.

1:1 MENTORSHIP

Youth perceived one-on-one mentorship as a key support for addressing personal goals, building confidence, and receiving targeted guidance aligned with each young person's interests and circumstances. Youth contrasted individualized mentoring support with institutional supports, such as school-based support, which lacked personalization and caused frustration. For example, youth contrasted mentoring with guidance counselling, the latter often perceived as unavailable, impersonal, and insufficiently tailored to their circumstances.

SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORTS

Youth often expressed distrust and dissatisfaction with school-based support, which they perceived as adopting a "one-size-fits-all" approach and lacking the capacity to respond to individual needs. Youth also cited limited availability, scheduling challenges, and perceived lack of meaningful engagement as obstacles to developing satisfactory mentoring relationships with adults in schools. Many young people were inclined to distrust adults in schools, who were positioned as institutional authority figures. Instead, youth gravitated toward informal supports offered in youth-serving and community-based spaces outside of schools.



PEER MENTORSHIP

Youth expressed strong interest in peer-to-peer mentorship models. They perceived peer mentorship as easing anxiety and building belonging, especially during key transitions. They described these relationships as less intimidating than traditional adult-led mentorship, often likening peer mentors to older siblings rather than authority figures. This relational dynamic appeared to reduce formality and power imbalances, creating a space where youth felt more comfortable seeking guidance and sharing concerns. Peer mentoring helped youth feel less isolated in their transition to adulthood and fostered a sense of shared experience and mutual support. Peer to peer mentorship can help students understand expectations, build routines, and develop the social and emotional skills needed to adapt to new contexts.

While youth preferred mentors who were closer in age, they emphasized the importance of mentors still being somewhat older and more experienced. A moderate age difference, often described as approximately five years, was viewed as ideal, as it balanced relatability with credibility. They felt that mentors within this age range were better positioned to understand their current experiences while also offering relevant advice informed by recent, lived experience. The support provided by peer mentors who are at similar life stages, or who have recently navigated similar transitions, was seen as both reassuring and empowering.

Overall, these findings suggest that peer-to-peer mentorship models, especially when delivered in community settings, may be more effective in fostering trust, engagement, and meaningful support among youth. Programs that emphasize relational closeness, lived experience, and flexibility, while avoiding overly formal or institutionalized approaches, appear better aligned with youth preferences.

***"I feel more connected to the other mentors. Understanding that we are all feeling similar."
- Youth participant (SCC)***

"I looked at it more as an opportunity to make sure that I wasn't alone in my experiences, and also just to create a sense of community for myself as well" - Youth participant (SCC)

BENEFITS YOUTH SEEK FROM MENTORSHIP

SCC's youth engagement and the Unlocking Doors study showed that young people view mentorship as a pathway to skill development, future opportunities, and meaningful employment journeys.

The most highly prioritized potential benefits included gaining new skills and competencies, accessing education or employment support, and building professional connections. These findings underscore that youth primarily view mentorship as a tool for career development, post-secondary navigation, and professional networking, particularly as they prepare for transitions into adulthood.

In addition to career-oriented outcomes, youth also identified important personal and developmental benefits associated with mentorship. Importance was placed on improved mental well-being, increased confidence in navigating adulthood, and the development of practical life skills such as financial management and leadership. This suggests that youth are not only seeking



instrumental support tied to employment and education, but also relational and emotional support that contributes to overall well-being and self-confidence.

Youth further emphasized the value of mentorship in providing clarity around career goals, educational aspirations, and the steps needed to achieve them. The desire for guidance on post-secondary pathways highlights the role mentorship can play in helping youth make informed decisions, set realistic goals, and better understand available options.

Overall, these findings suggest that youth perceive mentorship as a holistic support mechanism that addresses both professional advancement and personal growth. Effective mentorship, therefore, has the potential to simultaneously support workforce readiness, educational attainment, mental well-being, and confidence during critical transitional stages of young people's lives.

BENEFITS ACHIEVED THROUGH MENTORING

Youth's perceptions of mentoring's potential benefits are supported by program evaluation results from SCC's Youth Opportunity Fund aggregate report, which reflects the program experiences of youth from racialized communities, including Black, Indigenous, and newcomer youth. Results indicate that youth experience meaningful and multifaceted benefits from their mentoring relationships.

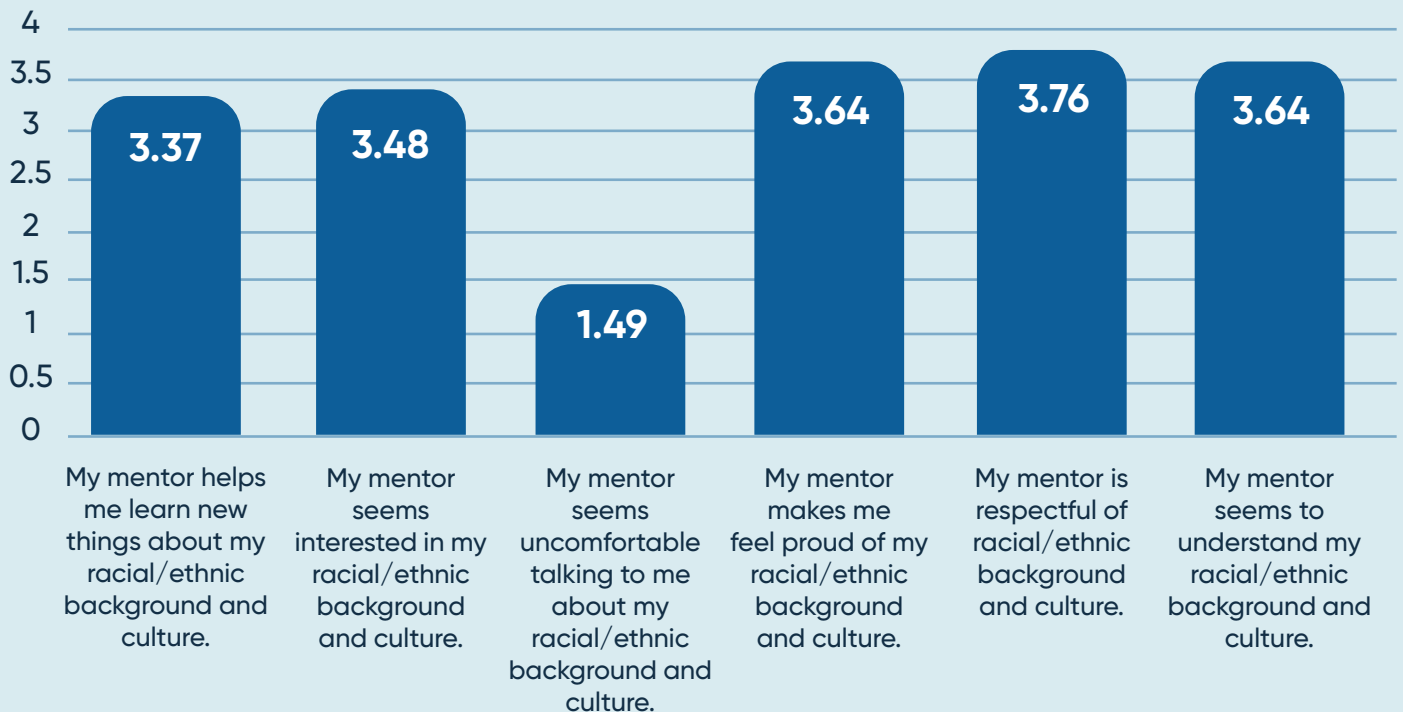
Youth program participants reported moderately high levels of engagement in collaborative and growth-oriented activities with their mentors. These included working together to solve problems (3.61/5), spending time focused on personal development (3.57/5), learning new skills collaboratively (3.55/5), setting and achieving goals (3.59/5), and collaborating on projects that resulted in accomplishments (3.57/5).

"I think she helped me to like self-actualize myself and I was able to bridge between who I was at the time and who I wanted to see myself emerge into." – Youth participant (Unlocking Doors)

Youth also reported moderately high levels of mentor support for racial and ethnic identity development. They indicated that their mentors were respectful and understanding of their racial and ethnic background and culture (3.76/5). Participants also gave moderately high ratings for mentors helping them feel proud of their racial and ethnic identity (3.64/5), suggesting that mentorship can play an important role in fostering cultural connectedness and pride. In addition, youth perceived their mentors as being interested in their cultural background (3.48/5) and as supportive in helping them learn more about it (3.37/5).



Mentor Support for Racial Ethnic Identity (N=67)



These findings highlight the significant role mentorship plays in supporting both personal and professional development among racialized youth. Culturally responsive mentorship can serve as an important vehicle for affirming identity, strengthening cultural pride, and supporting positive youth development and confidence among racialized youth. Mentors provide not only guidance and practical support, but also structured opportunities for youth to build confidence, agency, and skills through sustained collaboration. **The emphasis on goal setting, learning, and accomplishment underscores mentorship as a key mechanism for empowering youth to navigate challenges, develop competencies, and progress toward their goals and aspirations.**

YOUTH PROFILES

The following section explores how mentorship can respond to the specific circumstances of diverse equity-deserving groups in Canada.

BLACK YOUTH

Black youth benefit most from mentorship that reflects their identity, lived experience, and cultural context. Having mentors who look like them and understand their background helps build trust and a sense of belonging. It's not just about guidance, it's about connection and relatability.

"I was learning things that I've really wanted to learn for a while with like, from people that I could identify with." – Youth participant (SCC)

"I think being around people with similar life experiences helped me like remember that I'm not alone in that I could seek out those friendships or meet people like that." – Youth participant (SCC)



Leadership mentorship is especially impactful. When Black youth see other Black professionals thriving in their fields, it opens up possibilities. It shows them what is achievable and helps them imagine their own future in leadership roles.

"Another thing that I've learned, and I guess our participants as well, is the importance of having role models and having a mentor, and the difference that it can make in you know your path in life, and you know the direction in which you're going, how much a good environment and support system matters." – Youth participant (SCC)

"This has been a unique opportunity because being a BIPOC student interested in STEM, seeing representation of different career options that I didn't even know existed was crucial in applying to university earlier this year." – Youth participant (SCC)

Mental health support is another essential layer. In many Black communities, mental health remains taboo, and that silence can be isolating. Creating safe spaces where youth can explore their emotions, share their experiences, and learn coping strategies is vital, especially for those dealing with trauma, racism, or displacement.

"Opening myself up and being vulnerable and then getting to know others was an accomplishment for me." – Youth participant (SCC)

Employment preparedness and access are also major areas where mentorship can support Black youth. Many Black youths are looking for help with school, career planning, and job opportunities, but don't always have access to the right resources. Whether it's academic guidance, networking events, or exposure to new experiences, mentorship can help bridge those gaps and reduce barriers to success.

"We have a lot of challenges, but one of the main [ones I] can say [is] professional development, like having a space where Black youth in London would go to like, if they have any [...] like questions in regards to like their homework, or like advice on which programs to take at school or how to select their courses, or like just some guidance in a professional way." – Program staff (SCC)

INDIGENOUS YOUTH

Mentorship for Indigenous youth must be rooted in cultural respect, healing, and community connection. Many Indigenous communities continue to feel the deep impacts of colonization, including a lack of extracurricular programs and youth engagement opportunities. These gaps leave young people without spaces to grow, connect, or simply be themselves.

For students who attend schools outside their communities, the experience can be jarring. Cultural shock, isolation, and limited support systems often make it hard to adjust, emphasizing the importance of Indigenous mentors. These mentors help youth navigate transitions, support their mental health, and affirm their cultural identity in spaces where it might otherwise feel invisible.

"There's a cultural shock when they attend school." – Program staff (SCC)

In the Indigenous context, healing is also central to mentorship. Intergenerational trauma runs



deep, and youth often carry grief that is not always visible. Programs that centre Truth Leading to Reconciliation can be transformative, helping youth reconnect with their roots, reclaim their stories, and begin to heal.

"As young Indigenous people, when we're together, as much as we've been through tons of trauma, like when we're together, it's a time for us to feel safe with each other and to joke and laugh." – Youth participant (SCC)

Culturally relevant mentorship means creating safe spaces for celebration, learning, and ceremony. Land-based activities and traditional practices like medicine picking, ribbon skirt making, smudging, Sun Dances, Pow Wows, and Round Dances are not just cultural – they are grounding. For many youth, these experiences are life-changing. They offer a sense of pride, belonging, and spiritual connection that can't be replicated elsewhere.

"I connected spiritually. It gave me insight into things I never knew about myself. I felt a connection, a tether if you will, to Bek. It opened up my soul and begat a light of confidence and self-worth." – Youth participant (SCC)

Mentorship for Indigenous youth is about more than guidance; it is about restoring what was taken, honouring what remains, and building spaces where Indigenous youth feel seen, supported, and empowered.

NEWCOMER YOUTH

Newcomer youth often arrive in Canada carrying the weight of transition – new language, new culture, new systems. Mentorship for these youth must be grounded in empathy, practical support, and a strong sense of community. This work goes beyond supporting adjustment to fostering long-term success.

"The emphasis on solidarity, community support, and creating a safe space for sharing experiences was particularly impactful." – Youth participant (SCC)

"I think sometimes it's like easier to build trust with other BIPOC people because they understand where you're coming from and there's one less extra step when you talk to them because most of them come from immigrant families or they've experienced the same experiences that you have, so I feel like it's easier." – Youth participant (Unlocking Doors)

Language learning and social reintegration are key starting points. Many newcomer youth face language barriers that make it hard to connect with peers, understand schoolwork, or navigate daily life. Additionally, providing parallel supports to adult newcomers benefits newcomer families.

Mentorship that focuses on building language skills and creating social development opportunities can help youth feel more confident and less isolated. Academic support is critical, but it's not just about giving answers. It's about teaching youth how to learn – how to study effectively, use resources, and think critically. The goal is to build self-sufficiency, so youth can take ownership of their education and future.



“More supports are needed for newcomers with low English. Schools and the community are not prepared to offer them the level of intensive language supports and system navigation coaching they need. Many graduate or age out of high school before attaining a level of English that will allow them to enter meaningful work or post-secondary. Also, students that chronically do not attend school to the point of being at risk of not graduating often live with parents who are unequipped to support them and struggle to cope with their own mental health challenges. There is a real lack of support for parents in this situation.” – Program staff (SCC)

Positive role models play a huge role in this journey. Youth are looking for reassurance, for someone who believes in them, and for spaces where they feel they belong. Mentors who understand their experience, whether through lived experience or cultural sensitivity, can help build that trust and confidence.

“They need to be listened to, it’s a new reality for them, they live with a lot of stress. Normalize their difficulties and it is normal to fail because you haven’t seen the subjects you’re learning.” – Program staff (SCC)

Financial mentorship is another major need. Many newcomer families struggle to access financial resources, and youth often have to navigate scholarships, grants, and aid packages on their own. Mentorship can guide them through these systems, teach financial literacy, and help them find paid internships, jobs, and affordable school supplies.

Mentorship for newcomer youth is about more than support – it’s about listening, validating their experience, and walking alongside them as they build a new life.

YOUTH WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS

For youth with special learning needs – including those with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or other cognitive differences – mentorship is especially important. These young people often navigate academic environments that weren’t designed with their strengths or challenges in mind. They face barriers not only in learning but in accessing the resources meant to help them thrive.

“Students have a lot of academic difficulties... There are not enough resources and students don’t know where to find resources or don’t want to use them.” – Program staff (SCC)

Mentorship for this group must be deeply personalized. It begins with understanding, not just of diagnoses, but of lived experiences. A mentor needs to recognize that motivation, organization, and concentration are not just habits to be taught, but hurdles to be navigated with care. For neurodivergent youth, executive functioning challenges can make even basic tasks feel insurmountable. A mentor who can break down assignments, co- create routines, and offer consistent check-ins becomes a stabilizing force.

These youth also need mentors who advocate for structural supports, such as quiet study spaces, sensory-friendly environments, and access to assistive technologies. Many students don’t know where to find resources or feel ashamed to ask. Mentors must be proactive, guiding students through systems and modelling how to use tools without stigma.



In a world where educational systems often fall short, mentorship becomes the bridge connecting youth to the support, confidence, and community they need to succeed. This means mentorship that is trauma-informed, disability-aware, and rooted in empathy. Mentors need to be well informed of the specific cognitive difference to support effectively – this means they need to be better informed, better trained, and better supported.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Mentorship is a critical support for young people as they navigate education, employment, and the transition into adulthood. Across all data sources and youth groups, mentorship was described as an important relationship that helps young people build confidence, develop skills, and feel supported during complex, often overwhelming transitions.

Young people emphasized that the mentoring relationship was very important to them. Qualities such as trust, communication, and feeling genuinely listened to were more important than formal titles or institutional structures. When youth felt respected and understood, they were more willing to seek guidance, reflect on their goals, and take steps toward meaningful employment. This finding reinforces that mentorship works best when it is relational rather than transactional, and when mentors show up as invested, caring adults rather than authority figures.

At the same time, youth were clear that mentorship must also be practical and goal-oriented. They are looking for support with concrete tasks such as résumé building, interview preparation, career exploration, post-secondary planning, and navigating employment systems. Many youth, particularly those from equity-deserving communities, are moving through systems that were not designed with their realities in mind. Mentors help make these systems more navigable by translating information, offering guidance based on lived experience, and helping youth break long-term goals into manageable steps.

The findings also highlight the importance of culturally responsive and identity-affirming mentorship. For Black, Indigenous, and newcomer youth, having mentors who understand their cultural context or who share similar lived experiences can build trust, reinforce confidence, and foster a sense of belonging. Mentorship that affirms identity was closely tied to positive outcomes such as cultural pride, motivation, and engagement. This underscores the need for mentorship approaches that recognize and address systemic barriers rather than treating all youth experiences as the same.

Peer-to-peer mentorship emerged as a particularly effective model. Youth often felt more comfortable engaging with mentors who were closer in age and who had recently navigated similar transitions. These relationships reduced power imbalances and created more honest, approachable spaces for learning and support. Community-based mentorship settings were also preferred over school-based models, which youth often described as inaccessible or impersonal. These findings suggest that flexible, community-rooted mentorship approaches are more aligned with youth preferences and needs.

A significant gap identified throughout the report is the lack of consistent, individualized mentorship over time. Youth expressed a strong need for sustained support that begins in high school and continues through post-secondary education and early adulthood. Short-term or one-off interventions were widely seen as insufficient, particularly for youth facing financial barriers,



family support gaps, discrimination, or additional learning needs. Mentorship was most effective when it adapted to changing circumstances and remained present during key transitions.

Overall, this report reinforces that mentorship is a holistic support system. It contributes not only to employment readiness but also to mental well-being, self-confidence, life skills, and a sense of connection. When mentorship is accessible, flexible, culturally responsive, and built on strong relationships, it can play a transformational role in young people's lives. Across all pathways, youth thrive when mentorship is extended, consistent, and celebratory.

ABOUT MENTORING AS A CATALYST FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mentoring as a Catalyst for Youth Employment is a multi-year project, funded by the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Skills Strategy, that uses Sensemaking to build the capacity of the youth employment ecosystem to accelerate the adoption and integration of high-quality mentoring practices and mentorship opportunities to improve employment outcomes for youth ages 18 to 30 across Canada.

ABOUT MENTOR CANADA



Mentor Canada

Mentor Canada is the only national registered charity dedicated to supporting and building capacity for mentoring across the country, linking programs and initiatives to a comprehensive portfolio of leading-edge mentoring resources, research, training, and networking opportunities.

Mission & Vision:

To accelerate and scale world-class mentoring in Canada.

We envision a Canada where mentoring is valued and accessible to all –grounded by evidence, rooted in collaboration, and driven by a dynamic ecosystem that unlocks potential, fuels opportunity and strengthens communities. Our impact is clear, and our reach is nationwide.

To learn more about Mentor Canada, visit mentorcanada.ca



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APPENDIX: STUDENTS COMMISSION OF CANADA DATASETS

SCC data for this analysis was drawn from multiple sources in the SCC's Sharing the Stories platform, including Pathways Canada report, the SCC's Art of Work program evaluation the #CanadaWeWant conference, and the Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) aggregate report. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, incorporating focus groups in which youth shared their mentorship needs and priorities, as well as surveys that assessed the quality of mentorship relationships.

The YOF works primarily with Black, Indigenous, and other equity-deserving youth across Ontario, which provides important context for interpreting the findings. The Pathways dataset included 96 focus groups with a total of 442 participants, while the YOF aggregate data included approximately 90 focus groups. For Pathways, findings were analyzed by group, like Black youth, Indigenous youth, and newcomer youth, to ensure the results accurately reflected the experiences of each community. Although individual responses could not be directly linked to specific demographic characteristics, overall demographic information was available for participants.



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