A report by:

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

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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.

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FOREWORD

Young people must be at the centre of Canada's post-pandemic recovery. MENTOR Canada firmly believes that mentoring is a key tool to foster a more equitable and inclusive recovery.

Research has demonstrated that connections and safe, supportive, and nurturing relationships play an integral role in young people's healthy development and resilience. The social isolation many of us experienced as a result of the pandemic provided us with first-hand experience of how critical relationships are for our mental health and well-being. Disconnected, we languish.

In 2019, shortly after MENTOR Canada was created, we undertook a comprehensive research project about the state of youth mentoring in Canada. As part of The State of Mentoring Research Initiative, we conducted three studies to 1) map the mentoring gap and understand which young people had or did not have access to mentors growing up, 2) capture the mentoring landscape and increase our understanding of the prevalence and scope of mentoring programs and services across the country, and 3) raise the profile of mentoring and examine adults' views on the place of youth mentoring in Canadian society and understand what motivates them to mentor or, conversely, what prevents them from doing so. Our goal was to gather information that MENTOR Canada, and the youth mentoring sector more broadly, could use to guide our efforts to build sector capacity and, ultimately, increase young people's access to quality mentoring opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic not only forced us to make some changes to The State of Mentoring Research Initiative, it endowed it with new meaning.

The pandemic disrupted young people's ability to access supportive relationships outside of their immediate family. Social distancing guidelines and other public health measures such as school closures impeded many young people's access to informal mentors, many of whom are teachers and coaches, as well as formal mentors since programs suspended their operations or shifted to virtual settings. Although many emphasized a need to stay socially connected despite physical distancing, some of our most vulnerable young people faced additional barriers that prevented them from doing so.

Over the last decade, a robust body of international research has shown that mentoring can have a significant effect on a wide range of young people's outcomes, including their social and emotional development as well as their educational and vocational attainment. This is true for both natural or informal mentoring relationships as well as mentoring relationships that develop through formal programs. Our State of Mentoring research findings showed that young adults who have been mentored while they were growing up are more likely to report positive educational outcomes such as high school completion and pursuing further education after high school than their non-mentored peers. They are also more likely to report positive career-related outcomes. They are more likely to report feelings of belonging to their local community and being able to count on people to support them (social capital). They are more likely to report positive mental health than their non-mentored peers.

Mentoring must be integrated into holistic approaches to empower youth to fulfil their potential and increase opportunities at home, school, and in the workforce in the post-pandemic world.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The first mentoring programs were established in Canada in the early 1910s. These programs were predicated on the simple idea that supportive relationships can help children and youth overcome adverse life circumstances. Since then, their popularity has steadily increased. According to the findings from our **Mapping the Mentoring Gap**, an estimated 16 percent of young adults in Canada participated in a formal mentoring program at some point while they were growing up (approximately between 1996 and 2019). Many children and adolescents are currently participating in mentoring programs in their schools and communities across the country.

Mentoring programs can benefit all young people, but they can be especially important resources for children and youth who have limited access to natural supports as well as for those facing specific issues or going through challenging life transitions. These programs generally aim to overturn at least some of the negative impacts of a lack of social connections and caring relationships such as increased health disparities, risky behaviour, and a widening of the opportunity gap. Studies have demonstrated that mentoring programs can have a significant effect on a range of youth outcomes including their socio-emotional development, their cognitive and identity developments, and their academic and vocational achievements.[1] Yet, until now, we had limited information about mentoring programs across Canada: the young people they serve, how they support children and youth, and the challenges they are facing.

THE STATE OF MENTORING RESEARCH INITIATIVE

As an advocate for youth mentoring, the recently created MENTOR Canada undertook exploratory research to better understand the current state of mentoring in the country. MENTOR Canada worked with the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to execute *The State of Mentoring Research Initiative*. The research advisory committee, comprised of academics, practitioners, and young people, provided insights into the development, administration, and analysis of the research. The research initiative is inspired by similar studies conducted by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership (USA).

The State of Mentoring Research Initiative is a critical piece of foundational work intended to inform quality improvement and decision-making around future directions for the field. It comprises three distinct studies:

1) 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 mentoring experiences and the effect of having had a mentor on their current lives.

2) Raising the Profile of Mentoring

   This study seeks to measure adults' engagement in mentoring relationships outside their immediate families and identify their motivations and barriers to engaging in mentoring. This study also examines adults' opinions about the role mentoring relationships should play in Canadian society.

3) 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. Its goals are to gather information that can inform public policy and investments in youth mentoring, as well as identify gaps in services and areas in which mentoring programs could improve their work or support even more children.

The findings from these three studies will guide MENTOR Canada's efforts to attract new partners, advocate for increased investment, support existing programs and services, and develop a long-term strategy to enhance youth mentoring in Canada. Together, we can build a Canadian mentoring movement.

THE MENTORING LANDSCAPE

One hundred fifty youth-serving organizations across Canada participated in the Canadian Survey of Youth Development and Mentoring Organizations between April and September 2020 (see Figure 1). Respondents provided information about:

- Their organizations;
- Their strengths and challenges;
- Their mentoring programs and services, including their goals, the young people they serve, the mentors who participate in their programs, and their program model.

Participating organizations provided details about their activities during their previous fiscal year, often January to December 2019 or April 2019 to March 2020. Consequently, the responses collected reflect the situation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Appendix A for more information about the study's methodology). Participating organizations provided details about 215 mentoring programs.

> Definition of **Mentoring Program** for the purpose of the survey:
>
> A structured set of related activities and/or services to respond to the needs of a specific target group, usually over an extended timeframe, that are directly tied to or in support of, or dedicated to, the main goals of mentoring. Mentoring is a primary – although not necessarily the only – change mechanism through which program outcomes are achieved.

A greater proportion of responses were collected in provinces where established regional youth mentoring networks, such as the Alberta Mentoring Partnership and the Ontario Mentoring Coalition, helped promote the survey to their members and partners.
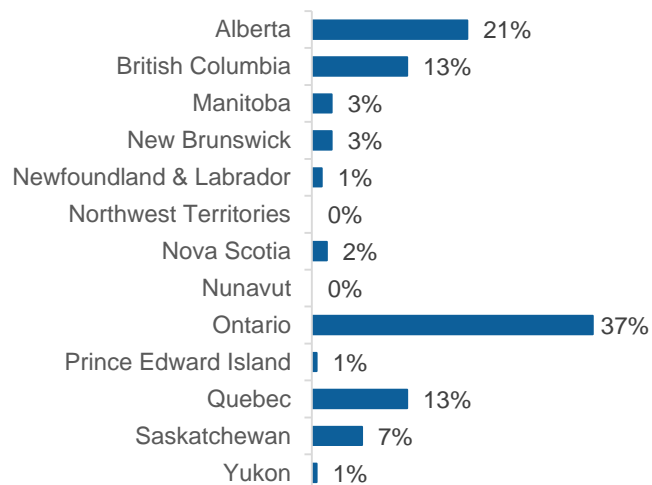
Most participating organizations were non-profits (79 percent) and many were registered charities (64 percent). Only 5 participating organizations were schools or higher education institutions (3 percent), 3 were religious organizations (2 percent), and 2 were health care organizations (1 percent). It is possible that these last organization types were underrepresented in our sample.

Approximately 44 percent of organizations were considered small, serving fewer than 80 young people in their mentoring programs, while 20 percent were of medium size, and 36 percent were considered large, serving 200 youth or more through their mentoring programs (see Figure 2).

Figure 1 Participating Organizations that Responded to the Survey across Canada (n=150)

|	
Alberta	21%
British Columbia	13%
Manitoba	3%
New Brunswick	3%
Newfoundland & Labrador	1%
Northwest Territories	0%
Nova Scotia	2%
Nunavut	0%
Ontario	37%
Prince Edward Island	1%
Quebec	13%
Saskatchewan	7%
Yukon	1%

A small proportion of organizations (15 percent) offered only one youth development program but a majority offered between two and five distinct youth development programs, including programs and services to young people beyond mentoring.

Other than mentoring, the most common programs and services included:

- positive youth development programs and services offered by 71 percent of participating organizations;
- youth empowerment or leadership development programs and services offered by 54 percent of organizations;
- mental health programs and services offered by 41 percent of organizations;
- career readiness programs and services offered by 40 percent of organizations and employment and/or training programs offered by 19 percent of organizations.

Figure 2 Participating Organizations by Size (n=123)

- Small (1-79)
- Medium (80-199)
- Large (200+)
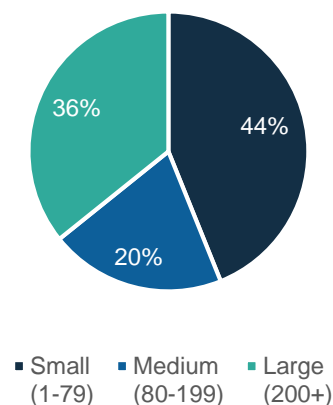
Several organizations also offered programs and services for specific populations, including:

- 34 percent of organizations offered programs and services for LGBTQ2S+ youth;
- 29 percent for Indigenous youth;
- 27 percent for immigrant or newcomer youth;
- 18 percent for youth with a disability;
- 18 percent for justice-involved youth.

Table 1 Programs and Services Offered to Youth and/or Families

| Services and programs offered	No	%	Services and programs offered	No	%
Positive youth development	107	71%	Youth living with disabilities	27	18%
Empowerment/leadership development	81	54%	Violence prevention	22	15%
Mental health prevention and wellness	61	41%	Workforce development	20	13%
Career readiness	60	40%	Drop in centre/homeless/shelter services	19	13%
Service learning/volunteerism	58	39%	Independent living/transition-aged youth	17	11%
Case management	53	35%	Education (Primary or Secondary school)	16	11%
Services for youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+	51	34%	Foster care or services for foster youth	15	10%
Academic support	44	29%	Pregnant and parenting teens	13	9%
Services for First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit (Inuk) youth	43	29%	Psychological counselling	12	8%
Immigrant and Newcomer	41	27%	Substance use disorder prevention or treatment	12	8%
College or university readiness	38	25%	Medical/healthcare	5	3%
After school/daycare	33	22%	Outpatient psychological treatment	3	2%
Employment or training	29	19%	Pregnancy prevention	3	2%
Juvenile justice-involved youth	27	18%	Residential or inpatient psychological treatment	1	1%

WHO DO MENTORING PROGRAMS SERVE?

Organizations provided details about the children and youth they serve a) in all their mentoring programs combined and, b) at the individual program level.

Participating organizations reported serving between 3 and 100,000 young people across all of their mentoring programs in the last year (see Figure 3). The vast majority of organizations served a total of 500 young people or less through their mentoring programs. Organizations served an average of 95 (median) young people in total across all of their mentoring programs.

Figure 3 Number and Percentage of Youth Served by Organization (n=123) **and by Mentoring Program** (n=214)
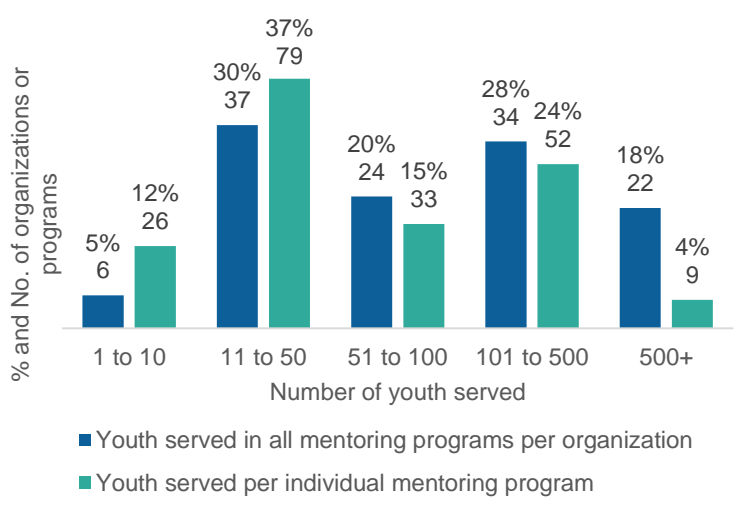
Individually, mentoring programs tended to serve smaller numbers of young people. Nearly two-thirds of programs served 100 young people or less each in the last year.

Close to three-quarters of mentoring programs served youth aged 18 or under. Nevertheless, a small number of organizations that participated in the survey reported that they offered programs for young adults. A total of 37 programs (17 percent) were offered to young adults under the age of 25, and 12 (6 percent) were available to young adults aged 25 or older.[2]

Overall, organizations reported serving boys and young men and girls and young women in similar proportions. Young people who identified as non-binary, Two-Spirit, or belonging to another cultural gender minority also represented a small proportion of youth served by mentoring programs across Canada. The young people who participated in mentoring programs had diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences.[3] Nearly two-thirds of participating organizations provided additional details about the characteristics of the young people they serve through their mentoring programs:

- racialized youth accounted for more than 25 percent of young people served through mentoring programs in over half of these organizations;
- Indigenous youth and newcomer youth accounted for over 25 percent of young people served in nearly one-third of organizations;
- youth with a disability accounted for over 25 percent of young people served in over one-quarter of organizations.

Programs also served LGBTQ2S+ youth and youth in care in varying proportions.

A high proportion of young people in mentoring programs were facing specific challenges. The most prevalent challenges were poverty, mental health issues, and academic challenges:

- 63 organizations reported that over half of their mentees were living in poverty;
- 46 reported that over half of the mentees had mental health needs;
- 43 reported that more than 50 percent of mentees were academically at-risk.

The fact that young people with experiences of poverty, mental health issues, and academic challenges accounted for a significant proportion of mentees is consistent with organizations'
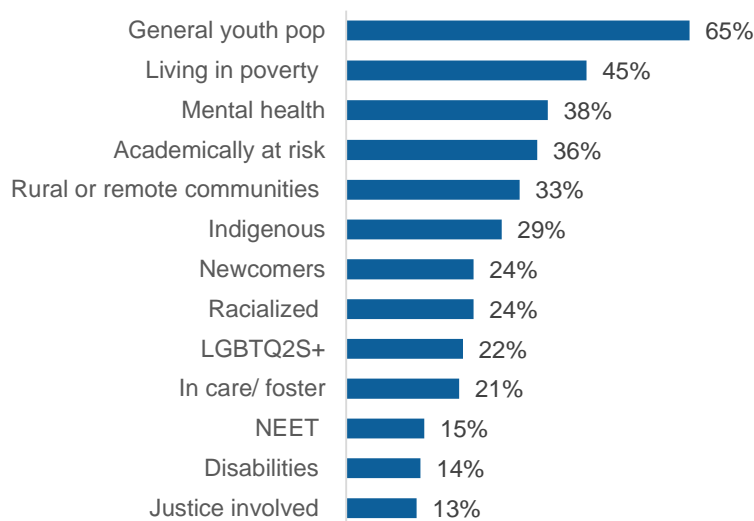
approaches which intentionally target these groups for their mentoring programs and services (see Figure 4):

- 45 percent of organizations targeted youth living in poverty;
- 38 percent targeted youth with mental health needs;
- 36 percent targeted youth who were academically at-risk.

Organizations that offer mentoring programs tended to serve broad categories of young people. A total of 65 percent of organizations reported that the general youth population was one of the top three target groups for their mentoring programs. In fact, 83 organizations out of 150 (55 percent) selected the general youth population as their first target group.

Figure 4 Top Three Target Group of Youth by Organization for all Mentoring Programs (n=150)

General youth pop	65%
Living in poverty	45%
Mental health	38%
Academically at risk	36%
Rural or remote communities	33%
Indigenous	29%
Newcomers	24%
Racialized	24%
LGBTQ2S+	22%
In care/ foster	21%
NEET	15%
Disabilities	14%
Justice involved	13%

However, a slightly different picture emerges when examining the subpopulations served at the individual program level. While organizations tended to serve broader categories overall, several mentoring programs were more specialized and served a specific youth subpopulation. Indeed, mentoring programs were evenly split between those that targeted a specific youth subpopulation and those that do not. For example, some programs targeted youth from specific ethnocultural or gender groups. Others focused on youth with specific experiences such as youth in care, justice-involved youth, youth from single parent households, or newcomer youth.

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH WAITING TO BE SERVED?

Demand for mentoring exceeds a majority of organizations' capacity: 54 percent of organizations reported that they had young people waiting for a mentor and 7 percent reported that, although they do not keep a waitlist, demand for mentoring exceeds their capacity. The median number of young people on a waitlist was 40, and the largest waiting list had 800 young people waiting for a mentor.

Boys and young men were more likely to be waiting for a mentor than girls and young women. Only 15 percent of organizations reported that girls and young women accounted for more than half of the young people on their waitlist whereas 68 percent reported that boys and young men account for over half of the waitlist. Twenty-one percent reported that boys and young men constitute more than three-quarters of the young people waiting for a mentor.

A large proportion of young people waiting for a mentor had mental health needs, were academically at-risk, and/or were living in poverty.

WHO MENTORS?

Three-quarter of organizations reported having 100 mentors or less during their last fiscal year. The median number of mentors per organization was 53. A total of 14 organizations (roughly 10 percent) reported that their mentors received financial compensation and 106 relied on volunteer mentors (roughly 78 percent).

Mentors were more likely to identify as women than men (see Figure 5): 55 percent of organizations reported that more than half of their mentors were women whereas only 13 percent reported that more than half were men. A total of 33 organizations indicated that they had mentors who identified as non-binary, Two-Spirit, or part of another cultural gender minority. In each of these instances, non-binary mentors accounted for less than a quarter of the organization's mentors.

Nearly half of organizations reported that they had mentors waiting to be matched with youth. 84 percent of organizations with a mentor waitlist reported that men accounted for less than half of the mentors waiting to be matched whereas 64 percent reported that women accounted for more than half of their mentor waitlist. It is likely that some mentoring programs are struggling to recruit the mentors who are the right fit for their programs and the young people they serve, particularly in terms of mentors' gender identity.

Figure 5 Proportion of Mentors Based on their Gender Identity by Organization
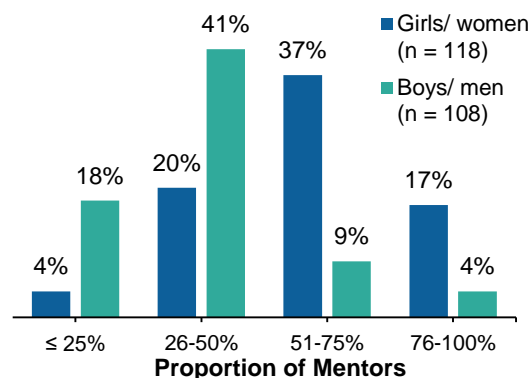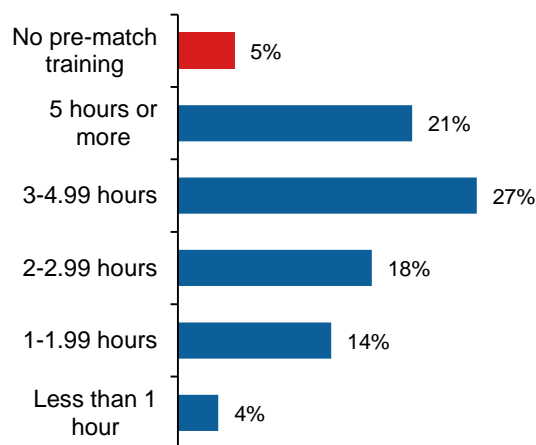

HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORT MENTORS AND MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS?

Some program practices – including mentor training and monitoring and supporting mentor-mentee matches – have been demonstrated to have a significant impact on the quality and longevity of mentoring relationships.[4] Consequently, training, monitoring and support are important components of quality mentoring programs.

Best practices in the youth mentoring field suggest that mentors should receive a minimum of 2 hours of training before coming into contact with their mentees for the first time.[5] Two-thirds of participating organizations met that threshold. Most often, organizations offered between 3 and 5 hours of pre-match training. However, 18 percent offered less than 2 hours of training and 5 percent offered no pre-match training at all. Pre-match training may be a bigger challenge for small and medium sized organizations (serving fewer than 200 young people): 28 percent of small medium organizations did not meet the training threshold compared to 9 percent of large organizations.

**Figure 6 Pre-Match Training for Mentors by Organization** (n=138)

The great majority of organizations said they provide support for mentors throughout their mentoring relationships (see Figure 7). Supports could include check-ins, supervision, and/or supplemental training. Most organizations offered a minimum of 1 support contact per month. However, 10 percent of organizations offered less than 1 contact per month and 1 percent offered no contacts at all. Small organizations were more likely to offer no support contact or less than 1 contact per month for their mentors than medium or large organizations.

Ongoing support, training and resources were highly valued by the mentors who were interviewed as part of our Raising the Profile of Mentoring study. Interviewed mentors described regular check-ins and responsive communication from program staff as helpful. They also indicated that training and resources on several topics such as conversation prompts, how to support transitions, how to spot signs of abuse and neglect, how and where to refer mentees who need more support, suicide prevention, bias awareness and diversity, and how to better understand the stressors of living in poverty.

**Figure 7 Post-Match Support Contact with Program Staff** (n=136)
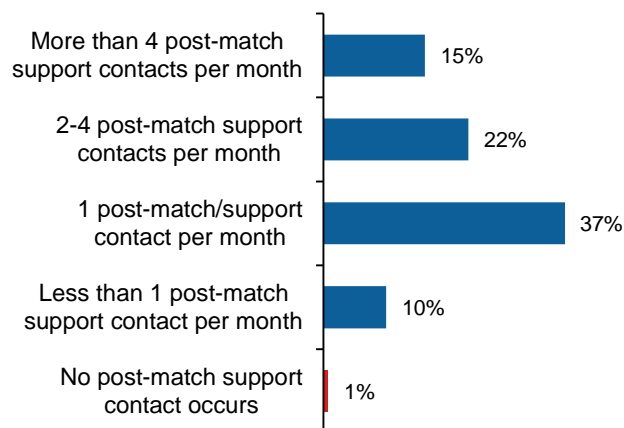
"I feel supported, I know I can call at any time. That's a big thing, a mentor needs to know they have back-up, they are not flying solo out there by themselves."

- Raising the Profile Interview Participant

WHAT DO MENTORING PROGRAMS LOOK LIKE?

The 150 organizations that participated in the survey provided details about 215 dedicated mentoring programs. The Canadian mentoring field is dynamic and growing. New programs have been steadily created over the last few decades. Close to a quarter of mentoring programs were created in the last 5 years, and over one-third were created within the last decade. About one-third of programs had been operating for over 20 years.

Figure 8 Mentoring Programs: Number of Years Offered (n=215)

- 10 years or less
- 11 to 20 years
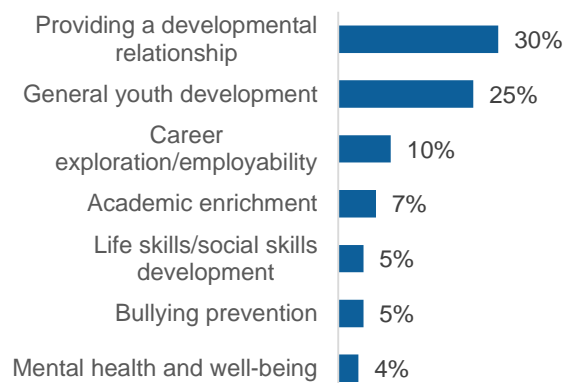- more than 20 years

35%
26%
34%
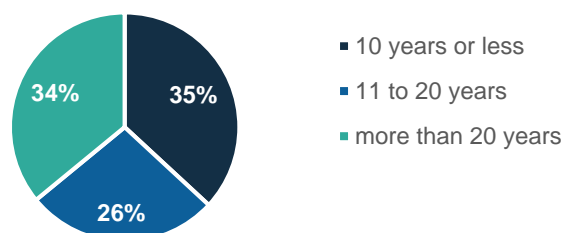
PROGRAM GOALS AND TYPES

A large proportion of mentoring programs had broad goals such as general youth development (25 percent) or providing a developmental relationship between a young person and an adult (30 percent). However, a small number of programs had more specific goals such as career exploration or employability, academic enrichment, life and social skills development, bullying prevention, and mental health and well-being (see Figure 9).

Programs that targeted young adults had slightly different goals. About one-third of these programs aimed to support young adults' career exploration and/or employability.

Figure 9 Program Goals (n=215)

Goal	Percentage
Providing a developmental relationship	30%
General youth development	25%
Career exploration/employability	10%
Academic enrichment	7%
Life skills/social skills development	5%
Bullying prevention	5%
Mental health and well-being	4%

The types of mentoring programs offered across Canada varied:

- 43 percent of mentoring programs were out-of-school enrichment programs and 35 percent were in-school enrichment programs;
- 21 percent were career-readiness or youth employment programs;
- 17 percent were sports and recreation programs and 10 percent arts and culture programs;
- 4 percent were faith-based programs.

> **Developmental relationships** were defined as close connections though which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them.
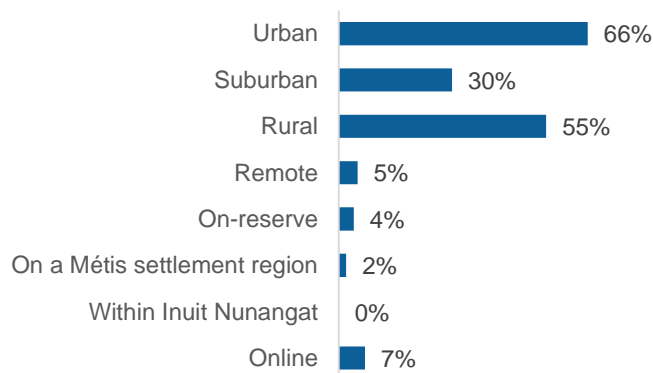
PROGRAM STRUCTURES

Mentoring programs were offered in various community types across the country (see Figure 10). A large proportion were offered in urban or suburban areas but 55 percent of them were also available in rural areas. A small number of them were offered in remote locations, on reserves, or in a Métis settlement region.

A small proportion of them were also offered online, but most of these programs appear to be hybrid virtual and in-person mentoring programs since only 1 percent of programs reported that they operated primarily online before the COVID-10 pandemic.

Figure 10 Program Delivery Location (n=215)

Location	Percentage
Urban	66%
Suburban	30%
Rural	55%
Remote	5%
On-reserve	4%
On a Métis settlement region	2%
Within Inuit Nunangat	0%
Online	7%

A one-to-one mentoring relationship between a mentor and a mentee was the most common relationship model:

- 57 percent of programs used a one-to-one model;
- 22 percent of programs used a group mentoring model with one or several mentors working with a group of mentees;
- 15 percent of programs relied on a blended model that combined one-to-one and group mentoring.

Mentors and mentees most often met out in the general community (45 percent) or at school either during the day (37 percent) or after school (14 percent). A number of matches also met at a community centre (14 percent) or a non-profit organization (15 percent). About one-tenth of programs also allowed their matches to connect virtually.

The majority of mentoring programs expected mentors and mentees to meet frequently (see Figure 11). Two-thirds of all mentoring programs expected mentors and mentees to meet once a week, while 17 percent expected them to meet 2 to 3 times per month, and 6 percent expected them to meet on a monthly basis. Only 3 percent of programs did not have any requirements with regards to the frequency of the meetings

Figure 11 Meeting Frequency

Bar chart showing meeting frequency for All ages (n= 209) and Ages 19+ (n= 36):
- More than once a week: 6%, 8%
- Weekly: 66%, 22%
- 2-3 times a month: 17%, 41%
- Monthly: 6%, 14%
- No expectation or requirement: 3%, 14%

■ All ages (n= 209) ■ Ages 19+ (n= 36)

between mentors and mentees. However, programs that specifically served young adults expected their mentors and mentees to meet less frequently: 22 percent expected matches to meet weekly, 41 percent expected them to meet 2 to 3 times a month, and 14 percent had no required meeting frequency.

Mentoring programs tend to last several months (see Figure 12). Just over a third of programs had an expected duration of at least one year and 24 percent lasted between 7 to 11 months. However, about one-quarter of mentoring programs had a shorter duration and lasted 6 months or less, while 17 percent had no fixed duration.
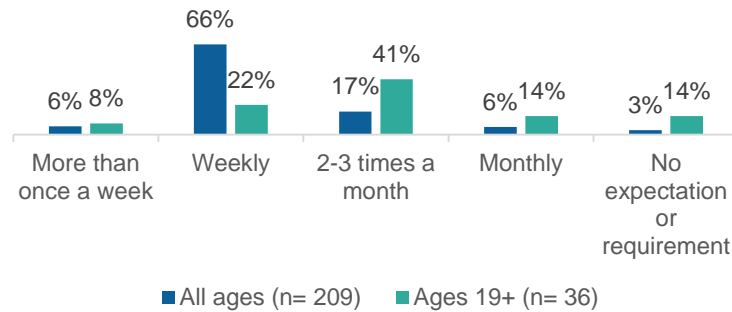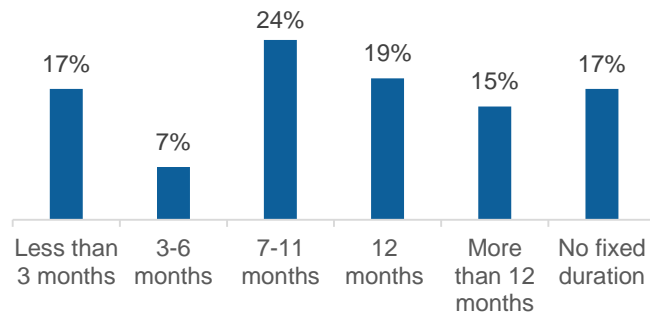
Figure 12 Expected Program Duration (n=214)

Bar chart showing expected program duration:
- Less than 3 months: 17%
- 3-6 months: 7%
- 7-11 months: 24%
- 12 months: 19%
- More than 12 months: 15%
- No fixed duration: 17%

EARLY RELATIONSHIP TERMINATION

Early relationship termination is an important challenge for mentoring programs. Not only are premature terminations likely to limit the impact of a program, they may have negative consequences for young people.[6] Often, mentors and mentees do not meet the minimum commitment because of changes in life circumstances, unrealistic expectations about the mentoring programs and relationships, or challenges with the relationship. As a result, programs often spend considerable resources to help prevent premature termination at every stage of a mentoring relationship cycle: from recruiting and screening, to matching, training, and monitoring and supporting mentors and mentees. Despite these efforts, many programs have a number of matches that do not meet the minimum commitment length (see Figure 13).

A total of 42 percent of programs reported that fewer than one in ten mentoring relationships did not meet the expected program duration in the previous year. However, other programs reported greater proportions of mentoring relationships ending prematurely. Over one-third of programs reported that 10 to 24 percent of their mentoring relationships did not meet the requirement. Over 10 percent reported that between 25 and 49 percent of their relationships ended prematurely.
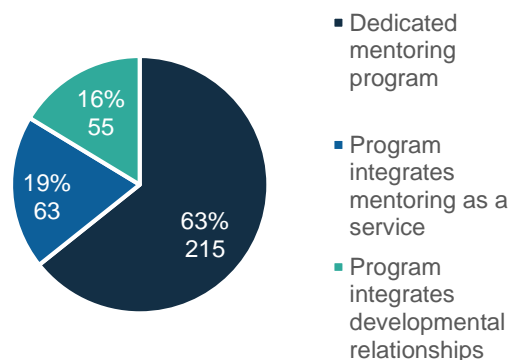
Figure 13 Percentage of Mentoring Relationships Ending Prematurely by Program (n=214)
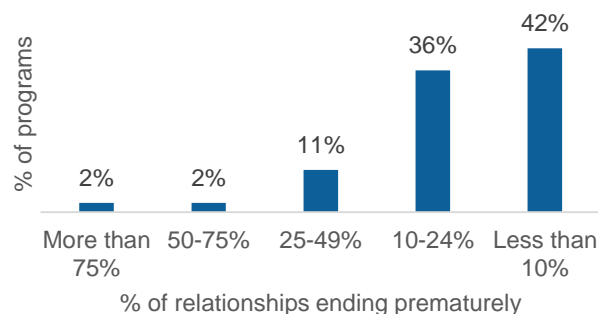
HOW DO OTHER PROGRAMS INTEGRATE MENTORING APPROACHES?

Even if they did not offer dedicated mentoring programs, some organizations offered programs that integrated mentoring approaches. Organizations provided details about 63 programs that integrated mentoring as a service and 55 programs that integrated developmental relationships (see Figure 14).

These types of programs were more prevalent for young adults. Indeed, the majority of programs offered to youth aged 19 and older were not dedicated mentoring programs but rather programs that integrated mentoring as a service (29 percent) or that integrated developmental relationships (25 percent). Conversely, only 16 percent of programs offered to children and 35 percent of programs offered to adolescents were not dedicated mentoring programs.

Figure 14 Percentage and Number of Programs Integrating Mentoring Approaches by Program Type (n=333)

- Dedicated mentoring program
- Program integrates mentoring as a service
- Program integrates developmental relationships

Youth development programs that integrate mentoring approaches were also offered in Indigenous communities. Survey respondents provided details about 31 programs that were available in Indigenous communities: 12 were dedicated mentoring programs and 19 were programs that integrated mentoring approaches. Half of the programs offered on reserve and on Métis settlement regions were dedicated mentoring programs whereas the other half integrated mentoring as an approach. None of the programs available within Inuit Nunangat were dedicated mentoring programs. Instead, they integrated mentoring approaches.

While many dedicated mentoring programs tend to last for several months, youth development programs that integrate mentoring approaches have varied expectations. 8 percent of these programs lasted less than 3 months, 22 percent had no fixed duration, and 44 percent lasted 7 months or more.

Definition of **mentoring as a service:**

An organization may not offer a dedicated mentoring program but may offer services or activities that incorporate mentoring approaches. In other words, mentoring services are complementary, but not central, to how the primary program goals are expected to be achieved. A mentoring service would also include programs where a mentoring relationship is not excluded from forming but is not an explicit or intended goal.

Programs that integrate mentoring approaches had slightly different goals: 15 percent of them had general youth development as a goal compared to 25 percent of dedicated mentoring programs, and 18 percent had career exploration or employability as goals compared to 10 percent of dedicated programs. Finally, 10 percent had leadership development as a goal compared to 2 percent of dedicated mentoring programs.

Information collected about programs that integrate mentoring as a service or that integrate developmental relationships show that mentoring is an approach that is relevant to a variety youth development programs beyond traditional dedicated mentoring programs.

WHAT ARE ORGANIZATIONS' STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES?

Organizations reported several strengths. The most common included program sustainability (37 percent), partnership development (36 percent), developing meaningful activities for mentors and youth (33 percent), integrating mentoring with other services (28 percent), and making strong mentor-mentee matches (27 percent).

Organizations offering mentoring programs also reported facing several challenges linked to operations and to program delivery. The most common top-rated operational challenges included:

> "We operate on 100% fundraising budget – difficult to offer consistent programming without consistent income."
>
> \-   Survey respondent

- Program growth or scaling (22 percent);
- Fundraising and/or grant writing (18 percent);
- Program sustainability (11 percent);
- Program evaluation/data collection (7 percent).

Participating organizations explained how funding challenges had negative repercussions for other aspects of their program delivery, particularly in terms of building trust with the community, retaining mentors and staff, and offering consistent programming.

> "Building trust is important when working with at risk families and youth. Sustainability in funding [is needed] to ensure sustained exposure to have the greatest impact"
>
> \-   Survey respondent

Overall, the most significant operational challenges remained consistent regardless of the size of the organization offering mentoring programs (see Figure 15).
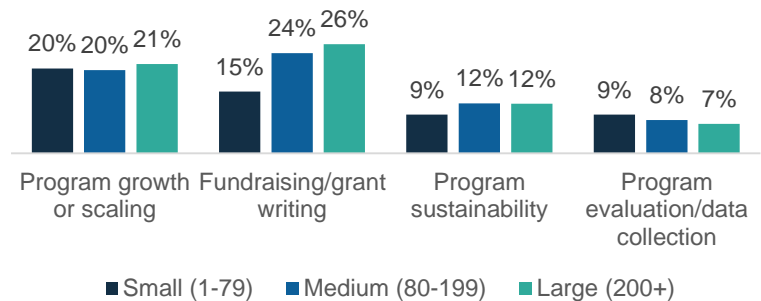
Although these 4 challenges also feature prominently amongst the second top-rated operational challenges, a number of additional challenges emerged among. These included: staff retention, offering mentoring programs in rural communities, marketing and communications, and facilitating networking and knowledge sharing opportunities between organizations. Small organizations also reported that the professional development of their staff was a common challenge.

Figure 15 Top-Rated Operational Challenge by Organization Size (n=148)

	Small (1-79)	Medium (80-199)	Large (200+)
Program growth or scaling	20%	20%	21%
Fundraising/grant writing	15%	24%	26%
Program sustainability	9%	12%	12%
Program evaluation/data collection	9%	8%	7%

Organizations also reported facing a number of program delivery challenges. Mentor recruitment was by far the biggest programmatic challenge organizations faced: 39 percent of participating organizations reported that it was their biggest programmatic challenge and 13 percent reported that it was their second biggest challenge. Overall, half of all organizations reported that mentor recruitment was one of their top-two program delivery challenges. Large
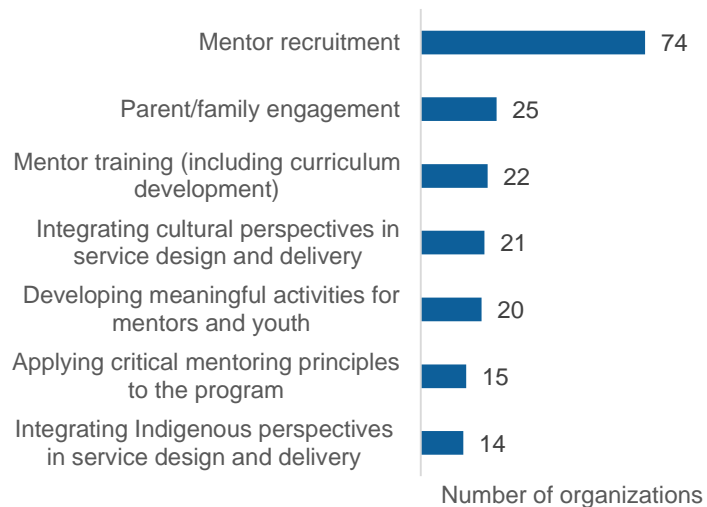
and small organizations reported that mentor recruitment was a top challenge in slightly higher proportions than medium organizations. Several survey respondents added that recruiting male mentors was particularly challenging.

Other commonly reported program delivery challenges included engaging parents or family, training mentors, developing curriculum, and developing meaningful activities for mentors and mentees (see Figure 16).

A small proportion of organizations reported that integrating cultural perspectives in service design and delivery, integrating Indigenous perspectives, or applying critical mentoring principles to their program were also top programmatic challenges.

Figure 16 Top 2 Programmatic Challenges by Organization[7]

Challenge	Number of organizations
Mentor recruitment	74
Parent/family engagement	25
Mentor training (including curriculum development)	22
Integrating cultural perspectives in service design and delivery	21
Developing meaningful activities for mentors and youth	20
Applying critical mentoring principles to the program	15
Integrating Indigenous perspectives in service design and delivery	14

Number of organizations

Promoting a culture of mentoring and helping supportive adults such as teachers and coaches develop their awareness and skills as mentors were also programmatic challenges for several organizations. Adults who have frequent interactions with youth are in a privileged position to become informal mentors or natural supports, which can help all young people expand their webs of supportive adults. By moving beyond the mentor-mentee dyad to foster supportive relationships with other adults that are part of a young person's life, programs can help young people cultivate the natural supports they need to thrive during and after the mentoring program. These adults can also provide additional supports that can complement the supports offered by a formal mentor.[8]

The Role of Schools in Youth Mentoring

Schools play an important role in the youth mentoring landscape. Over one-third of mentoring programs are in- or out-of-school enrichment programs. Over one-third of organizations intentionally target academically at-risk youth for their mentoring programs and academic enrichment is a common program goal. Schools also provide a common meeting location for mentors and mentees.

Findings from the **Mapping the Mentoring Gap** study confirmed schools provide a favourable context for informal and formal mentoring.[1] Teachers and other school staff members were by far the most common group of formal and informal mentors. 22 percent of mentored youth reported that their most meaningful mentor was a teacher or another school staff member.

Young adults who participated in interviews as part of the **Mapping the Gap** study often emphasized school as an ideal place for mentoring relationships to develop. They described school as a credible, safe, and accessible location for youth, especially since young people did not have to rely on parents or others to attend. Some interview participants also indicated that focusing on academics could be a useful entry point for mentoring relationships since they perceive that topic as more neutral or less stigmatizing. According to them, academics would be a more comfortable starting point from which a more personal relationship could eventually grow.

Several interview participants explained that universal mentoring programs offered to everyone – as opposed to targeted approaches for youth who are excelling or struggling – could encourage the normalization of mentoring and reduce the stigma sometimes associated with participating in a mentoring program. They explained how this approach may also be helpful for youth who experience discrimination since it would not require them to self-identify in a particular way or disclose personal information to participate in a program.

"I think I would still give more priority to school because that's what I know. Okay. This is authentic. If my school has it... I'm not being scammed. I'm safe… From school, it goes to the community or any other setting. Then I would be open to it because I have seen that person at my school. I know he's right… But, for say, if I just meet them at a coffee shop or something, I wouldn't be open to that."

- Interview participant, Mapping the Mentoring Gap

"I think you have to build a bond with someone before you can open up for more personal things, at least for me personally. So I think If I have clicked with someone who I felt I could trust and I respected in terms of academics, which is very neutral, then with time that relationship could have grown into more emotional and deeper connections"

- Interview participant, Mapping the Mentoring Gap

"I think if let's just say coming into high school, every student sat down with a guidance counselor, even if for a 15-minute intro meeting or given a mentor off the bat like everybody has one, if you normalize it and give every child an opportunity to just have access to it, like for a couple of minutes to see what it is. I think that would have definitely changed my view because if I had a say, a guidance counselor and every student got to see one for the first 15 minutes of the first week of grade seven, like this is normal. This is someone that's part of my educational journey, like everybody else got it."

- Interview participant, Mapping the Mentoring Gap

CONCLUSION

This study is the most comprehensive investigation of youth mentoring programs in Canada to date. It has allowed us to confirm that the Canadian youth mentoring field is dynamic and diverse. Over one-third of mentoring programs were created in the last decade and close to one-quarter were created in the last five years. The mentoring programs in this study were diverse in terms of their size, location, mentoring models, and youth served. There was no universal or standard approach to delivering a mentoring program. Several youth development programs that were not dedicated mentoring programs also integrated mentoring approaches. This diversity highlights how mentoring is a flexible prevention and intervention approach which can be tailored to address young people's diverse needs and goals.

Organizations offering mentoring programs tended to serve broad categories of children and youth. A large number of organizations served youth living in poverty and youth with mental health needs. Although organizations tended to serve the general youth population, many served young people who face a variety of challenges and who have potentially specialized needs.

It was more common for programs to target specific youth subgroups. Indeed, about half of mentoring programs indicated that they served a specific group of young people. Several programs have broad goals or outcomes such as general youth development or providing a developmental relationship, but a number of programs had more specialized goals such as career exploration and employability, academic enrichment, or life and social skills development. The majority of mentoring programs served children and teenagers, but a small number of programs were offered to young adults, often to support them in the areas of career exploration and employability.

The demand for mentoring programs is strong. In fact, demand outpaces many organizations' capacity to serve youth. More than half of the organizations that participated in the survey indicated that they had children and youth waiting for a mentor. Recruiting mentors, especially male-identified mentors, was the most important or second most important program delivery challenge for half of all participating organizations.

Our findings also indicate that a majority of organizations in the youth mentoring sector serve a small number of youth. The relatively small scale of many programs and the strong demand for mentoring raises some concerns about organizations' ability to offer high-quality programs without increased supports and investments. A large number of programs of all sizes reported facing growth and scaling challenges, fundraising challenges, and sustainability challenges. Furthermore, possibly as a result of limited resources, a number of programs are struggling to offer mentors and youth the quality experience they deserve in terms of training, support, and enduring high-quality mentor-mentee relationships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Together, we can begin to address the gaps and barriers identified in the **Mapping the Mentoring Gap** study and increase young people's access to the support of mentors. In the coming weeks, MENTOR Canada will work with youth representatives and key stakeholders from the mentoring sector to co-create a set of calls to action based on the findings from the State of Mentoring Research Initiative.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

It is difficult to assess how well this survey reflects the entire population of mentoring programs across the country, especially since no survey of this scale had been attempted before. There are notably few programs from Francophone areas and Northern communities. Faith-based programs, programs offered by schools, and programs for young adults may also be underrepresented in our sample. Our recruitment strategy relied heavily on pre-existing networks such as the Alberta Mentoring Partnership, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, the Ontario Mentoring Coalition, and *Mentorat Québec* (see Appendix A for details about the

survey dissemination strategy). Outreach emails and phone calls to organizations beyond our existing networks were only moderately successful.

The study's findings are based on self-reported information by staff which is not necessarily based on administrative data. It is worthy of note that staff completing the survey may not have been able to accurately describe the ethnocultural and demographic identities of mentees and mentors. Furthermore, to facilitate the completion of the survey, a number of questions asked respondents to select percentage or number ranges rather than exact numbers or percentages. While this approach helped boost the number of responses, it limited our ability to provide exact data about a number of questions such as mentees and mentors' demographic characteristics, the number of youth served in a mentoring program, or the number of premature mentoring relationship termination.

Feedback gathered about the first iteration of the survey questionnaire highlighted that it was too complex and too long. Other reviewers expressed concerns about sharing information about finances and staffing since they feared it could give MENTOR Canada and its founding partners an unfair advantage in the mentoring sector. Consequently, MENTOR Canada decided that questions relating to how mentoring programs are funded and staffed were not critical at this time and were removed from the questionnaire.

The survey was administered during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted organizations' capacity to participate. Furthermore, the survey asked respondents to report on their situation in the previous fiscal year (around 2019) and did not take into account the changes likely engendered by the pandemic. The landscape is likely to have changed and the results reported here reflect the pre-COVID-19 pandemic situation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

MENTOR Canada and SRDC developed the Canadian Survey of Youth Development and Mentoring Organizations in consultation with the research advisory committee (RAC), which comprises academics, service providers, and youth representatives. The RAC provided input into the survey's main sections and themes, as well as feedback about the response options available to ensure inclusiveness across all categories. A preliminary version of the survey was shared with 4 organizations in the youth development and mentoring fields in March 2020 to obtain feedback on:

- The clarity of the instructions and definitions;
- The survey's flow;
- The readability and clarity of the survey;
- The survey's comprehensiveness;
- The survey's length and organizations' general ability to complete the survey.

Consulted parties shared that the first iteration of the survey was too long and that some organizations may not want to divulge details about their budget/funding and staffing. SRDC and MENTOR Canada revised the survey based on their feedback.

Survey respondents were asked to provide information about their organizations and programs pertaining to their last complete fiscal year (c. 2019). Since the survey was completed as the COVID-19 pandemic was gaining momentum, we also specified that the information provided should reflect the pre-pandemic situation. As such, the results of this study do not take into account how and to what extent the pandemic has changed the youth mentoring field.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

The bilingual online survey was launched April 22 and concluded September 4, 2020. Respondents also had the opportunity to complete a paper version of the survey, but no organization selected this option. MENTOR Canada, with the support of BMO Financial Group, offered organizations a chance to win one of five $1000 cash prizes for their youth development programs as an incentive to complete the survey. SRDC notified the 5 winning organizations mid-September 2020.

Survey instructions specified that because of the information requested, we recommended that the survey be completed by an executive director, program coordinator, or other staff member in a leadership position who would have an in-depth understanding of the organization and its mentoring programs.

MENTOR Canada mobilized its network of partners and communication channels to disseminate the survey. The invitation to participate was relayed to:

- MENTOR Canada's three founding partners (AMP, BBBSC, OMC) to share with their members, reaching approximately 300 mentoring service providers;
- MENTOR Canada's 1413 newsletter subscribers;
- 5 youth development organizations with national reach;
- Over 650 organizations identified through online databases such as 211.

Each of these groups received a minimum of one reminder to share or complete the survey.

In July and August 2020, MENTOR Canada conducted outreach phone calls and connected with 159 organizations to encourage them to participate in the survey.

Organizations that had begun answering the survey but that had not completed it received two personalized reminders to encourage them to complete it.

DATA ANALYSIS

A few organizations submitted two responses to the survey. Duplicates were removed and only the first completed survey was kept.

Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Not all organizations answered all questions. Therefore, the denominator for each question varied and was reported in all figures. Comparisons made in the report looked at differences in percentages and did not use statistical tests.

Organizations could provide details for up to 3 programs that incorporate mentoring. If an organization had more than 3 programs that met this criterion, they were instructed to select the 3 that best represented their work in mentoring. Overall, 141 organizations provided details about at least one program, 112 about 2 programs, and 87 about 3 programs. In total, respondents provided details about 340 youth development programs. Of these, 63 percent (215 programs) were dedicated mentoring programs, 19 percent were not a youth mentoring program but did offer mentoring as a service, and 16 percent were neither a mentoring program or service but included a developmental relationship as part of their program. For the purpose of this report, results reported for <u>mentoring programs</u> refer to the 215 dedicated youth mentoring programs.

NOTES

[1] Raposa, E. B., Rhodes, J., Geert Jan, J. M. S., Card, N., Burton, S., Schwartz, S., . . . Hussain, S. (2019). The effects of youth mentoring programs: A meta-analysis of outcome studies. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 48*(3), 423-443. DuBois, D., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J., Silverthorn, N., & Valentine, J. (2011). How Effective Are Mentoring Programs for Youth? A Systematic Assessment of the Evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest,* 12(2), 57-91. Van Dam, L., Smit, D., Wildschut, B., Branje, S., Rhodes, J., Assink, M. and Stams, G. (2018), Does Natural Mentoring Matter? A Multilevel Meta-analysis on the Association Between Natural Mentoring and Youth Outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 62: 203-220.

[2] The categories were not mutually exclusive: programs could be offered across multiple age groups.

[3] Participating organizations provided information regarding demographic subgroups, ethnocultural identities, and gender identities on a percentage scale. Each organization provided the proportional range of their mentors and mentees who had a specific identity compared to all the youth and mentors in their programs. As each organization had a different number of mentors and mentees, we have not calculated the proportion of all mentors and mentees within each subgroup.

[4] Dubois D.L., Holloway, B.E., Valentine, J.C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 31, 157-197. Kupersmidt, J.B., Stump, K.N., Stelter, R.L., & Rhodes, J.E. (2017). Predictors of Match Closure in Youth Mentoring Relationships. *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 59, 25-35. Kupersmidt, J.B., Stump, K.N., Stelter, R.L., & Rhodes, J.E. (2017) Mentoring program practices as predictors of match longevity. *Journal of Community Psychology,* 00, 1-16. McQuillin, S.D.. & Lyons, M. D. (2021) A National Study of Mentoring Program Characteristics and Premature Match Closure: The Role of Program Training and Ongoing Support. *Prevention Science,* 22(3), 34-344. Spencer, R., Gowdy, G., Drew, L. A., McCormack, M. J., & Keller, T. E. (2020). It Takes a Village to Break Up a Match: A Systemic Analysis of Formal Youth Mentoring Relationship Endings. *Child & Youth Care Forum,* 49, 97-120.

[5] MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership. (2015). Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring (4th edition). Boston.

[6] Spencer, R. (2007). "It's not what I expected" A qualitative study of youth mentoring relationship failures. *Journal of Adolescent Research,* 22(4), 331-354. Spencer, R., Gowdy, G., Drew, L. A., McCormack, M. J., & Keller, T. E. (2020). It Takes a Village to Break Up a Match: A Systemic Analysis of Formal Youth Mentoring Relationship Endings. *Child & Youth Care Forum,* 49, 97-120.

[7] 148 organization reported a first challenge and 133 also reported a second top challenge.

[8] Prieto-Flores, Ò., Feu, J. Casademont, X., & Alarcón, X. (2021). Critical autonomy, social capital, and mentoring programmes for children and youth. In Ò. Prieto-Flores & J. Feu (Eds.), *Mentoring children and young people for social inclusion: Global approaches to empowerment* (pp. 1-15). Routledge. Varga, S.M. & Zaff, J. (2018). Webs of support: An integrative framework of relationships, social networks, and social supports for positive youth development. *Adolescent Research Review,* 3(1), 1-11.