GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN MENTORING

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WHO ARE, OR HAVE BEEN IN RECEIPT OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

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The field of mentoring has grown substantially over the past two decades generating different types of approaches or models, within a variety of settings and with service to increasingly high risk youth. Although innovation in and expansion of youth mentoring programs are positive trends, it is imperative that structured mentoring programs are developed and implemented using consistent standards supported by research.

Mentoring, at its core, is a simple concept. However, "believing that mentoring is so easy and so inexpensive that anyone can do it" does a disservice to everyone involved in a mentoring program. (Effective Strategies for Providing Quality Youth Mentoring in Schools and Communities, 2007) Running an effective mentoring program is not easy, and there are many nuances and programmatic details that can have a big impact on outcomes for youth. Furthermore, recent mentoring research points to potentially harmful consequences of short-lived mentoring relationships; a hallmark of programs that are not well designed. This guide is intended to provide you with research, best practices and information to support the development of meaningful, effective mentoring programs.

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

In January 2013, the Youth Leaving Care Working Group, established by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) in conjunction with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, released the Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System (the Blueprint), a plan to better support and prepare young people in the care of children's aid societies (CASs) to reach their full potential. The Working Group, comprised of youth with experience living in care, and community partners, made a number of recommendations for system change, which are reflected in the Blueprint.

Among the recommendations, the Blueprint highlighted the importance of supportive, long-lasting relationships to the success of children and youth formerly in care. Specifically, it was recommended that children and youth in care be provided with the opportunity "to be matched with peer-mentors who have been in care or adult mentors from the community with formalized mentoring organizations that meet their individual needs (e.g. sexual identity and orientation, cultural identity, etc.)."

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Community partners across the province have indicated that there is a need to collect research, articulate elements of effective practice and disseminate information to enable them to efficiently develop and deliver high quality mentoring programs to children and youth who are involved with, or have had previous involvement with, the child welfare system in Ontario.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada was contracted by the Ministry of Child and Youth Services to develop and disseminate a practical, evidence-informed resource guide for Children's Aid Societies and their community partners that outlines best practices and guidelines for mentoring children and youth who are, or have been, in receipt of child protection services. The intent of this resource guide is to support CASs and their community partners in developing, delivering and/or accessing high-quality mentorship opportunities for the young people they are serving.

This resource draws from both the expertise of Ontario's Child Welfare System and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Ontario's Children's Aid societies are leaders in enhancing and promoting the welfare and well-being of children, youth and families. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is the leading national volunteer-based mentoring organization committed to providing youth with high quality, volunteer based mentoring programs. They are the recognized expert in delivering mentorship services, including recruiting, screening, and training mentors, matching them with youth, and monitoring matches.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

After reviewing and consulting research literature regarding mentoring children and youth in and leaving care, we identified limited literature relevant to informing our discussions and the creation of this resource, other than the previous work by The Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research Centre, prepared for the Children and Youth in Care and Mentoring Subcommittee of the Alberta Mentoring Partnership in September, 2014.The Centre was established to support and disseminate research knowledge and evidence on policy issues related to improving the well-being and health of children and youth and is seen as an innovative leader in that regard. The document summarizes both the literature, as well as interviews with key individuals with experience in mentoring children and youth in care in the Canadian context. This resource, therefore, utilizes the findings and conclusions of the Centre's literature review. The document is in the public domain and is cited as follows:

Vandenberghe, C. (2014). Mentoring Youth in Care. Calgary, AB: Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research for the Child and Youth in Care and Mentoring Subcommittee of the Alberta Mentoring Partnership (see Appendix A)

Additionally, this resource builds on the key findings from a new study which explores mentoring with youth transitioning out of foster care:

Munson, M.R., Brown, S., Spencer, R., Edguer, M., & Tracy, E. (2015). Supportive relationships among former system youth with mental health challenges. Journal of Adolescent Research, 30(4), 501-529.

Furthermore, we have utilized the experiential knowledge that has been gained through interviews with experts in the mentoring field, practitioners in both the child welfare sector and in the mentoring field, as well as evaluation studies of programs and projects within the Big Brothers Big Sisters movement.

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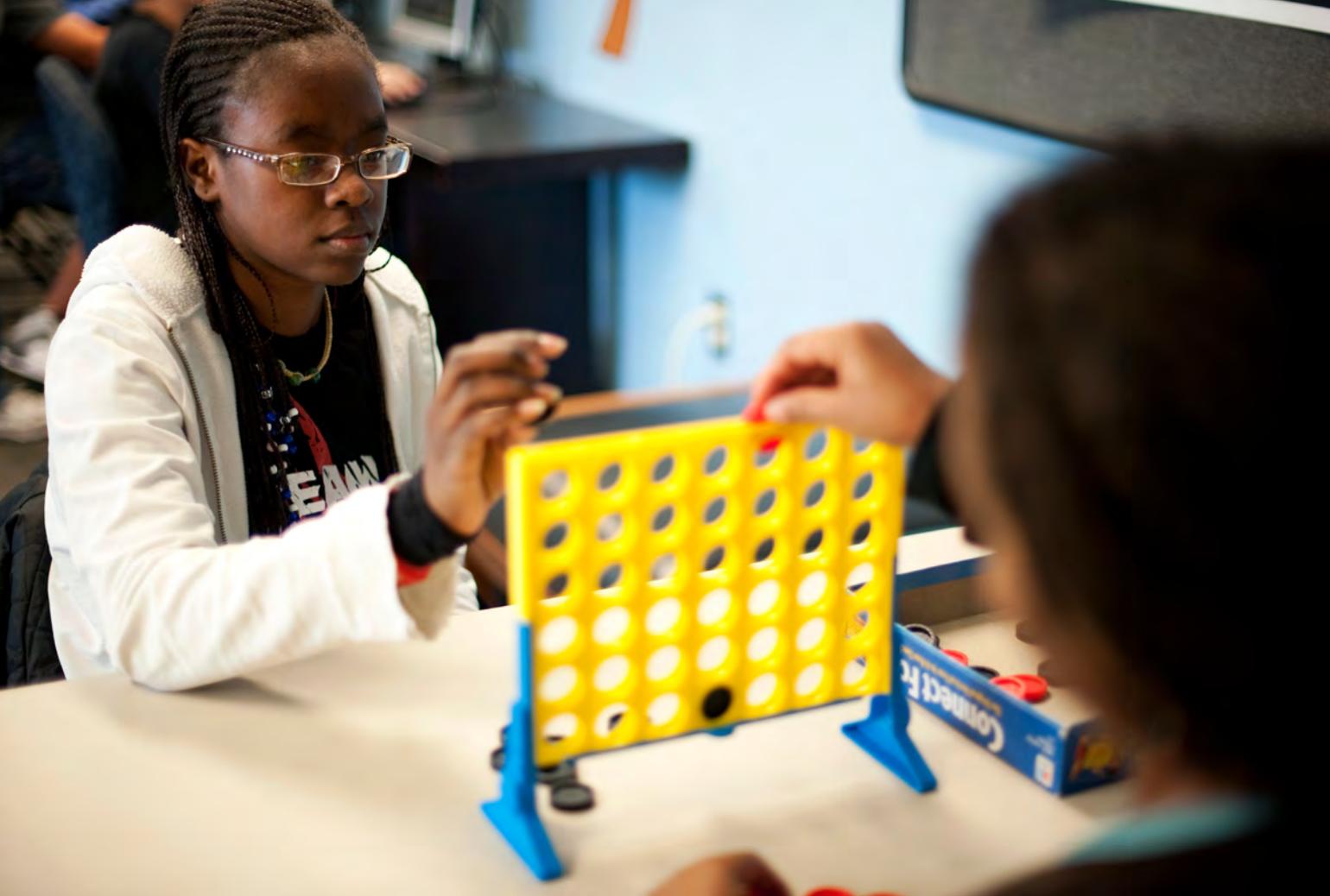
ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE, OR HAVE BEEN, IN CARE

Almost 15, 000 of Ontario's 3.1 million children are in the care of Children's Aid Societies.[i] This means that on any given day, 1 out of every 182 children in Ontario is in care.[ii] Of the 15,000 children in care, approximately 5,800 children and youth are permanent wards of the Crown and CASs have full guardianship responsibilities.[iii] Research indicates that children and youth in care experience poorer outcomes compared to the general Canadian child and youth population across a range of domains including educational attainment, employment, and health.

In Canada today, approximately 2,291 young people "age out" of the child welfare system every year (Conference Board of Canada 2014). The majority of these youth leave their foster and group homes when they turn 18 or 19, depending on the province; by the time they turn 21, the limited government funding they have been receiving largely ceases, as does the emotional support they received from staff and former care providers, and they must find the means and resources to establish

i   Ibid, p. 4. 16,825 children were living in care in 2010.
ii Bay Consulting Group, A Description of the Child Welfare System Landscape in Ontario, October, 2010, p. 24
iii Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, Child Welfare Report 2009/10, p.6.

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a life of independence. By and large, youth in care face difficult circumstances as they transition into adulthood. At the age of 18, these youth must assume responsibility for their own health and well-being, relationships, employment, housing, education, and building connections within their communities. Lacking the financial and moral support that most Canadian children take for granted, they struggle to cope with these challenges of adult life, including the challenge of transitioning to adult support systems, such as health and mental health, criminal justice, and social services systems. Many of these youth may lack the knowledge and skills to navigate these service systems. As a result, chronic unemployment, unplanned parenthood, homelessness, and incarceration are just some of the problems they encounter, with significant social and economic costs as a result.[iv]

Clearly the circumstances and life chances for these young people are significantly poorer and the challenges and hardships considerably greater than for other young people in the general population:

- 40% of former youth in care have been homeless or "couch surfed" at some point since leaving care (25 Is The New 21, 2012 - Report from the Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth)

- Only 30% of kids involved with the care system graduate high school compared to 88% of the general population. In Ontario, only 44% of youth in and from care graduate from high school compared to the 81% high school graduation rate for all Ontario Students(25 Is The New 21, 2012, and The Conference Board of Canada)

- Numerous reports dating back to the mid-1980s show that youth leaving care are over-represented in the youth justice, mental health, and shelter systems (OACAS, Annual Report, 2009)

- According to Youth in Care Canada (www.youthincare.ca), one youth in fifty has been involved in the child protective system, with a disproportionate number being Aboriginal. There are nearly 100,000 children and youth in care in Canada. Although only 2 per cent of Ontario's population is Aboriginal, Aboriginal children and youth make up 22 per cent of Ontario's Crown wards. (Statistics collected in My REAL Life Book: Report from the Youth Leaving Care Hearings. Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth May 2012, p 33.)

- Youth leaving care tend to have more mental health problems than their peers. Over 46% of Crown Wards have been prescribed drugs for psychiatric conditions. When they age out of the system, they often lose their prescription drug coverage. The ability to control major mental illness is drastically diminished without access to prescribed medication. A random sample of permanent Wards in Ontario showed that almost one third of youth still in care had a mental disorder. In that group, 49% also had another type of disability. In addition, youth leaving care have shown higher levels of alcohol and drug use.[v]

Research and practice wisdom validates the additional risk for these youth and suggests the need for multi-sectorial collaboration in addressing these often complex and numerous risks.

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iv Conference Board of Canada 2014 p.1
v My REAL Life Book: Report from the Youth Leaving Care Hearings. Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth May 2012, p 24.)

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The Social and Economic Costs

In April 2014, the Conference Board of Canada released the findings of a new study analyzing the social and economic costs of youth leaving care who go unsupported versus the social and economic benefits of investing in their success and well-being.

The Results Were Astounding:

Every child leaving care will cost all levels of the Canadian government more than $126,000 over his/her lifetime in the form of higher social assistance payments and lower tax revenues.

For one cohort of 2,291 youth aging out of care in a year, this represents a 10-year loss of $7.5 billion in earning potential.

If all levels of Canadian government were to invest a total of $126,000 in each young person leaving care, approximately $289 million would be saved over the lifetime of just one cohort of 2,291 kids and the government would still receive a positive return on investment.

Every child aging out of care will earn approximately $326,000 less income over his or her lifespan than the average Canadian.

It is estimated that ongoing long-term investment in education and mental health for youth leaving care will provide permanent gains for Canada's GDP of up to 0.15%.

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The Need for Mentorship

The need for a wide-reaching, high-impact mentorship program for youth leaving care has long been recognized by the Canadian child welfare sector as a crucial gap in the delivery of services to this deeply vulnerable population. The Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System highlighted the importance of supportive, long-lasting relationships and it was specifically recommended that children and youth in care be provided with the opportunity "to be matched with peer-mentors who have been in care or adult mentors from the community with formalized mentoring organizations that meet their individual needs." This call has been supported in part by preliminary research findings such as DuBois, Holloway, Valentine and Cooper's 2002 meta-analysis of mentoring programs, which found that mentoring may provide the most benefit to at risk youth. This resource will make tremendous strides toward filling this gap by ultimately ensuring that all young people receiving child protection services can access the support of a consistent, caring mentor.

Children in care often experience trauma resulting in removal from home which compromises their ability to develop healthy relationships. Healthy relationships – and the sense of safety, trust, belonging and security they foster – form the

foundation of a young person's capacity to develop self-esteem. The often dysfunctional coping mechanisms young people employ to manage trauma, loss and fear, contributes to a cycle of mislabelling (e.g. Lazy, bad, full of attitude, etc.), continued disruption and, too often, a myriad of negative outcomes.

Interrupting that cycle is critical. Replacing instability and helplessness, which fuels the maladaptive coping mechanisms, with a stable, patient relationship with a well-prepared, persistent and consistent mentor, is one way to disrupt the cycle. Feeding a basic sense of belonging can lead to the strengthening of a healthy self-esteem and a new self-identity as a resilient, important and contributing community member.

A recent literature review by the Child Welfare Institute found consistent agreement among child welfare experts that "a permanent connection with at least one committed adult who provides a safe, stable, and secure relationship… would foster improved success for youth transitioning from care" (Literature Review: Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care, Child Welfare Institute 2014).

But most importantly of all, the need for supportive mentors has been voiced repeatedly by the youth themselves:

I feel that it would be a big asset if there was a mentor or a Big Brother program in the system. This would let kids see that life is hard and things don't always go your way but they can make their lives good even if their past was so bad."
– Former youth in care, speaking at the 2012 Youth Leaving Care Hearings at Queen's Park, Toronto

"I very much felt alone and it would have been nice to have somebody, I guess, there to be able to say, we kind of get this and it's okay that you're feeling this way."
– Katelynn, 21, former youth in care

The Impact of Mentoring

A pro-bono study conducted by Boston Consulting Group for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada in 2013 revealed that mentorship services for vulnerable young people have a profound impact on the trajectory of their lives. Compared to their non-mentored peers, youth who receive mentoring are:

- 17% more likely to be gainfully employed and earn 13% more on average, leading to an earnings increase of approximately $315,000 over their lifetime (similar to the results of the Conference Board of Canada study).

- 50% more likely to volunteer and 13% more likely to give to charity.

- 60% more likely to report feeling consistently happy and 45% more likely to report feeling consistently confident.

- 50% more likely to have a strong social network.

It is critical that young people in receipt of child protection services are able to form positive relationships with those who can provide the guidance and support they so desperately require as they navigate the difficult path to a more stable future. Specially trained mentors have the ability to change a youth's outlook from one of despair to one of optimism and opportunity.

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WHAT IS MENTORING

Youth mentoring can be defined as the relationship between a caring, more experienced individual(s) and a less experienced person resulting in the provision of support, friendship and constructive role modeling consistently over a period of time.[vi] Mentoring happens in a number of different contexts and ways. Some of the differences between mentoring programs include:

- Informal/casual to formal relationships.

- Goals or intent – career development, academic achievement, personal development, cultural or faith based growth, teaching life skills etc.

- Settings – community, school, workplace or online.

- The number of mentees – one to one, group, family or community sessions.

Mentoring occurs as natural mentoring, when a sustained relationship develops naturally between a coach, teacher, neighbour, or other adult and a young person, or as planned mentoring, when a relationship is purposefully created to help a young person who may otherwise not have the access he or she needs to the wisdom and support of a caring adult.

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vi Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, Measuring Reach, 2014

Types of formal mentoring and how they are commonly defined

ONE TO ONE

What is it?

One adult to one young person.

Where Does the Mentoring Take Place?

Agency-based: At a community agency; typically an after-school program, Boys and Girls Club, etc.

Community-based: The mentor and mentee can meet anywhere, including attending events, going to museums, etc. This is typical of the Big Brothers Big Sisters model.

Faith-based: Mentoring pairs usually meet in a house of worship or adjoining building.

Online: E-mentoring—also known as online mentoring, telementoring, or teletutoring—is a mentoring relationship that is conducted via the Internet.

School-based: At the mentee's school (elementary, middle, high school), on school grounds, in full view of school officials. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place within the building and/or use of school facilities (open classroom, computer lab, gym, art room, library) if available.

Workplace-based: At the mentor's workplace. Students are typically bussed to the site. Either the school district or the company may pay for the bus. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place at the workplace.

E-MENTORING

What is it?

Mentoring via e-mail and the Internet.

Where Does the Mentoring Take Place?

The internet: The mentoring relationship is conducted via the Internet, as an independent program or added component of existing programs.

These programs require technology in place that provides a safe and secure environment for communication exchanges, archives all messages and enables thetracking of communications between mentoring pairs.

PEER MENTORING

What is it?

Caring youth mentoring other youth.

Where Does the Mentoring Take Place?

School-based: At the mentee's school elementary, middle, high school), on school grounds, in full view of school officials. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place within the building and/or use of school facilities (open classroom, computer lab, gym, art room, library) if available.

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Types of formal mentoring and how they are commonly defined

TEAM MENTORING

What is it?

Several adults working with small groups of young people, in which the adult-to-youth ratio is not greater than 1:4.

Where Does the Mentoring Take Place?

Agency-based: At a community agency, typically an after-school program, Boys and Girls Club, etc.

Community-based: The mentors and mentees can meet anywhere, attend events, go to museums, etc. This is typical of the Big Brothers Big Sisters model.

Faith-based: Mentoring teams usually meet in a house of worship or adjoining building.

Online: E-mentoring—also known as online mentoring, telementoring, or teletutoring—is a mentoring relationship that is conducted via the Internet.

School-based: At the mentees' school (elementary, middle, high school), on school grounds, in full view of school officials. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place within the building and/or use of school facilities (open classroom, computer lab, gym, art room, library) if available.

Workplace-based: At the mentors' workplace. Students are typically bussed to the site. Either the school district or the company may pay for the bus. Mentors and Mentees should have a designated meeting place at the workplace.

GROUP MENTORING

What is it?

One adult to up to four young people.

Where Does the Mentoring Take Place?

Agency-based: At a community agency, typically an after-school program, Boys and Girls Club, etc.

Community-based: The mentor and mentees can meet anywhere, attend events, go to museums, etc.

Faith-based: Mentoring groups usually meet in a house of worship or adjoining building.

Online: E-mentoring—also known as online mentoring, telementoring, or teletutoring— is a mentoring relationship that is conducted via the Internet.

School-based: At the mentees' school (elementary, middle, high school), on school grounds, in full view of school officials. Mentor and mentees should have a designated meeting place within the building and/or use of school facilities (open classroom, computer lab, gym, art room, library) if available.

Workplace-based: At the mentors' workplace. Students are typically bussed to the site. Either the school district or the company may pay for the bus. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place at the workplace.

Source: Compiled from Mentoring School Age Children (1999) by Public/Private Ventures and MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, Understanding Mentoring Relationships (1992) by the Search Institute, Elements of Effective Practice, second edition (2003), MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, and The Connecticut Mentoring Partnership, Business Guide to Youth Mentoring.

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MENTORING YOUTH

Who Are, or have Been, in Receipt of Child Protection Services

In response to the Youth Leaving Care Working Group's plan for fundamental change to the child welfare system, new resources and supports for youth have been put in place to help improve outcomes for youth who are involved with, or have had previous involvement with the child welfare system in Ontario. Supporting CASs and child welfare sector partners in developing or assessing quality mentoring program for these youth will effectively build on these steps, increasing the odds these youth maintain strong relationships, stay in school, pursue post-secondary education, and are better prepared for leaving care.

Although successful strategies for addressing the issues discussed above are scarce, many of the root causes – lack of guidance, a sense of hopelessness and despair, low self-confidence, poor attitude for school, non-existent coping skills can be addressed through intentionally designed, high quality mentoring. Mentoring has been proven to influence a number of relevant protective factors, including strong social supports, problem solving skills and community engagement. Additionally, well-trained mentors can act as a shepherd, connecting youth with other positive relationships, while walking a fine balance between expanding the youth's horizons and strengthening relationships within the youth's own community. In fulfilling these varied roles, mentors augment their mentee's social capacity.

Mentoring programs are not the panacea for all the challenges these young people will face, nor is mentoring a one-size fits all proposition. Every young person who would benefit from a mentoring relationship has individual needs. Effective mentoring programs offer enough flexibility to help meet each mentee's personal needs, yet allow mentoring relationships to flourish within a safe structure. Research supports the fact

A mentoring relationship with a well-prepared, nurturing adult can change the trajectory of young people in care by offering a positive role model, facilitating access to community services and supports, and providing a buffer from the stress and disruption of the in-care experience. Structured mentoring programs and well-trained mentors can help young people in care develop the skills they need to overcome challenges and reach their goals.

Mentoring programs for youth in care should incorporate a focus on positive development, youth-driven activities, and the development of core competencies and skills (e.g., decision-making and problem-solving skills, how to access community resources). Programs should include structured activities that address young people's needs and developmental stage. For example, younger children may benefit most from educational support and an opportunity to develop healthy relationships with their mentor. Middle adolescents need opportunities to interact positively with peers in a structured group setting. Mentoring of older youth typically focuses on developing life skills, such as job training, managing finances, and securing a living arrangement.

-Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System Involved Youth; Mentoring Youth in Foster Care

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that mentoring relationships can provide a buffer for youth against serious struggles and build their resilience and capacity to manage difficulties. Tailoring the training and support that is available to matches based on the specific risks youth face has the potential to produce even stronger benefits.[vii]

Unique Challenges

Mentoring youth both in and transitioning out of care, or those receiving child protection services presents unique opportunities and challenges for youth and the mentoring programs trying to serve them:

Family Environment:

Children enter the child welfare system because of abuse or neglect, rather than delinquency. Although most are supported at home, those youth who are removed from their biological home may change care placements multiple times. Each placement brings a new community and culture for the youth to navigate. Young people in care have suffered multiple losses—their biological family, friends, neighbours, and teachers, possibly even their pets and their favourite toys— in addition to the abuse or neglect that brought them into care in the first place.

Developmental Issues:

Children have different developmental needs at different ages. Involvement in the child welfare system impacts children in diverse ways, partly depending on how old they are. For example:

- Elementary school-age children (ages 6–10) can have difficulty forming relationships with adults when they experience a significant transition (such as entrance into the child welfare system). Some children may be very clingy in their interactions with adults, while others may be distant and dismissive; both behaviours stem from a fear that the adult will leave.

- Early adolescents (ages 11–14) begin to develop relationships with their peers but are still very dependent on their families. Youth in this stage are beginning to explore their personal strengths and identity, and without positive adult encouragement may seek recognition from others, including negative peer groups.

- Middle adolescents (ages 15–17) depend more on their peers than on family members. However, multiple placements may interfere with the ability of these youth to develop supportive, positive peer relationships, leaving them more vulnerable to negative peer influences.

- Older youth (18 to early 20s) want independence but may not have had sufficient education or work experience to be able to live independently. Lacking an understanding of how to get and keep a job, what healthy relationships look like, and how to set appropriate relationship boundaries can cause these youth to lag behind their peers developmentally.

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vii Herrera, C., Sipe, C. L., & McClanahan, W. S. (2000). Mentoring school-age children: Relationship development in community-based and school-based programs. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. (Published in collaboration with MENTOR/ National Mentoring Partnership, Alexandria, VA

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Mental or Emotional Stability:

Because of the trauma they have experienced, children in care are more likely to have physical, mental, behavioural, emotional, and substance abuse problems, to engage in risky sexual behaviours, such as early initiation of sex, and to experience early pregnancy.

Education

Children in care often change schools numerous times. As a result of regularly missing school, having to change schools frequently, and having their enrollment delayed every time they enter a new placement, young people in care are often academically behind their peers. Many find it difficult to form relationships with school staff who could support their academic success and/or help them to maintain the motivation to work hard in school.

Employment

Many adolescents in care lack adult support to learn critical job or work-related skills. Lacking these capabilities, their employment options suffer—12 to 18 months after "aging out" of the child welfare system, only 38 percent of youth are employed, and less than half have held a full-time job.

Transitional Challenges:

Increasing numbers of older adolescents age out of care, transitioning from care placement to independence. Outside of the system's care, with no financial supports or resources other than their family or peers, these youth often return to the same high-risk environment they came from.

In tailoring mentoring services to meet the distinctive needs of youth receiving child protection services, mentoring programs must operate on the foundation that relationships are at the core of youth mentoring and are ultimately the catalyst for youth change and development. Additionally, recognition that the needs of these youth will vary greatly across time and life events is crucial. The mentoring needs of a young child in care will be distinctly different from a youth who will soon be exiting the care system; youth at various ages and at different stages in the system need very different supports. Similarly, youth wind up in the child welfare system for many reasons – some have suffered substantial abuse and trauma, others have not. Programs serving youth who experienced extreme violence will require different mentoring supports. Likewise, different kinds of mentoring will benefit youth as their needs change across time, (for example adult mentor, peer mentor, group mentors) at different times to meet their needs.

Moreover, mentoring programs must be sensitive to meeting the needs of all youth receiving child protection services, including LGBT2SQ youth, ethno-cultural youth, aboriginal and youth with disabilities. LGBT2SQ youth are disproportionately

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represented among youth receiving services from children's aid societies. These youth are an invisible and often forgotten minority for whom adolescence and the transition to adulthood can be especially difficult. Similarly, aboriginal youth are over-represented in child welfare systems across Canada, vastly outnumbering non-Aboriginal children in care on a proportional basis. Working with culturally diverse populations requires that organizations review and customize mentoring program activities and materials in such a way as to ensure that the information and activities have culturally appropriate content and are delivered in culturally appropriate ways. Research and practice wisdom have highlighted the need to customize mentoring programs to the unique needs, situations and cultures of the target population.[viii]

Finally, positive outcomes are only possible when young people are engaged in high quality mentoring relationships. Research and practice wisdom has informed the development of six core standards of practice that cover the aspects of mentoring programs that directly support their mentoring relationships: Recruitment, Screening, Training, Matching, Monitoring and Support and Closure (outlined in more detail in Section 7). Other practices shown to be effective in working with children and youth who are, or have been in receipt of child protection services should supplement these evidence based practices.

Mentoring Models Important to Youth Transitioning out of Care

Group Mentoring: Allows mentees to interact with other participants from similar life experiences. Youth can explore feelings about leaving care with other youth which normalizes the transition out of care experience. Group mentoring also allows for the transmission of information and skill building on relevant topics such as preparing for a job interview, finding housing and improving personal communication.

Peer Mentoring: Youth participate in group mentoring workshops led by youth in care alumni. Mentors are peers who share their background, act as role models and normalize the experience of transitioning out of care. Youth participate in problem-solving discussions and shared learning.

One program model can implement several styles of mentoring that supplement one another. One-on-one mentors can be used as a support piece for a larger suite of targeted services.

Youth aging out of care and transitioning into independent living and adulthood need more tangible support and services designed to achieve very practical outcomes like independent living and higher education enrollment.

Workshops and training opportunities on a variety of topics can enhance all mentoring models: applying for financial aid, researching and choosing schools, finding a job, obtaining a birth certificate, etc.

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viii CWLA, 2006 - Best Practice Guidelines Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care

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Although traditional mentoring programs sometimes serve youth who are involved in the child welfare system in the context of their regular mentoring programs, in most cases traditional mentoring programs are ill-equipped to deal with the special needs of these youth. Despite well-intentioned efforts, mentoring programs that are not equipped to support these youth risk perpetuating the damaging cycle of chronic loss that is common for this population. Mentoring programs for youth involved in the child welfare system are different from traditional youth mentoring programs. Some of the unique characteristics of effective mentoring programs for children and youth who are, or have been in receipt of child protection services are:

- A great deal of support for mentors and mentees from program staff

- A program focus that goes beyond building mentoring relationships to helping youth develop life skills such as problem solving and goal setting

- Linkages to community resources to enable youth to successfully transition to independence when they age out of the care system

- Comprehensive training for both mentors and program staff

"In general, we know that for newcomer youth, one on one mentoring is not something the population is familiar with or comfortable with. The idea of mentoring usually exists as something that happens organically in a large extended family. In introducing a mentoring relationship, it raises eyebrows. Group mentoring is more successful, especially when it's tied to school. It's easier to introduce because it's seen as an extension of the school. Homework help or something related to academic success is more comfortable for families. And they already have some trust in schools. The group mentoring is focused on building relationships and reducing social isolation in the school…"
- Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

Group Mentoring is Best for Aboriginal Youth

Research has demonstrated that Aboriginal youth are more effectively served by a group mentoring model, where mentors and children and youth interact together rather than in traditional one-to-one scenarios (Bisanz, J. et al. 2003).

Aboriginal communities have a history of group practice in the education and support of their children. A group mentoring model not only recognizes this important cultural practice, but builds upon it.

Benefits of Collaboration

Building a successful mentoring program is challenging. Careful consideration should be given to the various factors involved: cost, possible duplication of services, legal liability, organizational structure, and capacity for outcomes evaluation and ongoing quality improvement. Additionally, mentoring staff must have a solid understanding of youth mentoring research and best practices, along with demonstrated skills in applying evidence-based practice to their work. Forming partnerships with existing mentoring organizations and programs with the established infrastructure and knowledge base to run a mentoring program is highly recommended. Good intentions are not enough to deliver an effective youth mentoring program as there are a myriad of components to establish and oversee.

MENTOR (an American advocate and expert mentoring resource) has developed an online toolkit grounded in research and evidence-based practices, which provides detailed information, sample forms, advice and other resource materials to develop and manage a program. The toolkit (which can be downloaded here) addresses four major components of a safe and effective mentoring program:

1. Program Design and Planning;
2. Program Management;
3. Program Operations; and
4. Program Evaluation

Collaboration:

☑ Expands services to reach a wider audience;

☑ Develops a greater understanding of client needs;

☑ Improves communication with other youth serving organizations;

☑ Increases knowledge of resources and services available to mentees, mentors and mentoring program staff;

☑ Ensures the sustainability of the mentoring program;

☑ Increases organizational capacity by bringing together diverse strengths and competencies;

☑ Increases visibility with the media and the public;

☑ Reduces costs;

☑ Conserves resources.

"We all want young people to be knowledgeable, caring, responsible, and healthy. Young people who succeed academically and in their personal lives are socially and emotionally competent. They are self-aware. They have a positive attitude toward themselves and others. They know their strengths and are optimistic about the future. They can handle their emotions. They are able to set and achieve goals. And they are effective, responsible problem solvers"
Safe And Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide To Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, And Emotional Learning, March, 2003, page 5.

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STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR EFFECTIVE MENTORING PROGRAMS

Mentor Recruitment:

Intentional recruitment is critical to launching meaningful mentoring relationships. The following factors should be considered when deciding whom to recruit as mentors:

- Recruitment strategies should realistically portray the benefits, practices, supports and challenges of mentoring youth in the program

- Outreach strategies should be tailored to the characteristics of the people you want to recruit. (See below for additional details). Little research exists on how to best target very specific cultural and ethnic groups. However, practice wisdom suggests that programs can best address race and gender issues in recruitment by tapping into the smaller community-based social networks and organizations to which these individuals might belong. Recruitment is most often successful if there is an existing relationship with the community or population being targeted.

- In the case of working with Aboriginal communities in order to recruit mentors, this is very much a trust building activity. Only when the community feels that the program is truly respectful of their culture and working in a culturally appropriate manner will people agree to become mentors. (Alberta Children's Services, 2006)

- The strategy should be focused and comprehensive to ensure that volunteers understand the goals and guidelines of the project and are best able to meet the needs of youth.

- Focus on the transformative power of mentoring. Describe the mentor's role in teaching skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, and how to access community resources.

- Provide an orientation session whereby potential mentors are invited to a meeting where staff describe the program and mentors and mentees talk about their experiences.

- Give potential mentors a realistic sense of the commitment required.

- Emphasize the support available to mentors from your program (e.g., training, supervision, mentor support groups, group activities for mentors and mentees). Let potential mentors know that they will not be the sole support for a young person.

> Don't duplicate. Build on existing programs/ partnerships whenever possible. Connect with mentoring programs / organizations already working with/in the community. These may be at local schools, youth centres, settlement services, etc. Find out what they are already doing. Explore partnerships. Work to build on their successes.

> To assist in building trust and communication with ethno-cultural youth and communities, programs may want to consider the approach of using cultural brokers or navigators. Cultural navigators help support culturally-responsive practice and policy development in government and community organizations, and help ethno-cultural individuals connect with the health care and social services they need.

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AT A GLANCE
Strategies for Mentor Recruitment and Program Support

WORD OF MOUTH

People are more likely to volunteer when someone they know asks them to. Consider personal contacts (family, friends, and colleagues) when recruiting mentors. Since individuals often associate with people similar to themselves, asking current mentors to recruit new mentors can be a good way to reach the type of volunteers you want to engage.

MARKETING

Focus on the media outlets that reach the segment of the community from which you want to recruit mentors. Write press releases, op-ed pieces that articulate the benefits of mentoring youth, highlight successful matches, and promote the program. Posters, brochures, and flyers can be displayed in local businesses, community centers, libraries, settlement services agencies, cultural community groups, and other places frequented by the type of people you want to recruit. Marketing materials should describe the program and the need for volunteers.

THE MEDIA

Focus on the media outlets that reach the segment of the community from which you want to recruit mentors. Write press releases, op-ed pieces that articulate the benefits of mentoring youth, highlight successful matches, and promote the program.

LOCAL LEADERS

Leaders of local government agencies, businesses, faith organizations, and professional and business associations may provide access to their employees or members to meet with and tell about the program.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Create a website, recruit volunteers using Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In and Blogs, or online resources such as Volunteer Canada, Get Volunteering or The Canadian Volunteer Network.

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- Avoid negative or stereotypical labelling. Emphasize that these young people are not bad; many have become involved in the system of care because of environmental and social forces outside of their control. Potential volunteers may be 'scared off' by a stereotypical description of a youth receiving such services as "at-risk" or "system involved."

- Emphasize the assets of youth who are in the child welfare system, especially their social competence, autonomy, and resiliency in the face of challenges. Explain that mentoring can help youth to build on these strengths with the support of trained mentors and program staff.

- Consider recruiting mentors with a similar personal background as the youth they will be serving (or perhaps some experience in the helping professions. e.g. teachers, social workers, health workers, police, etc.). Normalizing the youth's experience is critical, as is role modeling successful coping strategies, so mentors can benefit greatly from personal experience here.

- Strive for inclusion in the recruitment plan with proactive outreach and recruitment efforts that deliberately focus on increasing diversity.

- Consider having youth identify any natural mentors to be brought forward for screening and support in the program. There is increasing evidence that successful outcomes may be associated with the presence of growth-fostering relationships with natural mentors for adolescent youth in care (Britner, Randall, & Ahrens, 2013). Unlike programmatic or formal mentors, who are unfamiliar to the youths, natural mentors are adults with whom the youths already are connected.

Particularly for older youth in care, there are several potential benefits of natural mentoring over programmatic mentoring. First, youth residing in out-of-home placements invariably have suffered loss and often experience difficulty with forming trusting relationships. Thus, natural mentoring capitalizes on the fact that youth possess enduring relationships from their communities of origin that can be strengthened and enhanced. Because these relationships are pre-existing, youth do not have to work through the challenges involved with establishing and building a foundation of trust. Additionally, these relationships are more likely to continue over time, as they formed organically and did not originate in an agency setting.

> Natural mentors are most likely to remain in place for the youth and create a sense of belonging long after they leave care and/or after other professional services end.

Second, by definition, natural mentoring is a youth-led process and relies on the decision-making power of the youth to identify their natural mentors. In a system where so many decisions are made for youth, young people in care often feel powerless and out of control. Natural

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mentoring puts the control back in the hands of youth by allowing them to nominate an adult whom they determine to be important.

Third, natural mentoring may be a more culturally sensitive approach for adolescents in care because it seeks to strengthen their existing social support networks rather than imposing another outside relationship on them. Youth in care determine the important adults in their own lives as opposed to a potentially impersonal matching system.[ix]

Mechanisms to support and cultivate these natural relationships must be formalized and in place in order to maximize the potential of the youth, and the various roles that mentors can take on.

ix Natural Mentoring of Older Foster Care Youths — Behavioral Health Benefits by Johanna K. P. Greeson, PhD, MSS, MLSP; Allison E. Thompson, MSS, LSW; and Susan Kinnevy, PhD, MSW Social Work Today Vol. 14 No. 4 P. 10

What Are Youth Looking For?

The life experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of young people involved with child protection services can introduce challenges to the mentoring relationship. In particular, youth in care face unique challenges, regardless of the reason for, or the length of their stay in the care system. Most of these young people come from backgrounds and experiences where relationships have a history of trauma, lack of attachment and disappointment. Therefore, successful mentoring of these youth requires a good fit between a youth and a mentor. The following should be considered when deciding whom to recruit as mentors:

What Are Youth Looking for in a Mentor?

A review of the Mentoring Literature found that when asked what they are looking for in a mentor, the following personal characteristics are important for youth in care to see in their mentor:

- Trust, attention, empathy, availability, affirmation, respect and virtue (Laursen and Birmingham, 2003)

- Authenticity, collaboration and companionship (Spencer, 2006)

- Encouraging, reliable and able to provide help when needed (Collins et al, 2010)

- Ability to guide, understand and listen (Hudson, 2013)

Interviewees from Key Informant interviews have identified additional characteristics (see Appendix C) :

- Previous mentoring experience

- Supportive without being directive

- Belief in the young person

- Willing to let go of stereotypical views of youth in care, or those receiving child protective services

- Youth centered

- Ability to follow through on expectations and obligations; a "stick-to-it-iveness"

- Able to meet rejection, challenge and change with consistency

- Open to learning

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Additionally, semi-structured, individual qualitative interviews completed with former/current youth in care for the purposes of this resource, elicited the following characteristics youth would like to see in a mentor:

- **Passion**, including an emotional investment in their mentee

> "The number one quality … to be an excellent mentor is passion. Like that passion has to be directed in the right way, but ultimately, you have to have that emotional investment in your work to want to see it through to the end."
> **(Participant, Youth Focus Group)**

- **Inspiration**, motivation, positivity, particularly when directed toward challenges in their care environment, academic or vocational goals, or the youth's sense of identity

> "They were just sorta that person where, if my self-esteem was low, they could give me a boost … Like a shot of self-esteem, and then she'd send me back out in the world again, and when my self-esteem was low again, I'd come back."
> **(Participant, Youth Focus Group)**

- **Humble** and teachable, yet a capable adult who can serve as a role model

> "The one thing I really appreciated about the mentors that I have now, and in the past is that they were teachable, they were people who were willing to learn more, willing to accept that their perspective wasn't the only one."
> **(Participant, Youth Focus Group)**

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- **In balance** with a desire for a mentor who is positive and inspirational, some youth also desired that their mentor be "realistic about potential accomplishments, and honest, even if that meant sharing difficult truths.

> "A lot of the time, your friends don't want to tell you the hard truth. They kind of just want to please you, and tell you the things that they know that you want to hear. A mentor is more like a guidance, or like since you look up to, they also, like they're not going to just let you hear whatever you just want to hear. They're going to tell you the truth … They're going to make sure you know the reality of what's going on."
> **(Participant, Youth Focus Group)**

- **Ability to provide structure** and guidance contrasted with fostering independence and confidence

> "You need some kinda structure. 'Cause when you enter into care, some people have no idea what it's about." The participant continues on to explain the need for youth to learn on their own: "You have that person kinda like following along with you, letting you make your mistakes, but still letting you know what kinda mistakes you're making. And how to better improve yourself."
> **(Participant, Youth Focus Group)**

- **Ability to focus on mentee**, keeping in mind that for some youth, the mentor is the only person in their life who is one hundred percent focused on them, unlike a social worker who has other job responsibilities related to the youth's care

> "I see a mentor as someone who really listens. Who's really attentive to the details and to the situation that's going on, and is able to provide that [stability] to go along with it. … [The] main role of a mentor is to be able to listen and be able to listen and to be able to provide that safe space to allow you to grow and explore."
> **(Participant, Youth Focus Group)**

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- **Ability to support mentee** in pursuit of their goals

"At the end of the day, if you're going to be a mentor, you have to be able to help, support and lead someone to their goal."
(Participant, Youth Focus Group)

(See Appendix D for Summary Report of Youth Focus Groups)

"Mentors are not just anyone. They're people who you trust in your heart. … If you're not able to learn from who that person is, then that person's not your mentor, that person's your friend."
(Participant, Youth Focus Group)

Mentee Recruitment

The following factors should be considered when deciding whom to recruit as mentees:

- Recruitment strategies should realistically portray the benefits, practices, supports and challenges of being mentored in the program.

- As mentoring may not be appropriate for all young people in this target population the program should recruit mentees whose needs best match the services offered by the program.

Best Practices for the Recruitment of Mentees

for Programs Serving Youth Who Are, Or Have Been In Receipt Of Child Protection Services

Involvement in a mentoring program is an excellent way to guide these children and youth to lead productive lives. But participation in a mentoring program, like anything else, may not be for everyone. Developing a solid recruitment strategy will help to identify and approach the children/youth who will benefit most from the program. Many of the existing mentoring programs serving this population accept referrals from multiple sources including social workers, foster parents and the youth themselves.

- Create opportunities for youth to self-refer. Keep in mind, certain youth, for example, youth who are LGBT2SQ may be reluctant to access a mentoring program because of their experiences of past discrimination or perceived homophobia. These youth can be doubly stigmatized because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and their cultural, racial, or ethnic identity. Ensure non-discriminatory policies and practices are in place. Make certain that forms contain gender neutral language. Add LGBT2SQ identity-affirming language on any websites and other materials so that LGBT2SQ youth know they are welcome.

- Strive for inclusion in the recruitment plan, including engaging underserved groups in meaningful ways and proactively removing the barriers to their participation.

- Consideration should be given to any language barriers that may exist for ethno-cultural youth and the resources for addressing them.

- Regardless of the source of referral, it is important to obtain the consent of the legal guardian and to ensure that the youth's participation is voluntary.

- Ensure that the needs of the youth recruited for the program match the services that the program provides.

> "There is a lack of understanding of these youth. There isn't adequate training on the staff level. That leads to an intake process that may not be inclusive and accessible to the youth, and that makes it challenging to have a successful mentor matching process. Mentors also need to understand LGBT2SQ youth and their needs. We're not seeing any of that training being implemented except in some small parts of the country."
> **- Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada**

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SCREENING

To ensure the safety and security of mentors and mentees a responsible mentoring program must have a documented and comprehensive selection and screening process. Further, mentors must be screened to determine whether they have the time, commitment and personal qualities to be an effective mentor. Prospective mentees and their guardians must also be screened as to whether they have the time, commitment and desire to be effectively mentored.

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AT A GLANCE
Mentor Screening

Acceptance Criteria

Clear criteria for accepting mentors into the program, as well as criteria for disqualifying mentor applicants.

Formal Application

A written application that includes questions designed to help assess their safety and suitability for mentoring youth in the target population.

Interview

At least one face to face interview is held that includes questions designed to assess suitability for mentoring youth.

Reference Check Interviews

Conducted with multiple adults who know an applicant, ideally both personally and professionally, that includes questions to help assess suitability for mentoring the target population.

Criminal Background Check

A comprehensive criminal background check, conducted by a qualified individual/ organization, including a Vulnerable Records search. Additionally, a search of Provincial Child Abuse Registries, where available. Finally, a policy on volunteer eligibility related to criminal history that address things such as: charges/convictions which could potentially affect a young person's safety such as assault or domestic violence, impaired charges, drug charges, weapons charges; charges/convictions which would indicate poor decision-making: theft, mischief, vandalism, etc.; any charges related to the misuse of a motor vehicle, such as excessive speeding tickets, unsafe driving practices; the applicant's criminal history in relation to different factors such as the extent or number of charges, the length of time that has passed since charges occurred, and age of the applicant when the charges were laid.

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Mentor Screening

Best Practices for the Screening of Mentors

for Programs Serving Youth Who Are, Or Have Been In Receipt Of Child Protection Services

The intention of the interview is to gather relevant and meaningful information to determine whether to accept the applicant and then, to make the most appropriate match. When you review the literature and reflect upon what characteristics lead someone to be a good and effective mentor, you think about qualities such as persistence, understanding, stability, consistency, being child-centred, and the ability to develop appropriately close and healthy relationships. Interview questions should serve to help the applicant more clearly understand the mentor role, boundaries and issues that may arise.

Successful mentors have particular strengths that make them effective in working with youth. Individuals who are strong across the following dimensions are most likely to make good mentors to vulnerable youth:

Motivation

What the research says:

Relationships in which mentors are focused on trying to build a connection with the child with whom they are matched and are willing to readjust their personal expectations are stronger, with both participants expressing greater satisfaction with the relationship and expectations that it would continue indefinitely. In contrast, mentors who are invested in having their self-interest fulfilled (e.g., feeling good), talk about the relationship in ways that convey less satisfaction with the relationship, such as feeling their efforts are underappreciated by their mentees, and greater distress about scheduling challenges and other hurdles encountered in the relationship.

Assessment Considerations:

The Interviewer should have an understanding of why the person wants to mentor, their expectations, and why they are applying now. Do they have a good understanding of the program? Are their expectations reasonable? What will they get out of being involved?

Concerns

Concerns include mentoring only for credit, because they are lonely, wanting to be matched with a child "as soon as possible", going through a transition (separation, divorce, etc.), idealizing or thinking they can "change" or "save" the child, having needs greater than the volunteer experience can/should fulfill, and expressing unrealistic expectations of their role or what they can accomplish. An inability to articulate their motivation to volunteer is also a concern.

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Relationship Style

What the research says:

Mentoring is about building a healthy relationship with a youth. Patterns of behaviour in current and previous relationships, both personal and familial, are good indicators of how the applicant is likely to engage in a mentoring relationship. Stability in current healthy relationships and a reasonable and supportive network of adult friends and family members is an indicator of an ability to persist and negotiate through challenge.

Research into the characteristics of effective mentors, suggests that the attachment style of mentors plays a major role in how they perform in a mentoring relationship, especially when there is conflict. Mentors with a healthy, secure adult attachment pattern are able to withstand periods of conflict in mentoring relationships. Those who have a less healthy pattern of attachment may struggle to bond with the youth, invest in the relationship, or stick with it through a challenging time in the relationship. This has implications for programs serving youth, who may be more likely to "test" their mentor or resist the relationship. Programs serving youth in systems of care must be careful to avoid mentors who have less than- ideal attachment patterns. They are unlikely to be successful in creating those positive contexts and following through on the commitment.[x]

x   Reflections from the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring "It May Be the Missing Piece" – Exploring the Mentoring of Youth in Systems of Care, Michael Garringer, National Mentoring Center

Assessment Consideration:

The interviewer should have a clear understanding of important relationships in the applicant's life, current relationships with a partner, involvement of a partner in the match, support network and some insight into stability related to relationships. The interviewer should have an understanding of the applicant's family background and current family situation to assess stability, support networks, relationship boundaries, likelihood and appropriateness of family members being involved in the match, etc. Applicant should demonstrate a pattern of openness to others, flexibility and empathy regarding the changing needs of relationships, the capacity to connect across differences, and an ability to connect with young people and be able to appropriately engage with family/guardians. Applicant should demonstrate an ability to end relationships in a healthy way and an understanding of his/her role in ending relationships.

Concerns

include a lack of friends in childhood, the lack of a "best friend" or confidant growing up, patterns of social isolation beginning in adolescence, a lack of meaningful adult friendships as an adult, a belief that children make the best friends, unrealistic expectations about friendships or relationships, history of poor or short-term relationships, a tendency to not take any responsibility for relationship problems, unhealthy attachment or over-involvement in new relationships, over-idealized notions of past or future relationships, tendency to view past or future relationships in extreme ways, getting lost in relationships, general lack of support, marriage ending due to arguments over parenting, personal parenting issues, disruptions caused by moves or crises or conflict, a negative emotional climate at home, frequent moves, living alone in an area heavily populated by children, inappropriate relationships with children in community (eg. "Kids come to me if they have a problem"), a family that had poor boundaries around sexual behaviour, presents self as victim of other's behaviour and a lack of support through a crisis or major transition.

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Mentoring Style

What the research says:

Relationships in which mentors think primarily of their mentee's needs and interests are associated with higher levels of closeness. Mentors who take a more collaborative and encouraging approach to their relationship, particularly in the beginning stages of the relationship, are likely to have stronger and healthier relationships.

Assessment Consideration:

Interviewers are looking for responses that show that the applicant understands the differences between a mentoring relationship with a young person and a friendship with an adult. Mentors who do not expect to transform the youth's life, who listen nonjudgmentally, and who respect the youth's desire to have fun are more likely to establish a trusting relationship with a young person. Answers that reflect a "developmental" approach that is encouraging, collaborative and supportive, answers that illustrate that the applicant has an understanding of youth in or leaving care, such as "maybe my mentee doesn't know all the options", "maybe my mentee hasn't been exposed to enough different things to know everything he likes or doesn't like", or "maybe my mentee isn't sure if I'm interested in the same things" would all be appropriate thoughts.

Concerns

include a lack of understanding of youth, a domineering or rigid approach to conflict resolution, a description of a mentor role inconsistent with a supportive approach such as too youth-led, too adult-led, too much of a playmate, too heavy handed and an unwillingness to impose and reinforce boundaries and reasonable structure.

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Persistence and Sensitivity to Rejection

What the research says:

Many of the young people in and/or leaving care, or involved with child protection services, have experienced loss and disappointment in their primary relationships. This may result in some of the young people maintaining a distance, not communicating their feelings or testing, particularly in the early stages of the mentoring relationship. While this is a healthy coping mechanism, it can often prove challenging to mentors who may not receive immediate reinforcement or acknowledgement of their efforts.

Assessment Consideration:

Does the interviewer get the sense that the applicant is able to move forward despite challenges? Does the interviewer feel that the applicant has a realistic expectation of the potential mentee and the possible outcomes of their relationships? Is the applicant open to and thinking of the mentee's life experiences and to considering the mentee's point of view? Does the applicant demonstrate an ability to accept responsibility for when plans haven't gone well?

Concerns

include an unwillingness to "wait and see", an inability to take the young person's perspective, a lack of insight into how they may cope with rejection, a history of "giving up" and short term friendships.

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Stability and Consistency

What the research says:

Mentor stability and consistency are key elements required to building a trusting mentoring relationship. The reliable involvement of a non-parental adult in the life of a young person is linked with many positive outcomes. Likewise, unstable and/or inconsistent involvement can often lead to unwanted feelings of distance, resentment and insignificance and may result in damaging early match closure.

Assessment Consideration:

Is the applicant stable? Now and for the foreseeable future? Does the applicant understand the need for match support and supervision? Do job changes seem reasonable and fairly planned? Does it seem like the applicant will have time to participate in the program? Interviewer should have an understanding of any health-related concerns that would impede the applicant's ability to fulfill the volunteer commitment in terms of length of time as well as consistent contact. Concerns would be recurring physical ailments or chronic debilitating conditions, an inability or unwillingness to discuss health concerns (beyond appropriate hesitancy), recurring mental illnesses, or recent unresolved emotional issues. Interviewer should have a clear understanding of the applicant's stability and ability to be a consistent presence in the life of the youth.

Concerns

include frequent short-term employment, a history of conflict at work, quitting jobs often, expressed difficulty with authority, employment responsibilities inconsistent with education, extensive unsupervised access to children, volunteer experience only or primarily with children, lack of follow-through, inability to see how change may impact a mentoring relationship, more concerned with self than others, not enough time, and lack of insight.

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Attitudes Toward Youth and Matching Considerations

What the research says:

Some preliminary research suggests that an individual's attitude towards youth in their community is related to their quality as a mentor. A positive attitude, generally, towards youth and their experiences, challenges and strengths can be reflective of their ability to be a positive mentor.

Assessment Consideration:

Interviewer should be able to get a sense of the applicant's personality in terms of ability to get along with others and deal positively with frustration, anger and difficult experiences. Interviewer should also have a good sense of an appropriate match relationship, as well as an understanding of the applicant's attitude towards children and youth, including attitude toward youth and family vulnerability specific to youth involved in the child welfare system, and experiences related to children.

Concerns

may include social isolation, a combative stance towards others, overdependence, over-compliance, lack of direction, and an inability to deal with strong emotions. Additional concerns may include a lack of experience or understanding of children, harsh or unrealistic attitudes about children, expecting unquestioning respect and compliance from a child, idealizing children, desiring to be matched with a specific child or a specific profile (e.g. wanting to be matched with a "quiet" child or a child who has been abused previously), having extensive involvement with kids and wanting more, wanting to change a child, seeking unlimited contact with child, wanting to take on a parental role, wanting to be the only male in a child's life and expecting the child to be overly grateful to them for spending time with them; actively promoting discrimination.

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Child Safety

What the research says:

It is critical to ensure that mentors are thoroughly screened, well trained, supervised and supported to ensure the safety of the mentee participant. In addition, as many match activities may occur in the applicant's home, it is necessary to assess the suitability of the home environment. Conducting the interview at the prospective mentor's home (or at least visiting once as part of the screening process) can reveal even more information about the individual. This practice will be most relevant for community based programs where the mentor and mentee may be occasionally meeting at the mentor's home. Site-based programs may also consider this practice, as it can provide a window into the mentor's life outside the program and uncover inappropriate behavior (e.g., drug use, illegal activity) or attitudes that make them unsuitable for working with a child, even in a controlled, site-based setting.

Assessment Consideration:

Interviewer should know who lives in the home, or visits regularly, if there are pets living in the home or if people smoke inside, be aware of any safety concerns (e.g. a pool or river running through the property), the safety of the neighbourhood, etc.

Concerns

may include allergens, safety of the neighbourhood, a wide assortment of children's toys or videos in homes where there is no logical explanation for them, access to firearms, etc. Additional concerns include rationalizing behaviour, inconsistencies between response and Vulnerable Sector Check results and externalizing blame for poor decisions.

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Reference checks

The information obtained from references is critical to developing a full picture of the volunteer applicant. The information can either confirm and elaborate on, or dispute the information obtained through the volunteer interview. In order to gather as much relevant and meaningful information as possible, questions should be geared to the type of involvement the referee has had in the applicant's life. Questions should be designed to gather important information that will help the interviewer decide if the applicant will be able to follow through on the commitment, be persistent, be comfortable with direction, understand boundaries and engage in a safe, healthy way with a vulnerable youth. Interviews should look for trends in responses; rarely will one answer determine whether an applicant should be accepted or rejected.

Assessing Mentor Suitability

Interviews, reference checks, home visits and criminal records checks only have value if the program knows how to interpret the information and has policies governing the types of information that would prohibit some applicants from volunteering. Although it is extremely important to ensure the safety of the children and youth in the program, it must also be recognized that many diverse cultural groups do not have the same connection to and understanding of these practices. In fact they are often seen as overly bureaucratic, invasive and unnecessary. Screening needs to be culturally appropriate; the criteria must be flexible enough to allow people to be mentors who have overcome difficult life challenges but have relevant experiences to share (Bisanz et al., 2003; Klinck et al., 2005).

> "We turn down most mentors who apply. The mentor has to be willing to make the long-term commitment. If they can't do that, I'd rather wait for the kid to have a mentor until we can find someone. Everyone abandons these kids, and that's why we're so strict."
> **- Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth**

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AT A GLANCE
MENTOR ASSESSMENT

Eligibility

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Appropriate motivation

- ☑ Realistic expectations of impact

- ☑ Clear understanding of role of mentor

- ☑ Positively completed all required components of enrolment

- ☑ Available and able to commit to the required period

Concerns

- ☒ Unsafe home environment (may not be relevant for all programs)

- ☒ Expecting major changes which may impact the match

- ☒ Boundary issues expressed by applicant or referees (e.g. over-involvement, losing self in relationships, develops close relationships quickly, etc.)

- ☒ Over-involvement with children

- ☒ Referee or staff concerns about premature closure

- ☒ Impatient to be matched immediately

- ☒ Concerns with complying to program guidelines

- ☒ Staff have an unexplainable sense that something isn't right (gut instincts are not 100% reliable)

- ☒ Inappropriate reasons for applying that indicate the applicant may hope that the mentee will meet an unmet emotional/psychological need (e.g. loss of job or a child, divorce)

- ☒ Inability to complete mandatory steps of the application process

- ☒ Inconsistent or vague answers that sound positive but lack detail or coherence

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MENTOR ASSESSMENT

Stability

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Plans to stay in area long term

- ☑ Stable employment, plans to stay with current employer for reasonable length of time

- ☑ Positive support network in area

Concerns:

- ☒ History of troubled relationships or an obvious lack of close, meaningful relationships

- ☒ Unexplained poor relationships with immediate family members

- ☒ Unstable or lacks network of friends

- ☒ History of not following through on commitments

- ☒ Refusing to take responsibility/ blaming others for instability

- ☒ Frequent moving, job changes or school changes without reasonable explanations

- ☒ Physical health concerns that would negatively impact the match relationship

- ☒ Emotional or mental health concerns that would negatively impact the match relationship

- ☒ Medication (new or changed within past year) which may impact stability or judgment

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MENTOR ASSESSMENT

Capacity to Engage in Positive Relationships

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Positive experiences with young people
- ☑ Positive relationship skills
- ☑ Positive, relevant volunteer experience
- ☑ Managed difficult experience positively
- ☑ Healthy relationships with immediate family members
- ☑ Stable network of adult friends
- ☑ Stable relationship with significant other
- ☑ Ability to perspective-take
- ☑ History of healthy endings to relationships

Concerns:

- ☒ Judgmental/discriminatory attitude
- ☒ Plans to fix or change a child
- ☒ Would struggle with minimal response from mentee
- ☒ Relevant past or current illegal activity
- ☒ Boundary issues expressed by applicant or referees
- ☒ Inappropriate comments during interview
- ☒ Fails to take responsibility for actions
- ☒ Tried to control the interview
- ☒ Debates program policies and protocols

Reliability

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Punctual
- ☑ Dependable in employment or education (e.g. hands in assignments on time)
- ☑ Referees indicate volunteer's reliability
- ☑ Demonstrated problem-solving
- ☑ Demonstrated common sense

Concerns:

- ☒ Referees indicate lack of reliability from volunteer
- ☒ Previous no show to interview or repeated cancellations

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AT A GLANCE
MENTOR ASSESSMENT

Matchability

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Flexible and accommodating
- ☑ Special skills
- ☑ Developmental approach to mentoring (focus on relationship)
- ☑ Instrumental approach to mentoring (focus on tasks and doing)
- ☑ Able to set healthy boundaries with children/youth
- ☑ Able to set healthy boundaries with adults
- ☑ Open to trying new things
- ☑ Educational/intellectual focused activities
- ☑ Athletic/sports focused activities
- ☑ Creative/arts focused activities

Concerns:

- ☒ Rigid schedule
- ☒ Unrealistic expectations
- ☒ Prescriptive or "bossy" approach to mentoring
- ☒ Overly specific criteria for a match
- ☒ Seeks unlimited authority over child
- ☒ Looking for lax parental attitudes in child's family
- ☒ Finds setting boundaries with children challenging
- ☒ Finds setting boundaries with adults challenging
- ☒ Expects to make dramatic and unrealistic changes in the child's life
- ☒ Needs to be "only male" in child's life

Coachability

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Able to take direction from program staff
- ☑ Responded well to feedback on scenario questions

Concerns

- ☒ Challenged rules and policies
- ☑ Responded negatively to feedback

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Mentee Screening

Acceptance Criteria

Clear criteria for accepting mentees into the program as well as criteria that would disqualify a potential youth participant.

Formal Application

Guardians complete an application or referral form.

Informed Consent(s)

Informed permission to participate in the program, as well as for the release of relevant information.

Interview

To gather information in order to assess youth's ability to have a close relationship with an adult; to determine motivation and expectation.

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Best Practices
for the Screening of Mentees

for Programs Serving Youth Who Are, Or Have Been In Receipt Of Child Protection Services:

Having a face-to-face interview with potential mentees provides mentoring program staff with a tool to allow them to gather appropriate information to determine eligibility, to determine the type of mentoring from which the youth will benefit the most and to make a mentoring match that will be connected and healthy. In addition, it allows for the development of positive rapport with guardians or the child welfare staff in order to facilitate successful match support, for orientation to the program and to mentoring. It additionally allows for solid engagement of the youth in order to clearly understand interest in participation.

It is also essential to begin to build a relationship with the youth. This process should gather important information about the youth's current behaviour and current relationships from the guardian's perspective and give a sense, from the youth, how they interact with adults, and what activities and personal traits might be important to them in connecting with a mentor.

The process of getting matched involves many steps over a span of time; under certain circumstances this time period can be quite lengthy. Because it is possible that information critical to the success of the match may have been discussed six months before the actual match happens, mentoring program staff should gather "what you need to know, when you need to know it". For example, the information needed to determine eligibility is different from the information you need to know to make a solid match; if it's unlikely the youth will be matched for a lengthy period of time, consider gathering matching information closer to the actual date.

Assessing youth will also assist in gathering information necessary to determine the child's needs and strengths to 1) match them to an appropriate volunteer mentor; and 2) to match them to the type of mentoring most likely to address the gap between their needs and strengths. Not every child will benefit from every program.

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Motivation and expectations

Discussing motivation for wanting a mentor provides opportunity to understand which mentoring type might best suit the young person's needs and expectations. Matching expectations with intended program outcomes is a meaningful way to improve the likelihood that the young person will stay committed to the program/match relationship. This is an ideal time to begin to assess whether the youth and guardian are appropriate for the program and can fulfill the responsibilities of their role.

Assessment Considerations:

Interviewer should have an understanding of why the guardian wants a mentor for the youth, their expectations, and why they are applying now. Interviewer should additionally have an understanding of why the youth wants a mentor and whether the youth's motivations and expectations align with the guardian's expectations and motivations. Do they have a good understanding of the program? Are their expectations reasonable? What will they get out of being involved?

Concerns

include requesting a mentor for unrealistic reasons, for a babysitting service, as respite or if the reasons shared by the guardian do not align with the reasons shared by the young person. Other considerations include that the needs of the young person are not conducive to participating in the program (eg. adolescents overwhelmed by behavioural problems are less likely to benefit from mentoring), the child is involved in many other extracurricular activities or, most importantly, does not want to have a mentor or is incapable of understanding child safety principles.

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Child's Background, Personality and Relationship Style

Experiences that the young person has had in other relationships with adults will be brought to this mentoring relationship; the mentor will need to handle the residue of negative relationships. Mentoring programs make the most difference with those youth who are capable of forming relationships with non-familial adults however, because of the circumstances related to their environment, are not exposed to appropriate role models. Gathering this information should help to build rapport with the guardian and with the young person and contribute to the ability to form a good match.

There is also value to measuring youth risk at intake—both the environmental and individual challenges youth may be experiencing will have important implications for the match's success—the specific types of challenges mentors are most likely to experience and the types of supports that may be most helpful. Some youth in care have had such negative relationships with adults that they are unable to benefit from a one-to-one mentoring relationship. The youth may profit more from mentoring with adults/peers in groups so they are not required to get "too close".

Assessment Considerations:

Interviewer should have a clear understanding of important relationships in the young person's life and the health of current relationships with family members. Additionally, interviewer should have a high level understanding of the family background and current family situation to assess stability, support networks, and conflict. It is a good idea to have an understanding of the quality of important relationships and the dynamics in those relationships so that change over time can be better assessed. Finally, the interviewer will want to determine if the child/youth knows how to be in relationship with other adults.

Concerns

include an inability to connect, poor boundaries related to other relationships, lack of support (and possibly active negative involvement) by non-custodial parent. Relationships with youth who sustained long-term or severe emotional, sexual or physical abuse are more likely to terminate prematurely.

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Caregiver Involvement

Whether the youth is in foster care, kinship care or a group home setting, caregivers (e.g. parents, foster parents, group home workers, CAS caseworkers, etc.) play an important role in supporting the mentoring relationship. They need to be involved in the match relationship to support it, to share relevant information about the child and recent events…this is a team. Caregivers should have an understanding about mentoring and the role of the mentor and be willing to participate in case management conferences.

Assessment Considerations:

Families characterized by sensitivity to others' ideas and needs and an ability to openly express views are more likely to encourage youth to become involved in positive relationships outside the family. Interviewer should have a clear understanding of the guardian's stability, availability and understanding of their role in supporting the match relationships and a strong belief that the guardian will positively support the match relationship.

Concerns

include a history of not returning phone calls, a history of conflict in relationships, a lack of understanding of the important role that guardians play and significant stress that may negatively impact the relationship.

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Matching Considerations

Be aware of the balance that needs to be struck: the more restrictions or matching criteria, the more difficult it will be to match the young person. However it is important to understand the relationship the guardians are looking for in order for them to support it. The age and gender of the young person needs to be taken into consideration for it has bearing on the type of mentoring approach from which they would benefit…instrumental vs relational.

On occasion, the environment in which the young person lives, can expose a volunteer to risky situations. For example, the family may live in a neighbourhood characterized by gang fighting, drug dealing or simply be run down without adequate lighting. Respectfully gather information to help the mentor keep her/himself safe.

Assessment Considerations:

Interviewer is looking for responses that show that the applicant understands the differences between a mentoring relationship with a young person and a friendship with an adult. Interviewer should know who lives in the home, or visits regularly, if there are pets or if people smoke inside; be aware of any safety concerns (e.g. bad lighting in the parking lot), etc. Interviewer should have a clear sense of match criteria and restrictions.

Concerns

would include being overly specific and restrictive regarding the qualities of a mentor, an unwillingness to answer the questions, a known-to-be-violent partner or active gang activity nearby.

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Mentee Assessment

Motivation and Expectations

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Appropriate motivation
- ☑ Realistic expectations of impact
- ☑ Guardian has clear clear understanding of role of mentor
- ☑ Positively completed all required components of enrolment
- ☑ Available and able to commit to the required period
- ☑ Understanding of importance of participating in match support calls

Concerns

- ☒ Unsafe home environment (may not be relevant for all programs)
- ☒ Expecting major changes which may impact the match
- ☒ Concerns about premature closure
- ☒ Concerns with complying to program guidelines
- ☒ Staff have an unexplainable sense that something isn't right (gut instincts are not 100% reliable)
- ☒ Inappropriate reasons for applyingsuch as primarily wanting babysitting services
- ☒ Inability to complete mandatory steps of the application process
- ☒ Young person is disinterested
- ☒ Young person is unable to participate in a relationship(e.g. significant trust issues or severe disabilities/ mental health concerns)
- ☒ Young person is unable to fully comprehend child safety principles (e.g. cognitive disabilities or immaturity)

Child's Background, Personality and Relationship Style

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Young person readily engages in conversation or can be drawn out of shell
- ☑ Young person has history of positive relationships

Concerns

- ☒ Young person has experienced significant trauma and may not be ready for match
- ☒ Young person is likely to wait a significant length of time for an appropriate match

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Mentee Assessment

Parental Involvement

Benchmarks:

☑ Plans to stay in area long term

☑ Able to participate as a partner in the match relationship

☑ Willing to engage appropriately with mentor

☑ Dependable and reliable

☑ Supportive of youth's involvement in match relationship

Concerns

☑ Instability in many aspects of life

☑ History of not following through on commitments, showing up, returning phone calls

☑ History of refusing to take responsibility/blaming others for instability

☑ Significant stressors in life which may impede ability to participate appropriately in match

☑ Many personal relationships characterized by conflict

☑ Debates agency policies or protocols

☑ Non-custodial parent is not supportive of involvement and may sabotage relationship

☑ Guardian has history of poor boundaries in relationships (eg. frequent conflict, relying heavily on others, etc.)

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AT A GLANCE
Mentee Assessment

Matching Considerations

Benchmarks:

- ☑ Young person has history of challenged or difficult relationships and may test the mentor

- ☑ Young person is interested in trying new things, open to new experiences

- ☑ Young person is peer-focused (consider matching in group or community programs)

- ☑ Young person is most interested in active or sporting activities

- ☑ Young person is most interested in creative or arts or passive activities

- ☑ Young person is most interested in educational or cultural activities

- ☑ Medical conditions or special needs to consider, such as cultural sensitivities.

Concerns

- ☑ Guardian or young person has explicit and specific criteria for a mentor

- ☑ Young person has expressed a belief that mentor will spend lots of money on them

- ☑ Home environment/neighbourhood will expose mentor to risky situations

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TRAINING

A key aspect of successful mentoring programs is the training provided to both mentors and mentees about the relationship upon which they are about to embark. Training has three primary purposes, to: prepare match participants for their role in a healthy, successful mentoring relationship; illuminate safety issues and strategies; and, emphasize that resources and ongoing support will be available to all match participants.

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Mentor Training

Program requirements

Match length (expected commitment), consistency, match frequency, duration of visits, protocols for missing or being late for meetings and match ending.

Expectations

For the mentor, the mentee, the guardian and the mentoring relationship; clear expectations of what mentoring is and what mentoring isn't.

Obligations & roles

Contact with mentoring program (who to contact, when to contact); money spent on mentee and mentoring activities; approved activities; suggestions for mentoring activities.

Relationship Development

Initiating the mentoring relationship; relationship monitoring requirements (response time, frequency, schedule); confidentiality; boundaries around time, money; sense of self and sharing; communication and interpersonal skills; relationship development with mentee's family, caregiver, etc.

Safety

Appropriate physical contact; mandatory reporting requirements/ legislated child protection responsibilities; digital and social media use; overnight visits and out of town travel; transportation; emergency and crisis situation procedures; conflict resolution; discuss signs of neglect and abuse and what to do if a mentor should encounter such a situation.

Closure

Matches have a beginning, middle, and end: each stage is equally important; importance of formal closure procedures with the goal of a positive match closure for all parties; closure procedures in the event of an unsuccessful match.

Support for Mentors

Resources and referral points for other support services; ongoing skill development that meets the identified needs of the mentor.

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Best Practices for the Training of Mentors

for Programs Serving Youth Who Are, Or Have Been In Receipt Of Child Protection Services:

Training begins during recruitment and screening. In fact, it begins with the first contact with prospective mentors. As part of the application and screening process, all potential mentors should receive straightforward, realistic information about both the challenges and benefits of mentoring youth receiving child protection services. Let potential mentors know that they will spend considerable time in training, both before the match and throughout their volunteer experience.

> "Youth in systems of care have many service provid¬ers working with them at once, in addition to the mentor. Social network mapping can help pro¬grams understand the interconnectedness of these supports and key players in the young person's life, helping deliver more targeted mentoring."
> **-Thomas Keller, Director of the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring and the Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring Research**

Mentors are the most valuable asset in any mentoring program. The training program should provide them with the tools they need to successfully fulfill their role. Training for mentors working with youth receiving child protection services, particularly those in or leaving care, should be more comprehensive than traditional mentoring programs. The following training should be delivered to mentors:

- An orientation to governing legislation for Child Welfare/ Child Protection Services in Ontario – The Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) - and its mandates and policies; how to navigate the care system; how the mentoring agency works in relation to this system.

- A mentor may be the only person connected to a youth receiving child protection services who is not paid or seen as being in an authoritative position. Clearly outline the role of the mentor in relation to:

  » mentee

  » mentoring program coordinator

  » CAS case worker

  » group home staff or foster parents/guardians

  » biological parents

- Mentors should be trained regarding the unique needs of youth in care and how mentoring can become a vital part of a youth's support network:

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» Share studies which show how involvement in a positive and consistent mentoring relationship leads to a profound improvement in the youth's ability to function and thereby succeed as a productive member of society.

» Help the prospective mentor understand the importance of individualizing the young person by focusing on their strengths and appreciating their resiliency.

Social Network Map of Youth in Foster Care[xi]

Strong tie > weekly contact
Weak tie < weekly contact
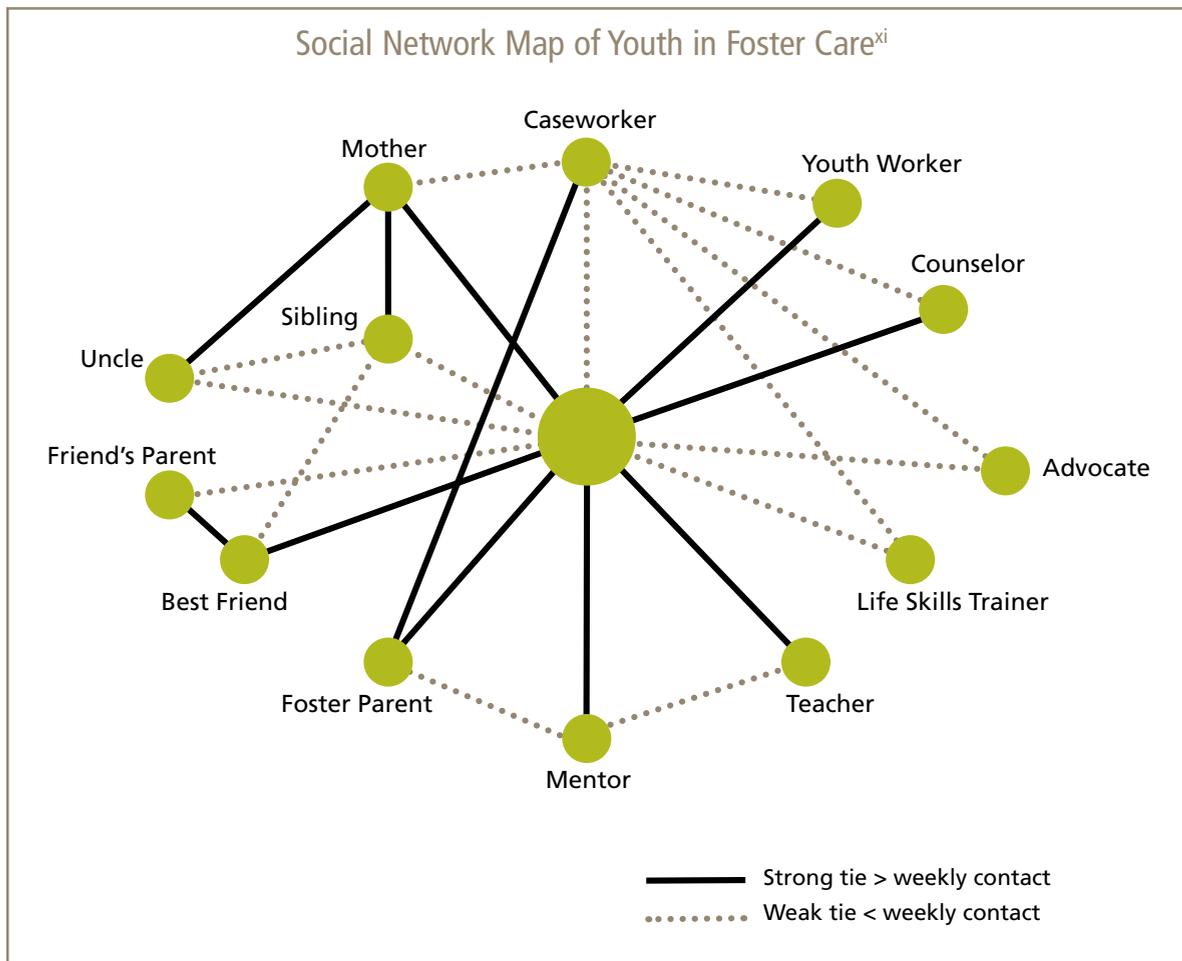
- Increase mentors' understanding of the issues faced by youth who are receiving child protection services which will assist mentors in setting realistic expectations for the mentoring relationship, particularly regarding reciprocity in the early stages of the relationship.

- Provide opportunities for experienced mentors, whenever possible, to present about their experiences as a mentor.

- Teach mentors about matters of confidentiality. Require them to sign a confidentiality agreement. Rules of confidentiality should protect youth from involuntary disclosure about their sexual and/or gender identity.

- Review program policies about contact between the mentor and the youth's biological or foster family, as well as the requirements

Mentor programs that want to create safe spaces and serve all youth should have this reflected in their program and organizational policies. all staff, volunteers and youth should be made aware of these policies which expect safety and respect for all.

xi Blakeslee, J (in press). "Expanding the scope of research with transition-age foster youth: Applications of the social network perspective."

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to keep program staff informed of such contact. Mentors should understand need for communication with caregiver(s) and program staff.

- Help mentors understand that many youth in care have experienced separation and loss in their lives; because of this, it can be difficult or more time consuming for them to form a trusting relationship with an adult. Mentors should be trained to persist and work through the initial resistance to trusting adults and forming a mentoring relationship. Guide mentors to interpret lack of follow-through or communication by the youth as a need for more support.

- Recommend strategies for building a relationship with youth. Mentors must be able to connect with and help transform the youth they are working with. Emphasize concepts such as:

  » Expressing yourself clearly, both verbally and nonverbally

  » Being able to listen to how the youth feels; giving youth a voice

  » Responding in positive and appropriate ways, even when the mentor is frustrated.

  » Being nonjudgmental

  » Respecting the youth's confidence (except when it may impact the health and welfare of others)

  » Not being surprised or upset if the youth lies about something; recognizing that this is often just a coping mechanism for deeper issues that the mentor can address

  » Offering suggestions about problems the youth is having, but not dictating what the youth should do (and accepting that the youth may make some bad decisions)

  » Keeping the commitment over time; no quitting!

  » Being positive, even when talking about difficult or painful topics

  » Knowing that there will be ups and downs along the way, and using disappointments and frustrations as an opportunity to grow the relationship

"We see a lot of newcomer youth here at SOY. They did not grow up in the West. Often they are here from countries where it is illegal to be LGBT2SQ. One of the reasons that we extended the age of SOY up to 29 is that if you had to hide who you were for your safety, you have to come out later. So if you come out when you're 24, it's different. One young man said that he knows that it's ok to come out in Canada, but he can't stop looking over his shoulder. Some have a family member who might have supported them, but many of them are really missing the love from their families. Some have a lot of fear that they don't want a mentor from their same ethno-cultural background because they are afraid it will get back to their family, but other youth are very excited to have a mentor who is like them. I've learned to make no assumption about what youth want or need but to listen to what the youth want."
- Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth (SOY)

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- Include role-plays as part of training. These hypothetical situations give perspective mentors an opportunity to explore various ways of responding to their mentees and test their communication skills.

- Incorporate an Advocacy and Teaching Role: The traditional role mentors play may not be sufficient for mentoring youth in/leaving care. An effective approach when working with higher-risk populations of youth is for the mentor to also serve as an advocate, building a community of support for the youth. Mentors should be taught how to help youth access appropriate resources and programs, how to navigate social service systems (for example, welfare agencies, juvenile justice, foster care) and how to access other environmental resources (for example, in the youth's neighborhood) that may be crucial to bolstering mentors' efforts and reinforcing youth gains. Mentors should be trained on the appropriate boundaries and strategies of operationalizing this new role. (see appendix E for what advocacy might look like for LGBT2SQ youth in mentoring relationships)

- Given that many youth in care have histories of abuse or neglect, it is recommended that mentors be trained in trauma informed care; they must understand the behavioural manifestations of trauma; how that manifests itself in a relationship with an adult the youth doesn't know and may not trust, and learn how to effectively minimize its effects without causing additional trauma.

- Diversity and cultural responsiveness should be a common theme throughout training. It is not a unit of training, rather it should be a constant theme through the process and the journey. Mentoring relationships should support development in a way that reflects both individual and cultural identity, and value diversity. Children involved in the child welfare system are extremely heterogeneous with regard to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity. Children in care can sometimes be placed in neighbourhoods that are strikingly different from their own, with caregivers of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds; even these differences are not static because they change when children change placements. If the mentors are not from the targeted community then training on the specific cultural context of the program will need to be provided.

> "We have one youth transitioning. A female transitioning to male. It's been a learning experience for us. We've had a lot of communication between the caseworker, the foster parents, and the youth. We are trying to accommodate the youth's needs. Even though the youth is transitioning to male, he still wanted a female mentor. We have provided some specific support for the mentor. And we have had speakers come to speak to the group as a whole so that the youth who is transitioning would feel comfortable in that setting."
> **– Kim Megyesi, Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Saskatoon**

- For mentors from diverse populations, formal mentoring may be a new and intimidating prospect and the program staff will need to provide training and on-going support to each mentor to ensure they are successful. For most diverse populations, especially for Aboriginal mentors, the training they receive will need to be grounded in their culture and be directly applicable to being a mentor. The training will need to provide practical information that can be easily applied in the program.

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- All mentors should receive training about working with LGBT2SQ youth and be provided with information about the issues and needs of these adolescents. A youth may start the program before coming out as LGBT2SQ and mentors should be trained how to support the youth with this kind of disclosure and in the youth's decision to tell others about his or her sexual or gender identity. It is also critical that mentors understand their own feelings about homosexuality.

- Mentors who work with Aboriginal youth must have an appreciation for the knowledge of Aboriginal language, culture, history, values, heritage, spiritual beliefs and the social context (Klinck et al., 2005; Schissel & Fedec, 2001). Canadian research suggests that mentors of Aboriginal youth should be Aboriginal and that the programs should include the youth's family, if possible and, traditional values and culture.

- Supplement in-person presentations with readings from the many online and print materials available on youth issues. Provide mentors with a comprehensive training manual that covers all information provided during training as well as information on community resources.

- Offer on-going training opportunities (perhaps on a monthly basis) on a variety of topics to add to the knowledge base of mentors and to help address difficulties as they arise in the mentoring relationship. These sessions can also allow mentors to share experiences and ask questions. (See match support section for further information).

- Once mentors are matched they require even more training and support as they begin to deal with real-life situations. Training sessions should be designed to provide more in-depth information about particular topics. Training content should be driven in part by the interests and concerns of mentors, and often include an outside expert as the presenter.

Build a Community of Mentors
Consider offering informal gatherings where mentors can interact with each other to share ideas and approaches and offer solutions to challenges they face. These gatherings help build a community of mentors within the program, offering opportunities for mentors to network, problem-solve together, and socialize.

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Other topics/presentations from other community programs
and services to add to the knowledge base of mentors:

- First aid training

- Addictions and mental health services

- Attachment issues

- Online safety

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

- Autism

- Cross cultural communication

- Power and privilege: anti oppression

- Suicide prevention

- Resources available to youth as they age out of care

- Resources and support for LGBT2SQ youth who have come out or are questioning.

- Conquering conflict: effective communication in times of conflict

- Gang awareness training

- Helping mentors overcome frustrations and disappointments

- Labeling youth who are in care: what the labels mean, and how labels impact them

- Adolescent brain development

- Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome

Mentors know that there is a circle of knowledge and support
available to both their mentee and themselves.

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Mentee Training

Program

Orientation to mentoring as well as the supports available to them; commitment and consistency expectations, match frequency, duration of visits, protocols for missing or being late for meetings and match ending.

Expectations

Benefits of having a mentor and how to use the mentor for support; limitations and constraints of the mentoring role.

Obligations & Roles

Shared responsibility for maintaining the relationship by honoring mentor meetings and communication with their mentor; contact with mentoring program (who to contact, when to contact); money spent on mentee and mentoring activities; approved activities; suggestions for mentoring activities.

Relationship Development

Stages of the mentoring relationship (getting to know each other, spending time together, honouring the commitment and ending or closing the match); strengths, interests and goals for the relationship; relationship monitoring requirements (response time, frequency, schedule); boundaries around time, money; sense of self and sharing; communication; healthy relationships.

Safety

Appropriate physical contact; personal safety in relationships; digital and social media use; risky behaviour.

Closure

Matches have a beginning, middle, and end: each stage is equally important; importance of formal closure procedures with the goal of a positive match closure for all parties; procedures for closing a match if a relationship is not meeting their needs.

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Best Practices
for the Training of Mentees

for Programs Serving Youth Who Are, Or Have Been In Receipt Of Child Protection Services:

Training for mentees is a fundamental method of preparing a young person to be in involved in the new role of mentee. Knowledge and expectations about program requirements, as well as about this new type of relationship, can contribute significantly to its success. Ensure the content any training materials is both understandable (especially for individuals with a first language other than English) and also that the materials deal appropriately with issues that may be either uncomfortable or 'taboo' for specific cultural groups.

The benefits of mentee training are significant:

- Understanding the potential benefits of being mentored and setting goals for the relationship can help build motivation in mentees and empower young people to be active contributors to building their mentoring relationships.

- It can contribute to the understanding of the young person's contribution to the relationship which enhances the likelihood of their commitment to the relationship.

- It can alleviate their anxiety and can help the relationship be initiated in a more positive manner.

- Mentees can contribute to participating in keeping themselves safe.

Many youth in care have experienced the loss of significant relationships in their lives and as a result it can be difficult to develop trusting relationships with adults. Researchers suggest that training for mentees should include attachment assessment modules and discussions on how their previous experience can have an influence on relationships with mentors and others in their lives.

Youth in care often have difficulty with boundaries in relationships. It is important to define appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, such as not calling a mentor in the middle of the night, not asking a mentor to help with financial problems and not expecting a mentor to intervene in conflicts with foster parents or social workers.

Finally, consider building relationships with other organizations that support youth who are diverse. For example, LGBT2SQ organizations to enhance the availability of supports for these youth; cultural organizations to foster cultural connections for both ethno-cultural youth and Aboriginal youth; or services that support the specialized needs of young people with intellectual, developmental or physical disabilities.

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Training Mentoring Program Staff

Best Practices
for Training Mentoring Program Staff

for Programs Serving Youth Who Are, Or Have Been In Receipt Of Child Protection Services:

An essential component of mentoring programs is ensuring that mentoring program staff are well-trained in issues and best practice related to mentoring, the care system, and cultural competences, putting them in the best position to effectively support matches. Ongoing training for staff working with youth who are LGBT2SQ should be provided about LGBT2SQ issues. Consider partnering with LGBT2SQ organizations for staff training. Internet and community resources with this information are also readily available.

Mentoring program staff members make important contributions to establishing strong mentoring relationships and achieving the goals of the program. For example, workers who recruit, screen, train, match, and monitor program participants have a role in supporting the mentoring relationship at every stage in its development (Keller, 2005a). In the process of maintaining clear communications, ensuring adherence to guidelines, and providing encouragement and advice, the workers may form their own meaningful relationships with mentors, children, and parents/guardians (Keller, 2005b). Ideally, as representatives of the program, these mentoring professionals would serve as excellent models of the very attributes they wish to see in mentors: being consistent, attentive, responsive; and providing appropriate structure and guidance to program participants.

Mentoring programs that serve youth in care though partnership with child welfare agencies must reach agreement with those agencies about how information on mentor- mentee matches will be maintained and shared, so that if a young person transitions to a new placement or a new child welfare agency, the mentoring relationship is continued.

Working With CAS Case Workers

Mentoring program staff should collaborate with child welfare agencies to ensure information about the mentoring program is included in training for CAS caseworkers. Expectations for the mentoring relationship should be clarified:

- Highlight how mentoring can fit into the life of a youth receiving child protection services.
- Clarify how mentoring can help the CAS caseworker achieve their goals for the youth in their caseload.

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- Emphasize that mentoring must not be taken away as a form of punishment. Mentoring needs to be clearly stated as a part of services for youth.

- Instruct on how to assess a youth's preparedness for mentoring, as well as his potential placement in a one-on-one or group mentoring relationship.

- Demonstrate how CAS caseworkers can assess the progress of a mentee within the mentor/mentee relationship through case management procedures.

- Show the CAS caseworker how to partner with a mentor while understanding the limits of what information can and should be shared with them.

- CAS caseworkers need to ensure mentors are informed of any changes in placement or any other new information about the youth's circumstances.

- Include progress notes in the case record of the youth for tracking purposes and to involve the foster parents/guardians who can play an active role in facilitating visits and outings with a mentor.

- Create procedures that would maintain information on current mentor/mentee matches even if a youth is moved from one CAS agency to another. In many cases, the mentoring relationship may have been established at a primary agency, but the secondary agency may have no record of that relationship and/or may not understand how important it is to the youth that the relationship be allowed to continue.

- Develop a policy for continuing the mentoring relationship even if the youth in care is adopted - emphasizing the importance of the mentor as a consistent, positive relationship in the young person's life to the adoptive parents.

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Matching

The mentoring relationship should be initiated using strategies likely to increase the odds that mentoring relationships will endure and be effective. A well planned matching process confirms the roles, responsibilities and expectations of match parties and increases the likelihood of a successful relationship. Key elements:

- Characteristics of the mentor and mentee are considered when making matches: interests; proximity; availability; age; gender; race; ethnicity; personality; expressed preferences of mentor, mentee and guardian; goals; strengths; previous experiences. Although research suggests that matching based on race, ethnicity and socioeconomic factors should be considered, the mentor's qualities and behaviours are the most significant because the mentor has the greatest responsibility for the success of the match.

- An initial meeting between the mentor and mentee, as well as when relevant, the guardian, is arranged and documented. The program staff member should be present during the initial match meeting.

- An agreement is signed by all stakeholders (mentors, mentee, and guardian) consenting to the programs rules and requirements, e.g. frequency, intensity and duration of match meetings, roles, frequency of contact with the program and risk management policies.

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Best Practices for Matching

in Programs Serving Youth in and/or Leaving Care

Where possible, mentors should be provided with information
on their mentee's case history to better understand their
specific experiences, strengths and challenges:

- If you are matching a youth who is out as LGBT2SQ, be sure to consider his or
  her unique needs. Some of these needs could include feeling isolated from family
  and peers, as well as externalized and internalized homophobia. Ask LGBT2SQ
  youth if they'd like to be matched with an LGBT2SQ mentor. Don't assume either
  way. If you match the young person with a heterosexual adult, be sure that the
  adult is trained and very comfortable working with a LGBT2SQ youth.

- Provide an overview of the services and supports available for the youth so
  mentors can learn how they fit into the system of care for that particular child.

- Clarify how communication between the guardian/foster family
  and the mentor should work and provide contact details.

- Allow both mentor and mentee to ask any remaining questions they may have.

Monitoring and Support

The relationship is the mechanism by which change happens in mentoring programs. Although not every relationship leads to desired change, there are evidence-informed elements that must be fostered in those relationships to achieve success:

a) Closeness: Herrera, Sipe, and McClanahan[xii] observed that "at the crux of the mentoring relationship is the bond that forms between the youth and mentor. If a bond does not form, then youth and mentors may disengage from the match before the mentoring relationship lasts long enough to have a positive impact on youth."

b) Consistency: Studies of both informal and formal mentoring relationships highlight the significance of how often mentors and youth spend time together. Regular contact has been linked to positive youth outcomes indirectly via its role in affording other desirable processes to take root in the mentoring relationship. For example, regular meetings may lead to engagement in beneficial activities[xiii], the provision of emotional and instrumental support[xiv], and a deeper integration of the adult into the youth's social network.[xv] The reliable involvement of a caring non-parental adult in a youth's life may offer more direct benefits as well in the form of enhanced feelings of security and attachment in interpersonal relationships.[xvi]

c) Youth-centredness: Relationships that are youth-centered in their orientation, as opposed to being driven primarily by the interests or expectations of the mentor, have been found to predict greater relationship quality and duration[xvii] as well as improvements in how youth experience their relationships with other adults.[xviii]

d) Structure: Researchers have found that outcomes are most favourable when youth report experiencing both structure and support from their mentors. Helping youth to set and work toward goals that are important to their development appears to be beneficial, especially if the goals are agreed upon by the mentor and youth in accordance with a youth-centered approach.[xix]

e) Duration: Positive effects become progressively stronger as relationships persist for longer periods. Conversely, youth whose relationships terminate prematurely experience a significant decline in self-concept when compared with youth who were not mentored at all.[xx]

Fostering these elements through monitoring and support leads to more positive youth outcomes.

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Information Gathering for Monitoring and Support

The format below mirrors the critical elements of effective mentoring relationships identified in mentoring literature. Each question is not required to be asked for each contact, however, each section should be assessed at each contact. Program staff should ask a selection of questions from each category for each contact. When selecting the questions to ask, consider 1) the length of the relationship, 2) the age of the mentee and 3) the type of program in which they are involved. The questions in each section are intentional in that they have been tested and determined as effective in eliciting the information necessary for effective match support.

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Information Gathering: **Activities**

ASK MENTORS Questions About Activities

How often since we last talked have you seen your mentee?

What have you done?

Where have these activities taken place?

What activities do you do for fun?

Probe: Have you had an overnight? Have you been talking about having a sleepover/ trip together?

Do you talk between visits to plan your activities?

How often?

How (email, social media, phone, text)?

ASK YOUTH Questions About Activities

How often since we last talked have you seen your mentor?

What did you do together?

What do you do most often?

Who else is involved?

Where do you go?

What activities do you do for fun?

Probe: If you go on to the computer, what do you do? What computer games?

Probe: If you go swimming, where do you swim?

Probe: If you take pictures, what do you take pictures of? Who do you show them to?

Probe: If you have received gifts, what were they? Were they for an occasion? What did your guardian say when they saw your gift?

Probe: Have you had an overnight? Have you been talking about having a sleepover/trip together?

Do you talk between visits to plan your activities? How often do you talk between visits? How do you talk? Email? Social media? Phone? Text?

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ASK GUARDIAN Questions About Activities

How often since we last talked has your child and mentor seen each other? What are some of the things they did together? Where did they do them? Who else was there?

Have you had any concerns regarding pick-ups, curfews, overnights, treats, or anything about the mentor or the match?

Does your child and his/her mentor talk between visits? How often do they talk? How (email, Facebook, phone, text)? Do you have concerns about this?

ASSESSING MATCH ACTIVITIES

Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Safety Concerns
The one activity that is most predictive of match length is having fun. The match should be engaging in some activities that are fun.	Negative interactions are more predictive of match length than positive interactions. Be cautious about mentors taking on a more directive, prescriptive approach to activities. Men, mentors of older youth and older mentors are more likely to be adult-focused than women, mentors of younger children and younger mentors.	Be aware of most activities happening in a private setting (e.g. the volunteer's home, hiking, etc) to the exclusion of public activities. Be aware of volunteers deciding activities unilaterally, without giving consideration to the interests of the youth. Be aware of an over-eagerness to have overnights, to travel together, to become over-involved in other facets of the youth's life (eg. school, sports, lessons, etc.), purchasing gifts and a drastic change in behaviours.

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Information Gathering: **Consistency**

Regular contact has been linked to positive youth outcomes indirectly via its role in affording other desirable processes to take root in the mentoring relationship.

Key is that the young person feels that s/he can rely on the mentor.

It is unlikely that a mentor will be able to follow through on every match activity, every time. Consistency implies, though, that the youth understands what can be expected and feels unperturbed when match activities are cancelled.

Ask Mentors Questions About Consistency

Have you had any challenges following through on your commitment to your mentee?

Probe: If so, what have they been?

Tell me about a time when you had to reschedule with your Mentee.

What is keeping you motivated?

Ask Youth/Guardians Questions About Consistency

Tell me about a time when an outing had to be rescheduled.

On a scale of 1 to 10, (1 meaning never and 10 meaning always) how well does your mentor follow through on what they say they are going to do?

ASSESSING MATCH ACTIVITIES

Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Safety Concerns
Contact between mentor and young person is consistent.	Contact between mentor and young person is inconsistent and may be causing problems in the relationship. Contact has dwindled drastically or stopped entirely.	Contact between mentor and young person is over-involved.

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Information Gathering: **Connectedness or Closeness**

At the crux of the mentoring relationship is the bond
that forms between the youth and mentor.

Key is that the relationship is progressively
getting closer within clear parameters.

There must be opportunities for building an appropriately close relationship
in order for the mentor and youth to become comfortable with each
other and to learn about each other. Feelings of closeness progress
over time and the mentor should be encouraged to build closeness at
a pace that is responsive to the youth's comfort and their own.

Without comfortable closeness, the relationship will not work or last.

Ask Youth Questions About Closeness

On a scale of 1 out of 10 (1 meaning "I want the match to end" and 10 meaning "It's awesome"), how do you think your match is going? Why? What would make it 10/10?

What do you tell others – like your guardian or friends – about your match?

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 meaning "nothing" and 10 meaning "lots"), how much does your mentor know about you?

Probe: How would your mentor describe you?

What do you like about being with your mentor?

Probe: What do you and your mentor have in common?

Is your mentor easy to talk to? Do you feel comfortable with your mentor? Do you feel you can talk with your mentor about what's bothering you?

How does your mentor make you feel special/important/like you matter?

Do you look forward to your visits (all the time, sometimes, hardly at all, never)? What do you look forward to?

Ask Mentors Questions About Closeness

How connected do you feel to your mentee? What could you do to feel more connected?

What are you doing to build a close relationship with your mentee?

Probe: Do you think s/he would confide in you if something came up?

How do you show that you are interested in your mentee and his/her life?

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Ask Guardians Questions About Closeness

What does your child say about the mentor? Does s/he look forward to visits and activities?

Tell me about how your child acts before and after visits.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 meaning "not close at all" and 10 meaning "very close"), how close do you feel your child and mentor are?

Probe: What could we do to help them establish a closer relationship?

What role does the mentor play in your child's life?

Probe: What role does the mentor play in your family's life?

ASSESSING MATCH CLOSENESS

Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Safety Concerns
The mentor and young person feel they have a relationship that is appropriately close considering the length of the match, the type of match, and the age, gender and culture of the participants in the match.	The mentor and young person feel like there is no connection, that the connection is weak or that they were mis-matched or, conversely, that the closeness of the relationship is progressing too quickly.	The mentor and young person are inappropriately close, spending too much time together, know too much about each other. The relationship reflects something other than a mentoring relationship.

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Information Gathering: **Youth-centredness**

Youth-centredness captures the mentee's perception that he or she and his or her concerns are the focal point of the match.

Key is how the mentor engages the young person.

Mentors need to understand that this is a relationship that is unequal in power by virtue of age. Mentors must assume greater responsibility to initiate and structure the interaction while being responsive and attuned to the needs and interests of the youth.

Ask Mentors Questions About Youth-centredness

How do you decide on activities together?

What are you doing to encourage your mentee to make decisions with you about match activities?

Probe: What seems to work?

Have you noticed any positive or negative changes in your mentee? What are they?

What are you doing to help your mentee grow as a person?

Probe: Are you helping them learn anything new?

Probe: What do you tell your mentee s/he is good at?

What are you doing to make your mentee feel like his/her opinion matters?

How would your mentee know that you enjoy spending time with him/her?

Ask Youth Questions About Youth-centredness

How do you decide on activities together?

At any time during your match, have you ever felt unsafe or uncomfortable?

Probe: If no, what does your mentor do to make you feel safe when you are together?

Has your mentor ever done anything to make you feel embarrassed?

What kind of secrets have people asked you to keep?

Probe: Has your mentor ever asked you to keep a secret?

Do you feel like your mentor listens to you? Probe: Do you feel like your mentor cares what you think?

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Ask Guardian Questions About Youth-centredness

How does your child feel about his/her mentor?

Probe: If you had to use a word to describe their relationship, what word would you use?

ASSESSING MATCH YOUTH-CENTREDNESS

Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Safety Concerns
Mentor encourages youth to participate in decision-making as appropriate. Youth feels understood and heard.	Mentor is domineering or preachy, does not engage at the youth's level. Youth always follows mentor's lead or does not feel heard. Youth feels angry or disappointed with mentor, youth feels like mentor doesn't know him/her. Relationship is overly youth-centred, lacking boundaries and structure.	Relationship crosses over into dynamics that feel more like a peer friendship, a "dating" relationship or a parental relationship. Mentor is so domineering that youth feels coerced or feels unable to express his/her point of view.

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Information Gathering: **Structure** (goal setting)

Key is the balance of structure, boundaries and support.

The relationship needs to demonstrate a balance of fun activities mixed with an appropriate amount of seriousness. The youth needs to know that s/he can experience both within parameters.

Questions to Ask Mentors

What have you set for a goal? Can you provide examples of times when you worked towards your shared goal?

How do you balance being both a friend and a role model on visits with your mentee?

Does your mentee test boundaries? How? What do you do to set appropriate limits when you are with your mentee?

Questions to Ask Youth

What have you set for a goal? Can you provide examples of times when you worked towards your shared goal?

What is something that you and your mentor hoped would happen in your relationship this year? Did it happen? Tell me about it.

ASSESSING MATCH STRUCTURE

Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Safety Concerns
Appropriate boundaries and limits are established. An achievable goal has been established and attended to.	Although match is older than 4 months, no goal has been established. Goal has been established but ignored. Weak or rigid boundaries have been established. The relationship is about "nothing" such that it is anxiety-provoking for the youth.	Youth is unaware of any boundaries; relationship looks and feels more like a peer or dating relationship rather than a mentoring relationship. Inappropriate requests have been made of either the mentor, the family or the young person.

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Information Gathering: **Duration and Expectations**

Key is that the relationship lasts the intended period of time.

Meeting reasonable and expressed expectations of all parties is critical to the relationship lasting as long as it was intended. It is likely that the mentor will not feel appreciated or understand his/her impact without the program staff's intervention.

Ask Mentors Questions About Expectations

What program rule are you finding the hardest to follow?

How do you feel about the level of support you get from the agency?
What can we do to support your relationship better to make it last?

Are your expectations being met? How or how not? How can we make it better?

Do you get satisfaction from your match?

If you could change one thing in the mentoring relationship what would it be?

What accomplishments or successes in your relationship can you celebrate so far?

What is the relationship like between you and the youth's guardian?

Ask Youth Questions About Expectations

How do you show your mentor that s/he is appreciated?

Probe: How do you show your mentor that you enjoy spending time together?

What's the best part about being with your mentor?

\f you could change one thing in the mentoring relationship what would it be?

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Ask Guardians Questions About Expectations

Do you have any concerns about your child's match ending earlier than you would like?

Are your expectations for this match being met? How or how not? What would you like to see changed? Is there a role that we can play to help you with this?

Have there been any changes in your child's behaviour since the match?

What is the relationship like between you and your child's mentor?

ASSESSING MATCH DURATION / EXPECTATIONS

Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Safety Concerns
Guardian, youth and mentor all feel positively that match relationship will continue. Expectations are being met. Mentors, young people and their guardians have reasonable expectations of their own role and role of the others.	Relationship is at risk of not continuing to its intended length. Scheduling of activities and match support is a growing or significant challenge. Original expectations are not being met. Unaddressed unmet expectations may lead to early match closure; those may include: mentor does not feel like s/he is making a difference, does not feel appreciated, feels unneeded, feels pressure or guilt about not seeing mentee often enough, problems with mentee's guardian, and feeling overwhelmed.	Youth repeatedly makes efforts to avoid contact with the mentor or requests that the relationship end. Expectations are unrealistic and not appropriate for a mentoring relationship. Mentor's needs come first.

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Information Gathering: **Updates**

Questions to Ask Mentors

Are there any changes in your life that could affect the match?

Any other changes that we should know about? (email, phone number, work, relationship status, address, etc.)

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Questions to Ask Youth/Guardians

Any changes that we should know about? (email, phone number, work, address, etc.)

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

ASSESSING MATCH UPDATE INFORMATION

Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Safety Concerns
Although there may be changes in /mentor or mentee's life, they are not anticipated to adversely affect the relationship.	Changes in mentor or mentee's life are having a negative impact on the relationship including a decrease in match activity, an inability to follow through, a request for match to be placed on hold, a lack of focus on the mentee, etc.	Changes in mentor or mentee's life have resulted in no match activity, disinterest in continuation and a lack of contact with agency. Young person may be feeling inadequate and unwanted.

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Information Gathering: **Safety**

ASSESSING MATCH SAFETY

Meeting Expectations	Not Meeting Expectations	Safety Concerns
No safety concerns. Minor safety concerns identified in a timely fashion and addressed appropriately.	Safety concerns, unrelated to abuse, identified and addressed.	Safety issues, although previously addressed, continue to occur. Serious safety issues identified. Program policies around overnights, prohibited match activities, drinking or drug use, and match contact parameters (e.g. school based mentoring match meeting off-school property) are violated.

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Monitoring Matches

Because the standard of care is defined by the activity, monitoring should be appropriate to the level of activity involved. Generally, group mentoring requires less monitoring and supervision from a mentoring program coordinator than a one-to-one mentoring relationship does. Monitoring and supporting the match assists to motivate and guide the relationship and is critical to the success of the relationship. As mentoring relationships develop over time, support from program staff can help the mentor adjust to changing developmental needs of the mentee. Furthermore, consistent and frequent monitoring and support helps the match navigate any challenges that arise. Finally, monitoring and support of mentoring relationships is critical for ensuring child safety.

Best Practices for Monitoring and Support
in Programs Serving Youth in and/or Leaving Care

As with any relationship, there will be challenges and as a mentor begins to spend time with the mentee, it will be helpful to keep this in mind. For a relationship with a high-risk youth, the challenges may be more pronounced and a mentoring program needs to account for these challenges so that a mentor will have the tools he/she needs to be most successful during each stage of the relationship:

Stage 1: Getting to Know Each Other

Be predictable and consistent
- It is critical for mentors to be predictable and consistent, even if the young person is less consistent.

Anticipate testing - Some young people may not trust adults and as a result, they use testing as a coping or defense mechanism to determine whether the adult can be trusted. Mentors need to be aware of the fact the mentee might test by not showing up to a scheduled meeting just to see how the mentor will react. It is helpful for the mentor to set expectations and acknowledge when those expectations have not been met. This will help the mentee understand when his/her behavior is inappropriate or hurtful.

Mentors Engage Youth When They:

- find the right blend of purposefulness and personal connection;

- give the youth voice and choice;

- have consistent interaction; and

- provide opportunities to contribute to the world around them.

"Engaging Youth in Mentoring Relationships and Programs", April 2012, Education Northwest/ National Mentoring Center; Mentor Michigan; Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota

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Establish confidentiality - Establishing confidentiality helps to instill a sense of trust between mentor and mentee. Mentors should let their mentee know that whatever s/he wants to share will remain confidential, as long as—and it is important to stress this point—what s/he tells the mentor is not going to harm him/her or someone else.

Focus on building a connection - When asked about engagement, youth said:

- Spend time talking with us

- Listen, don't multi-task or get distracted when you're with us.

- Respond to our email, voice, and text messages.

- Do what you say you're going to do.

- Show appreciation for what we do.

- Relax, don't feel like you have to be on your guard.

- Laugh with us.

- Attend our concerts, games, and other events.

- Show that you have confidence in us.

- Ask us to help you, and to show you what we can do.

- Teach us what you know.

- Push us to do our best.

Stage 2: Relationship Development (spending time together)

Honour the Commitment - Committed mentors understand that persistence is important in mentoring. Such commitment flows naturally from a resolute belief that mentors are capable of making a significant and positive impact on the life of another. This belief is not grounded in naive conceptions of what it means to be a mentor. Rather, it is anchored in the knowledge that mentoring can be a challenging endeavor requiring significant investments of time and energy.

Understand and Establish Boundaries - After a mentoring relationship has been established and the mentor and mentee become more comfortable with each other, additional challenges might present. Mentors should not assume something is wrong with the relationship if these rough periods occur occasionally. High-

Boundaries Are Determined By Your Program Model and Program Expectations

Beyond the basic physical, emotional and social boundary recommendations, boundaries will vary depending on the type of program: site-based compared to community-based where mentors and mentees meet on their own. For example, those who meet on their own may share phone numbers, text, and email.

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risk mentees have more risk factors and may be dealing in his/her own way with a life event that has affected how he/she communicates or acts. It is also very important for mentors to think in advance about setting appropriate boundaries with their mentees. When working with young people, there are DO's and DON'Ts which are prescribed by the nature of the relationship, the context, and other factors specific to the mentee's age and developmental level.

Mentor should be aware of the three types of boundaries:

i)   **Physical**
     Mentors should be clear with their mentee about what type of physical contact is appropriate. For example, is it okay for your mentee to give you a hug at the end of your meetings?

ii) **Emotional**
     Deciding what and how much personal information to share with the mentee can be challenging. The mentee may bring up sensitive issues such as sexual activity or drug use. Mentors need to listen without judging, and remember to keep such conversations confidential unless the mentee or someone else may be harmed. How much information mentors share about themselves will depend upon the age of the mentee and the policies of the mentoring program.

iii) **Social**
     The mentoring program should have specific guidelines about the meeting schedule the mentor and mentee will follow. Mentors need to be clear about how often and what type of contact is appropriate and how to handle requests by the mentee to meet more often or talk on the phone every day.

Stage 3 Closure:

Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that youth with abuse or neglect histories were more likely to have their mentoring relationship end early. Research has demonstrated the negative effects that can result from early match endings with youth in care (Spencer, 2007a). As an example, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) showed that youth whose matches ended within the first three months had diminished self-reported educational, psychosocial, and risk-behavior outcomes at one year follow up. Similarly, youth whose mentoring relationships ended within the first six months had increases in externalizing behaviors in Britner and Kraimer-Rickaby's (2005) study.

"One of the things that has transformed our work is texting. If the youth has access to a phone with texting, that is the best way to find the youth. Facebook is also a great way to keep in touch. We have a closed page that is monitored by one of our staff. She posts info and events. … And even if they don't have a phone, they can go to a library and use a computer to message us through Facebook. When we ask them the best way to get in touch with them, they will tell us the technology that they prefer."
– Dawn Flegel, Sarnia-Lampton CAS

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Match Closure

Closure

Mentoring relationships can end for a wide range of reasons that are both predictable (e.g. conclusion of the academic year program) and unpredictable (e.g. moving). Closure may also occur as a result of interpersonal or practical challenges that result in the mentor losing interest or motivation to sustain the mentoring relationship. Regardless of why the mentoring relationship is ending, mentoring program staff should always try to ensure the relationship ends on a positive note for all involved, but particularly for the youth. The closure process provides for an opportunity to reflect on the outcomes of the mentoring relationship and an opportunity for match participants to discuss their experiences in the relationship. Additionally, the process provides for an opportunity for program staff to evaluate how the mentee and mentor participated in the mentoring relationship. Finally, the closure process provides the mentee with a model of the behaviour and processes to bring a relationship to a healthy and appropriate close.

Current mentoring research, has clearly indicated that poor match endings can undo all the benefits gained by a child from a mentoring relationship…and in some cases, even be harmful. Therefore, it is essential to fully integrate a match closure process as part of service delivery with the goal of a positive match closure for all parties, especially the child/youth. It is essential to provide structure, support and coaching to mentors, mentees and guardians to normalize match closure. The closure process should ensure that mentoring program staff invest just as significantly in positive match closures as they invest in making quality matches.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - TYPES OF FORMAL MENTORING AND HOW THEY ARE COMMONLY DEFINED

Source: Compiled from *Mentoring School Age Children* (1999) by Public/Private Ventures and MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, *Understanding Mentoring Relationships* (1992) by the Search Institute, *Elements of Effective Practice*, second edition (2003), MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, and The Connecticut Mentoring Partnership, *Business Guide to Youth Mentoring*.

	ONE-TO-ONE	E-MENTORING	PEER MENTORING	TEAM MENTORING	GROUP MENTORING
DESCRIPTION	One adult to one young person.	Mentoring via e-mail and the Internet.	Caring youth mentoring other youth.	Several adults working with small groups of young people, in which the adult-to-youth ratio is not greater than 1:4.	One adult to up to four young people.
WHERE MENTORING TAKES PLACE	**Agency-based:** At a community agency; typically an after-school program, Boys and Girls Club, etc. **Community-based:** The mentor and mentee can meet anywhere, including attending events, going to museums, etc. This is typical of the Big Brothers Big Sisters model. **Faith-based:** Mentoring pairs usually meet in a house of worship or adjoining building. **Online:** E-mentoring—also known as online mentoring, telementoring, or teletutoring—is a mentoring relationship that is conducted via the Internet. **School-based:** At the mentee's school (elementary, middle, high school), on school grounds, in full view of school officials. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place within the building and/or use of school facilities (open classroom, computer lab, gym, art room, library) if available. **Workplace-based:** At the mentor's workplace. Students are typically bussed to the site. Either the school district or the company may pay for the bus. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place at the workplace.	The mentoring relationship is conducted via the Internet, as an independent program or added component of existing programs. E-mail or Web-based programs need to have technology in place that provides a safe and secure environment for communication exchanges, archives all messages and enables the tracking of communications between mentoring pairs.	**School-based:** At the mentee's school elementary, middle, high school), on school grounds, in full view of school officials. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place within the building and/or use of school facilities (open classroom, computer lab, gym, art room, library) if available.	**Agency-based:** At a community agency, typically an after-school program, Boys and Girls Club, etc. **Community-based:** The mentors and mentees can meet anywhere, attend events, go to museums, etc. This is typical of the Big Brothers Big Sisters model. **Faith-based:** Mentoring teams usually meet in a house of worship or adjoining building. **Online:** E-mentoring—also known as online mentoring, telementoring, or teletutoring—is a mentoring relationship that is conducted via the Internet. **School-based:** At the mentees' school (elementary, middle, high school), on school grounds, in full view of school officials. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place within the building and/or use of school facilities (open classroom, computer lab, gym, art room, library) if available. **Workplace-based:** At the mentors' workplace. Students are typically bussed to the site. Either the school district or the company may pay for the bus. Mentors and Mentees should have a designated meeting place at the workplace.	**Agency-based:** At a community agency, typically an after-school program, Boys and Girls Club, etc. **Community-based:** The mentor and mentees can meet anywhere, attend events, go to museums, etc. **Faith-based:** Mentoring groups usually meet in a house of worship or adjoining building. **Online:** E-mentoring—also known as online mentoring, telementoring, or teletutoring—is a mentoring relationship that is conducted via the Internet. **School-based:** At the mentees' school (elementary, middle, high school), on school grounds, in full view of school officials. Mentor and mentees should have a designated meeting place within the building and/or use of school facilities (open classroom, computer lab, gym, art room, library) if available. **Workplace-based:** At the mentors' workplace. Students are typically bussed to the site. Either the school district or the company may pay for the bus. Mentors and mentees should have a designated meeting place at the workplace.

MENTORING YOUTH IN CARE

September 8, 2014

Prepared for the Children and Youth in Care and Mentoring Subcommittee of the Alberta Mentoring Partnership

by
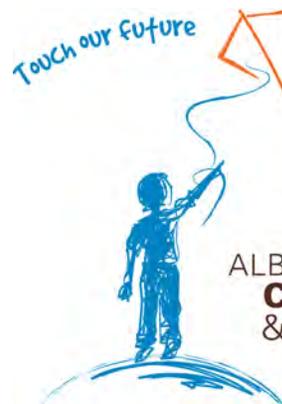
The Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research

Background:

The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research (the Centre) was established to support and disseminate research knowledge and evidence on policy issues related to improving the well-being and health of children and youth. The Centre is seen as an innovative leader in the development and dissemination of policy relevant evidence.

The Child and Youth in Care and Mentoring Subcommittee of the Alberta Mentoring Partnership wanted to consult research literature regarding mentoring children and youth in care. The Centre provided assistance in summarizing the literature on and interviewing contacts with experience in mentoring children and youth in care in the Canadian context.

For a more general review on mentoring please see:

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Keywords:

mentor, Alberta, children, youth, care, child intervention, foster care

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Alberta child intervention services are delivered through the Ministry of Human Services (Government of Alberta, n.d.). When parents or guardians are unable to provide a home for children (0 to 17 years), the government is mandated to intervene under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. In cases where guardians are unable to ensure the well being of a child, Child Intervention Services will conduct an assessment or investigation. When maltreatment of a child has been reported, the police will open an investigation. The primary reasons for involvement in the child intervention system in Alberta are neglect and exposure to family violence (Government of Alberta, 2014).

Children can be removed from the home for either a temporary period (1 day to 18 months) or permanently in the case of private guardianship or adoptions (Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, 2014). They may be placed either with extended family members or people with whom the child has a relationship (kinship care), a foster home, group care, a residential treatment centre or through supported independent living (Government of Alberta, 2014). In care is defined as Child Intervention Services having "care and custody of the child or youth either through a custody agreement with the parents or guardians or through a court order" (Government of Alberta, n.d., p. 2).

As you can see in Figure 1, only a portion of children involved with Child Intervention Services are in care.
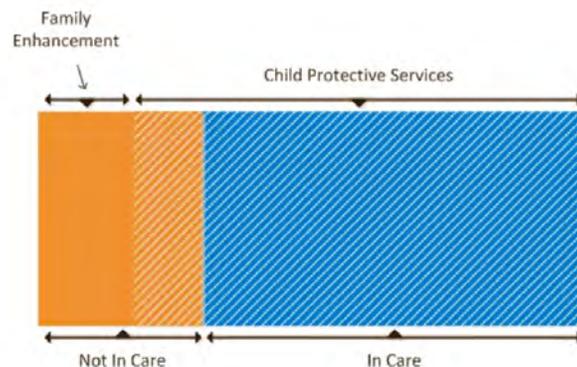
Figure 1. Range of child intervention services in Alberta (originally from Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, 2014).

Youth in care are at increased risk for poor outcomes. Over half of children (52%) had a concern with their physical, emotional or cognitive health or behavior when entering the

intervention system (MacLaurin et al., 2013). Youth exiting care are less likely to graduate from high school and to enroll in post secondary education (The Conference Board of Canada, 2014). Additionally, they may have difficulty finding employment, become involved in the justice system or have mental health and substance use problems (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). Experiences of youth in care such as removal from the home, placement moves and adults entering and exiting their lives contribute to a sense of ambiguous loss, which is a loss that occurs without closure.

Research has shown that a caring adult, such as a mentor, in a child's life can help foster resilience (Masten & Garmezy, 1985). As such mentoring has been suggested as an intervention for increasingly at risk youth, including youth in care. For example the Alberta Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force (2007) recommended, "Schools, communities and the provincial government should work together to expand mentoring programs for at risk children and youth" (p. 58). This call has been supported in part by preliminary research findings such as DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper's (2002) meta-analysis of mentoring programs, which found that mentoring may provide the most benefit to youth at risk.

Researchers have argued that participating in healthy new relationships, such as with a mentor, can provide a corrective experience for past negative relationships (Sparks, 2004; Olds, Kitzman, Cole & Robinson, 1997). Similarly Rhodes, Haight and Briggs (1999) suggested that as much of the harm youth in care have experienced was through relationships, a relationship based intervention may be best suited to their needs. Diehl, Howse and Trivette (2011) found that regardless of a youth's risk level, they had positive attitudes towards mentoring and expressed an interest in having a mentor themselves.

The current review aims to gather the available evidence on mentoring youth in care. The term "in care" here encompasses children and youth in kinship care, foster homes, group care, residential treatment centres or in supported independent living. Literature on programs that focus on mentoring youth in care were sought out, as opposed to programs that serve a range of youth including those in care. Initially academic studies of mentoring youth in care were examined. When unavailable for specific topics, grey literature was referenced. As much of the literature on this topic originates from the United States, interviews were conducted with individuals with expertise in mentoring youth in care in the Canadian context. The academic, grey literature and interview responses were then critically reviewed and summarized according

thematic categories.

2.0 NATURAL MENTORS

Natural mentorship refers to important adults that naturally occur in a youth's environment (Greeson & Bowen, 2008). The percentage of youth in care that report having a natural mentor ranges from 47% to 69% (Ahrens, DuBois, Richardson, Fan & Lozano, 2008; Collins, Spencer & Ward, 2010). However, Munson and McMillen (2009) found that only one third of their sample reported that they had been involved with their mentor on a long term basis. Additionally, Rutman, Hubberstey and Feduniw (2007) found that youth in care tended to have only one or two people in their lives as a source of emotional, tangible and financial support.

Most of the natural mentors in Ahrens et al.'s (2008) study were family members (e.g. grandparents, uncles) 36%, followed by those informal roles (e.g. parent's friend, coaches) 31%, professionals (e.g. teachers, ministers) 21%, and other roles 11%. Similarly, in Munson, Smalling, Spencer, Scott and Tracy's (2010) study most natural mentors were friends of the family 25% or staff from a former care placement 23%.

Greeson and Bowen (2008) identified characteristics of natural mentoring relationships that were key to youth. These included a sense of trust, love and caring and a parent and child like relationship. Natural mentors in Ahrens et al.'s (2008) study provided advice 56%, emotional 51% and tangible support 24% and served as a role model 11% or a parental figure 10%. Similarly, mentees of natural mentors in Greeson and Bowen's (2008) study shared that their mentors provided them with emotional, informational, instrumental (e.g. helping move), and appraisal (e.g. advice) support.

Greeson and Bowen (2008) suggest that relationships with natural mentors may be less pressured and have less difficulty trusting than those with a volunteer mentor, as relationships with a natural mentor develop gradually over time. Also, ensuring continued contact during placement moves is easier in natural mentoring situations as the mentor and mentee often share social networks. For example youth interviewed in Ahrens et al.'s (2011) study routinely had contact with their adult mentor for other reasons, such as at their job site or as part of an independent living program.

A study of long term outcomes of youth in care who had natural mentors found that these youth

were more likely to report positive overall health and less likely to have suicidal ideation, received a diagnosis of a sexually transmitted infection or had hurt someone in a fight in the last year (Ahrens et al., 2008). Collins et al. (2010) found that youth with natural mentors had a higher level of academic achievement and were less likely to experience homelessness. Similarly, Munson and McMillen (2009) found positive outcomes for youth in care that had a natural mentor for longer than a year. These included less depressive symptoms, stress, number of arrests and greater life satisfaction. However, they did not find a relationship between natural mentoring and preventing alcohol and drug use or a youth's current employment status.

Some youth in care can face difficulties in finding a natural mentor. For example, mentees in the Youth in Care Program at Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area were asked in a focus group about barriers they experience in trying to find a mentor. Youth cited logistical difficulties such as transportation and time issues. They also noted difficulties in finding someone whose personality fits with theirs, someone who is non-judgmental, who understands the life of someone in care, as well as someone who has similar interests as them.

When youth do not have access to a natural mentor, formal mentoring programs with volunteer mentors have been suggested as a means to bridge this gap. The remainder of this review will focus on leading practices related to formal mentoring programs with volunteer mentors.

3.0 MENTORING PROGRAM FEATURES

DuBois et al. (2002) in their systematic review of the mentoring literature identified a set of features, or leading practices, of mentoring programs that were the strongest predictors of positive program effects. The benefits of mentoring were greater in programs that followed a greater number of these best practices. They also found that programs that followed fewer of these practices had negative effects on youth. They recommend that mentoring programs follow those features that have empirically demonstrated their effectiveness. These include: ongoing training for mentors, structured activities for pairs, clear expectations around the frequency of mentoring meetings, program support mechanisms, and caregiver involvement in the program. Following is a description of these leading practices in relation to mentoring programs for youth in care.

3.1 Establishing a Program

Rutman, Hubberstey and Hume (2009) noted that full implementation of a mentoring program may take up to three years. First, a mentoring program's philosophy and focus must be decided upon and clearly articulated. Those establishing a mentoring program need to think about the types of outcomes they would like to encourage for youth in care through their program as well as their theory of change (Garringer, 2011). It is important to engage youth in care themselves in the mentor program planning process. This information will help in guiding the program's elements, practices and administration (Spencer, Collins, Ward & Smashnaya, 2010).

As Berger, Collins and Spencer (2011) note, youth in care are a heterogeneous group possessing different strengths and needs. Additionally their needs will vary greatly across time and life events. The mentoring needs of a young child in care will be distinctly different from a youth who will soon be exiting the care system. This theme emerged in interviews for this review with those involved in mentoring youth in care in Canada. When asked how mentoring a child in care was different from working with any other child many respondents noted that at younger ages there are less differences, but as children age differences begin to emerge. Different kinds of mentoring will benefit youth as their needs change across time. For example participants in Hudson (2013) study shared that they needed different mentors (e.g. adult mentor, peer mentor, career mentor) at different times to meet their needs.

In a review of 29 mentoring programs for youth in care Mech, Pryde, and Rycraft (1995) found that five models emerged. The models identified were: transitional, cultural empowerment, business, and young parent mentors, as well as mentor homes.

Transitional mentors assist youth in making the shift from a care setting to independent living, by teaching mentees independent living skills. Of the sites surveyed by Mech et al. (1995), 80% of programs followed the transitional mentoring model. An example of this type of program is the My Life Program in which mentors assist transitioning youth in achieving goals that they set for themselves (Garringer, 2011). As these mentoring relationships are only active during transition times the length of these relationships are shorter and therefore may result in different outcomes for youth.

Cultural empowerment mentorship on the other hand involves matching an adult of a cultural group with a mentee from the same group, thereby providing a positive role model (Mech et al.,

1995).

The business mentor model matches youth in care with mentors from the private sector. Businesses participating in the program facilitate job placement and career development opportunities for the mentees (Mech et al., 1995). Youth interviewed in Hudson's (2013) study expressed interest in having a career mentor. Those interviewed felt a career mentor could be a short term relationship, for example a few weeks, that could expose them to real world examples of professions in which they were interested. They also felt that career mentors could assist them in selecting the academic classes needed to enter into those careers.

The mentoring young parents model matched older mothers who share their parenting experience with younger pregnant or parenting teens in care (Mech et al., 1995). Finally in the mentor homes model several, four to six, youth in care are placed with an adult mentor in a residential setting. Mentors then model positive behaviours and independent living skills in the home. A Canadian example of this model is British Columbia's Interior Community Services Residential Youth Mentorship program (http://www.interiorcommunityservices.bc.ca/programs/youth). The program provides short term residential services for youth in care along with an adult mentor.

3.2 One on One and Mixed Group Mentoring

As Britner and Kraimer-Rickaby (2005) note, most mentoring youth in care programs use the one on one mentoring model. One on one mentoring involves one mentor focusing their efforts on a single mentee (Ferronato, 2001). However the Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth (n.d., b) suggest a mixed group mentoring approach for working with children in care. Mixed group mentoring includes both one on one and group mentoring aspects. Here group mentoring refers to when mentor and mentee pairs meet with other pairs to participate in activities together.

Mixed group mentoring opportunities provide a chance for mentors to meet with other mentors of youth in care. Similarly, mentees have a chance to network with other youth from similar life experiences. Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth (n.d., b) share that an advantage of mixed group mentoring is that "mentor pairs can work together with a particularly challenging youth" (p. 3). Additionally, those youth or mentors who are waiting to be matched or re-matched can participate in the group while an appropriate

mentor or mentee is identified. Potential matches could also meet in this venue to see if they are interested in pursuing a match. In an innovative program by Bruster and Coccoma (2013) mentors and mentees meet regularly for a family style dinner as a group followed by structured activities in an effort to encourage discussion and unity among the group.

3.3 Recruiting and Screening

3.31 Mentees

Mentoring has emerged as a resource for youth in care, particularly to assist with the transition to adulthood (Mech et al., 1995). Participants of the Youth in Care Program at Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area identified other transition times such as graduation, moving to their first foster home, or living on their own as key times they would like to have a mentor. Youth in Ahrens et al.'s (2011) study stated that they would be amenable to an adult mentor during periods of vulnerability brought on by these transitions. Researchers have noted that mentees should be identified and matched before these transition periods. This would provide an opportunity for the mentoring relationship to be established and allow enough time to develop a trusting relationship (Osterling & Hines, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2011).

Many of the existing mentoring youth in care programs accept referrals from multiple sources including social workers, foster parents and youth themselves. For mentees that are referred to a program by an agency or themselves, it is important to obtain the consent of the legal guardian (Berger et al., 2011). Also for youth that are referred by others, programs should ensure that their participation is voluntarily and that they are interested in taking part (Berger et al., 2011). The Kinnections program also requires guardians and youth sign an activity permission form, which allows youth to participate in activities with their mentor. The form also contains rights and responsibilities for youth participation in the program as well a waiver of liability to be signed (Wilson, 2010).

Figure 2 is an example of a referral form from the Urban Native Youth Association's Kinnections Program, which requests the youth's contact information and signature that they consent to be referred. The form also requests the youth's social worker's contact information and if possible their signature (http://www.unya.bc.ca/downloads/unya-kinnections-referral-form.pdf).

Figure 2. Urban Native Youth Association's Kinnections program referral form.

Program staff should hold a face-to-face interview with the potential mentee, in an effort to get a sense of the youth's personality, as well as their commitment and readiness for the program (New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2005; The Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., a). For example, mentees should be asked if they feel that they are able to maintain regular contact with a mentor given their current commitments (e.g. school, work). It is important to also ask potential mentees about their interests, goals and qualities that they would like in a mentor. As Hudson (2013) notes "few studies have engaged youths in care as partners in the mentoring process a priori or have focused on the mentor characteristics that foster youths would like before the mentoring relationship begins" (p. 133).

Mentees behaviour in the interview could provide a clue as to the ease with which they will bond with a mentor. For example mentees in Ahrens et al.'s (2011) study who were confident and secure reported easily forming and long lasting relationships with their mentors. Conversely, mentees who expressed mistrust through their body language and speech tended to have more difficulty forming and maintaining a mentoring relationship. As such these youth may need more

support in their relationships with their mentor.

3.32 Mentors

Some programs recruit mentors by asking that youth identify a natural mentor that they already have contact with (e.g. a staff member) rather than matching them with a new adult (Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., b). Hirsch, Mickus and Boerger (2002) suggest this could assist mentoring programs that may have difficulties in recruiting sufficient mentors for youth. An example of youth self identifying a possible mentor is British Columbia's Kinnections mentoring program for youth in care. The program provides youth with a choice of identifying and approaching a natural mentor in their life to join the program, provided they pass the program's screening process, or being matched with volunteer mentor.

Programs recruiting volunteer mentors can consult research studies that have examined the personal characteristics important for youth in care to see in their mentor. Laursen and Birmingham (2003) in their interviews with youth in care identified trust, attention, empathy, availability, affirmation, respect and virtue as important characteristics. Spencer's (2006) work with at-risk youth identified four themes of mentor characteristics namely authenticity, empathy, collaboration and companionship. Youth of Collins et al.'s (2010) research requested mentors who are encouraging, reliable and able to provide help as needed. Participants of Hudson's (2013) study defined a mentor as someone who guides, understands and listens to them. They also shared that they would like a mentor who is successful and at least five years older than them, while also noting that it was not important that their mentor had experienced the care system themselves. However youth in Kirk and Day's (2011) study stated that role models who had been in care had the most impact on themselves.

Other mentor characteristics identified by Berger et al. (2011) and interviewees for this review:

- **committed**
- **stable lifestyle**
- **self awareness**
- **flexible**
- **can manage expectations**
- **not attempting to fulfill an unmet need**
- **youth centered**
- **able to weather rejection/challenge**
- **patient**
- **resilient**
- **approachable**
- **openness to feedback**
- **verbal and nonverbal communication skills**

Mentees of the Youth in Care Program at Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area identified personal qualities that would make a good mentor. These included someone who is trustworthy, empathetic, honest, committed, able to compromise, non-judgmental, sincere, stable, and open minded. They also added that it is helpful to have a mentor with similar interests, someone with previous mentoring experience as well as someone who gently pushes their mentee to achieve.

Ahrens et al. (2011) recommend recruiting mentors for youth in care that are trained in helping professions (e.g. social workers). Consistent with this mentoring programs such as the Fostering Healthy Futures and Mentoring for Educational Success Project for youth in care have chosen to use students from helping professions as their mentors (Taussig, Culhane, Garrido & Knudtson, 2012; Bruster & Coccoma, 2013).

Experienced mentors from traditional mentoring programs could be recruited to work with youth in care. Their past mentoring experience would be an excellent foundation to work with these higher risk youth. As one respondent from those interviewed for this review noted "*Having previous experience in mentoring may be helpful in moving onto working with youth in care.*"

As children in care are an especially vulnerable group, it is important that programs enhance their screening procedures for mentors who are interested in working with this group. For example, mentors should be asked to provide several personal and professional references (New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2005). Mentors should also be screened via a criminal record and child intervention record check (New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2005).

Similar to the recruitment of mentees, program staff should hold a face-to-face interview with the potential mentor to get a sense of their personality and whether they would be a good fit for the program. Below are some potential red flags staff can watch for when interviewing possible mentors from Clayden and Stein (2005).

- **desire to "social work" or "save" the mentee**
- **too quiet**
- **too overbearing**
- **non-participative**

3.4 Training

A key aspect of successful mentoring programs is the training provided to both mentors and mentees about the relationship upon which they are about to embark. Training can take two forms pre-match and ongoing. Pre-match training can help give mentors and mentees an orientation to the organization and what to expect once a match is made. Ongoing training support can educate mentors on how to address difficulties as they arise in the mentor relationship, ideas for activities and information on the organization's policies and procedures.

Given that many youth in care have abuse or neglect histories, it is recommended that mentoring program staff and mentors be trained in trauma informed care. Yeager, Cutler, Svendsen and Silis (2013, p. 595) define trauma informed care as:

> Care that is organized around a contemporary, comprehensive understanding of the impact of trauma that emphasizes strengths and safety and focuses on skill development for individuals to rebuild a sense of personal control over their life.

One aspect of providing trauma informed care is to ensure that program staff and mentors are

made aware of trauma related issues. One possible resource for programs is the Trauma-Informed Practice Guide developed by the British Columbia Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council (2013) available at http://bccewh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013_TIP-Guide.pdf.

Finally, confidentiality will need to be discussed with the mentor and mentee in terms of what information can be shared, and with whom. New York City Administration for Children's Services (2005) recommends that mentors of youth in care sign a confidentiality agreement. Mentees should also be made aware the conditions under which confidentiality will be broken (e.g. being a danger to themselves or others).

3.41 Mentees

Most of the literature around training within mentoring programs focuses on training for mentors as opposed to mentees. However, mentees can also benefit from training, including both pre-match and ongoing training. Youth should receive an orientation to the mentoring agency as well as the supports that are available to them.

Mentees bring expectations to the mentoring relationship. Programs can help shape these expectations by providing pre-match training on the role of a mentor (LEARNS, 2004). Karcher (2007) noted that mentees could also benefit from an orientation on the benefits of having a mentor and on how to use their mentors for support. Additionally, mentees should be made aware of the limitations and constraints of the mentoring role.

Mentees and mentors of the Youth in Care Program at Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area were asked about topics that should be covered in training with mentees. Several participants noted the need to discuss healthy communication skills with mentees, as well as coping strategies and personal safety in relationships.

Many youth in care have experienced the loss of significant relationships in their lives; as a result, it can be difficult to develop trusting relationships with new adults. Researchers suggest that training for mentees should include attachment assessments, modules and discussions on how their previous experiences can have an influence on relationships with mentors and others in their lives (Britner, Randall & Ahrens, 2013; Ahrens et al., 2011). As Ahrens et al. (2011) states, "such training has the potential to prove especially valuable for those who show

maladaptive or counterproductive tendencies in their interactions with adult support figures as well as those who may be actively avoiding such relationships altogether" (p. 13).

Mentees should also be made aware of their shared responsibility for maintaining the relationship by honoring mentor meetings and communicating with their mentor (Rhodes, 2007). Finally, Spencer et al. (2010) emphasize that mentees should know the agency's procedures for closing a match if a relationship is not meeting their needs.

3.42 Mentors

Training for mentors working with children in care should be more comprehensive than traditional mentoring programs. This should include an initial orientation to the program, dedicated pre-match training sessions, as well as ongoing training. For example, mentors in the System of Care mentoring program for youth in care receive a two to three hour orientation with their supervisor, followed by 10 hours of training within their first six months, and ongoing training throughout their time at the program (Johnson, Pryce & Martinovich, 2011). More intense programs such as Fostering Healthy Futures provide mentors with 40 hours of training before working with youth in addition to ongoing training.

The program orientation should introduce mentors to the program's policies and procedures; special emphasis should be given to the supports available to mentor pairs, as well as closure procedures in the case of an unsuccessful match. Mentors should also receive an orientation to the provincial child intervention system and how the mentoring agency works in relation to this system (New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2005). Information should also be provided on the Alberta Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, care policies and how to navigate the care system.

Where possible mentors should be provided with information on their mentee's case history to better understand their specific experiences (Britner et al., 2013). For example a program for youth in care interviewed for this review shared that they provide their mentors, after signing a confidentiality agreement, with an information package on their mentee that includes information on their family background and any behavioural issues.

A mentor's lack of understanding of the experiences of those in care has been cited by youth as a barrier to forming a relationship with their mentor (Ahrens et al., 2011). As a result, training

about the experiences of youth in care is recommended (Ahrens et al., 2011). Mentors also need to understand the emotional, physical, and developmental needs that are unique to youth in care (LEARNS, 2004).

Education should be provided on how trauma can affect different forms of development. As an example mentors should be made aware of possible challenges, such as initial mistrust or distancing by youth, in bonding with a child who is in care as well as relationship building strategies to combat these challenges (Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., b; LEARNS, 2004; Mennen & O'Keefe, 2005; Price & Glad, 2003). For example, Ahrens et al. (2011) suggest that mentors regularly check in with their mentee to ask them about their experiences and expectations for the mentoring relationship as a possible strategy. Mentors that are prepared for these experiences will be better able to keep them in perspective and respond to them effectively (Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., b). Preparation for challenges should also be balanced with information on the benefits and impact mentoring can have for youth in care (Britner et al., 2013). This will help mentors to persist in difficult times throughout the relationship (Britner et al., 2013).

> *There are testing behaviors, "How is my mentor going to react if I do this, are they committed?" – Interview Respondent*

Boundaries that are acceptable to both parties are a critical part of a successful mentoring relationship. To ensure these boundaries are understood, it is important for the mentoring program to clearly define the role of the mentor in relation to the mentee; this will help support the development of realistic expectations for the relationship (Spencer et al., 2010). Training should include information on the boundaries of the relationship, how to set limits with youth, and how to respond to inappropriate requests (LEARNS, 2004; Britner et al., 2013; Johnson, 2009). For example the Just Ask Youth peer mentoring program makes it explicit it their manual that mentors are not permitted to: complete ministry standard visits, drives, medical appointments, renew medications, access visits, approve placements, lend money, and serve as prom dates.

Mentors also need to know how their role relates to the program's coordinator, the mentee's caseworker, and the group home staff/foster parents/guardians and biological parents (Spencer

et al., 2010; New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2005). Mentors will be interacting with these other adults in their mentee's life and they will need to be educated on how to communicate effectively with these individuals.

An important training subject for mentors will be cultural competency, as many mentors will find themselves in matches with children of a different background. From 1999 to 2012, 58% of children (0 to17 years) in care were Aboriginal (Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, 2014). Also many mentees come from low-income households while most volunteer mentors are Caucasian from middle to upper income levels (Freedman, 1993; Spencer et al., 2010; MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2006). As such, mentor training regarding ethnicity and class could be beneficial (Spencer, 2006). Training can help mentors identify their own cultural values and beliefs as these may influence their interactions with their mentee (Spencer, 2007b).

Mentors should receive pre-match training on warning signs of emotional or behavioural problems (New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2005; Berger et al., 2011). The Conference Board of Canada (2014) reported that 80% of youth in care had a special needs diagnosis and 50% required medication for a mental illness. Trocmé et al. (2008) found that 19% of youth in care were believed to be suffering from depression or anxiety. Training on how to talk about difficult topics such as mental illness with youth would be beneficial as well (LEARNS, 2004). Similarly, mentors should be educated on the warning signs of abuse and neglect, and be aware of the appropriate procedures should they notice these signs, or encounter any other crisis situation (New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2005; Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., b).

Following the pre-match training mentors should be provided with a comprehensive training manual that includes information provided in training sessions, the agency's policies and procedures, along with additional information on youth in care and links for future reading.

As the Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth (n.d., b) suggests, topics for ongoing training sessions can be gleaned from issues that mentors frequently raise during check ins with program staff. Some suggestions for ongoing training topics include training mentors in skills to pass on and model for their mentee. These can include life skills, anger management, conflict resolution, decision-making skills, and goal setting

(Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., b; LEARNS, 2004; Britner et al., 2013).

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Other possible topics:

- **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**
- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**
- **behavioural/emotional issues**
- **developmental delay**
- **teen pregnancy**
- **substance abuse**
- **sexually transmitted infections**
- **suicide prevention**
- **adapting to youth's changing needs**
- **crisis intervention techniques**

- **physical and emotional development**
- **attachment**
- **grief**
- **problem solving**
- **decision making skills**
- **relationship building**
- **first aid**
- **communication skills**
- **strengths based approaches**
- **listening skills**

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Training is just as important as content; it is recommended that training sessions provide an opportunity for mentors to role-play their responses to realistic scenarios in a supportive environment (Berger et al., 2011; The Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., b). Those interviewed for this review agreed that training should be more scenario based rather than lecture style.

> *Talk about scenarios and get a good understanding of how they would react. For example, "You call the mentees home and their foster parent says they're not here and won't give any information, what do you do?" – Interview Respondent*

Finally, as mentoring programs become more established, experienced mentors to youth in care can participate in trainings to share their experiences and mentor new mentors.

3.5 Matching

Some of the youth interviewed by Munson et al. (2010) shared that similarity between themselves and their mentors in terms of age or interest in activities, helped the relationship. Consistent with this finding, youth in care reported that they were more likely to maintain a relationship with those adults who participated in activities with them that matched their interests (Ahrens et al., 2011). This piece of research also found that youth were interested in being matched with those they feel had similar life experiences. Finally mentees in Hudson's (2013) study shared that, while the gender of their mentor did not matter to them, having a mentor of a similar ethnicity was a priority. However, mentees should be asked about their individual preferences prior to matching.

3.6 Relationship Length

In their examination of mentoring relationships with youth in care, Ahrens et al. (2011) found that the duration, frequency and type of contact varied on a case-by-case basis. However, consistent contact between mentors and mentees was associated with greater longevity of the match and better outcomes for youth (Britner & Kraimer-Rickaby, 2005). Johnson et al. (2011) note from their study that mentoring should be of sufficient duration and frequency when mentoring youth in care. They found that youth who received limited amounts of therapeutic mentoring demonstrated no improvement over six months compared those who received the consistent mentoring or the control group. They concluded that providing limited access to mentoring was worse than no mentoring. For reference, most of the programs in Mech et al.'s (1995) survey expected their mentors to spend an average of 10 hours a month with their mentees. Additionally youth in Hudson's (2013) study expressed a desire to meet with a mentor at least once per week. However, every relationship is different and individual circumstances should be considered in terms of frequency of mentoring meetings.

3.7 Activities

Osterling and Hines (2006) recommended that initial visits between the pair concentrate on developing a strong relationship foundation before working on goal setting or developing other skills. For example, youth in Ahrens et al.'s (2011) study shared their initial experiences of participating in everyday activities with their mentor such as going camping. Greeson and Bowen's (2008) interviews with mentored youth illustrated a "ladder of development" of the mentoring relationship, starting with establishing trust, which in turn leads to the development of loving and caring feelings. One of respondents interviewed for this review shared that after the

initial match, there is a *"need to take time with the match at the front end. Possibly have pre-visits before setting the match off on their own, there is a need to proceed "slow and steady" for these matches."*

In Johnson et al.'s (2011) therapeutic mentoring program mentors and mentees came to an agreement about the activities in which they would participate. Pairs could also consult with program support staff for assistance in planning activities. Rutman et al. (2009) also noted that youth should be actively engaged in setting the goals for the mentoring relationship. Involving youth in decisions such as these empowers mentees to express their views and desires (Johnson, 2009).

3.8 Guardian/Caregiver/Caseworker Involvement

As noted earlier, care systems vary in their ability and willingness to collaborate with external agencies. Those interviewed for this review agreed that programs providing mentoring for youth in care should be as inclusive as possible to those involved in a mentee's life. As one respondent noted *"There is a need to educate all of those involved in the life of the youth in care (e.g. caseworker, youth worker, foster parents) about mentoring and the role of the mentor."*

If possible, mentoring programs for youth in care should reach agreements with care agencies on what type and how information can be shared. Caseworkers and caregivers should be made aware of any critical incidents or reportable circumstances that occur during the mentoring relationship (Wilson, 2010). Also some mentoring youth in care programs encourage mentors to participate in case management conferences when invited and, provided the mentor is comfortable, assist their mentee in communicating their needs.

One program arranged pre-match meetings with pairs in mentee's homes; this provided caregivers an opportunity to meet the mentor while program staff reviewed the program's guidelines and goals as a group (Johnson et al., 2011). A mentoring youth in care program interviewed for this review shared that after a child is referred to their program they do a caregiver interview with whomever the child is currently living (e.g. guardian, foster parent) to collect current information on the child.

3.9 Monitoring and Support

Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that youth with abuse or neglect histories were more likely to have their mentoring relationship end early. Research has demonstrated the negative effects that can result from early match endings with youth in care (Spencer, 2007a). As an example, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) showed that youth whose matches ended within the first three months had diminished self-reported educational, psychosocial, and risk-behavior outcomes at one year follow up. Similarly, youth whose mentoring relationships ended within the first six months had increases in externalizing behaviors in Britner and Kraimer-Rickaby's (2005) study.

Due to the negative consequences of mentoring relationships ending prematurely, it is important that mentoring programs for these vulnerable youth have a solid monitoring and support structure to assist their mentoring pairs (Britner et al., 2013). It is also important to ensure the infrastructure needed for these programs is developed; established mentoring programs for youth in care in Canada that were interviewed for this review noted the funding requirements for this infrastructure. The additional caseworker support needed to run these programs has budgetary implications. Additionally, many of the youth in care programs also run a group mentoring component for mentors and mentees which brings with it additional costs (e.g. transportation, food).

Some program models, such as the My Life Program, pay their mentors and/or reimburse expenses, including mileage for related travel, vehicle insurance coverage, and activity expenses (guidelines for amounts and allowable expenses vary greatly by programs). Smith (2004) argues that paid mentors for high-risk youth ensures that mentors will make a long term commitment to their mentees. However, some have argued that youth in care need caring adults in their lives that are not paid for the time spent with them (Bruster & Coccoma, 2013). Other programs have chosen to use undergraduate or graduate students as their mentors, who receive practical experience or course credit in exchange for their time. In their meta analysis, DuBois et al. (2002) found no significant relation to effect size for mentoring outcomes whether the mentor was paid or a volunteer.

Infrastructure also includes appropriate resources and well-trained staff that are supported and have reasonable case loads (Spencer et al., 2010). A respondent interviewed for this review shared that caseworkers for their program carry half the case load of regular workers. Program monitoring and support can help in preventing premature terminations of matches. The

Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth (n.d., a) also notes that matches involving older youth in care require more support as they may face even more complex problems.

> **Program guidelines should be established regarding (Rutman et al., 2009, p. iv):**
> - **screening**
> - **orientation and training for mentors and mentees**
> - **ongoing training for mentors and mentees**
> - **activities for pairs**
> - **frequency of pair contact**
> - **program monitoring and implementation**

Pairs should be informed that they will be monitored and supported through regular check ins; common monitoring and support activities include phone calls from the program coordinator to the mentor and mentee, in person meetings, and mentor activity logs (Mech et al., 1995).

> **Coordinators from the British Columbia's Kinnections program, keep in regular contact with mentors and mentees each time probing (Rutman et al., 2009):**
> - **how often matches were meeting**
> - **what activities they were participating in**
> - **comfort level**
> - **current or upcoming barriers**

Support staff should maintain more frequent contact with pairs in the early stages of the match in case there are any concerns (The Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., b). Mentors and mentees should be provided with the program coordinator's contact information and office hours, a 24-hour support number to call should issues arise, and crisis hotline numbers (Wilson, 2010).

Mentors in Osterling and Hines (2006) study noted that a lack of information resources was a challenge, and that accessing community resources for their mentees was frustrating. They suggested a resource coordinator or directory would be helpful to their work. An example of this is Just For Youth's resource guide for youth available at http://www.justaskyouth.com/Resources.html. One of the respondents interviewed for this

review commented that mentors should also be prepared to go beyond simply providing referrals to services. For example, when referring a youth to a resource, such as the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, the mentor should bring the youth to the office, introduce them to staff and if needed, support them through the meeting. As illustrated by this example, several of those interviewed for this review noted that mentors for youth in care often must take on an advocacy role for the youth. Programs should discuss this with mentors and how an advocacy role fits with the boundaries of the mentor role for their specific program.

One barrier to mentoring relationships frequently mentioned by mentors and mentees is care placement changes or other types of moves (Ahrens et al., 2011). These moves can make it difficult for pairs to meet and mentees may lose contact with their mentors and program supports.

Spencer et al. (2010) noted that participation in a mentoring program should not be tied to a care placement; this means that as children move/are adopted, they should not lose their mentor. Agencies should develop policies to ensure the mentor remains with the child (New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2005).

> *"When there are placement changes you have to roll with it, be resilient, try to stay upbeat, positive and make the best of it."*
> **– Interview Respondent**

LEARNS (2004) recommends that programs plan as best as they can for moves and transitions should they occur. An example is determining how pairs will reach one another in the event of a move (Spencer et al., 2010). Programs should also encourage pairs to be creative and flexible in connecting with one another, such as calling or texting when they are unable to meet in person (Spencer et al., 2010).

Mentor peer support groups, or group mentoring including both mentors and mentees, are another means of supporting mentors of youth in care (The Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth, n.d., a). These groups provide a common venue where mentors share difficulties and problem solve with the assistance of program staff. Group settings such as these also provide an opportunity for program staff to observe how pairs interact with others, as well as how mentors and mentees relate individually.

> **The Kinnections program maintains a volunteer log for their mentors with the following information (Wilson, 2010, p. 38):**
> - **name**
> - **contact information**
> - **orientation date**
> - **forms completion date**
> - **date of training sessions attended**
> - **phone check-in dates and notes**
> - **key notes**

Additionally, some of the mentoring youth in care programs ask that mentors submit case notes for each visit with their mentee.

3.10 Closure

Sometimes the endings of mentoring relationships are unavoidable, due to events in the lives of mentors or mentees. Pairs should be encouraged to have open discussions around the possibility of closure of the relationship. Several of the mentees in Ahrens et al. (2011) study expressed that these discussions prepared them for what to expect and when the relationship would end with their mentor. Agencies can help this process by having clear guidelines around match closures and ensuring pairs are aware of the proper procedures (LEARNS, 2004). This will ensure that mentors and mentees do not abandon the mentoring relationship if they do not want to continue the relationship (Spencer et al., 2010).

> *"Closure needs to be celebrated rather than seen as a negative thing, because in the past many of these children have unresolved closures with adults in their lives." – Interview Respondent*

When match closures occur, Berger et al. (2011) encourage agencies to help mentors and their mentees celebrate and reflect on the successes of the relationship and move forward by setting realistic expectations for the future. Mentors and mentees can be asked: What did you learn about yourself? and How can you apply this to other relationships? One of the programs interviewed for this review shared that they try to get feedback from all parties (e.g. mentor, mentee, caseworker, foster parent) about the closing relationship, asking:

- What success factors occurred?
- What did we learn?
- What will you take forward?
- How will we get better?

If some parties unable or unwilling to meet together, the caseworker can communicate responses to the above questions back to each party.

4.0 MENTORING OUTCOMES

Research regarding the outcomes of mentoring youth in care is limited. Most of what has been reported is changes in socio-emotional or interpersonal outcomes. For example, foster parents in Rhodes et al. (1999) study reported that mentored youth showed improved social skills as well as comfort and trust when interacting with others at an 18 month follow up. The youth themselves reported improvements in their peer prosocial supports and self esteem. Mentees in Osterling and Hines' (2006) study felt that they were understood, more open with their feelings, and less angry following mentoring. They also noted improvements in interpersonal and independent living skills.

The Fostering Healthy Futures program resulted in positive impacts on youth mental health functioning in a Randomized Control Trial (Taussig & Culhane, 2010). These included an improved quality of life, fewer dissociation symptoms, and requiring fewer mental health services at six months. Taussig et al. (2012) found that youth, particularly those in non-kin care, that participated in a mentoring program and skills group had greater permanence and stability in their care placements.

In interviews with mentored youth in care, mentees reported more tangible outcomes had been achieved (Ahrens et al.'s, 2011). For example mentees discussed how their mentors helped them to learn problem solving and independent living skills. They also reported that their mentors assisted them by connecting them with useful personal contacts as well as informational resources. Mentors aided youth in teaching them about healthy relationships, including conflict resolution, anger management, and setting boundaries with peers. Additionally, mentors provided emotional support and acted as role models to youth.

Collins et al. (2010) showed changes in youth's educational outcomes as a result of mentoring. Youth with a mentor were more likely to complete high school or a High School Equivalency

Diploma than those without a mentor.

Finally, Johnson (2009) noted changes among mentees in a number of areas as a result of therapeutic mentoring. In the first six months of participation in the program, mentored youth showed improvement in the areas of family and social functioning, school behavior, and recreational activities. Those in a mentoring relationship for up to 18 months exhibited fewer traumatic stress symptoms.

5.0 MENTORING YOUTH IN CARE RESEARCH

Britner et al. (2013) note that "existing handbooks and guidelines tend not to have references to any rigorous research or evaluations of such tailored mentoring practices for the population of youth in foster care" (p. 350). While there are a number of mentoring programs serving youth in care, many have not been subjected to evaluations (Rhodes, Bogat, Roffman, Edelman & Galasso, 2002). Collins (2004) acknowledges research regarding the use of mentoring programs with youth in care is at an early stage.

The research that does exist is primarily qualitative studies with small samples, descriptions of programs, and individual evaluations of programs (Britner et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2010). While the research conducted to date on mentoring youth in care has been commendable, Spencer et al. (2010) encourage the use of "progressively rigorous designs for constructing the knowledge base" (p. 232) for this intervention.

Researchers have noted that studies conducted on formal mentoring programs for youth in care have focused on short-term as opposed to long term outcomes (Ahrens et al., 2008; Avery, 2011). To address this deficit, Britner et al. (2013) propose longitudinal research studies of formerly mentored youth in care.

> *"Looking back, did mentoring make a difference to you?"*
>
> > *Mentee: "When I got older I started to realize how they helped me, but I didn't see it at the time."*
>
> **(Clayden & Stein, 2005, p. 65)**

Johnson et al. (2011) also recommend that future research examine mentee characteristics, including time spent in care and the types of adverse experiences, to see how these characteristics may influence the outcomes of the mentoring relationship. They also note that

the dosage of mentoring for youth in care in order to produce positive outcomes has not yet been established.

As much of the research to date on mentoring youth in care has focused on either natural or formal mentoring programs, it would be interesting to compare the outcomes of these two types of experiences (Britner et al., 2013).

Finally, researchers have suggested that additional efforts should be made in mapping youth in care's social networks (Blakeslee, in press). This would enable identification of where there are gaps in a youth's network in order to provide more targeted mentoring.
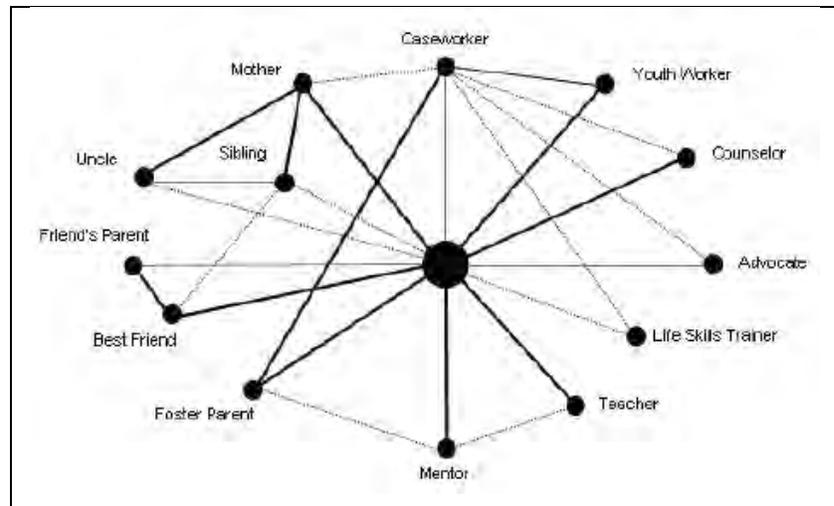
Figure 3. Social network map of youth in care (originally from Garringer, 2011).

In regards to evaluation, programs are encouraged to provide clearer information on the demographics of youth and mentors in their programs, as well as their program philosophy and theory of change (Spencer et al., 2010). This information will enable comparisons across programs.

6.0 REFERENCES

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7.0 Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Mentoring Youth in Care Interview Guide

Preamble

The Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research is currently assisting the Child and Youth in Care and Mentoring Subcommittee of the Alberta Mentoring Partnership in developing guidelines for mentoring children in care. In addition to summarizing the literature on this topic, we are asking those with experience in mentoring children in care in the Canadian context about what should be included in the guidelines.

1. How is mentoring a child in care different from working with any other child?

2. What personal qualities of a mentor are especially important when mentoring a child who is in care?

3. How do events that are unique to a youth in care influence the mentoring relationship (e.g. aging out of care, moving to a new placement, being adopted)?

4. What training topics should be covered with new mentors to children in care?

5. What resources have assisted you in your/your program's mentoring work with children in care (e.g. literature, people? Probe: monitoring and support

6. Is there anyone else you recommend that we should speak to on this topic?

7. Is there anything else you'd like to add that hasn't been covered by the questions I've already posed?

8.0 Appendix 2: Canadian Mentoring Youth in Care Programs

Alberta

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary and Area

Youth Engaging Supports (YES)

http://www.bbbscalgary.com/bins/content_page.asp?cid=2287-2290-2350

Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area

Youth in Care Support Group and Mentoring Program

http://bgcbigs.ca/youth-in-care/

British Columbia

Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Childen and Family Development

Kinnections Youth Mentorship Program

http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/kinnections.htm

Ontario

Government of Ontario, Family and Children Services of the Waterloo Region

Just Ask Youth Peer Mentoring Program

http://www.justaskyouth.com/welcome.html

Saskatchewan

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Saskatoon and Area

Youth in Care

http://www.bbbssaskatoon.org/en/Home/mentoringprograms/youthincare.aspx

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

Youth In Care: Key Informant Interviews

"How can we help kids find those mentors? The one thing that was true in every report was that one individual made a difference in their life. More often than not, it was teachers. But it was usually someone outside of their mother or father. The challenge for the system is to find out who are these people? How do we find them? When we see it, how do we support it?" – Irwin Elman, Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

Overview

To respond to a request from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is working on a report to the Ministry on how to best provide mentoring support to Youth in Care. There is a special interest in supporting Youth through the process of transitioning from care to independence.

There is some research and literature on effective practices for mentoring youth in care. However, Big Brothers Big Sisters did not feel the existing knowledge base is adequate to complete a full report. Therefore, in the process of preparing the report, BBBS set out to gather insights on research and practice from a set of key informants with particular experience in mentoring Youth in Care. A full list of the key informants can be found in this report.

Process

Twelve key informant interviews were completed between November 2 and November 18, 2015. Each interview was conducted by telephone and the interviews generally lasted 30-45 minutes. Interviews followed a standard set of questions, although some interviews did not include all of the questions or ranged to some topics beyond those included in the questions. All interviews were completed by Graig Meyer of The Equity Collaborative. Graig Meyer also compiled this report.

A second set of interviews will be completed in December 2015 to include more key informants, delve more deeply into some issues addressed here, and to address some issues not adequately covered in this round of interviews. A series of interviews with youth in care are also being planned.

Major Themes

There was broad consensus on some important beliefs about effective mentoring for youth in care.

Trauma-Informed Mentoring

The context for mentoring youth in care is different from mentoring other youth in some significant ways. When focusing on the youth themselves, key informants consistently referenced the need for mentors and programs to be skilled in working with youth who have a history of trauma. Trauma has a direct impact on the brain that will impact the ability of many youth in care to establish and sustain a mentoring relationship. It was a consistent recommendation of key informants that mentors and program staff should be trained and supported to work with trauma-impacted youth.

"The relationship formation, attachment, and testing is exasperated here. These kids have had some trauma, and some of those core relationships have broken down. It's critical to have mentors understand that it's going to take longer. They have to stay in there. You can't misinterpret the youth's behaviour, which will seem like they don't want a mentor. But it's really a protective behaviour based on their trauma. We have to help the mentors decode the confusing behaviour and respond appropriately."
– Tannis Pearson, BBBS of Edmonton

"Give space and validate for feelings like anger, rage, distrust, and sadness. Those feelings are very real in our lives. All of our lives we've been taught to supress them. But mentors can help the mentee how to learn to use those feelings in a way that would be helpful." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

Youth Voice

Nearly every key informant touched on the pervasive feelings of youth in care that they have very little control over their own life circumstances. After having lost parental support, the child welfare system often feels more controlling than supportive to the youth in care. Mentoring practitioners have seized on mentoring as an opportunity to help youth reclaim a sense of agency by exerting their voice in the mentoring relationship. There was however, some variation in opinion about whether the youth would want their mentor to be someone who helped them interact with the child welfare system (perhaps as an advocate, perhaps simply as a supporter), or whether youth would prefer for their mentor to be someone who is completely disconnected from the system (the youth's "own" adult when so many other adults are paid to interact with the youth). As a matter of preference, this is likely to vary from youth to youth.

"Youth have to have a say. It has to be a partnership with youth. It needs to be done in partnership with youth. We've lead so much from the conferences and the book. The Province and the agencies have learned so much from them. It needs to be a partnership. If you're talking about the older kids, those ones for the most part have experienced adults coming in and out of their lives throughout their lives. And so the other principle is having them involved in choosing who they work with. They shouldn't be assigned a mentor. We started a running group here at CAS. I wish I could have let kids pick their case workers, especially the older kids. You might know who you like. If there are opportunities to spend time together in group settings, then they can develop relationships more naturally." –Julie Carter, Sarnia CAS

"Don't assume that we don't have common sense. A lot of the YIC are extremely intelligent but have never been given the space to show it." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

Long Term Relationships

Because many Youth in Care have frequent transitions in care settings and eventually move towards independent living without support from a family or the Ministry, many informants emphasized the

importance of developing and supporting mentoring relationships that would last over the scope of many years.

"It's kind of like adoption, in terms of the commitment. But you don't' have to live with the child. But if the genuine link can be made, it's about seeing the commitment through. It's hard, but I believe it's possible. Can they make a commitment? A permanency contract? And then it's about supporting the relationship." – Irwin Elman, Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

"If you ask the kids if they want a mentor, they might say no because the last thing they want is one more adult in their life. In an ideal world, I would like to see every child need someone who delights in them (to paraphrase Dr. Jean Linton). They need that for their brain. They don't have that type of permanent relationship. We need the mentors to be someone that the kid can call on forever. If they're getting married, who walks them down the aisle?" – Julie Carter, Sarnia CAS

Understanding the System

Informants repeatedly emphasized that mentors must be trained and supported on understanding and navigating the child welfare system. It was recommended multiple times that mentors for youth in care be more experienced in youth work than the average mentor, and one of the reasons was so that they would be better equipped to support a youth whose life is so entangled with the system. There was consensus that most mentors will know very little about how the system works, and therefore will need pre-match training on just understanding the basics. Over the course of the match, program staff will need to act as a liaison between the mentor and the system, providing support for things as basic as making sure the mentor has contact information for the mentee when living arrangements change.

"For the general population, youth in care are a big mystery. It's intriguing and interesting, and people want to help a blameless population. They come in with curiosity but not knowledge. So part of what they need is an education about how kids get into the system, and what it's like to be in the system. It's hard for adults to connect and relate to that, so you really have to help them understand it." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

"I was recruited to be a mentor in a standard program, and half way through the year the youth went into foster care. That sent me down this road. As a mentor, I recall just knowing nothing about the system. Not understanding the basics of what it means that this youth is living with a foster parent, and was it ok for me to call the house to talk to her? I didn't have any communication with the caseworker. I don't know if the program was communicating with anyone? I was often overwhelmed and uncomfortable with the conversations that were coming up." – Jennifer Blakeslee, Portland State University

Dilemmas

There were also some consistent dilemmas presented by informants. All informants were able to express opinions on these matters, but no one had an easy answer.

Relationship Loss

There is an inherent risk in providing a mentor to a youth who has already suffered significant relationship loss. Is it worth providing a mentor when the end result might be another disappointment for a traumatized youth? Most respondents felt that the risk was worth it because of the opportunity to compensate for the lack of consistent, supportive adults in the lives of youth in care.

"What worries me is that the youth are so concerned about their relationship because they've been burned so many times. If it goes bad, it's more detrimental to the youth than to a general kid. On the flipside, it could change their life in a great way." – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

"If the program was designed with the best interest of the youth in mind, there are more benefits than risks. We can't always know when the match is going to be the best, and there's some trial and error. The research says that for young people who grow up in dysfunctional environments and have been at risk for a number of years, one of the corrective experiences that can benefit them is to have a positive relationship with one adult." – Carleen Joseph, National Youth in Care Network

"I do know that there is an emptiness. And you can't legislative love. That's true, but you can create the conditions in which love can flourish. And BBBS can create that condition when a match is made. When they move home to home, when they age out of care, they always have someone who they can reach out to. They don't want someone who is paid to do this. Sometimes the best youth workers transcend that. Secretaries, teachers, and mentors can all do that. But it's the same goal. Someone they can count on, who listens to them and understands them." – Irwin Elman, Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

"The most powerful part was the external validation that there is a person who really does care. They want to be in this program for me, and they are willing to spend this time with me. This is an adult who says they care, and isn't being paid to care. It's damaging to think that the only person who cares about you is someone who is paid to care about you." – Johanna Greeson, University of Pennsylvania

Respondents also had opinions about how to manage the mentoring relationship to minimize the risk of loss to the youth.

"There could be so much benefit for each young person to have one person who champions them and sticks with them through thick and thin. What's most important is what is in place to remedy the situation when you run into the times where the match is not a good one. You have to go back to the drawing board and figure out what to do next. What services are going to be put in place to address that young person's needs if and when a match doesn't work out?" – Carleen Joseph, National Youth in Care Network

"The teens talked about how traumatic it was when the mentor stopped showing up. We know that bad endings are really, really harmful. Our program is a 9 month program. We're very clear about it. We tell the kids. We believe that a health, non-traumatic, but sad ending can be a corrective experience. Interveiws showed that a lot of them said it was really sad, but that they were ready for it. I believe that learning how to do endings well is really important for this population." – Heather Taussig, University of Denver

Several informants recommended that mentoring programs think ahead about relationship closure.

"I think it's absolutely critical to think about endings first. What if kids move? What if new adoptive parents won't let the kid stay in the program? That's not a good way to end either. Design the program so that the mentor can stick with the child when they change placements." – Heather Taussig, University of Denver

"At the end of the one year, they come in for an exit interview. It's a celebration, not an ending. I ask them what made their mentorship successful, and often they mention that it's a mutual understanding

and each individual has their own obligation. They can continue after the year is over because the ultimate goal is to provide a lasting relationship. After the year they sign a match closure form that their formal mentorship with Covenant House has ended, and that if they continue beyond that Covenant House is not liable for whatever happens." –Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House Toronto

"We're asking them to participate in the program for a short period of time, an intense commitment for a few months. But then when the program ends, we hope that they'll continue to be engaged with the young person. In a formal mentoring program you are always "in a program" but this is intensive for a time, and then we're going to disappear – although they can always get in touch with us later if they feel that they need it. But we are expecting or asking that they make a lifetime commitment. We use the Foster Club's permanency pact, because that helps make the expectations clear. It's basically a conversation guide, and helps them agree to what it means to be in a mentoring relationship. It's different from a formal program that asks for a longer program, but not a lifelong commitment." – Johanna Greeson, University of Pennsylvania

Two informants raised the possibility that mentoring is not for everyone.

"I'm not convinced that mentoring is appropriate for every child, especially by lay people. We've been looking at our own data to see who had the greatest benefit. We can see that on the ACES index, the program seems to be more effective for children who have fewer ACES. So I wonder if we can't identify for whom mentoring is the best intervention and for whom it's not." – Heather Taussig, University of Denver

"I think mentors can be really helpful. But I'm not sure a mentor is at the top of the list that I would provide. But if widespread reform of the child welfare system is off the table, then maybe this will help." – Michael Garringer, MENTOR

Mentor as Advocate
There were a few respondents who were sceptical about mentors taking on the role of advocate, and others who were convinced that it was both helpful and necessary. The sceptics worried about the burden that advocacy roles might place on mentors, that some youth may not want their mentor being involved with the child welfare system, or that a mentor taking on advocacy could end up in conflict with the child welfare system.

"Whatever you do, you have to recognize what you're asking of unpaid volunteers. It's probably too much to ask a volunteer to do everything to navigate the child welfare system and be a good mentor. You have to think through what you can realistically ask the volunteer to do. Is it too much, too complicated? In our program, we're going to have paid professional advocates for educational rights. The mentor won't have to navigate those more complicated issues. The paid staff and volunteer could collaborate." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

"I think it's really important to be the phone call to the kid after court. The Guardian ad Litem and social worker are going to be in court. The mentor needs to call afterwards and ask how are you doing. My experience has been that it is helpful to be apart from that system. I can have some conversations with those people, but once I got lumped into the system I wasn't different. And the mentor needs to be a little bit different. If anything, it's more about investing in the youth. That the youth is important and their relationship is rewarding." – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

"My initial reaction is no because the mentor won't have a lot of chances where they're empowered enough to do that. It could happen only if they did it through the mentoring program. I could see them very quickly running afoul of the public agency if they try to make recommendations about the case, and this actually happens all the time. If they are trying to advocate with the caseworker, that could potentially fail and come in the way of them continuing the relationship." – Jennifer Blakeslee, Portland State University

Those who most strongly believed in advocacy as part of the mentor's role pointed out that foster care youth often lack an individual who is always on their side. Several informants expressed that a mentor could not take on all advocacy independently, but would need help from program staff in many circumstances and could benefit from knowing when to ask someone like the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth to step in.

 "There's absolutely no way that you can mentor a YIC without playing an advocate role. It's not going to happen. It's important to acknowledge that you're going to be in that position. The mentors will be put in a situation where they witness injustice that the youth is going through, and you have to step in but it will be intense and very difficult. From my experience, the mentoring program should have an advocacy branch, so that if the mentor has a mentee going through something they can hand it over to the advocacy branch. I go to the Provincial Advocate's office and ring their ear to say I need help." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

Program Ideas

The key informants have operated, researched, or just imagined a wide variety of approaches to mentoring youth in care. No one believes that there is a single right way to mentor youth in care, and possibly individual youths need opportunities to access different types of mentoring. Here is an exploration of some of the themes that came up about mentor program design.

Youth-Initiated Mentoring

Echoing the theme of youth voice introduced above, numerous key informants discussed ideas related to youth-initiated mentoring. Traditional mentoring matches where a youth is assigned to a mentor may be appropriate for younger mentees and may be necessary for mentees without a strong social network. Younger mentees may also benefit from a highly structured mentoring program such as a school-based mentoring opportunity. The overall message was that as youth in care get older, it is critical to give them a voice in identifying their mentor and guiding their mentoring relationship.

"When I've seen mentors work, it's been elegant. It's when they found each other rather than being matched. With small children it's easier to have a match that grows up together. With older children, how can we help them identify and find that relationship?" –Irwin Elman, Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

 "We start a conversation about who are all the people in a child's life. We have a genogram or eco-map type concept. It has concentric circles, with the youth in the middle. They draw the people in their lives, with the people closest to them nearest to the center. Then you get them to talk about the people that are on the sheet. Then we do some family finding to help kids. We had two kids who had a really hard time identifying anyone. So we used their family finding list, and asked the kids if they wanted us to reach out to anyone on the list. It generated some names. It's a hard conversation to have when they don't have anyone. We ask the youth to rank order people 1-5, if they can come up with that many. And then we reach out to those people." – Johanna Greeson, University of Pennsylvania

"Our meet and greet process get the chance to meet each other. It's a social. The youth get to ask some questions, we use some get to know you activities like speed dating. Often the mentors and youth don't want to end. After 2 hours the mentors are dismissed. The youth get to give their top 3 choices. Some mentors are chosen by more than one youth. That would be the only time where I would have to choose for the youth. I listen to the youth and gain some insight from the mentors. Just because it's #3 it doesn't mean. We try to really keep an eye out for demand from the youth. We do recruitment and matching every 2-3 months. I'll match the number of youth with the number of mentors, or maybe have one or two extra mentors. Usually we have around 6-8. If we have more mentors than youth, we let the mentors know that ahead of time."- Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House Toronto

"We're trying to think about how we can help the [mentees] identify supportive adults in their natural environment and then how to ask those adults to become involved. Healthy adults who can stick with them after the program ends. [...] Teens do self- asessements and set goals, and then the mentors help them meet those goals. Working on skills requires healthy, trusting relationships, because for some of these youth that is very hard. From the very pragmatic (if your mentor texts you, text them back, reciprocity), how to identify what support they need and how to ask for it (self-advocacy). The beauty of this is that its so individualized." – Heather Taussig, University of Denver

"We're importing the Wendy's Wonderful Kids adoption model. Could we not adopt that model? Look for mentors who are already in their life? Ask the kids to identify the people? What if it's their blood uncle? That's where they're going when they leave the system anyhow. And that would give the person some support. IF you're going to have people involved, you have to have some support. Because it's tough to be there. The kids try to push you away. When they've been hurt when they're young, things are always going to come up when they're 15, 16, 17" – Irwin Elman, Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

Group Mentoring
To reduce the risk of a mentee being disappointed by a failed one-on-one relationship, some informants are utilizing group mentor programming. In some cases this also means that the program will be able to serve more adults. Another potential benefit is that it exposes youth to a larger number of supportive peers and adults.

"We are just in the startup state of pulling a group of teen males on the waitlist who have less of a chance of finding a mentor in the immediate future. Trying to see if 40 youth could participate and get there. We also have some guiding principles for that as well. We want to see what they want to achieve as a group. And we could bring in some YIC alumni, who don't really want to leave the group. The Alumni and regular youth could intersect at some points and the alumni act as mentors for the younger youth." –BBBS of Edmonton and Area

"We're also looking to group mentoring where mentor-mentee pairs do some things together so that they youth meet similar college-interested youth and to meet other caring adults." Amy Salazar, University of Washington

In some cases, the organizations are trying a hybrid model – combining group and individual mentoring. This makes it possible for youth to engage in a lower-stakes group activity, and then move on to a one-on-one relationship if they bond with someone. If an adult mentor leaves their role, a group component means that the youth can still retain some support and maybe even find another mentor. This approach also allows for an element of youth-initiated mentoring.

"They'll say "I don't want a big brother" because they don't need that. But then when we got them to go to a group function that BBBS had, and they got to mingle, it was way different. They met [the program coordinator] and he talked with them about the program. Then it's different, because they start to develop a relationship. And some kids ask how long because they had an in school mentor but it ended after 10 months, and they were like 'That sucked because I liked my mentor and then they were gone.' It helps to bring the mentors and youth together and see what transpires naturally. The kids will come if they have choice to say no after going to the initial event. They'd like to go to the activity, but they want control. I see in the running group that different people come out, and you see them make connections. We see the same people running with the same kid every time. They just make these connections." – Julie Carter, Sarnia CAS

"We want a two-tiered model. One tier is a formal agreement with the mentor. [Second,] they are participating monthly in community building events. The whole community is there even when the mentor is not. If your relationship ends, you still have the community to be there with you and for you. At the end of the year, they can choose to continue the relationship. If not, they still have the option to belong to the community." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

Peer Mentoring

A few informants are specifically utilizing a peer mentoring model to expose youth in care to others who are in care or have been. This approach helps provide a peer network that may be supportive in ways that a typical mentor cannot.

"You should consider peer mentoring in the equation as well. If you're talking about adolescent development, by the time a young person hits their teenage years there is that individuation that happens. They are going to separate from caregivers and connect with their peers. Youth in care are going through the same thing as well. There is research that youth in care tend to do better aging out when there is a lot of effort put into connecting them with other youth in care going through the similar situation. […] There is research that youth in homeless shelters who are the most motivated to get their life together tend to draw in peers and help each other along the way. It's very common, and I experienced it in my adolescent years, that I only had surface level friends. I was in a group home. No one from school ever came home with me. I never talked about being in care because it was so foreign to everyone else. The possibility of sameness and understanding is extremely important." – Carleen Joseph, National Youth in Care Network

"We often do not see or hear about those who have had successful experiences. And it would be useful to have someone to hear from during the difficult moments of transition. When the times get really challenging, the transition coach can step in to say 'Yes I know, it's difficult but it's not impossible.'" – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

E-Mentoring

One informant is considering using e-mentoring with youth in care. This structure may also make it possible to reach youth in care in rural areas, and to maintain mentoring relationships that otherwise would end when a youth is moved to a new home.

"We're interested in doing an e-mentoring program. And BBBS has an electronic and online mentoring program called Dreamcatchers, and that's the model that we're looking at. This is a very vulnerable population and sometimes face-to-face mentoring doesn't work for them. I've talked with a number of

people across the country who work with youth in care, and everyone says this population is difficult to work with. We don't think so, but that's the prevailing thought. So we want to provide something different, and something that the young people are comfortable with – the Internet. I'm really interested in learning about the stages where BBBS" – Carleen Joseph, National Youth in Care Network

Key Informant Interview Questions

Additional responses from key informant interviews are compiled below.

1. What principles should guide mentoring programs for youth in and/or leaving care? Are there differences between the two groups?

BBBS of Edmonton and Area has a "Values and Principles" document for their Youth in Care Project. This comprehensive list includes being Children and Youth Focused; Collaborative Relationships; Adaptive and Responsive Journey; Leading Practices; Culturally Responsive; Inclusive and Anti-Oppressive; and Strengths-Based, Trauma Informed, and Solution-Focused. The full document will be provided as Appendix A of this report.

One respondent covered a lot of ground in her response:

"Programs should consider how to use natural mentors, so the young person has a say in what kind of a mentoring relationship they want to have and who that mentor should be. If they have been moved repeatedly and disconnected from their home community, they may have someone in their life – a family member, a pastor, whoever – but that gets severed when they have to move. Traditional mentoring relationships may work, but programs could support and augment natural mentoring relationships. You're talking about young people who have experienced abandonment and are very cautious about forming connections, and rightfully so. They have had multiple experiences of abandonment. The mentor has to be willing to stick it out and grow with the relationship. One of the most challenging experiences is when there is a break in the relationship. For a child who has grown up in a supportive environment, they may be able to over come that. But for a child who has experienced the trials and tribulations of living in care, it can be devastating for the mentoring relationship to end. Even for something that's "normal" like taking a job out of town. So you have to be very careful about the expectations. Some of that you can't really tell how things are going to unfold. But you should keep those things in mind." – Carleen Joseph, National Youth in Care Network

Youth Centered Approach
"We believe in a youth-focused approach in advocating what's important for them, how they want to be treated by professionals and volunteers. How they want or don't want services to be brought into their life. Beyond that comes a lot of different self-selective values and principles that we try to honour as long as they are healthy." –BBBS of Edmonton and Area

"The youth having an active voice in the process. Which is why natural mentoring is such a nice fit. It' a youth directed process. For kids in foster care, who don't have a whole lot of say in what happens for them, that can be an important process for them to be a part of and direct." -Johanna Greeson, University of Pennsylvania

"Not having mentor be in the expert role. Focusing on helping the youth feel empowered." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

Stability and Ability of the Mentor

"Providing a mentor who will be incredibly stable. Do you have someone who can keep meeting with a child even if they're bouncing around in their placement? How big of a geographic distance are their moves? Given what these kids are going through, common sense says that this person can't flake out on them. Beyond something tragic, these mentors need to be there for quite a long period of time. The programs I'm aware of who are targeting these students are using high end grad students who are doing this as part of their practicums and using this as some of their experience of working with kids. That has some drawbacks, but also brings some set of skills." – Michael Garringer, MENTOR

"Pursue the youth that you are mentoring. They have had many people come and go, so they don't expect someone to stick with them. Be active in their life. Prove that you're not just another social worker or person of authority. Find a way to connect with them on a personal level, be vulnerable with them." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

Navigating the Child Welfare System

"You also have to figure out all of the dynamics of how the mentor communicates with all of the parts of the foster care system. What's the structure? Who are all of the adults in the child's life? How does the mentor communicate with them? How does the mentor learn simple things like that the kid's placement has been changed." – Michael Garringer, MENTOR

"There's a lot of excitement about the idea of using mentoring to help YIC, and then there are the automatic barriers that you run into. One thing that is critical is partnership with the public agency. Moreso than the usual mentoring model. Your point person at BBBS needs a point person at the child welfare agency – and it needs to be at the supervisory level. The case workers need to know about the program so that they can contact the mentoring agency if any problems arise. A mentor who isn't connected to the case worker will quickly find themselves being sidelined or forgotten about. Let's say that the kid is moved, loses a phone and isn't given a new phone… the case worker has to work with the mentor to get a new contact information. And this can happen several times in a year as they move from home to home. Or if the kid is arrested, the BBBS staff person needs to call the public agency to find out what's going on. If the mentor calls, they're not going to get a call back. But the agency probably will. Case workers will almost always say yes to a mentor, unless the youth is so unstable that they can't even get the first meeting off the ground. But most case workers are not sure of how to get a referral to a mentoring program. They don't know who to call. So the partnership between the program and the agency can be important to recruiting the youth as well. And that increases the awareness at the agency" – Jennifer Blakeslee, Portland State University

Understanding Trauma

"I think too that you have to understand security and trauma. Don't do behaviour mod. Understand the cycles they're going to go through. I see that there are sometimes placements that don't have that understanding, and instead of doing repair work they do more damage. Training has to be at the front end around attachment, trauma, mental health and addictions. Neuroscience is telling us so much about all of that right now. And when kids miscue and people respond the wrong way, it does damage. And the mentors need ongoing support because these kids are great but got through some tough times. – Julie Carter, Sarnia CAS

Building Trusting Relationships

"We have a really big focus on how to build relationships with foster care youth. This population have had a lot of trust challenges, because the people they are supposed to rely on have not been there. So building these relationships can look a little different. It needs to be really well thought out. You can't just tell them to hang out and connect. You need a plan and guidance for how to do that." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

Managing External Stressors
"Instead of having to work on helping them build a relationship, it was more about the stressors that got in the way of them being able to spend time together. The mentors they nominate are coming from high stress environments too, the kids social networks. So moving forward, we're going to try to address those stressors – work schedules, child care, needing transportation, finding flexible ways to do sessions (like at the natural mentor's house). It's the reverse for programmatic or formal mentors. Programs need to help the dyad trust each other, but the external stressors are usually far less. For natural mentors, the bond is already there and they already know each other." –Johanna Greeson, University of Pennsylvania

2. What, if any, aspects of offering mentoring are done differently than usual in terms of supporting mentoring children and youth in care? (specific to recruitment, screening, training, matching, monitoring and supporting, match closure, collaboration with professional supports and caregivers)

Challenges to Forming Connections
"Many of the youth have very few substantive adult connections and have trouble forming those connections, but they are expected to make do after aging out without any assistance. It is needed and important to develop some type of mentoring to support youth as they age out. But you also have to understand the uniqueness of this population." – Carleen Joseph, National Youth in Care Network

"It needs to be less commitment intensity or more commitment intensity than the one-year standard. It makes more sense to either plan for a couple of years, or to understand that if the click doesn't happen within the first few months then it's ok to let it go. We might work harder to make it work when the youth isn't in care. But there's a different standard of how much you sort of push to meet your program goals as compared to what the youth is telling you they are or aren't ready for. If they do click, try to support it for more than a year, because it can be a critically important relationship and they will be in foster care for more than a year. If the youth is saying that it isn't working and I have too much going on already and I'm stressed out by it all… then don't force a mentor onto them. If the kid is telling you it's not working for them, then maybe let it go. But on the other hand, sometimes youth are pushing people away without trying. I would encourage a relationship between the youth and the program through group events, etc where they meet other foster youth and potential mentors, and then you can ask them if they'd want to try with another mentor. If they want to try with another mentor, then let them do that." – Jennifer Blakeslee, Portland State University

Transience
"Sometimes the youth are MIA, and we have to track them down. You have to be relentless in ensuring that you have the most up to date information on them, and you have to build new communication paths that may become obsolete pretty quickly. And when youth go into treatment or the justice system, their contactability is limited to nil for a period of time. It's our role to connect with the mentor and ensure that they know what's going on with the mentee, and helping the mentor hold on through the no-contact period." – Tannis Pearson, BBBS of Edmonton

"There are a lot of different players and caregivers involved. That changes our relationship with caregivers and the way we ensure that child safety is met." – Tannis Pearson, BBBS of Edmonton

Lack of Caregiver Support
"Sometimes we don't have caregiver support, so it requires an increased amount of staff time." – Tannis Pearson, BBBS of Edmonton

Boundaries
"Mentors can struggle with boundary issues because youth in care don't have a lot of adults, and so they may be seeking out more than the mentor feels they are responsible for. So we try to help them clarify their role and get good at setting boundaries. Boundaries include: sharing (what's appropriate and when), money (kids don't have resources), time, role they play (you're not filling in for the parent even though the youth doesn't have one)." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

3. What are the characteristics of the mentors who are supporting children and youth in care? Do they differ from other mentors?

Mentors Need Previous Experience
"We've looked at volunteers who have a level of experience that speaks to their ability to work with a youth through testing behaviours, challenges with emotional regulation. We look for mentors who are really mature and have some developed skills in working with youth. The volunteers needs a good volume of having done youth work previously. They need a high level of maturity across the board. We want to know what is their attitude towards someone who will challenge them. Can they depersonalize that, make the challenge not about them. Empower the youth and not get into a power struggle, not make the conflict about me as a mentor. Teachers, youth workers, and even parenting experience. We want someone who has a broader scope of experience." –BBBS of Edmonton and Area

"I would look for a mentor that has experience being marginalized, not necessarily with child welfare, but for instance someone who is a newcomer, or someone who has lived below poverty and risen above. Someone who has had it rough and has made it, but can also be compassionate. Someone who can be open and raw and compassionate about their experiences. At the same time, I have some mentors who recognize their own position of privilege and have been able to be relatable." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

"They should have also volunteered previously, especially in other mentoring programs. We want them to have understanding of some of the challenges our youth placed. It's also valuable if they have some knowledge of trauma-informed care." – Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House, Toronto

Youth Voice in Selection and Natural Mentors
"We come up with some matching characteristics that might matter to a youth, and we have the youth tell us the characteristics that matter to them. Some youth really want someone who knows where I'm coming from, but others don't want someone who has been in the system because they don't want anyone who has anything to do with it. With older youth, you can have them help tell you what to look for." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

"We're also offering the youth the option of a natural mentor. Someone who is already in their life who meets the criteria. It's beneficial to use that person because they're less likely to go in and out of the kid's life." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

Mentors Should Take the Right Approach
"One of my longest and most enduring relationships was from an adult who was mentoring us through that process. He had a hands off approach. When we talked about youth empowerment, it wasn't lip service. He supported us developing our own voices. He gave us lots of chances, knowing that we would screw up sometimes. But he said that he always wanted us to come to him, no matter what. We could reach out to him any time of day. Someone who is supportive without being directive. Someone who lets you know that screwing up is ok but I'm still going to be there and not abandon you. I am going to let you know now and then if I think you're going down the wrong path, but it's still your decision about what to do with your life. As a professional, I probably take a harder line. But his approach is that things happen and you have to be there. But the mentor has to be someone who is open enough to listen to and believe the young person. They have to allow the young person to make their own decisions about the future. They have to dig as deep as they can to find positive things for that young person to relate to. And they have to have a stick-to-itiveness. They can't just pick up and run. It's very hard to measure someone's character. They have to have some ways to make the kids feel like they can relate to the mentor. Things that just break the "myth of the adult". Mentors have to break that mold and help them see that there's adult me, responsible me, silly me, and all of those types of things. The mentor has to let go of the stereotypes of the YIC as well. They have to let go of the sensationalized bad stuff you hear from in the mainstream media. Youth in Care have this unique ability to be resilient, and we need people to recognize that." – Carleen Joseph, National Youth in Care Network

"They shouldn't feel the need to provide everything for that kid. They should help the kid learn how to work for some things and develop some schools. It's important to let that kid have the same learning lessons as any other kid. You want those shoes? How are you going to earn them?" – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

4. What training and supports are required for mentors?
Approaches to Pre-Match Training
"There are four categories: Understanding trauma and brain development, mental health, the child and family services system, cultural components (history and how those issues are impacting youth in care today). 3 hours of training on top of Strong from the Start." –BBBS of Edmonton and Area

"We have a 2-hour, weekday evening pre-match training to orient them to their role. What does it mean to be a mentor? We have them put it into context within their own lives. Who have you gone to? What are the characteristics of those individuals? We also talk about why our youth need mentors. What are the things challenging our youth? Who are the types of youth we serve? And we have some guest speakers come in, such as youth who can share their experience in the program. So our mentors also understand where they are living. And previous mentors come in and share their experience and some tips. We also talk about what are the things that make an effective mentor, and what a mentor isn't. Also, effective communication and how to build a trusting relationship. We also give them a mentor guideline, a booklet that shares practices of effective and ineffective mentors, and how to deal with worst cases scenarios. Effective communication is especially important because mentors need to help our youth learn those skills too. We also use role plays, and the group offers feedback. People are usually really helpful and offer great suggestions. We also talk about how to offer positive feedback in reflection. We also talk about activities that they can do in their relationship. We tell them we want the relationship to be about more than providing finances, and they can't spend money on the youth. Our youth have a source of income. And we want them to teach budgeting as a life skill." – Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House Toronto

"We had 6-8 hours of training. This includes adolescent development (theories and principles), understanding the child welfare system, trauma-informed natural mentoring, practices of effective natural mentors (what should we do together? Beyond structured activities), establishing and maintaining boundaries. Delivered best in group, also sometimes one on one because the mentors needed it that way." – Johanna Greeson, University of Pennsylvania

"In a school based program, they may not need all that different of training for the role in the school. But when the youth are older, there are so many issues that are going on. Mentors probably need to be trained on the system itself, what the kids are going through on an institutional system." –Michael Garringer, MENTOR

"Many of these kids have been through trauma. So training on the principles of trauma-informed support. And then case-by-case training on the individual things that kids are dealing with." –Michael Garringer, MENTOR

"Programs probably struggle to know what to tell a mentor, and what they can tell a mentor legally. But it's really important to prepare a mentor on who they're going to be working with and what the kid has been dealing with. It's also really important to focus on strengths. These kids have a lot of resilience." – Michael Garringer, MENTOR

"Also training on trust building. A lot of these kids probably have a lot of reluctance to open up. All mentors probably need that, but in this case mentors need to be particularly strong on making the kids feel safe, building trust over time, helping them understand what the relationship is doing and why." – Michael Garringer, MENTOR

"How to get support. There's usually a clinician involved and a case manager. Another feature would be some pretty intensive support for the match. How do you utilize those people. Access to higher level clinical help. Knowing where the boundaries are in your ability to help. Who do I turn to in the program?" –Michael Garringer, MENTOR

"The foundation should be an anti-oppression model. I think it's extremely important with this population. For Toronto, I am focused on black youth in care, and I want to the mentors to understand the experience of being racialized and the experience of systemic oppression. I don't want mentors to believe that they have been the victims of trauma in the way that people stereotype. How many of the youth are newcomers and parents were in poverty, and the system didn't understand them. For instance the mom is working three or four jobs and just doesn't have time to help with homework." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

"They are going to have to realize that there's a world going on where they (the mentor) aren't living. It's almost like they need to hear a first hand story from someone who's been there. Just to help personalize it. Because when they hear the mentee's story, it is going to be really emotional and hard. They need preparation for how rough some of the story is going to be. On the flipside, the mentor can be helpful because the kid needs exposure to a happier, healthier world." – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

Providing Mentors with Ongoing Support
"We also look for more skills in our case workers than in a typical relationship. And we provided the staff training on high-risk youth, supporting aboriginal youth, and other topics. We have kept our match caseloads much smaller because the contact frequency is increased. The check ins have more depth. The

case worker is involved with the youth, family and mentor. The relationship varies depending on the needs of the youth. For instance, youth who are struggling with eating disorders or are involved in the criminal justice system. So we may pair them up with another mentor who has experienced the same thing. With addictions and mental health concerns, we have had a lot of explorations around things as they have come up. Our staff have become mini experts on a lot of different topics. And we're really well connected to other agencies that are better able to help our mentees. We're doing check ins at least twice per month. We have 30 matches per caseworker, the capacity might be 45. We also do some group programming. "– Amy Salazar, University of Washington

"They have to visit twice a month and check in with us once a month. The monitoring piece is really important for mentors and for youth. A lot of times they may not share unless you ask. Especially with new matches, you need to check in to make sure they are making progress. WE ask them to come to Covenant house for three mandatory meetings one-to-one at the beginning of the relationship. This is a comfortable environment for the youth, and the mentors understand the structure of the program. When they are meeting, we give them some icebreaker activities to help work through anxiety. Once a month we check in to see if they're doing ok, meeting regularly, facing challenges. Some of the most common challenges is just having the time. Sometimes they have conflicting schedules and find it hard to meet. Sometimes its communication, like not returning phone calls or text messages in a timely manner. But I let the mentors know that the youth have not learned the skills to respond to messages right away. A lot of those challenges are teachable moments. It takes some patience and persistence." – Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House Toronto

5. What role can mentors play as supports during times of transitions for youth in care? How can this role be enhanced?

Flexibility Required
"In my programs, we are unspecific. The way that we think about this that the issues that come up can be quite complex. It's not really reasonable to ask a mentor to figure out how to navigate all of the really complicated child welfare issues, but they need to know who they can reach out to, and they need to be able to ask someone to help their youth navigate that complicated situation so that it doesn't become overburdensome for the mentor and doesn't prevent the youth from getting what they need." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

"You have to be pretty flexible in what you're going to offer the youth. If you get too prescriptive, it doesn't work. You can have a structured program for the youth. You can have expectations for the minimum frequency for youth and mentors to meet. But you have to be flexible in what they focus on. It just can't feel prescriptive to the youth. We've dealt with that by having lists of recommended types of activities that we have given mentors and mentees. If you don't have any recommendations at all, people feel really lost as well. So we have a whole set of recommendations and ideas that they can decide what to do together. Our recommendations were post-secondary focused, and fell into five different categories: Academic, career, fun, and two others. We encouraged them to mix up their activities by categories." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

Hard Skills and Character Traits Required for Independent Living
"The mentor's role is to be a friend and a confidant. They are not the parent, legal guardian, or counsellor. They are working with a counsellor here at Covenant House. It's more of a friend. Their activities have to be in public settings. They can't give rides or take the youth to their home. A lot of what they focus on are skill buildings – job applications, etc. Our youth are transitioning and need life skills. They need things as simple as how do you make a phone call to a potential employer. That's the

type of guidance a lot of our youth need and are looking for. A lot of our youth also want to go to college and need help looking for programs and going through the process. Mentors will often go to the college with them and show that they will still be there to support them. The mentors have to show that they will be stable. A lot of our youth have lost that one stable role model." – Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House Toronto

"Working on an independent living skill that the youth wants to develop." – Johanna Greeson, University of Pennsylvania

"Post-secondary or higher education, or for those who don't want to pursue that then find another way to pursue financial stability. How realistic are the options they have for being financial stability?" – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

"Building social supports, what does that look like? Who's your family? Where are you going to spend Thanksgiving and Christmas? Who do you have for those relationships? Maybe it's your best friend's mom. How do you admit to need help. It's ok to ask and accept help. We're often very independent, and you have to be ok to ask and accept help. Who are the people you can let in who will be compassionate when you need it, but will also know when it's time to tell me to pull up my socks and move on." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

"Kids who complete six months of continuous employment (1-15 hours per week) get to join 2nd Family Foundation and take part in all of our other programming. Finding local business partners – restaurants, balloon shop, ice cream shop. We are providing the cost of their wages and partnering with DSS to provide transportation. Cost and transportation were the two big sticking points. We have a pay bonus for grades (up to $200 per semester) and we have a savings program with savings incentives. So after six months of showing they can do this, we will show them how we can help them develop themselves. The board sees this as a preventative thing. The research shows that employment is a protective factor. And the kids say that if they'd had a job skill to reference, they would have been more successful after age 18." – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

"Building grit: Going to Crossfit. Doing a workout that is really hard. Having to make the choice of whether you are going to quit or persevere. Making the choice that your brain says, yes, do it. Hopefully they see that these really small decisions of perseverance make a difference. They set physical goals, but also life goals. And they talk with their trainers about both types of goals. It's hard. For some of them it's hard just to show up. The first session finished with only 2/3 of the participants, but we considered that to be good. Only 2 of 7 met their goals. We're trying to reward effort, rather than making it about right or wrong, not about being smart or the best. We want them to find satisfaction in working hard and meeting their goals." – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

Being There During Tough Moments
"The things that we don't think about because of our privileges. Remember those bad days in college when you wanted to quit school and you had someone to call who would talk you through it. Or the day when you spend all of your money. Or your girlfriend breaks up with you. Or your car breaks down on a Sunday and you're supposed to be at work. Those things that happen and you automatically know who to call. I feel like you give kids what you need, and every kid has individual needs. Don't assume that because the kid has good marks and got into university that the kid doesn't need you to take them to the university because they may not know where it is." – Julie Carter, Sarnia CAS

6. How do events that are unique to a youth in care influence the mentoring relationship (e.g. aging out of care, moving to a new placement, being adopted)?

Trauma and Loss

"For youth in care or leaving care, it's really important to understand the psycho-social background of the youth. Everyone has a history and a lot of it is traumatic. It's important to understand and know that before starting. Sometimes we all come with preconceived notions of different situations or backgrounds. As part of our ongoing trainings throughout the year, mentors go through different trainings based on the challenges that our youth might face, including mental health, substance abuse, communication skills. Trust and communication have to be in your mentoring relationship. This population also really needs confidentiality, because they are so used to having all of their information shared. But mentors have to break that confidentiality if there is a safety concern. ." – Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House Toronto

"I think some youth do not have a single person beyond the agency, and for those kids I'd want to see one person who is going to be their mentor for life. I have two youth who have been in group homes for their whole lives, but they both would benefit from having a mentor because they don't have that outside supportive person." – Julie Carter, Sarnia CAS

Plan of Care Meetings

"If there's every an opportunity for a mentor to sit in with one plan of care meeting, that would be so helpful. Because often they are setting goals that are never really followed up on. I'd want the mentor to help make smart goals and hold they youth accountable – teaching them to be responsible for taking ownership of their own lives to meet those goals." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

The Initial Phase of Independence

"A lot of times, when the kid hits 18 they are going to tell their mentor to f*** off. Because they've been in the system for so long, and it's oppression in their mind. And they just want freedom. So you have to start talking about it when you're in high school. What is the youth going to do? What will their relationship look like? How will they stay in touch? What will happen when they run out of resources? What should they do when they need help? What is the youth's obligation when they need help? In general, you have to assume that for at least three years (18-21) the kid is going to be off the map. What are you going to do to keep a relationship during that time? One kid we had was getting housing and school support, but she quit going to school and started hosting parties. We had to cut her off. But some kids need that because they need to learn the lesson. And they will come back." – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

7. What role can mentors play as advocates for youth in care?

In addition to the discussion above, here are two comments from key informants. Additional information can be gathered in the future from the current BBBS Youth in Care pilot sites, which are all including advocacy in their model.

"We have mentors who would be amazing advocates who should be at the case conferences, but we have other mentors who will need a staff walking along side us right now. We want to understand more about what they're doing. It happens naturally for the mentors and staff." –BBBS of Edmonton and Area

"What I've been doing is starting off speaking for my youth. Then sitting in while she does the speaking, stepping in only when necessary. Guiding her on how to speak up for herself. Then following up after

she has done it for herself. Hand holding to letting go. But also telling her that it is important to have people who will speak up with you. Without that foundation, it's really hard to be on your own." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

8.   What are the limits of what mentoring can accomplish for children in foster care?

Mentors Are Not Parents or Authority Figures

"They can't be a substitute parent, which is tricky when the kid doesn't like their living situation. They can't be someone that you call any time all the time. It's a vulnerable population that needs so much, so it's hard to set a limit. And we don't have any substitute for a parent, but we also can't ask the mentors to do that. But you should keep an eye on overburdening the mentor." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

"The mentor should never play the role of being an authority figure or position of power. You should never do that or the youth will shut you off. They've had so many of those and they don't want that in your life. The mentor should be able to put themselves in the vulnerable position of admitting their own struggles and fears, and how did they cope with that?" – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

"The one thing that stands out the strongest for me is mental health. We need a professional partner to walk alongside us. Because it impacts every aspect of the relationship. If they are unwell, it changes everything. And similar to that are addictions." –BBBS of Edmonton and Area

"I wonder about the need for psychological support and mental health services. They're going to need to unpack that if they're going to be healthy in the long term. A mentor can support getting that help, but shouldn't be responsible for providing that help."-Michael Garringer, MENTOR

9.   What promotional materials are best to promote, recruit etc.?

Overall, informants did not have any easy solutions to this question. As with other forms of mentoring, they have found it difficult to recruit mentors. Here are an assortment of ideas that some informants shared.

"We recruit based on what the youth are looking for. I tell the youth about the program and what a mentor is, assess their readiness and attitude. Mentoring is not mandatory for the youth, it's voluntary – because we want to give them control and empowerment. Our shelter and program have a lot of structure and rules. So we want to give them some sense of control. When they tell me the kinds of people they are looking for, it's usually pretty broad. I try to get them to be specific, but also keep an open mind. I might find someone who is close enough to their criteria. Based on that I go out to the community to do recruitment. We receive a lot of applications online because Covenant House has been around for over 30 years in Toronto. So I sift through all of the applications and through my volunteer coordinator. If I can't find the exact individual she can help me seek for someone." –Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House Toronto

"That's dependent whether the plan is to do this with citizens, junior level professionals or high level students? For reaching out to the general public, I think you need a message that highlights the transient nature of these kids lives and emphasizes that they need someone who is consistently there. But is that effective? It's a big ask. It might not be effective, but it would be honest and emphasize the need. It

might winnow out the people who would do it on a lark. Maybe something with young people talking in it? Having a kid give a testimonial about having a mentor in their lives." –Michael Garringer, MENTOR

"A lot of adult mentors have a false image where they think that this is just a young person who doesn't have a father present, or the parents work a lot, and all they need is a little support here and there. When the child has more complex issues, people shy away from entering a mentoring relationship. The mentors have to understand the unique vulnerabilities of this population." – Carleen Joseph, National Youth in Care Network

10. How are /should caregivers be involved in the mentoring process?

There is Lots of Variation
"It's a quite lengthy continuum from supportive to dysfunction and challenge. And that can be family or staff. Sometimes turnover is the biggest problem. One of the great advantages of the community of practice is that we have professionals sitting around the table from every area involved. So they can help us address the system change that needs to happen. You still have to take it one step at a time (group home worker, case worker, supervisor...), and you always have to build individual relationships which is very time consuming. We end up doing a lot of educating about our role, the role of the worker, the role of the mentor." –BBBS of Edmonton and Area

"It's going to be different if they're a relative foster care provider. I would expect they would have good openness with some weariness. If it's a non-relative foster care provider, I would guess that they are looking to have as little contact with mentor as possible. The main thing they want is no problems. I think that maybe the foster care needs a little more openness to driving the kid places – like a doctor's appointment that the foster parent can't go to and the case worker can't go to. That may require the program to expand the role of a mentor, but also support mentors in knowing what to set as boundaries. Group home staff will usually be glad to have one fewer youth, but they have security protocols and they can be hard to reach by phone. The mentor is going to have to introduce themselves again and again as they meet different staff. It would be good if they got a badge that identifies them as an agency volunteer. That might also help in a school or another place where you are interacting with the youth." – Jennifer Blakeslee, Portland State University

"Our mentors tried to work collaboratively with caregivers, but every relationship was different. And you had to make sure that you were taking care of confidentiality. When kids went home, we had mentors connect with bio parents before reunification. And only 2 parents pulled their kids over 10 years. Parents can be so jealous, so we worked to demonstrate that our mentors are a source of support." – Heather Taussig, University of Denver

Have Guidelines Based on the Goals of Your Program
"When interactions move over the family realm, it's going to get more sensitive. You don't want the mentor and the foster parent to have problems that result in fallout in the case overall. If you have any planned interactions between the mentor and parents (foster or bio), you'd want really clear guidelines. Sometimes advocacy means you're pushing for the chid to be moved – that can be really tricky and messy. You have to look at the overall impact that might have. It should really be defined by the goal of the mentoring." – Amy Salazar, University of Washington

Set Limits and Boundaries
"It's hard for the mentors not to be a parent, because they are caring and loving and are parents themselves. So it's hard not to do that, but it's important to show that you can be a confidant. We have

a few boundaries, like they can't give them money or gifts. We also help them with setting limits like teaching when it is appropriate to call or not call. And about the need for confidentiality, that they can't introduce the other person to family or friends – so what do they do if they run into someone that they know in the community (she's my friend). A lot of our youth have gone through very traumatic experiences and it's important for the mentor to keep those sensitive topics to themselves and not share those with other people, unless it's a safety concern." – Jewla Cabrera, Covenant House Toronto

"If there is a parent around, the mentor needs to be prepared to deal with the anger and complex feelings about that. And they need to be able to set up boundaries" – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

Work Toward Shared Goals, Even when in Conflict
"I think it's extremely important to set the roles early on. At the end of the day, acknowledge that whether the system works or not, it has the same goal as the mentor – to give the youth the best that they can with the possible resources. You may not always agree with each other, but acknowledge that there is a common ground. If it ever comes to a time where the mentor sees that the youth is not being treated rightly, is the time to pull in the advocacy branch." – Rosi May Venancio, former Youth in Care now developing a mentoring program for Youth in Care

"A lot of times the family can be an obstacle. I've seen it where you are scared that they are going to take the youth and change them, and then the family will be resentful. I've seen that the parents are just scared of what's going to happen, the unknown. It takes a long time to build a relationship and trust, and it's still hard. You have to try and build it by showing up and keeping your commitment. You have to let them know what's going on. They're not making their kids show up, and sometimes they're enabling them to quit. In a perfect world, the mentor could be an unofficial mentor to the parents, helping them see how to make a difference." – Holly Kunkel, Second Family Foundation

Possible Topics for Further Study

Mentoring Diverse Populations: This round of interviews did not include any focused questions about mentoring youth from Native communities or any other special populations.

Supporting Independence: There were few comments shared by this group of key informants about supporting youth through the transition to independence.

Self-Advocacy: Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies participating in a pilot project for supporting youth in care have been working on tools to help mentees develop self-advocacy skills.

Key Informants

Johanna Greeson, Co-Director, Child Well-Being & Child Welfare Specialization	University of Pennsylvania	jgreeson@sp2.upenn.edu johanna@johannagreeson.com
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Julie Carter, Mentoring Program Manager	Sarnia Lambton, Children's Aid Society	dflegel@slcas.on.ca 519-336-0623 X 255
Tannis Pearson, Kerry Woodland	Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area	Liz.oneill@bgcbigs.ca 780-822-2525
Irwin Elman, Chief Advocate	The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth	IrwinElman@provincialadvocate.on.ca 416 325-5669	1-800-263-2841
Mike Garringer, Director of Knowledge Management	MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership	617-303-4600
Holly Kunkel, Program Director	Second Family Foundation	919.967.9823
Carleen Joseph	National Youth in Care Network	carleen@youthincare.ca
Rosimay Venancio	Former YIC	rosimay.venancio@gmail.com
Jennifer Blakeslee	My Life Project (PSU)	
Amy Salazar	University of Washington	amysal3@myuw.net
Heather Taussig	University of Denver	heather.taussig@du.edu

Couldn't participate this time; try again for second round of interviews

Colby Swettberg, Ed.M, LCSW	Chief Executive Officer	Silver Lining Mentoring, Boston	mentor@silverliningmentoring.org 617-224-1300
Shannon Turner	My Life Project (PSU)	
Dr. Thomas Keller, Associate Dean for Research and Sponsored Projects;	Portland State University School of Social Work	kellert@pdx.edu

Referenced but not yet invited

Edward Cohen	BBBS Central Ohio, Connecting the Dots Mentoring Initiative	
Kelly Dooley	BBBS Ventura County, Foster Youth Mentoring Program Manager	kdooley@bbsvc.org 805-484-2282 x119
Kim Snow	Ryerson University, Voyager Program	ksnow@ryerson.ca
Peel CAS via Shari Lyn		

Didn't Respond to Key Informant interview request:

Celeste Bodner, Executive Director	Foster Club All-Stars	(503) 717-1552

Dr. Janis Kupersmidt, President and Senior Research Scientist	iRT innovation Research & Training	919- 493-7700
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Alberta Mentoring Partnership – Children and Youth in Care Working Group

Guiding Principles

Children and youth in care are entitled to safe, positive, supportive and enduring mentoring relationships throughout their lives. These relationships are best developed through a holistic and inclusive community-based approach that recognizes individual needs and circumstances and reflects unique cultural identities.

As we reflect on the different sources of information (literature review, review of casework practice principles, conversations with other service providers, mentors experiences, and youth thoughts and opinions) it is possible to identify asset of key values and culture that will support Youth and Children in Care mentoring programs. The following principles will guide the work of the Alberta Mentoring Partnership Children and Youth In Care Working Group and will form the foundation of the developing pilot sites. Along with the specific principles are specific actions or qualities that will allow the principles to be operationalized.

Children and Youth-Focused
The needs and rights of children and youth in care will drive our strategies, decisions and actions. We include individual and collective voices of children and youth in decisions that impact their ongoing care and development. Ensuring all programs are highly attuned and responsive to the particular characteristics and needs of young people so that they can heal, develop and grow.

- Provide mentors with initial and ongoing training on the rationale and theoretical underpinning of mentoring youth in care
- Ensure all staff, mentors and mentees understand the philosophy and practice
- Ensure there is a structure in place to ensure mentors can get support and reflect on their activities with young people

Collaborative Relationships
Effective and supportive relationships are at the core of a successful and healthy future for children and youth. We encourage a collaborative and holistic approach among all stakeholder groups – children, youth, families, communities, government, as well as child intervention workers, education and health care providers, to enhance outcomes for children and youth in care. We encourage both formal and informal mentoring relationships to facilitate the ability of children and youth in care to form enduring, positive and meaningful relationships throughout their lives.

- Child intervention workers and carers (foster and group care) will need to be well briefed on the program and its principles
- Youth noted that there need to be a joint sense of support with the mentor and the case manager.

Responsive and Adaptive Journey

We strive for ongoing improvements in outcomes for children and youth through continuous learning, information sharing and knowledge transfer among all stakeholders.
- Enable the program design to accommodate education about trauma, family of origin, attachment, etc. and how these situations arise in behavior in young people
- Mentors need to commit to the program and their mentees

Leading Practices

Our work is grounded in leading practices in the areas of effective mentoring relationships and successful transition of children and youth into adulthood while enabling the physical and emotional safety of children and youth in care. We adopt strategies, programs and practices based on validated research, informed by our experiences.
- Ensure that mentors receive support from staff with relevant qualifications and experience
- Ensure that all members of the program provide a sense of safety, structure, acceptance and security at all times
- Provide a stable and consistent environment

Culturally Responsive

Our approach reflects and integrates the diverse needs and is sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of children and youth in care. We incorporate cultural education and are welcoming of all cultural backgrounds. We recognize that a significant number of children and youth in care are aboriginal and bring specific and unique needs. Mentoring relationships celebrate cultural diversity and support development in a way that reflects both individual and cultural identities.
- Ensure young people have opportunities to remain or become engaged with cultural practices
- Ensure mentors are aware of the impacts of colonization on the indigenous population as it relates to child welfare
- Youth have said they are seeking people who are non-judgmental and youth have a say in their matches.

Inclusive and Anti-Oppressive

We acknowledge <u>oppression</u> in societies, economies, cultures, and groups, and strive to remove or negate the influence of that oppression. Related to this there may be a 'care versus control' issue, because where there is care there is responsibility, and therefore control, and power. Practitioners and mentors need to be fully aware of the power (im) balance between mentees and providers (mentors or program staff) in order to work in an anti-oppressive manner. Youth should feel welcome, accepted, safe, listened to, valued and confident that they can participate in all activities.
- User-led and user-controlled service. (nothing about us without us principle)
- Healthy relationships will help build the confidence of the young person to enable them to develop their own ideas about their level of involvement.

- Provide an approach that is sensitive and respectful and actively explores and seeks to understand each young person's unique circumstances and experiences arising from the impact of their culture
- Ensure that program and mentors listen to young people and allow them to participate in decision-making processes regarding their activities

Strength-Based, Trauma-Informed, and Solution-Focused

We believe successful mentoring relationships are strength-based and affirming. We start with where the individual is at and build on strengths and successes, using resources available. A strong understanding of trauma and its impacts influences how we support children and youth in care.

- Provide specialized training in trauma theory model and its applications (affects of trauma and attachment disruption)
- Provide ongoing clinical support to mentors in this area
- Youth believe training is mandatory for all mentors and should include, basic first-aid, post-traumatic stress disorder awareness, and good communications skills, and sexual orientation discrimination awareness
- Youth suggest have online options for mentors like suicide prevention, etc. so it is there is a mentor needs it.

Youth voice was sought and received through some youth forums and interviews. When youth were asked what are the times in their life when they wished they had a mentor to help them they answered:

- Transitions to adult living
- High school grade 12
- When trying to get first jobs
- When going into group care
- When having a baby

A paper outlining the Youth engagement discussion is on the AMP website for consultation.

Youth In Care: Key Informant Interviews (Round 2)

"How do you find a chosen family if your family is not accepting of you? What does your family provide for you? What do they not? How can you find that in other parts of your life?" - Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth

"[Youth] teach us way more than we teach them. We get our best ideas directly from them. It's daily for them… the things that they encounter and experience, versus the daily privilege that we have. We benefit from the resilience that they have." – Dawn Flegel, Sarnia-Lampton CAS

Overview

To respond to a request from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is working on a report to the Ministry on how to best provide mentoring support to Youth in Care. There is a special interest in supporting Youth through the process of transitioning from care to independence.

There is some research and literature on effective practices for mentoring youth in care. However, Big Brothers Big Sisters does not feel the existing knowledge base is adequate to complete a full report. Therefore, in the process of preparing the report, BBBS set out to gather insights on research and practice from a set of key informants with particular experience in mentoring Youth in Care. This report reflects a second round of interviews focused on speaking with people who have expertise in serving LGBTQ youth and ethno-cultural youth. A full list of the key informants interviewed in this round can be found at the end of this report.

Process

Eleven key informant interviews were completed between Jauary 20 and February 3, 2016. Each interview was conducted by telephone and the interviews generally lasted 30-60 minutes. Interviews followed a standard set of questions, although some interviews did not include all of the questions or ranged to some topics beyond those included in the questions. All interviews were completed by Graig Meyer of The Equity Collaborative. Graig Meyer also compiled this report.

General Advice for Mentoring Youth in Care

Most key informants shared some general advice on mentoring youth in care along with their specific insights about target populations. The advice often affirmed what key informants' statements in the first round of interviews. Here are some quotes that complement the earlier information with additional perspectives.

The Importance of Group Settings to Youth in Care

Although most people conceive of mentoring as a one-on-one activity, a consistent topic in interviews was the ways that programs used group settings to facilitate successful mentoring. Significantly, several programs have group meetings along with their individual meetings. In some cases, the organizations use these group settings to facilitate mentor-mentee matching, and in other instances they intentionally keep the matching process separate from the group activities.

"[In our program,] each youth has a case worker and a mentor. We have a group component in addition to that. The group does skills workshops, with a big community dinner. All of their mentors come, they bond and learn something new. We've done cooking, printmaking, resume writing, discussing domestic violence, and we do fun stuff like barbecues and movie nights. It also helps mentors connect to each other and have a free activity." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

"There is a weekly youth group when the kids meet with the caseworker to do things in the community and to work on skills for transitioning to living on their own… The mentors can come to the weekly group or not. Usually they come depending on the activity, but that doesn't replace their one-on-one activity." – Kim Megyesi, BBBS of Saskatoon

"[The local Big Brothers Big Sisters Agency] has been flexible in having group meetings and letting the youth have some input in choosing their own mentor. Many of the youth in care have experienced lots of loss, and haven't had many positive role models. And, it's important that the person is not a CAS worker, it's someone who is volunteering their time and taking a specific interest in them. Making connections for them and building relationships." – Dawn Flegel, Sarnia-Lampton CAS

"Monday night drop-in was born out of the need for youth to have mentors, but their lives are too chaotic to forge weekly one-on-one mentoring. So this is a drop-in with a meal, staff and volunteer mentors. The other part is more like Big Brothers Big Sisters, where youth are matched on one-on-one basis. Monday night has about 50 youth coming each week. The food is home-cooked, and youth are invited to participate in the cooking if that's an interest of theirs. The group does a variety of activities – from jewellery making to a workshop on health relationships. The youth come and go during the evening, but the mentors get to know them over time. If something radically changes in the youth's life, like getting kicked out of a shelter, there is all of that support there. Our process does not allow for the matches to become one-on-one. But a mentor can volunteer for both programs, and they would have a different mentee in the one-on-one program. We don't let youth choose their mentor, we're trying to avoid hurt feelings. In the group setting, they are supportive adults who reflect their identities. The youth like that it is an LBGT mentor." - Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth

Youth in Care Need Long-Term and Continuous Support

Building on the a similar theme from the first round of interviews, several informants gave clear illustrations of how important it is for programs to prepare for long-term mentoring relationships. This may mean that programs need to provide additional staff support for mentors because of the complexity of needs that many youth in care have.

"When I was leaving the foster care system to work with Child Protective Services, the youth wouldn't leave me alone. I kept referring them to other people who could help them get a job or find housing or deal with whatever crisis was going on. But the youth were like 'No, I don't know that person. I don't want to know them. I already have enough social workers in my life, and I don't want another one.' And if I didn't help them, it would stand in the way of them getting the service. They needed the emotional connection, and they really resisted reaching out for new connections. They knew me as someone they could trust, and so they would call me constantly. But that isn't practical, so how could we replicate that for many more youth and have a long-term program? We have 26, 27, and 28 year olds that still reach out. A mentor can continue being that person for the rest of the youth's life." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

"The mentors stay with their mentee for multiple years. The idea is that they will be matched and stay matched through 21. Then they age out of our program, but they can stay matched. At that point they are no longer monitored." – Kim Megyesi, BBBS of Saskatoon

"We turn down most mentors who apply. The mentor has to willing to make the long-term commitment. If they can't do that, I'd rather wait for the kid to have a mentor until we can find someone. Everyone abandons these kids, and that's why we're so strict." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

Successful Mentoring Relationships Need Intensive Support

Supporting these mentoring relationships may require skills and time beyond what is expected of a typical mentoring case worker.

"It is really important to have someone who is really skilled at addressing complex issues working alongside the mentor. It's too hard for the mentor to do it alone. With YIC, the issues that come up are extreme. Most mentors, if they don't have the support of a social worker at that point, the mentor is going to freak out and leave. I would rather not have a mentor program at all than to have a program where the mentors leave. A lot of the work that we do is making sure that this relationship continues. I think it's fair for the mentor to freak out, so you need someone who is skilled to walk the mentor through this and to take over the help that the youth needs." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

"It requires intensive support. It takes a different type of caseworker. A caseworker who would be successful in our school-based mentoring or community-based mentoring programs might not be successful. It requires awareness of youth in care and what it takes to serve them. The hours are not daytime hours. This program in particular requires lots of work and communication outside of regular work hours. The staff also provide a lot of transportation for the youth group activities." – Kim Megyesi, BBBS of Saskatoon

"Caseworkers need experience working with youth. Experience working with high-risk youth. Experience working with aboriginal and First Nations youth. Have a skill set of being relatable and yet can set strict boundaries. We would not hire an entry-level person for this job. They have to have a little bit of street savvy. They have to know how to set boundaries. You can't just be the constant nag, you have to build relationships and support. It's a fine line." – Kim Megyesi, BBBS of Saskatoon

The Possible Benefits of Peer-Mentoring for Youth in Care

Kim Snow runs the Voyager mentoring program at Ryerson University. She made a compelling case for creating peer-mentoring relationships among youth in care. As emphasized above, her model relies heavily on group settings.

"Kids in care are very staff savvy. They can assess the staff better than the supervisors. They have foster parents, workers, group home staff, etc. They are adept at the language of institutions and systems. Given the instability that tends to happen, in reality their instability started long before child welfare was involved. So that instability doesn't get resolved in care and sometimes gets worse. They're often very cynical when well-meaning people want to help them. One of the reasons that I've come around to moving away from adults to young person [as mentor] is because they want to avoid relationships and anticipate that they are going to be short lived and let them down. Rooting them together with each other seems to be a better way to help them get some of the developmental lessons that kids usually get. If you're being a jerk, it's your peers that bring you in. And together you're doing about the same thing. Even if you're delayed launching, you're doing it together. YIC are always out of step with their peers – emancipated earlier, etc. – and so they are not dealing with their peer cohort's issues. Traditional [mentoring] models are based on relying on the broader community. But kids in care are on a different trajectory. So we're trying to create a cohort that artificially mimics what happens naturally in the community.

"Kids in care are more independent because they have to be, and they seek this out when they are ready, rather than being told when they have to. In Voyager, we've seen that the youth don't leave. Some have been in it for 10 years. They have come ready for the next step, and then life gets away from them, and they have safety net here. They usually come in and they're getting ready to transition, and this provides a type of safety net for them. As they lose relationships elsewhere, this helps them to make connections. I've seen a pattern where kids are doing fine in grade 10 and then tank in grade 11, and usually its because the system is getting them ready for independence, and they're in turmoil. They're not really ready to connect. So we do really well in grade 9 and 10, but not 11. At grade 12 they might be ready again. It's counterintuitive because they are out of sync with the community-based norms. They are still young and deserve the chance to be young. They are trying to figure out how to do all of these things, and survival dominates. Part of the work is knowing when the survival piece can be intervened with. When they are aging out of the system, they are feeling abandoned. At 18 if you're told you've got to go live on your own, that loss dominates. You're dealing with another rupture, and on top of that you have to survive. All young people on campus struggle with living independent for the first time, but they have the safety net of home. Youth in care at a younger age have no backup, and they see their peers living on the streets and they know they are one step from homelessness. It's really hard to keep a house at that age, and when you're living in poverty one bad thing can put you on the street. They are still young, they still need a lot of caretaking, they really should still be dependent but they're not. At some point we see that services are able to grab them – but usually when they are in crisis. Before that it's very hard to engage in a perceived service that might just abandon you, unless it's functional. So we try to help them bond with each other. Put them together and empower them. Help them see how to share places together, share bus passes. Build an organic community."- Kim Snow, Ryerson University

Using Cultural Brokers

When navigating relationships with ethno-cultural youth and their families, programs may want to consider the approach of using cultural brokers. Mentoring programs in Alberta use the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op as a resource to build trust and communication with ethno-cultural communities.

"A 'cultural broker' is similar to community health worker concept. They broker the relationship between the family's lived experience and the system (health care, education, child intervention). The broker understands the system and the culture of the family. They don't need to be of the same culture, but it is helpful to speak the same language. They do more than translate. They may explain what the teacher wants the family to do to apply for an assessment, then tell more about why the assessment

exists and what the stakes are, and then go on to tell the school system what assessments mean within this cultural context." - Roxanne Felix-Mah, The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research

"Whenever we are able to work in a holistic manner and be guided by the people, we will come upon cultural brokering. There is such a divide between the system and the people. It's a universal concept if we're guided by the people." - Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-Op

"A mentor could be a broker. Any kind of mentorship program that serves immigrant/refugee or indigenous youth really needs to recognize power and privilege differences. It's really tough for a racialized youth who might have an accent to have a mentor who doesn't understand the implications of those identities. That can be problematic because a lot of the challenges that refugee and immigrant youth face – the values of role models, and understanding that journey – the training needs to be done really different. The fear is that you'll get a group of well-meaning, well-intentioned people who are focused on helping people become more Canadian, without recognizing the importance of giving youth a full grounding in their own culture – which is what all the studies show they need for successful psycho-social development. They have to have a foot firmly planted in both worlds. It's a different type of mentorship; it's strength based. In some ways it's good if you want to keep them connected and build social capital in their community, but you can't discount their previous experience and focus on what they can do here without having them build on where they come from." - Roxanne Felix-Mah, The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research

"Just from our own observation, the most successful mentors in general are youth from the same community that the youth come from, who are implicitly practicing the role of cultural broker. If they're not from the community, then they need to learn very fast… become fluent in the reality of the youth, make sure there is no power imbalance, become egalitarian, be very humble, very clear about power disparity." - Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-Op

Using Technology to Facilitate Mentoring
The only consensus about the use of technology was that the youth are using it. Some key informants had strong opinions about the importance of staff and mentors using social networking to go where the youth are. Others had clear guidance about setting boundaries. No one had direct experience with using technology to facilitate mentoring conversations when the mentor and youth lived far apart from one another.

"All of our kids are on online. They are in constant communication with each other. They make use of that as a resource. The service system is light years behind the kids. We need cyber workers out there with the kids online. It's where they are and where they're networked. Things like Facebook are life saving. When they are suicidal they put a post on Facebook and 10 peers respond while you and I are sleeping. One youth was robbed and within an hour another friend had stepped in with a TV. When they need food or a bus pass, it's negotiated online. You see it a lot when domestic violence happens. One kid says 'He hit me,' and other kids come in and say 'That shouldn't happen' and here are services that you can access. We have to unburden staff, not be limited by our fear about liability. We have to get into the space where they live – they are there 24/7. They got me online. They maintain their access to me through my online presence. That is their world and if we want to engage with them, we have to go into their world. It's a risk in leaving them online alone." – Kim Snow, Ryerson University

"We have program Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp accounts. And we'll reach out to them through social media and then help them get in touch with the mentor. Mentors and mentees are not allowed to communicate on social media because a lot of youth are involved in variations of lifestyles. We had situations in the past where youth would post things and the mentor would not know what to do about

them. Posting guns, or serious drug use for instance. So then the mentor would be friends with someone who put a photo of a gun on Facebook. And similarly, what if the mentor got super drunk and a photo was on FB and the mentee saw it? There's such a lack of trust at the beginning of these relationships, that it's better to limit the number of things that can go wrong. We want to make it so that nothing can go wrong. The mentors [tell the youth] that they would love to be Facebook friends, but that StepStones doesn't allow it. The mentors do have a Facebook group where they can connect, and the youth have their own group." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

"NewYouth.ca is unique in the world. But online is where the youth are. They have smart phones and are very connected. It's important to have online event planning. We label ourselves as the online community for newcomer youth. They help each other through their settlement process. We post events on our Twitter account. Facebook isn't the best, because it seems a little more personal. But for their settlement needs, they go to the website discussion forum or Twitter." - Jai Sahak, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

"One of the things that has transformed our work is texting. If the youth has access to a phone with texting, that is the best way to find the youth. Facebook is also a great way to keep in touch. We have a closed page that is monitored by one of our staff. She posts info and events. We also saw that we posted something about a youth who was missing, asking for them to contact us, and the reach of Facebook was quite extensive. And even if they don't have a phone, they can go to a library and use a computer to message us through Facebook. When we ask them the best way to get in touch with them, they will tell us the technology that they prefer." – Dawn Flegel, Sarnia-Lampton CAS

Serving LGBTQ Youth

1. We know that LGBTQ[+] youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system and may require some special support in a mentoring program. What can you tell me about the population of LGBTQ[+] youth who are in care? What are the circumstances that bring these youth to be in care?

"We don't have any good stats in the child welfare sector around those questions... Some come into care because the family has rejected their identity, and some of the kids are in care already and come out or are exploring their identity. We draw on some research from the Family Acceptance Project. One thing that they found is that we get cases about parent-teen conflict, and the youth is afraid to come out to the worker and are talking more generally about the conflict, but not expressing that it's about their identity or how they express their gender. The parents feel ashamed of the youth, or may be afraid the worker will blame them, or may be afraid the child will be pulled into care, so the parent doesn't tell the worker what's really going on either. So the worker ends up spinning their wheels because they can't really find out what's going on. The important thing is to build relationships where there is some safety for the youth and the family to be able to talk about it." – Lorraine Gale, Toronto CAS

"We don't have any data about how many youth come into care out of family conflict, but we know it's happening. We find out after they are in care and when they are in a safe environment where they can disclose. In the last two to three years, we have focused on those youth and started working with a community partner to create that environment. We partner with them to run a program called Spectrum, which is a safe space for them to meet in a group and find some support." – Dawn Flegel, Sarnia-Lampton CAS

"Most are not in care because they are LGBT. It's just an added challenge once they end up in care. It may be a little harder for them to find a supportive home. They end up coping by doing drugs. They have

complex needs. I can think of one youth who ended up in care because his parents adopted him, he came out later, and he had many challenges – fetal alcohol syndrome - and the parents couldn't cope with him and so they put him in a group home." - Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth

2. What are some of the barriers and challenges that you have encountered in trying to provide mentoring to LGBTQ⁺ youth?

"We are still really learning about working with this population. It's a lot different in smaller cities like Sarnia, because we don't have many existing spaces and supports. In smaller cities and towns, there is less awareness, and it can feel very unsafe for them because there is not the same level of openness. We struggle with the public homophobic comments being made to them or about them. We have worked with an anti-oppression consultant to work with some of our other service providers. It tends to be the youth and younger population that tends to be more accepting." – Dawn Flegel, Sarnia-Lampton CAS

"It's hard to find a mentor pool. We have many more trans youths than trans mentors. Youth are definitely looking for someone who shares their identity. And the more complex needs the youth has the fewer mentors that are available to them. Sometimes I meet a youth and know it's going to be really difficult to find a mentor because they have so many struggles. If they have no other support, it sets the relationship up to fail because the mentor will get overwhelmed. So I often recommend starting the youth with a counsellor. But it's hard to start two relationships at the same time, so I want them to have the counselling relationship for a few months. Then once they start mentoring, the mentor can always recommend that the youth talk with their counsellor about some things. It's important to set up a circle of care, but sometimes youth don't want that. Some youth say they've been in so many systems that they've had it. They don't want a counsellor, or they've had a bad experience with a counsellor. Youth often cope by being very careful about who they share information with. And they don't want their supporters to meet each other because they tell certain people about certain parts of their lives. Many youth have to do a lot of self care, and so they only reach out in crisis and in between they feel like they don't need or want support. Their relationship to support has been fractured. They don't have many good experiences to draw on about what good support can be. YIC a lot of time don't have a lot of choice." - Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth

"There is a lack of understanding of these youth. There isn't adequate training on the staff level. That leads to an intake process that may not be inclusive and accessible to the youth, and that makes it challenging to have a successful mentor matching process. Mentors also need to understand LGBTQ youth and their needs. We're not seeing any of that training being implemented except in some small parts of the country." - Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

3. What are some of the best practices you have found in providing mentoring to LGBTQ⁺ youth? Consider recruitment, screening, training, matching, monitoring and supporting, match closure, collaboration with professional supports and caregivers.

"We have a twelve-hour training. And an interview process is part of that. It's all part of the assessment process. In terms of LGBTQ youth, we talk about a youth who is struggling with identity issues, what to do if the youth comes out, if they are attracted to you, if they are homophobic, if they say derogatory comments. We also do a similar unit for race. Some of the coping techniques are similar, so we look at ableism, sexism, and the whole gamut. How do you respond if you are gay and your mentee says 'That's

so gay.' The bottom line with all of this is that we work with pretty high needs youth and this does happen enough that we have to address it. The idea is that this is a positive space for everyone in our program. The amazing thing is that Youth in Care have this ability to accept others, because they have experienced significant stigma because of their situation, which isn't their fault. We train to be an inclusive environment and we want people to feel included. The youth really get it. The mentors are pretty good at working through those issues with youth." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

"Providing safety and acceptance becomes key. They need a safe space. Staff need to be very conscious of language, and being inclusive. Service providers have to be supportive for kids who are coming out... A lot of work needs to be done for them to feel safe and trusting, to open up." – Kim Snow, Ryerson University

"Reaching out because we can't work in silos anymore. So if it comes to a trans youth looking to be mentored, then we need to extend partnership building to community partners who work in the area so that we can build relationships and share practices and learn from each other. Those agencies can support the training and matching process. There was a successful matching process at the Toronto agency where they matched a trans youth to a trans mentor. That process took a lot of time. They had to partner with a lead agency in the community to understand and support the youth. They had to provide some training outside of the regular process. In the end there were three agencies working together to match this youth." - Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

4. Specifically, how do you match an LGBTQ[+] youth appropriately?

"Does the intake form include categories beyond male and female? Is it inclusive of other identities? Just that little thing can start off the process wrong. Staff need to know to use the right pronouns, especially for transgender youth. They should be inclusive to the way that the youth self identify. Matching is so crucial because if you don't have an understanding of the needs of that youth and how they express themselves, then you won't be sensitive to the needs that a mentor needs to be sensitive and supportive of what the youth is going through and that can even be detrimental to the youth." - Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

"Mentors go through an extensive screening process. We do in home interviews. I meet with the youth and do an intake. The next step is to have a match meeting, where they meet and I facilitate a conversation where they learn from each other and why they want to be in the program. I let them know some of the reasons why the match could work. Shared interests, shared values are even more important, a good combination of both bodes well. I give them a chance to talk for 10-15 minutes. I ask if they want to think about it or if they want to talk about a next step- something they can do in the community. They each let me know separately if they want to continue. If they do, we make a match agreement." - Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth

"We gender match. But we are open to not doing that if the youth request it. We are having conversations with one youth who was interested in a cross-gender match. We generally personality match. We have a fairly involved intake process with mentors. We spend a lot of time on their interests, strengths, triggers, belief systems. What do they believe about being matched with a gay mentee? So we take all of that into consideration. We do scenario based training and role plays, and a lot of those scenarios are about youth who are struggling with their identity or have been subject to homophobic slurs, and we watch their reactions. We have matched gay mentors with gay male youth, but we don't only do that." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

5. What do mentoring programs need to consider for a youth who is coming out or transitioning?

"We train our mentors and staff that this can be a safety issue for the youth. If they have come out to us, it doesn't mean they have come out to everyone. It can be a safety issue within their family. We have a few connections to other agencies, including one that provides a worker that is focused on gender identity, and she will come to where the youth is and talk about anything they want. There is no structure. She'll meet them wherever they want and just talk – coming out, transitioning, medical stuff, haircuts, anything. So rather than refer the youth to a million different programs, we try to bring this individual in to connect with our youth. If they want to get connected to other resources, they can do that. We've had a number of situations where they've only been out with us, and no one else in their lives. We also have role models like the chef who teaches our cooking class, and he's out and talks about his husband. We encourage people to talk openly as role models. It's very normative." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

"We have one youth transitioning. A female transitioning to male. It's been a learning experience for us. We've had a lot of communication between the caseworker, the foster parents, and the youth. We are trying to accommodate the youth's needs. Even though the youth is transitioning to male, he still wanted a female mentor. We have provided some specific support for the mentor. And we have had speakers come to speak to the group as a whole so that the youth who is transitioning would feel comfortable in that setting." – Kim Megyesi, BBBS of Saskatoon

"For youth who are coming out, I think that one of the most valuable supports is the mentor sharing their story and how they got to where they are in their life. That's not a one-time thing. The other big thing is getting to know the community. Often youth who are coming out have heard about Church Street, but have never been there. Mentors will take them for a walk there, go to a café, go to the community center. And now there are LGBT safe spaces all over the city, so they might explore those. A lot of matches also watch LGBT movies to learn their history. Also to connect to peers, so supporting them to get involved with something like a writing group where they will meet peers. There is also a lot of talk about relationships with family and how and when they might come out to family. - Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth

"I don't know how agencies ask the questions around parental involvement and confidentiality. There might be information that youth provides to the agency or a mentor that the parent doesn't know. If the youth is coming out in our process but the parents don't know about this, what is our role as an intermediary? I would hope that we could maintain some confidentiality for that youth. When and how are you going to tell your family?" - Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

"Let's say a worker starts working with a family and they are struggling to accept the young person's identity. If they are linked to a mentor who has an LGBTQ child or is from the LGBTQ community, the mentor may be able to help go into more depth than a work can in helping the family understand what the youth is going through. Certainly they can help support the youth who are usually so marginalized." – Lorraine Gale, Toronto CAS

6. Are there specific challenges facing ethno-cultural LGBTQ[+] youth that a mentoring program should consider?

"We have a number of racialized youth who have come out. Especially in the black community, these youth have faced a lot of homophobic behaviour. I think it's good to expose LGBTQ youth to other people who are similar, but we don't race match. But we do try to expose the youth to people who represent themselves. So we have several racialized male mentors, and they will talk about what it's like to be black and gay in Toronto. One of those mentors really tries to expose his youth to other gay men

who have made it, so that it's not the only thing that defines them. The biggest impact has been seeing other people who are like themselves, how they navigated the system, and how they coped. We had one mentor say that he would never hide that he is gay, and another shared when and why he did. It's just different perspectives, and the kids eat it up. We encourage the mentors to be real, and not to be social worky." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

"We see a lot of newcomer youth here at SOY. They did not grow up in the West. Often they are here from countries where it is illegal to be LGBT. One of the reasons that we extended the age of SOY up to 29 is that if you had to hide who you were for your safety, you have to come out later. So if you come out when you're 24, it's different. One young man said that he knows that it's ok to come out in Canada, but he can't stop looking over his shoulder. Some have a family member who might have supported them, but many of them are really missing the love from their families. Some have a lot of fear that they don't want a mentor from their same ethno-cultural background because they are afraid it will get back to their family, but other youth are very excited to have a mentor who is like them. I've learned to make no assumption about what youth want or need but to listen to what the youth want." - Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth

"The intersectionality between gender/sexual identity and other parts of identity can be profound. If we are only looking at one part of identity, then we are missing really important issues that someone might be dealing with. So we host an annual LGBTQ Black History Event, and it has been growing in popularity because there's a recognition that we have to look at the intersections of identity, but people struggle with knowing how we do that in a way that's really substantive rather than just something on the surface. There are questions that really haven't been answered yet about how we really dig deeper to do that integrative work that looks at intersecting identities. That's newer, cutting edge work that I would like to see developed further. The more we have someone dealing with intersecting identities, it can compound in layers of identities and related layering barriers. It can be pretty overwhelming at times, and at the same time I see incredible resourcefulness, strength and talent within the communities that isn't being sufficiently tapped." – Lorraine Gale, Toronto CAS

7. Do you have any specific guidance about the role that mentors should play as supports during times of transition to independence for LGBTQ[+] youth in care? How can this role be enhanced?

"It's really important that it be handled case-by-case. It's important that we look at what are their needs, and then how can the mentor help support those needs. There are lots of needs that kids have in transitioning to independence. There is some support needed in how to manage living in a group home as opposed to a foster care home. How can the mentor support that?" – Kim Megyesi, BBBS of Saskatoon

"I think they need support beyond their mentor for that. Needs are very great when you're suddenly without that support. Ideally there is a program so that the onus isn't on the mentor. Ideally the mentor is talking with staff and working collaboratively to address all of the needs that the youth have." - Leslie Chudnovsky, Supporting Our Youth

"If it's an LGBTQ youth in care, you're likely looking at a youth in care who is isolated even further in the system. They are likely not attached to a specific community. So their isolation is compounded as not part of a community and not part of the mainstream. So I would hope that a mentor could provide some type of stability, helping them have a confidant, and to help build self-esteem – so that they can look at the system and how they want to improve their lives and what they want to achieve. It's an organic process to further empower the youth." - Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

"There are a few pieces that are really important for LGBTQ young people. One of them is finding community, people on the diversity spectrum who are in similar places to where they are. Also, engaging in conversations around identity. Is there some internalized homophobia? It can be useful for them to have a talk with someone from the community about that. Just talking about some of the stereotypes of intersecting identities, like am I supposed to be submissive because I'm an Asian Gay Male? If someone is trans in particular, there's always lots of support needed around transition. Making sure they have information and resources, particularly in medical supports for helping them transition, if they are interested in that – some folks are and some aren't." – Lorraine Gale, Toronto CAS

Serving Ethno-Cultural Youth

8. What are some of the barriers and challenges that you have encountered in trying to provide mentoring to ethno-cultural youth?

"The initial experience that newcomer families have with CAS is a lack of trust. They see CAS as stepping on their toes when it comes to parenting. They don't understand. It's a cultural challenge. They have an idea of how they should parent, and the outside agency is intrusive. In the city of Toronto, we have public health workers that go into homes to help educate new parents, and the feedback from that is very similar… 'Don't tell me how to raise my child.' But the public health workers have seen that some of the things that newcomer families do are not the best. Some of the best practices for child development may be foreign ideas to the families.

"Two years ago I did a report for the UN on Roma youth in Ontario. The families had come to Canada with children, made a refugee claim, but were not sending their children to school because they didn't feel safe. In turn, CAS took away their children. Then the parents would get deported because they lost their refugee claim. The children remained in custody after the parents got deported. It's things like that which messes up the trust. There aren't always numbers, but the stories are out there in the community. Even without proof, it doesn't change the fact that the stories are out there.

"I find that with Newcomer youth, they have a lot of responsibilities. If you have a program with 15-16 year olds, you'll find that they have more responsibilities than the normal teenager. He may be expected to be the babysitter, the interpreter, or to have a part-time job. It's a challenge to get them involved, but there is nothing you can do because that is the role they have in their home. If the parent needs to go to the doctor, they have to go with them. So just general participation is a challenge." - Jai Sahak, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

"Many families share with us that even back in their home country or in the refugee camp, they heard that the Canadian government loves children so much that they might even take them away from families. So there is a lot of fear about the system. Many of these families live in chronic poverty, and that leads to interactions with the child welfare system. For instance, the family is fighting because of stressors, or they are using parenting techniques that the school is not supportive. The families that interact with us are usually very fearful or angry. If the child welfare system contacts us first, we reach out early to help find out what is happening in the family. If we find there are no child protection issues, we divert them out and try to help broker for other supports. Once children do enter the system, they do tend to stay in for a long time because they have a hard time telling if there are really child protection issues. In the last eight years, we shifted the fear and anger, and now some families even reach out to child welfare when they are vulnerable. And we're helping Child Welfare consider what type of outreach and communication they can provide. To help families understand under what

circumstances might they be a concern, and how to prevent problems." - Yvonne Chiu, Muticultural Health Brokers Co-Op

"In general, we know that for newcomer youth, one on one mentoring is not something the population is familiar with or comfortable with. The idea of mentoring usually exists as something that happens organically in a large extended family. In introducing a mentoring relationship, it raises eyebrows. Group mentoring is more successful, especially when it's tied to school. It's easier to introduce because it's seen as an extension of the school. Homework help or something related to academic success is more comfortable for families. And they already have some trust in schools. The group mentoring is focused on building relationships and reducing social isolation in the school. It's to build familiarity and community within the school. There's a lot of energy put into understanding how to build community and become Canadian. All while learning English in a non-judgmental environment. Newcomer youth themselves are quicker to choose a school intervention as opposed to another agency that offers the same service (like a settlement). They identify with other newcomers. In some qualitative interviews, it came out that they so enjoy meeting youth from other cultures and where they came from it might not have been so diverse. They loved the mixing of culture. The other theme was that they have two sides of themselves. School is English, western pop culture, hanging with peers. At home they speak their mother tongue, the food and culture are those of their family. They are very conscious of that." - Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

"There was recently a meeting with a bunch of folk talking about how to extend mentoring resources to all of the Syrian refugees coming into Alberta. This is not a new thing for us, but what struck me at this meeting was that there was no one there from the Muslim or Syrian background at all. What I understand is that it's so important to work through those communities themselves. Sometimes we jump in to help, well meaning. But there is so much to learn about relationships within their culture, such as connecting with the opposites sex. We haven't learned from what we know about cultural differences. How do you work through the community, rather than assuming that your current approach will automatically work. Which cultural group will adhere to this model? We know ours does, but we can't assume that others do? If it's difficult to recruit mentors from those backgrounds, what else can you do to connect with that community? Is there family-type mentoring? Is there a family base where the adults involved may be seen as a safer, more welcoming approach rather than a situation with a teen mentoring a younger child?" - Robyn Blackadar, The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research

"A lot of mentor programs in a western culture are permission-safety driven. It's all in written contracts and agreements. In non-western cultures a lot of time the written word is not important. They'll never sign the papers until they've met you in person. Even then they may not sign it, because singing something isn't currency. It requires an immense amount of creativity to figure out how to build those relationships." - Roxanne Felix-Mah, The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research

9. What are some of the best practices you have found in providing mentoring to ethno-cultural youth? Consider recruitment, screening, training, matching, monitoring and supporting, match closure, collaboration with professional supports and caregivers.

"We have an indigenous working group with the local Friendship Centre. It's all about relationships and learning about the different communities, and what their families and youth might need. We don't do

anything for their youth or their families without consulting with them – both on an individual level and a systemic level. So that's a huge issue in planning for services.

"You might have a particular youth who is struggling, and we might go to the Nation and speak about that particular youth. Versus a systemic question where we talk with them to say that we have five youth in care from your community who are aging out of care, and how can your community help to support them as they transition.

"Some communities may be interested in putting forth their own mentors to work with a local organization. They may have elders who will step forward. Partnering with the Friendship Centre would be a great place to recruit volunteers to support indigenous youth. Their identity is so important, so having someone with lived experience would be important to them." – Dawn Flegel, Sarnia-Lampton CAS

"There can be a little bit of a learning curve, but having someone with real experience with aboriginal children and youth and how they approach things. The mentors don't have to have that coming in, but there have to be supports around that. They need training on cultural competency, what's important within the aboriginal culture, how they approach things, how they make decisions. Understanding the barriers that underrepresented groups face." – Kim Megyesi, BBBS of Saskatoon

"Children have a right to maintain their cultural identity. We help develop training for foster parents and staff to understand each youth's desire to maintain their cultural identity, and how foster parents and workers can support that. We have designed some very simple, participatory games. So that both the mentor or foster parent and the youth are exploring what brings them a sense of identity, comfort, and safety. What type of spiritual practice, daily food, being cared for. We are cultural beings ourselves, so we should be sharing those stories with the youth. How do we pursue those things in our lives, in our homes. But the process should be guided by the youth. What are they yearning for?" - Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-Op

10. What role can mentors play as advocates for ethno-cultural youth in care?

"I think they can play a huge role if they have the relationship. The youth may be talking about issues that they can help bring forward. They can help the youth with self-advocacy. They are outside of the system and will see things that we won't. I would view it as an asset, a positive tension. We probably need more of that." – Dawn Flegel, Sarnia-Lampton CAS

"Everything. That's their shtick. We have a strengths-based approach and emphasize unconditional support. No matter what happens, you're behind that kid 100%. For instance we have a youth who is aggressive and has been kicked out of housing, so his mentor is trying to get him back in to a house. Getting back into school. Going to court. Writing letters to help get jobs. Some mentors get on the school's parent council. We've even had situations where the mentor has had to support the youth in working with the CAS worker. It's complicated because the worker has control, but it's important to advocate on their behalf. We've advocated in the courts around custody. For instance, if the youth is pregnant and immediately there's a child protection concern – whether there is a real risk or not." - Heather O'Keefe, StepStones for Youth

"I'm a strong believer in the 'with' and equipping youth to become their own best advocates. The more we can stand beside and help them negotiate their own needs, the better off they will be in the long run. I don't think the mentor should come in to play the role as advocate. They're better positioned to stand with a youth than to take that over. It's easy for caring people who want to help to speak <u>for</u>. It's

particularly important for kids in care to have someone who stands <u>with</u> them." – Kim Snow, Ryerson University

"Volunteers are usually strong advocates. Your volunteer coordinator is your sounding block for volunteers. I have a lot of matches where mentors have become part time family. We've had some really good experiences with volunteers being involved through placement changes and worker changes. Often the volunteer has a lot of the information about the kid. Attending plan of care meetings can be helpful, but sometimes the mentor is not informed." – Lori Gibbard, Toronto CAS

"I think they can play a large advocacy role. You might have a youth who isn't familiar with the rights they have, resources available to them. With a sensitive, educated mentor, they can lead them on the path to find the resources, to find communities that are welcoming and inclusive, and be a real bridge for that process. I wouldn't want to see a mentor doing everything for the youth and leaving the youth not empowered. It's about sharing information and supporting them through the process of wherever the youth wants to go, not dictating the process even if it's well intentioned." - Nooreen Pribhai, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

"I've heard about some work with homeless youth, questioning whether the only client is the youth – advocating for the youth without taking into consideration the context of the family. Traditionally, the norm has been to take the side of the youth and that's it. A lot of the brokers that I talk to, that comes up a lot because some of the relationships with family or even other members of the community can help or hinder progress in other areas. One of the things that I've noticed in ethno-cultural communities is that this conflicts with the professional practice of confidentiality. In Western practice, you have an agreement with that individual and don't share with anyone else. But some of the practices that we've seen that work are when you have a team working with a family - an older person working with the parents and a younger person working with the youth. The team trying to help find solutions for that family. In some cultures, if you side with the youth completely the family will shut you out. What's more important… that the family has a resource or that the youth trusts you? With ethno-cultural families, sometimes you have to redefine the concept of the practice. You have to look at what are the principles that matter in this context, knowing that isolation and poverty pay a big part for immigrant families. It's similar to working with native populations – it has to be a major shift rather than cultural sensitivity." - Roxanne Felix-Mah, The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research

Additional Resource

Key informant Leslie Chudnovsky and Dr. Christian RUmmell, of the American Institutes for Research, presented a webinar on "Including and Welcoming LGBTQ Youth in Mentoring Programs" in May 2015. The webinar and additional resources are archived here:

http://www.mentoring.org/program-resources/collaborative-mentoring-webinar-series/#1443187821871-eed6408b-ff6f

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Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

Youth In Care: Youth Focus Group Interviews

"Mentoring is when you have someone to look up to and talk to and always be there to mentor and guide you through all your troubles." (Group 6)

"When I did go out with [my mentor], even just to the movies, I learned love. … I learned compassion. I learned that people are safe. I learned that a lot of people are nice, I learned like a lot of tangible life skills that I don't think that I would have learned." (Group 1)

Overview

To respond to a request from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is working on a report to the Ministry on how to best provide mentoring support to Youth in Care. While there is some existing research and literature on best practices for mentoring youth in care, BBBS felt there was a need to increase the knowledge base. Thus, BBBS set out to collect perspectives and insights directly from young people who had been or are currently in care about their mentoring experiences, and about considerations for better supporting youth in care through mentoring.

Process

BBBS contracted Carleen Joseph, a former youth-in-care and Board President of the non-profit Youth in Care Canada, to conduct interviews with youth. Joseph conducted 9 group interviews, and 3 individual interviews, all with youth presently in care or previously in care. The group interviews functioned as focus groups, each with approximately 12 participants with an age range of 14-30 years. Each focus group had a duration of about 45-55 minutes, and involved Joseph as the sole interviewer. The sessions were recorded, with participants in a round table format, and later transcribed for ease of reference in composing this report.

This report was compiled by Graig Meyer of The Equity Collaborative with assistance from Mawiyah Patten. The report seeks to organize the content of the interviews into various categories. Some categories reflect areas of consensus among the youth interviewed in which the young people seemed to have similar opinions or experiences; for instance, the necessary qualities in a mentor. Other categories are thematic but heterogeneous, and summarize a diverse array of comments and perspectives that youth shared on a particular topic.

Necessary Qualities in a Mentor

The youth in care interviewed named the following as important qualities to have in a mentor.

Inspiration, motivation, positivity

Several youth described similar desires for a mentor who could bring inspiration, motivation, or positivity to the mentoring relationship. Various youth described this lens of positivity as helpful when directed toward challenges in their care environment, academic or vocational goals, or the youth's sense of identity.

"They were just sorta that person where, if my self esteem was low, they could give me a boost … Like a shot of self esteem, and then she'd send me back out in the world again, and when my self esteem was low again, I'd come back." (Group 2)

"Be supportive, and friendly and optimistic and sometimes hopeful, although I get it that not everybody or every situation can be optimistic." (Youth 2)

Passion and emotional investment

Many youth were quick to name passion as an essential quality of a good mentor. Interpretations of what passion looks like included an emotional investment in their mentee.

"The number one quality … to be an excellent mentor is passion. Like that passion has to be directed in the right way, but ultimately, you have to have that emotional investment in your work to want to see it through to the end." (Group 1)

Another youth underlined the importance of a mentor's primary motivation for their work.

"They've got to be really invested in you, not just doing it to make themselves look good … I'm helping these kids that have problems … No. You're actually doing it because you want to help this other person." (Group 2)

Truth telling

In balance with a desire for a mentor who is positive and inspirational, some youth also desired that their mentor be "realistic" (Group 1) about potential accomplishments, and be honest, even if that meant sharing difficult truths.

"A lot of the time, your friends don't want to tell you the hard truth. They kind of just want to please you, and tell you the things that they know that you want to hear. A mentor is more like a [guide], or like since you look up to [them], … they're not going to just let you hear whatever you just want to hear. They're going to tell you the truth, they're going to make sure that you're not just sitting around daydreaming. They're going to make sure you know the reality of what's going on." (Group 3)

"Kinda like a cold hard truth; 'this is what's going on - this is what's best for you. … I'm not going to hide it from you, I'm not going to beat around the bush.'" (Group 6)

"Let's say you did something wrong … they give you constructive criticism or [try] to help you through it." (Group 7)

Role Model in Tough Times

"Mentors also serve as a role model, someone that you can look up to. I know for me, having a mentor in my home, where I live, is like a really big thing for me, 'cause I never really had anyone to look up to growing up, so what she does is she offers a lot of support and a lot of advice, and like just helps me throughout my tough times." (Group 6)

"A mentor is someone that you look up to more. Like you could look up to your foster parents, or your family, or your friends, but you're not going to look up to every single one of those people. A mentor is going to specifically be a role model." (Group 4)

"Definitely someone who's kind and willing to help out, so not like when things are going well for you, but when they're going a little bit rough. Somebody who's not afraid to be there when times are tough." (Youth 3)

Humble and teachable

While acknowledging that a mentor ought to be a capable adult who can serve as a role model, youth also emphasized the need for a mentor to be humble and teachable.

"The one thing I really appreciated about the mentors that I have now, and in the past is that they were teachable, they were people who were willing to learn more, willing to accept that their perspective wasn't the only one." (Group 1)

Providing structure and guidance vs. fostering independence and confidence

In focus groups 1 and 2, the tension between offering guidance and promoting independence came up as a mentor quality that is more challenging to hold in balance.

"You need some kinda structure. 'Cause when you enter into care, some people have no idea what it's about." The participant continues on to explain the need for youth to learn on their own: "You have that person kinda like following along with you, letting you make your mistakes, but still letting you know what kinda mistakes you're making. And how to better improve yourself." (Group 1)

"They're there to actually help YOU do the things that you wanted because they're there as your mentor, whereas with [other] adults around, [there are] the unrealistic expectations of you that they always have." (Group 1)

"For some people, fostering independence is really critical. … I think everyone's different. I think for me, I had one mentor that was very hands on—she wanted to do things for me—whereas the other mentor was very much the opposite. He really wanted to foster independence and self-confidence." (Group 2)

Various Mentorship Structures

The youth who were interviewed had experienced mentorship in a variety of different structures. Some were through formal programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters; others were adults in a natural role of authority, such as a sports coach, teacher, or social worker; and others were family members, biological or otherwise.

Formal programs

Some described a greater level of commitment or investment within adults who choose to participate in structured mentorship programs.

"Mentors have more of a sense of duty to their work because they're the ones that have [formally] agreed to do this for you. They're vested in your success." (Group 1)

Another participant added the following.

"And it's not an obligation. So it's like a passion to help." (Group 1)

However, there were some negative limitations that result from that structure.

"The people that are there as mentors, they're really dedicated and passionate, but because our society doesn't see mentorship as something that is needed or something that is as important as other things, there's not a lot of funding, so a lot of times these mentors are very restricted [in the activities] they're actually able to do with you. " (Group 1)

Another youth commented about a potential challenge in pairing mentors to mentees.

"I find that it's always a barrier, … the person it's always hard to get a mentor for. " (Group 1)

On a practical note, structured mentorship is not an option for every youth in care.

"Not every agency's the same, not every youth that is in care gets to experience the same type of opportunities to be able to have those mentorships. Like for example, some agencies automatically send you to a program like Big Brothers Big Sisters or a community center for regular programs when there is a mentor, where other agencies, they don't have that at all. " (Group 1)

Family members in mentor roles

"My mentor after my father passed away was … my older brother. After my father passed away very suddenly he was the one that took a lot of the responsibilities of being the father figure in my life … really putting his needs second to mine, and making sure that I had someone that I could look up to. Someone that I could consider a role model in my life, and someone I could count on to be my rock and to be my support especially in the time of need and especially in time of crisis." (Group 1)

"[My mentor] would be my aunt. She's a small business owner, and throughout my life, she's been there to help guide me through many a hard [time]. And she's just dedicated to making my life better." (Group 1)

"I have an aunt too who I lived with until two years ago when I finally moved out on my own for school … My mother passed away at a young age, and since then I always spent like most of my summers over there, and she really took me under her wing, even though she already had two kids, and she's really the one who built me up to being the man I am today." (Group 1)

In a group interview with First Nations youth, they discussed the role of elders as mentors.

"Grandmothers, elders themselves, are teachers. They're older, and they have more knowledge, and they've been through a lot more experiences and can teach younger ones -- future generations." (Group 9)

Other influential adults

"I had a teacher in my life when I was in high school who was there for me through my ups and downs of it all, whether it was dealing with things at home, transitioning back from care to home to care and all the bumps up and down. This teacher accepted me into his family, and I refer to him affectionately as 'Dad,' and his wife is 'mom,' and his children are my brothers, and he's helped to aid me financially, whether it was [that] I was down on my luck or he would go up to me grocery shopping once a week when I first started living on my own to get me into the routine of it all." (Group 2)

"My foster mom that I've been with for almost 6 years now. … She's proved to me that she is my family now, even though I do get to see my [biological] mom whenever I can, when she's not working. And my foster mom has helped me to get through my high school, and get through my college, and [raising] my little one. She's always been there, supporting me, helping me with my homework -- getting through school. I've gone to school every day since then." (Group 7)

Peers as mentors

"My mentor … was someone my age. He was 2 or 3 years older than me- he was also in the care system, and so he could relate. And it was at a time I was going through university, and trying to figure out, you know, if I liked the program. … It was good because he was there; he was in my life and he was there consistently, and I still talk to him today, and I think having that consistency is someone who has been where you have been." (Group 2)

"I have a new foster sister who lives with me, and she's the same age as me. She's gone through the same sorta stuff- and I'm trying to mentor her to help her out so then she doesn't have to go through the same stuff and have to deal with the same stuff as the time when I came into care …" (Group 1)

"It's difficult when you first come into care, so to talk to someone who's been in care for a while -- they can explain what's going to happen, and like what you can expect to happen, the options that are going to arise in the future. And, um. A lot of youth when they first come into care, they see it as a negative thing, and if they spoke to someone more experienced, they could see like the benefits of it, and help them in the future, and what the Children's Aid Society can actually do for them, and why they're actually doing this for them." (Group 3)

Uniqueness of Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Several participants talked about the mentor's role as a confidante, a trusted person in whom they can confide. Yet participants also were emphatic that mentorship entailed more than confidential sharing. The youth who were interviewed described the following unique aspects of the mentoring relationship.

Mentor as confidante

One youth described the opportunity to confide in a mentor as unique from confiding in other adults in their life, such as social workers. The uniqueness lies in having the freedom to share openly with limited fear of negative repercussions, and without an intention to offer solutions.

"That's where a mentor would come in handy. As well as the ability to openly and confidently and in confidence, talk to the person – say, 'this is how I'm feeling.' Because there aren't a lot of people in my life today who I feel that I can go to and say 'I'm feeling this way' because each one of those people would have to report what I said to them, under the obligation to, um ... a board, or to an employer. Or

would feel concerned that they would want to intervene, when sometimes all you need is someone to sit there and say 'I understand,' or 'I understand that.' Or whatever. You don't need somebody to jump in and fix it, because sometimes, some situations cannot be fixed." (Youth 2)

"Someone who's non judgmental, like if you make a mistake, rather than preaching at you, they help you get through that stay, or getting you through those barriers- it's just like a friend- someone who's always there for you, and supporting you when you need it. There's a correlation between a best friend and a mentor, I think." (Group 5)

Mentor places complete focus on mentee

To some youth, the mentor is the only person in their life who is one hundred percent focused on them and their desires. This is in contrast to a social worker that has other job responsibilities related to the youth's care or a family member who may have their own desires for the youth's future.

"I think a mentor really supports you and your dreams, and your beliefs, whereas with family, the lines can be blurred between what you want, and what it is that your family wants from you, so it's nice to have somebody who isn't in it for themselves, they're in it for you." (Group 7)

"I see a mentor as someone who really listens. Who's really attentive to the details and to the situation that's going on, and is able to provide that [stability] to go along with it. … [The] main role of a mentor is to be able to listen … and to be able to provide that safe space to allow you to grow and explore." (Group 1)

For one youth this attentiveness was evident in the care her mentor took in suggesting activities.

"I had a Big sister, and her name was Kiki, and she genuinely took the time to understand my situation, and what was going on, so she would say, 'I know you like parks, so let's go to the park right now,' or 'let's go to the park later,' or 'let's grab ice cream,' because I love ice cream. Yeah, or favorite board games that I liked to play." (Group 6)

"And somebody who's not afraid to take a step over the red tape, 'cause a lot of people in this service, like this industry, like CYC's and SSWs, there's a lot of boundaries, and ethics, and blah blah blah, but if you learn how to navigate your job, you can make extreme change for youth. It's not always about 9 to 5, call me on this phone from 9 to 5, or you can't contact me at all. Somebody who's willing to take those extra little nooks, those extra steps, and is not so, uh, I can't do that, 'cause it said that, you know what I mean?" (Group 5)

Ability to support mentee in pursuit of their goals

Another thing that differentiated a mentor from a friend, or from other adults, was the mentor's purpose of and ability to support the mentee in pursuing their goals.

"At the end of the day, if you're going to be a mentor, you have to be able to help, support and lead someone to their goal." (Group 1)

Mentors are different from friends or peers in that they have the ability to offer advice, and they are people whom young people can learn from.

"My mentor was my foster mom. If I needed something, [if] I needed to talk about something that I couldn't talk about to my good friend, I'd go to her, and ask her advice. Why? Because she has the

experience, she's a lot older than me; she has the advice, she's done it. Right? A friend is … you're kinda in the same boat." (Group 6)

"Mentors are not just anyone. They're people who you trust in your heart. … If you're not able to learn from who that person is, then that person's not your mentor, that person's your friend." (Group 2)

Mentors also have the special ability to affirm mentees' potential and celebrate successes, even the small ones.

"Someone who walks the talk, has lived the experience, and has the ability to see my potential and pull that potential out of me. When I'm not able to do it myself, or not able to see it." (Group 5)

"And really appreciate no matter how big you are, how small you steps you make in life are. A mentor will appreciate every single thing- they know you- a mentor knows you, so what's success for one person, might not be a success for another person. What to be able to honor those little successes, how big and how small they are, where as other people in your life, they might be like 'Oh you got a job here, that's not even a big deal.' But it could be a big deal for you. A mentor will hone in on that. They'll appreciate it, expand on it, really honor it." (Group 5)

Insight into the youth's experience

One youth suggested that mentor's ought to have insight and understanding of the foster care experience.

"A mentor has a specific experience dealing with a specific situation, typically. In this case, foster care, I'm hopeful that they would be a foster kid, or work within something that is foster care. So in this case, maybe a social worker- a student studying within a university to become a social worker, or some type of background that would be of confidence, bring ability to the role that they were about to take on." (Youth 2)

Gains of Having a Mentor

The purpose of this study was to focus on the unique aspects of mentorship for youth in care, and youth were asked to comment directly on this subject. Specifically, youth were asked why mentorship was important, and why it was especially beneficial for youth in care.

Stability

Many youths stated that instability becomes a certainty for youth in care. They come to expect to move from one foster home to another, from group home to group home, and from social worker to social worker. Youth in care have a desire and a need for stability, no matter the source, and for consistency in some area of their lives. The youth interviewed described stability expressing itself in the following ways.

Surrogate family

"When it gets right down to it, we need someone that we can view as family, because there's a – there's a good chance that we won't be able to connect with our foster siblings. I've seen that happen quite a few times. And one of the reasons that we may be in foster care is that perhaps we've lost our families- or they want nothing to do with us… for whatever reason; there's a very decent chance that we don't

have someone that we can turn to that we can view as a sibling or someone as close as that. So we need a surrogate family, or at least a surrogate family member. Someone that we can confide pretty much anything to." (Group 1)

"Especially in the case of youth in care- they don't have [stability], they don't have that level structure … a mentor becomes [that much more] important because they provide that level of trust and level foundation that [typically] comes with the family." (Group 1)

"Some people in care don't have families that they can got to, so it's someone that they can trust and confide in." (Group 4)

Stability amongst chaos

Youth in care often experience tumultuous and chaotic home environments. One youth described the need for stability in the midst of chaos.

"When you're going into care, that's not exactly an easy period to go through. It's a period of lots of stress and a lot of turmoil. And having someone to anchor you down, and find some local support - I think that's the most important thing… A mentor really provides that stability, … so they don't feel like they're drifting the entire time." (Group 1)

"[A mentor] is also someone who can give you balance. So for example, maybe you've been going through a rough time, or anything, and you don't really know anyone to talk to. Probably your mentor could be one great valid point… for how to deal with it, and then you can figure out your priorities and balance them out according to the guidance that your mentor has provided you." (Group 2)

Consistency amongst change

Similarly, having a mentor as a constant presence, when other individuals in a youth's life are coming and going, can be important.

"So like having a constant person. Because when you're in care, sometimes you might keep moving and moving and moving, and living with some people that you might really want to move out from really quickly 'cause you don't like them. Just having that constant person there [that] you can always talk to and, like, have by your side, so that while everything around you keeps changing, you still have one thing that's the same." (Group 6)

"When you're in foster care, there's an end to EVERYthING [youth emphasis]. You have a great counselor; you only have her for 15 weeks. … I was fortunate and lucky enough to have the same social worker for 14 years, but my sister … she has like 8 social workers, she has not been able to build a relationship with anybody. Um, whatever type of mentor it is, it has to be ongoing. The issue lies within the fact that there's no budget for that, and then there's too many kids, and they have to make time, and on and on…" (Group 5)

Transitions

When asked when are the key points during their lives that they have needed a mentor, many youth referred to the periods of time when they first came into care, and when they aged out of care.

"When I first came into care, I was really attached to my mom. So it would have been helpful, because I didn't actually come into care right away, so it would have been helpful because I was struggling a lot with the idea of being in care. 'Cause I had heard really bad stories about it, and just giving me an idea of what it really was instead of worrying about it, and then having to experience it for myself. A mentor would have been helpful even to say that it's going to be fine, or not even like that -- it's not going to be that bad." (Group 4)

"Yeah, I think having someone just before … you turn 18, … like when you're 17. Because I was 17 when I was cut off, on my 17th birthday because I had a late birthday. I know for me, because I was moving to Toronto to go to school, so they told me that I had to go to CCSY, the continued care support … just having someone explain what the process is going to be like. Luckily, I had my foster parents to help me, and they helped me through it. But a lot of people aren't as fortunate; they don't have great families or foster parents who would help them through the process with you." (Group 4)

"I would say 16, 18, and 21, I believe at 16, that's when you're legally able to sign yourself out of CAS, 18 is when you're no longer a former crown ward, and you start BCM and 21 is when you stop receiving BCM. And I remember particularly at 21, when I stopped receiving BCM, and I went back to see this "graduation from care" whatever business, and they gave me this little gift package, and they gave me a cookbook. And that was literally it. Now, in terms of navigating, and transitioning, and navigating systems, um, because of the relationship that I had with my previous worker, that's really been the only- the key source of support, in terms of mentorship, etc. In the context of the child welfare system that I've had, so I think those three time periods" (Group 5)

"I think it's harder for youth and kids in care to find a mentor separate from the system, especially when you get older. 'Cause then you've aged out of care, especially when you've turned 21. You don't really have as many supports as when you were in care. Like all of the supports that you kinda had are gone. And it's hard especially to find someone outside of the system, because not everyone always has the family, or not everyone always has the friends someone can go to. Or a really good support system. Which is why a lot of kids in care don't actually grow up, you know, going to school, getting an education. Or like it's harder for them because they don't have the support system that a lot of the general population has." (Group 4)

Exposure to different environments and activities

Some youth talked about the restrictive environment that foster homes and group homes may provide. These environments limit youth's exposure to various activities and environments.

"The majority of the time, [youth in care] don't actually get exposed to the world. Sounds weird, but… They're confined to doing chores, or being in the household constricted to curfew, just going to school, and that's it." (Group 1)

For youth in mentoring relationships, the mentor provides a link for them to connect with new environments.

"I went away for a weekend with her actually … and it was like really really great. I got to hang out with her daughter, and the fact that I was trusted to be at her house, and I got to make my own meals, and to play with the toys and to do things that I normally would be watched so closely on." (Group 1)

"They open you up to a new world, they inspire you to be a better person, or they show you that you don't live the way you're currently living." (Group 1)

"[My] big sister would bring me on trips, which was like unheard of, because like my foster parents didn't ever buy me like a single thing, so when she'd bring me along on trips, I was like 'why is she doing this for me?' [She] taught me how to cook, … healthy food; really got me into fitness and exercise. And I think that all of those things are kinda my passions and what I do now." (Group 2)

Longevity of relationship

Some youth had the opportunity to maintain their relationship with their mentor, either formally or informally, after they had aged out of care. This was a significant, positive benefit for those youth.

"I just wanted to … repeat something about the consistency. My one big sister, I didn't really talk to her for like three years, but when I went back to her, it was like nothing had changed. … I think a mentor is like, … it's forever. You can always call on that person- no matter the distance … and you feel like family." (Group 2)

Love, compassion, trust

For some youth, the inherent freedom of the mentorship relationship created opportunities for deep connection and emotional learning.

"When I did go out with [my mentor], even just to the movies, I learned love. … I learned compassion. I learned that people are safe. I learned that a lot of people are nice, I learned like a lot of tangible life skills that I don't think that I would have learned. " (Group 1)

"A mentor is showing you true love, love in your heart when you least expect it. Accepting you if you're black or white. Injured or thin, if you're on a deathbed or not. Love is about letting someone know that they [will be] with you till you die. … Not a lot of people get that in life. And that's what it is. It's about someone being there, giving you advice. Giving you that encouragement when you're the weakest. I mean not just any weakest, I mean where you reach the point where you have nothing. I mean, rock bottom. Where you reach the point of suicide, and you try to, but someone has to prevent you and someone's there. That's what a mentor is - it's supposed to give you the greatest love and encouragement." (Group 2)

Areas for improvement or innovation

Desire for greater diversity in mentors

Several youth communicated the need for greater diversity in mentors, with respect to race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other identity facets, as well as diversity in vocation.

Diversity in identities

There were differing perspectives on whether it was important for youth from traditionally marginalized identities (i.e. youth of color or LGBTQ2 youth) to have a mentor who shared that identity. Some felt that it was important to have cultural commonalities with their mentor, especially if they were lacking that connection with their family or foster family.

"For black youth in care, the ratio between workers and black youth? So, the workers, the majority of them are white- to say it blatantly, and like period. And, in terms of guidance, having a mentor that culturally represents us too, I think that's really important. As she was saying, "with our hair," cultural identity, even such things as food, um, skin care, and stuff like that, it's extremely important to have that connection with culture. It's very very big, 'cause that gets lost when you're in the system. You lose it, and to have a mentor to help bring that back- that's important." (Group 5)

"I think it would be cool to have someone from the same culture as you. Because I'm mixed, and I live with my dad's side, my grandmother, and she's white, and my dad's white. But I'm also Somalian. ... I realize that I don't really know about my culture, ... and I'd really like to be able to learn about my culture ... I'd like to know more. ... I'd like to wear some of the things that my mom used to wear, and the food that she used to cook, 'cause that's where my home is." (Group 6)

"For me, a challenge was, particularly when I was in secondary, I started going to LGBTQ2, or queer friendly spaces, when I would go there, I would only see white people. So, for me, when I go to spaces, or access LGBTQ2 resources, I want to see individuals who are of African or Caribbean ancestry, or who identify as black, or self identify as black and are LGBTQ2 identified people. I want to see that." (Group 5)

Some youth described the importance for LGBTQ2 youth specifically having mentors who share their identity.

"[Having] that connection on the same level and in that sense that the youth will feel and know that there's a connection, or this person understands me, or feels what I'm going through, so I think that's important." (Youth 1)

Conversely, the youth in Group 6 were less amiable to the idea of mentor-mentee matches being made solely based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Several youth shared similar comments suggesting that they don't want to be defined by just one part of themselves. One youth put it this way:

"Like you don't like another straight person any more than you would like another gay person. Like it's the same thing. Like I think that a lot of times, people confuse it ... like, LGBTQ2 people are happier with people who are [LGBTQ2] ... I don't think that anybody really cares, a person's sexuality never makes you like them more. If somebody's a moron, I'll still think of them as a moron no matter how gay they are." (Group 6)

Supporting positive racial identities

The participants in Group 5 are in a program with a specific focus on building positive racial identities for black youth. They had an extended conversation about mentors who can (or can't) support their racial identities. The conversation started with a strong complaint, but moved on. Here is an excerpt:

"Well, currently, It's hard for me to find a black FEMALE mentor. Especially one who's not how do I put this nicely? [Interviewer: Just put it out there.] Internally racist, because a lot of the... not in this building specifically, but in my specific environment when I'm finding a black female mentor, they come off as very internally racist, so they project that hatred for themselves onto you. I've dealt with four already in the past year or so, and that's been... that's been my biggest challenge. Because I can't be with

somebody who's not comfortable in their own skin, trying to teach me how to be comfortable in my skin." (Group 5)

"There, I would agree with you, but I found this white lady, her name is […], and she connects with black people so well, and even though she's white herself, I always thought the same thing- I wanted a black mentor." (Group 5)

"I have a lot of white women in my life like that – that have been phenomenal in my life growing up – but they are still white, and of course, they're beautiful, individuals and they've helped me through so much, but that black connection- I really really want that. So, what we need to create strong black women in the field that can help young black girls, right? We can't have a bunch of black women in black bodies thinking that they're white. And trying to change all the black kids in the system, like that's not what it's for." (Group 5)

Exposure to various career options

"I know that their mentors and maybe their social worker are going to [tell them to] be social workers. I'm not saying that's bad in any way. I know kids that are great in math or whose English skills are great and they want to be writers [but] what's put in their head is like be a social worker. And why not 'cause all their mentors are social workers. That could be very damning because we have this whole generation of social workers… then kids are, like, typecast into these roles. It's frustrating, 'cause there's a lot more that they could be doing." (Group 1)

"Growing up in care, you see the world through this care lens. I mean, everything in your life is about care. … Even when it comes to picking a profession. All you see is - mom and dad are foster parents, or your foster parents are your foster parents. Social workers. People who may want to get a job in finance, or branch off in other different work experiences. They won't … be introduced to people who are [in those professions] - and it kinda leads to a cycle." (Group 2)

LGBTQ2 youth in care

Many mentor programs tend to assume a gender binary: boy or girl, man or woman, male or female. Because there is a wide spectrum of gender identity for youth, just as with any other age group, these categories may be unhelpful or even damaging for transgender or genderqueer youth.

Some youth suggested that LGBTQ2 identified youth should be paired with a mentor of a similar identity, when such a mentor is available. However, it can be difficult to attract queer-identified adults to mentoring programs.

"There's so much stigma. There's so much stigma just being of that [LGBTQ2] identity walking down the street. Let alone in a position where you're working with youth. … First of all, [agencies] have to be welcoming in terms of your philosophy, mandate as an organization, welcome mentors who have different identities, right? Like how else would they come apply? I'm talking about employment equity."

Other youth suggested it would be more valuable for all youth, LGBTQ2 identified and cisgender straight youth alike, to be given the choice of their mentor's gender.

"Just the way [agencies] tend to choose: All right, it's a boy? So we need to get him a big brother. You can give a boy a big sister. Or give a girl a big brother. Ask them, you know?" (Group 1)

"This rule that boys have to be paired up with men, and girls have to be paired up with girls. Problem with that is … there's not a lot of men who want to be mentor, or be in a mentor role. So, there are kids, including myself, who waited for mentors, or BBBS, for a long time until we aged out of the system, and that's a big problem with THAT organization, or with that setup. 'Cause just because there isn't somebody out there with that problem, or that setup, that particular gender, doesn't mean that they don't fit the role that they need to play. I don't think that a mentor should be solely based on gender- I mean a woman might provide a unique perspective to some things that adolescent male youth go through largely because they have a different view. I think it's very important when you're looking at mentors not to look at gender, and look at situation, the idealistic ideas of what a mentor should be." (Youth 2)

However, for many adolescents their identity, whether it relates to their gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, or racial identity, is still emerging or forming. Many youth in care may be questioning their gender identity. In these cases, pairing a young person with an adult of the same gender identity may not be possible or may not be the most helpful. For this reason, it may be beneficial to ensure all mentors have some knowledge about the emergence of gender identity, and specific challenges that trans youth may face.

"If you're dealing with youths [who are] just transitioning into whatever choice of identity they want to have - they're not actually there yet – a lot of times, they're questioning it. So, having a little bit of background as to what they're going through mentally, health wise, physically … even if you can't physically help that youth do it, or whatever, at least you can have more insight, and get [them] the help that they do need if they're going through a crisis. Whether it's something that's going through their head or something physical." (Group 1)

Youth with disabilities in care

As a young people with cerebral palsy, and physical limitations as a result, Youth 2 and 3 shared some compelling insights into the experience that youth with disabilities may have in the care system and specifically with mentors.

"I would say that my disability is a pretty big barrier. Most mentors, not all mentors are not familiar with the challenges and the yeah- challenges that having a disability could bring, so I find it's more difficult to find a mentor on that level. Um, a mentor that's comfortable talking about disability, and constantly being around disability, 'cause I find a lot of people can be awkward about it almost -- they don't know what to say, or do." (Youth 3)

"Specifically to disability, there needs to be [awareness] that just because they see somebody in a wheelchair doesn't necessarily mean that they're dumb. … I don't believe that anyone is dumb, but I'm just using that as a blanket statement 'cause I don't know how else to put it. 'Cause [that's] the automatic assumption of people – through no fault of their own -- society's been conditioned to think that if you're in a wheelchair, something's automatically wrong with your brain." (Youth 2)

"I find I was always lumped into the category of 'she's not very intelligent.' That would be somebody's first impression of me- but then they got to know me, and then they realized that I wasn't like that. I don't understand why that stigma's there- it's just there. We're just all lumped into the same group." (Youth 3)

"Also, the needs of a person with a physical disability might differ from that of a non disability person. In that- the mentor relationship should be different. So, you may have to help a little bit with personal care, if the person falls in the wash, or you may have to go in and help them get up, or if they can't get themselves dressed, you may have to do that, because there's nobody else around to do that. And if you're going to put them in a specific situation with a person who's disabled, I think you, at minimum, some training on personal care is important." (Youth 2)

They were some parallels to issues brought up about youth of color and LGBTQ2-identified youth; that is, the need for these identities to be represented within the pool of mentors.

"Well, having a few LGBT mentors would be a fantastic place to start. As it would to have a few mentors that were physically disabled. I think that would be ideal. Able bodied would be also great, but you need to bring voices to the table that are marginalized." (Youth 2)

Short of finding disabled mentors, the youth can be called upon to help mentors understand how to support disabled youth. When asked about educating a mentor on her disability, Youth 3 responded

"I would love to, they would just have to be willing. I found that to be the harder part- to find somebody who was willing to learn something out of their comfort zone. I love educating other people- it's just what people choose to do with the information that could be a little...."

Mentor training

When asked what type of training mentors should have before beginning a relationship with a youth in care, interviewees gave the following responses.

"[Mentors need] knowledge of what they could be getting into with a child from youth in care, because we all have our different situations, right? But if they understand maybe some of the situations that this child … is possibly in, it might give them a little bit more of an understanding of … why this child is acting the way they do, or whatever. Just to give them [an] understanding of what we go through so they could be more … empathetic." (Group 1)

"I think training is involved for mentors, but I don't think you can train a mentor to be a mentor; if that makes sense. That mentoring is a quality that people need to have in a sense, other than that skill can't be learned or improved upon. But I think it needs to be the … that natural ability, that natural willingness to do that before they look at any training." (Youth 2)

Another participant pointed out the need for mentors to have a basic understanding of trauma, triggers, and the effect of trauma histories.

"Learning how to recognize and have conversation with youths, and especially younger kids to see what their triggers can be. … Being able to talk to a kid that's been through trauma." (Group 1)

There are other ways mentors can be sensitive to bringing up topics that may raise painful emotions for youth, specifically youth of color.

"Training to not assume. To find out more about the youth's background. People naturally, like when you meet someone, you want to ask 'Where are you from? Have you been back to your home country?' kinda thing. … Like what do you do with these youths who don't actually know their identity, or even their religion, or anything of the sort?" (Group 1)

"[Mentors] need a behavioral management training just for at risk youth that they may come into contact with … I know people don't consider this a skill, but listen, it's a big one -- just being able to hear what the youth is saying." (Youth 1)

Some mentees called for mentors to have training on specific skills that can help mentees with the transition to independence.

"What it means to transition out of care. The different files that we have to fill out, different paperwork that we have to fill out, uh, the financial aspect of being a crown ward and transitioning, there's a lot- there's a lot of paperwork we have to fill out- there's a lot of things that get lost in transition and there's a lot of gaps in this paperwork so, if you have somebody who understands the paperwork, and can actually sit down and discuss it with us, and fill it out with us," (Group 5)

"They should have basic social skills, and they should be trained on the issues of mental health and like a little bit on services- let's say that the person that they're working with is inquiring about a service, basic information on services and stuff like that. Nothing that's overly hard to teach, but things that would be appropriate for a mentor- or maybe like financial kinda training, 'cause I know a lot of the times, mentors will help people with financial struggles. So, I think that would be important as well." (Youth 3)

Mentee training / readiness

Similarly, youth were asked if potential mentees could benefit from training before entering a mentorship pairing. Many responses were centered on assessing the mentee's readiness to accept a new adult into their lives, and to trust that person.

"I think you almost have to get the mentee to a point where they're willing to accept the help. Because honestly, you can try to get someone help, but if they don't want it, they're not going to accept it, it's not going to be productive. And if you want the mentor/mentee relationship to be productive, that person has to be willing to work toward the same goal." (Group 2)

"Getting [them] ready to learn how to slowly develop trust. Like counseling or something? Personally, I didn't start trusting people until I started seeing my counselor." (Group 6)

"They need to be taught, I guess, that it's okay to confide in this mentor. … Especially in foster care situations, we are conditioned -- if not told -- we're conditioned not to tell anybody anything, 'cause anytime we do, we get stabbed in the back. So, we need to be told that this is a safe relationship, … how to re-trust. Because after any length of time in care, even three weeks … you lose the ability to trust anyone and you have to gain that back, and sometimes, that's a life skill. I'm still trying to work on it today." (Youth 2)

One youth offered a picture of what this type of "training" or preparation might look like.

"Who ever the youth trusts the most at that moment, … get that person to sit down with the youth and be like 'How did you end up trusting me? What can we do so that you can trust those people who are trustworthy,' right? It's kind of like what we're doing right now, right? Sitting down and just talking about it, and then the youth is gonna think and be like 'oh, yeah, that makes a lot of sense, if I can trust one person, why can't I trust someone else - you [used to be] a complete stranger to me." (Group 6)

During one group's conversation about mentees' "readiness" to have a mentor, one youth called for training youth on their rights to empower them in the relationship.

"I think they should be informed about- first consent in terms of establishing a relationship, what are their rights, as a mentee, what are the boundaries, they have the right to cut off the relationship, or stop the relationship, whenever they want to." (Group 5)

Tips to mentors for greater success

A few youth offered personal advice for mentors to keep in mind as they step into their role.

"I think it's mostly understanding that … no two mentees are ever going to be the same. That you have to learn to be able to adapt to the situation that you have at hand with the mentee. Being very rigid [in] how you go about it is not going to lead anybody to great success." (Group 1)

One youth encouraged mentors to be themselves, and use their natural strengths.

"Work with your own tools, I would definitely say. Like work with what you have going for you, and don't try to be like the past mentor." (Group 1)

Using technology & social media

During the focus group interviews, Carleen Joseph posed several questions that asked how technology and social media are currently used within mentoring pairs, as well as how these avenues might be used in new ways. Groups talked about how social media and other online communication might be used for recruitment of youth into mentoring programs to strengthen existing mentorship relationships, and for staying connected.

Staying connected

One of the participants in Group 1 expressed a desire for ways to stay connected to their mentor even if they moved between foster homes. Other youth expressed similar thoughts about how the Internet could support them in maintaining contact with their mentors even in the same location.

"Not a lot of youth that are in care will be able to access a cell phone, but now it's become the norm that more and more homes are able to have computers with Internet access. So even if it's not Facebook or whatever, at least let there be a login site where these youth and their mentors … [can] connect if they're unable to access phones or whatever the case is, so that way, some connection's there. They can contact them." (Group 1)

The interviewer described the possibility of e-mentoring, wherein youth have a mentor who lives in a different part of the country. Their interactions might be split between in-person interactions and interactions via an online platform. Several participants responded positively to this idea, recognizing that this might increase the availability of mentors to some youth in care.

Strengthening relationships

For mentors and youth in active mentoring relationships, panel participants felt that social media can be a positive tool for building and maintaining relationships. For shy or introverted youth, connecting through online platforms may create opportunities to deepen the relationship.

"Sometimes I talk less in person than I will online." (Group 1)

Promotion of mentoring programs

There were differing perspectives on what could be done to promote mentoring programs to youth. Some felt that social media was a good outlet, while others disagreed.

[In response to "What is the best way to promote mentoring programs to youth in care?"] "Probably like social media, and a platform that young people use because you gotta get it out there, and a lot of the people are so focused in their own little world, that they can't even see what's going on outside of it, so if you can get into their own little bubble, which is their life, you'll be able to get to a lot more people." (Group 3)

"Using social media is ineffective, in this case. In most cases, a teenager isn't going to look and go online and go 'I want a mentor.' I'm pretty sure no one in this room [did] that. So, yeah, word of mouth is probably the most effective way to do it. … [Social] workers could probably talk about it more; your teachers could talk about it, your counselors in school talk about it. And that kinda spreads the word a lot quicker." (Group 3)

"When it comes to advertising a mentor, it has to be more innate in your real world, not in the virtual world. Because if I saw an advertisement on Facebook or YouTube, I'd ignore it -- it's an advertisement. Like, I don't read any of it, and I'm pretty sure that the majority of people who use technology don't use it to watch advertisements. So yeah, I'd definitely go more towards the idea of, you know, either having a social worker mention it, or just more of a physical way of getting the word out." (Group 6)

Using innovative approaches to reach youth

Although there were not a lot of youth with concrete ideas about using social media, one youth certainly saw the potential for new forms of connection.

"I think the youth have online resources and social media will be very important. For example, I came across this sexual health app from Planned Parenthood that I thought would be extremely innovative, that youth could download right onto their phone and they can use, so I think the use of social media and online resources is a tool to be used in terms of youth engagement and mentorship. I think it has to be innovative, and I think that the use of online resources and social media are going to be important." (Group 5)

Interview Questions
1. How would you describe mentoring? What does mentoring mean tp you?
2. Why is mentorship important? Specifically, what makes it beneficial for youth in care?
3. What are the qualities of a good friend?
4. What are the qualities of a good mentor?
5. What makes a mentor different than a friend?
6. What barriers or challenges stand in the way of youth in care having a mentor?
7. What kinds of activities would you like to do with a mentor?
8. What are the best ways to promote mentoring programs for youth?
9. What type of training do mentors need before working with youth in care?
10. What does a young person need to be prepared to accept a mentor into their life?
11. When are key points in a young person's life when they need (or when you have needed) a mentor?

Interviews

Groups 1 & 2: Our Voice Our Turn

Date:	Summary:
January 10, 2016	Our Voice Our Turn is a youth-led program, housed within the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, intended to amplify the voices and perspectives of youth and promote better outcomes for youth leaving care. As youth leaders, participants in this group were generally active and talkative. Each group lasted 45-55 minutes. Each youth was given a $25 honorarium for their participation.
Location:	
Offices of the Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth	
Participant demographics:	
These 2 focus group sessions were with youth leaders who were previously or are presently in care. Participant ages ranged from 14- to 30-years-old. There were 25 total participants, roughly 12 in each group. Six participants self-identified as LGBTQ2.	

Group 3: Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society (CAS)

Date:	Summary:
January 12, 2016	The participants in this focus group were all members of the Windsor-Essex CAS's Youth Advisory Committee (YAC). Levels of participation were uneven in this group. While many group members shared freely, a few group members remained quiet throughout the interview. This was primarily younger participants or new participants. A meal was provided for focus group participants, and they each were also given a $25 honorarium for their participation.
Location:	
Windsor-Essex CAS building, Windsor, Ontario	
Participant demographics:	
There were 18 participants ranging in age from 12- to 21-years-old. Nine were male and 9 were female. Two of the youth were black. No one in the group self-identified as LGBTQ2.	

Group 4: Durham CAS

Date:	Summary:
January 20, 2016	Three of the older participants became a part of the focus group because they were members of Durham CAS's Youth Advisory Committee. The other youth received invitations to participate through their social workers. A meal was provided for participants, and they each were also given a $25 honorarium for their participation.
Location:	
Durham CAS building, Oshawa, Ontario	
Participant demographics:	
There were 13 participants in this focus group, ranging from age 12- to 20-years-old, all of whom were in care at the time of the interview. Six identified as male,	

and 7 identified as female. Three of the 13 participants were Black (race of additional participants unknown). Two self-identified as LGBTQ2.

Group 5: *Hair Story*

Date:	Summary:
January 24, 2016	*Hair Story* is a project that examines the experience of Black youth in care. It is run out of the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth (OPACY).All 10 participants are involved with this project, and the majority of them participated freely in the interview. Two of the 10 were significantly less talkative. Each youth was given a $25 honorarium for their participation.
Location:	
Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, Toronto, Ontario	
Participant demographics:	
This group of 10 participants ranged in age from 15- to 25-years-old. All identified as African Canadian / Black. Four were male, and 6 were female; 3 self-identified as members of the LGBTQ2 community.	

Group 6: Ottawa Children's Aid Society Teens (CAST)

Date:	Summary:
January 27, 2016	The CAST group is made up of 35 youth total who meet weekly on Wednesday evenings. The purpose of the youth group is to advocate on behalf of all youth in care in Ottawa. The interviewer described this group as "very talkative and interactive". Each youth was given a $25 honorarium for their participation.
Location:	
Ottawa CAS building, Rockland, Ontario	
Participant demographics:	
This group was made up of 11 youth, ages 15- to 19-years old, all regular attendees of the Ottawa CAS "CAST" group (Children's Aid Society Teens). Of the 11 participants, 2 self-identified as First nations, 2 as African Canadian, and 1 as mixed-race. Three identified as male, and 8 as female; 4 identified as LGBTQ2.	

Group 7: Sudbury CAS

Date:	Summary:
January 29, 2016	Three of the youth did not participate in the discussion, including one young woman of First Nations heritage. The rest of the youth
Location:	
Sudbury CAS building, Sudbury, Ontario	
Participant demographics:	

Group 7 consisted of 13 young people ages 12- to 21-years-old, 4 of whom were female, and 9 who were male. Foster parents or group home staff members accompanied several of the younger participants. These adults were present in the room for the duration of the interview. Several of the focus group participants had been or are currently involved in the local BBBS chapter.

participated freely, despite some fidgety behavior and distractibility.

At the conclusion of the interview, several of the adult CAS staff members and group home staff expressed frustrations with BBBS as an organization, particularly that the organization ceases involvement when the mentee reaches age 16.

A meal was provided for participants, as well as $25 honorarium for their participation.

Group 8: Hands Residential Treatment Center

Date:	Summary:
January 20, 2016	Hands is a secure adolescent mental health residential treatment facility. All 3 youth participated actively in the conversation. Each person received a $25 honorarium for their participation.
Location:	
Hands Residential Treatment Center, North Bay, Ontario	
Participant demographics:	
This focus group had 3 participants; 2 female and 1 male. All particpants were 14-years-old, and their time in this residential facility ranged from 6 months to 2.5 years. Two out of the 3 participants have had or currently have a BBBS mentor.	

Group 9: North Bay Indian Friendship Centre

Date:	Summary:
January 20, 2016	All 16 participants had experienced out-of-home placement in some form. The focus group facilitator described this session as "perhaps the most challenging," due to participants' reluctance to speak freely. With extra effort, the facilitator managed to promote an adequate level of conversation.
Location:	
North Bay Indian Friendship Center, North Bay, Ontario	
Participant demographics:	
This focus group had a total of 16 youth participants, 9 of whom were male, and 7 who were female. None of the participants self-identified as LGBTQ2S. All 16 youth were First Nations, and ranged in age from 14- to 19-years-old.	

Youth 1

Date:	Summary:

January 20, 2016

Location:

Office of the Provincial Advocate, Ontario

Participant demographics:

Youth 1 is a 24-year old woman, and is a former youth in care.

Youth 1 works as a Youth Amplifier in the Office of the Provincial Advocate. She has been working on the *Hair Story* project, which examines the experience of Black youth in care. Youth 1 is not extremely talkative, and has a learning disability. She was interviewed individually as this was the best way to promote her open and honest participation. She received a $25 honorarium.

Youth 2

Date:	**Summary:**
January 26, 2016	Youth 2 did not have a positive experience in care, and also has a tenuous relationship with his biological family. He has cerebral palsy, a physical disability that affects his mobility and, to a very slight degree, his speech. The interviewer described Youth 2 as "intelligent, insightful, resourceful and quite the self-advocate." He was given a $25 honorarium for his participation.
Location:	
A restaurant	
Participant demographics:	
Youth 2 is a 16-year-old white male. He spent 27 months in care, but now lives with his biological father.	

Youth 3

Date:	**Summary:**
January 24, 2016	Youth 3 is a young person with cerebral palsy, a physical disability. Prior to her placement at the group home, Youth 3 lived in a foster home. The interviewer described Youth 3 as "a bright, cheery, intelligent and articulate young woman who is an advocate for youth with disabilities." She was given a $25 honorarium for her participation.
Location:	
York University Conference Centre	
Participant demographics:	
Youth 3 is a 17-year-old white female who currently lives in a group home for youth in care who have intellectual disabilities.	

APPENDIX E: What Might Advocacy Look Like for LGBT2SQ Youth in Mentoring Relationships

Advocacy through community access – Mentors can introduce mentees to additional LGBT2SQ community resources and networks. For young people that are struggling with feelings of isolation and "otherness" gaining new connections to others that are similar can help to build a sense of belonging. A mentor can advocate by introducing the mentee to such resources.

Advocacy through role modeling —Mentors that have been through their own "coming out" process can share their experiences, recollections, and stories. This type of sharing can strengthen bonds between a mentor and mentee and can also provide tangible steps that a mentee can take to process their feelings and thoughts during this time. This type of advocacy is about showing a mentee new ways of thinking about his or her possible selves.

Family advocacy — "Coming out" to a family member can be one of the most difficult things that a LGBT2SQ mentee can face. A mentor can offer support during this process by giving the mentee tools to use to prepare for this conversation as well as ongoing support while the parent processes their understanding of what this will mean for their child and their relationship.

Fostering self-advocacy — Self-advocacy may be difficult for a young person that has been placed on the margins due to victimization or stress. Many young people that have been bullied, harassed, or rejected may struggle to find ways to ask for what they need. These same young people may also have a more difficult time developing trust. When a mentor can break through and build a trusting relationship, a real opportunity opens up to change trajectories and help mentees find their voice.

Michael Garringer, Chronicle of Evidence Based Mentoring, MENTOR, March 13, 2013

Alberta Mentoring Partnership 2013

Children and Youth in Care and Mentoring
References & Resources

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Research Studies

Ahrens, K., Dubois, D., Richardson, L., Fan, M.Y., & Lozano, P. (2008). Youth in foster care with adult mentors during adolescence have improved adult outcomes. Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, 121(2), 246-252.

This is the first study focusing on the association between natural mentoring relationships and the adult outcomes of youth in care. The goal of this study was to determine whether youth in foster care with natural mentors during adolescence have improved adult outcomes. Youth were considered mentored when they reported the presence of a nonparental adult mentor in their life after the age of 14 and before the age of 18 that lasted at least 2 years. Youth in care with mentoring relationships during adolescence had more favourable outcomes in multiple domains of late adolescent/ young adult functioning than nonmentored youth. Areas of improvement included educational attainment (borderline significance), suicidal risk, physical aggression, general health, and risk for having a sexually transmitted infection. The findings suggest that mentoring relationships with nonparental adults cannot be expected to outweigh completely the significant risk conferred by the experience of having been in foster care but the improvements seen are noteworthy. Conclusions were drawn that mentoring relationships are associated with positive adjustment during the transition to adulthood for youth in foster care and strategies to support natural mentoring relationships for youth in care should be developed and evaluated.

Ahrens, K., Dubois, D., Garrison, M., Spencer, R., Richardson, L., & Lozano, P. (2011). Qualitative exploration of relationships with important non-parental adults in the lives of youth in foster care. Children and Youth Services Review, 33, 1012-1023.

This study conducted individual qualitative interviews with 23 former foster youth regarding their relationships with supportive non-parental adults to identify factors that influence the formation, quality, and duration of these relationships and to develop a hypothesis for

intervention strategies. Findings suggested several themes related to relationship formation with non-parental adults including barriers and facilitators. Themes were also identified related to the ongoing development and longevity of these relationships. Proposed intervention strategies include systematic incorporation of important non-parental adults into transition planning, enhanced training and matching procedures with formal mentoring programs, assistance for youth to strengthen their interpersonal awareness and skills, and the targeting of specific periods of need when linking youth to sources of adult support.

Britner, P. A., Balcazar, F. E., Blechman, E. A., Blinn-Pike, L., & Larose, S. (2006). Mentoring special youth populations. Journal of Community Psychology, 34(6), 747–763.

Whereas mentoring programs are well received as support services, very little empirical research has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of these programs to meet the diverse needs of different special populations of youth. Potentially useful theoretical orientations (attachment, parental acceptance-rejection, social support, adult development, host provocation) and a socio-motivational model of mentoring are presented to complement Rhodes's (2002) model. Mentoring research literatures for five special populations of youth (abused and neglected youth, youth who have disabilities, pregnant and parenting adolescents, juvenile offenders, academically at-risk students) are critiqued. Systemic, longitudinal research must address the co-occurrence of risk factors, populations, and interventions. The authors conclude with specific recommendations for future research.

de Anda, D. (2001). A qualitative evaluation of a mentor program for at-risk youth: The participants' perspective. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal. 18(2), 97-117.

This article presents a qualitative evaluation of the first year of a mentor program for at-risk high school youth (Project R.E.S.C.U.E) in a low income urban setting in Los Angeles County with high rates of youth and violent crime. The findings suggest that services to at-risk youth can be significantly increased by establishing community programs that employ committed adult volunteers who are willing to establish one-to-one relationships with youth. Mentor programs offer an effective, low-cost method for expanding the number of youth who can receive individualized supportive intervention.

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, 30, 157–197.

The authors used meta-analysis to review 55 evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs on youth. Overall, findings provide evidence of only a modest or small benefit of program participation for the average youth. Program effects are enhanced significantly, however, when greater numbers of both theory based and empirically based best practices are utilized and when strong relationships are formed between mentors and youth. Youth from backgrounds of environmental risk and disadvantage appear most likely to benefit from participation in mentoring programs. Outcomes for youth at-risk due to personal vulnerabilities have varied

substantially in relation to program characteristics, with a noteworthy potential evident for poorly implemented programs to actually have an adverse effect on such youth. Recommendations include greater adherence to guidelines for the design and implementation of effective mentoring programs as well as more in-depth assessment of relationship and contextual factors in the evaluation of programs.

Greeson, J.K.P. & Bowen, N.K. (2008) "She holds my hand" The experiences of foster youth with their natural mentors. Children and Youth Services Review, (30), 1178-1188.

This study gathered qualitative data about the experiences of female youth of colour in foster care(n=7) with their natural mentors – naturally occurring important adults in a youth's environment that can include teachers, extended family members, neighbours, coaches, and religious leaders. Theoretically, it is argued that natural mentoring may provide a better fit than programmatic mentoring for youth-in-care as the relationships are formed gradually and are less pressured; the mentor is not a stranger to the youth, and as a result, the youth has less difficulty trusting the adult; the adult and youth are already in the same environment and are likely to remain there; the chances that the relationship will endure over time are greater and the likelihood of positive outcomes increases. Five themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: relationships characteristics that matter (trust, love and caring, like parent and child); support I received (emotional, informational, instrumental, appraisal); 'how I've changed', 'thoughts on my future', and 'what I think about foster care'. The results suggest that child welfare professionals should connect youth in care with caring adults by incorporating natural mentor relationships into typical service provision processes. Natural mentors should be supported in cultivating the qualities defined by the youth as important. Natural mentors should be provided with the resources to offer different types of support (ex. training, funding, information and skill-building).

Mech, E.V, Pryde, J.A., & Rycraft, J.R. (1995). Mentors for adolescents in foster care. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 12(4): 317-327

The focus of this article is on trends in mentor program for adolescents in foster care. The authors surveyed 29 child welfare programs and found that mentor programs for adolescents in foster care tend to fall into several categories: transitional life skills; cultural empowerment; corporate/business; programs for young parents; and group homes with mentors. They concluded that mentoring has the potential to connect youth in foster care with a cross-section of caring adults who can provide a bridge to higher education and employment, and serve as a resource for transitional problem solving.

Munson, M., Smalling, S., Spencer, R., Scott, L., & Tracy, E. (2010). A steady presence in the midst of change: Nonkin natural mentors in the lives of older youth exiting foster care. Child Youth Serv Rev, 32 (4), 527-535.

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the non-kin natural mentoring relationships among 19 year old youth in the process of 'aging out' of the foster care system in

Missouri along with the kinds of support they may offer as the youth transition out of care. Analyses yielded descriptive information grouped into four categories: a) types of natural mentors; b) qualities of these mentors; c) qualities of the natural mentoring relationships; and d) the nature of the various forms of support these relationships offered to the youth participants. Natural mentors were predominantly friends of the family, professionals and various community members. Some of the salient qualities included their understanding and non-judgmental nature and the directness of their communication and advice. Similar experiences and hardship made them especially trustworthy and credible sources of support. Data suggests that those developing mentoring initiatives may want to encourage natural relationships and recruit adults with similar life experiences. Important qualities included trust, consistency, empathy, and authenticity. Implications for social work policy, practice and research are discussed including that organizations should support natural mentoring relationships rather than try to create new ones that may or may not take hold.

Osterling, K.L., & Hines, A.M. (2006). Mentoring adolescent foster youth: Promoting resilience during developmental transitions. Child and Family Social Work (11), 242-253.

This study uses qualitative and quantitative data from a study of the 'Advocates to Successful Transition to Independence' programme, a mentoring programme designed to train mentors to assist older adolescent foster youth in acquiring skills and resources needed for successful transition out of foster care and into adulthood. Results suggest that the use of a mentoring program for older adolescent foster youth represents a beneficial prevention strategy that may help prevent negative outcomes. Advocates to Successful Transition to Independence (ASTI) provides mentoring and advocacy services to youth in the child welfare system between the ages of 14 and 21. The purpose is to provide youth who are expected to transition out of the child welfare system with assistance and guidance out of the system and into adulthood. A qualitative and quantitative study found that establishing a strong relationship served as an important foundation for working on independent living skills. Youth reported being more open with their feelings, understanding their emotions better and being less angry. Advocates reported having difficulty finding resources and services for their youth and confusion over how to complete certain tasks. Three key recommendations were identified: 1) the establishment of a strong, supportive and caring relationship between mentor and youth appears to be necessary before mentors can support youth in developing independent living skills; 2) stronger linkages between mentoring programs and independent living programs may improve youth participating in ILPs; and 3) mentoring programs may benefit from more program coordination and support for mentors.

Rhodes, J. E., Haight, W. L., & Briggs, E. C., (1999). The influence of mentoring on the peer relationships of foster youth in relative and non-relative care. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 9(2), 185-201.

In this study, the authors examined the extent to which a formal mentoring program facilitated improvements in foster youth's peer relationships. The influence of a mentoring program (Big Brothers / Big Sisters) on the peer relationships of foster youth in relative and non-relative care

was examined. Youth were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control condition, and changes in their peer relationships were assessed after 18 months. Foster parents were more likely than non-foster parents to report that their child showed improved social skills, as well as greater comfort and trust interacting with others, as a result of the intervention. In addition, whereas the peer relationships of all non-foster youth remained stable, treatment foster youth reported improvements in pro-social and self-esteem enhancing support, and control foster youth showed decrements over time. When the foster youth were differentiated further on the basis of their placement, a pattern of findings emerged in which treatment youth in relative foster care reported slight improvements in pro-social support, whereas treatment youth in non-relative foster care reported slight declines. All foster you in the control group reported decrements in peer support over time, with non-relative foster youth reporting the sharpest declines. Implications for research and intervention are discussed.

Taussig, H.N. & Culhane, S.E. (2010). Impact of a mentoring and skills group program on mental health outcomes for maltreated children in foster care. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med, 164(8), 739-746.

This randomized controlled trial study evaluates the efficacy of the Fostering Healthy Futures program in reducing mental health problems and associated problems. Children in the intervention group received an assessment of their cognitive, educational, and mental health functioning and participated in a 9-month mentoring and skills group program. Results indicated that the treatment group had fewer mental health problems 6 months after the intervention, reported fewer symptoms of dissociation 6 months after the intervention, and reported better quality of life immediately following the intervention. A 9-month mentoring and skills group intervention for children in foster care can be implemented with fidelity and high uptake rates, resulting in improved mental health outcomes.

Articles and Reports

Alberta Mentoring Partnership (2011). AMP pilot strategy – Developing and delivering programs for diverse and under-served youth. Major Findings Final Report.

This report documents major findings from the AMP's strategy to support innovative mentoring pilot programs targeting underserved and diverse children and youth. The information focused on mentoring pilot programs with Aboriginal children and youth and/ or immigrant children and youth. Although some of the children and youth involved in these programs may also have been in care, there was not a specific focus on the needs of this population and addressing the specific and complex needs of this population was indicated as beyond the findings of this report.

Avery, R. (2011). The potential contribution of mentor programs to relational permanency for youth aging out of foster care. Child Welfare. 90 (3), 9-26.

This article summarizes published research regarding the effectiveness of mentor programs in general, and for youth in foster care specifically, as a basis for evidence-based practice in child welfare. It examines the pros and cons of mentor programs and characteristics of programs that are more or less effective for achieving specific social goals. The author explores the opportunity cost of investments in transitional mentor programs versus efforts to find permanent parents for youth aging out of care. The author posits that the creation of a strong social scaffolding will require at least one parental adult and one or more adult mentors who provide other forms of support and guidance on a more temporary, less committed basis. Mentoring relationships are no substitute for the intimate and lifelong bond to an adult willing to serve as a permanent parent to a child. Mentoring programs should be viewed as a compensatory resource contributing to relational permanency and are more limited in the terms of support they can offer.

Bruster, B.E., Coccoma, P. (2013). Mentoring for educational success: Advancing foster care youth incorporating the core competencies. Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment, 23(3), 388-399.

A collaborative relationship among three organizations developed a mentoring project using social work students (mentors) and independent living program (ILP) foster youths (mentees). The goal was to increase the mentees' awareness of educational possibilities beyond high school graduation while analyzing the mentors' learning as defined by the Council on Social Work Education core competencies. This pilot project paired mentors with ILP youths in this experiential opportunity conducted on a university campus. The students, acting as positive role models applying social work skills, engaged in an effort to improve the mentees' educational outcome, which would ultimately lead to self-sufficiency.

Clayden, J., & Stein, M. (2005). Mentoring young people leaving care: "Someone for me." University of York, England: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

This report explores longer term mentoring for young people leaving care. It describes young people's experiences of mentoring relationships and their outcomes. In an analysis of 181 mentoring relationships, the authors profile the young people and their mentors, describe their planning and goal setting, as well as the outcomes of mentoring. The study also includes interviews with 17 young people and their mentors, exploring the mentoring process, reasons for referral, matching, motivation for mentoring, and making plans and setting goals. The report concludes that for young people leaving care, who are coping with the challenges of transition to adulthood, often without consistent support from families, mentoring offers a different but complementary relationship from formal professional support.

Cleaver, H. (1997). New research on teenagers: Key findings and the implications for policy and practice. Adoption and Fostering (21), 37-43.

Many youth in care are isolated, marginalized, lonely, depressed and have low self-esteem. Adolescents need an adult to confide in, someone they can share their uncertainties with and

who will offer guidance in a non-judgemental manner. Studies indicate that a trusted mentor could play a strategic role in changing antisocial behaviour, such as drug misuse or offending. The role of a mentor is important when youth leave the care system. A mentor must be reliable and trusted, someone not afraid to broach sensitive issues and who will persevere with the relationship no matter what happens and for as long as the teenager requires their support. The author recommends a stronger partnership between local authorities and the voluntary sector.

Fauth, R., Hart, D., & Payne, L. (2012). Supporting care leavers' successful transition to independent living. National Children's Bureau. London, United Kingdom. Retrieved from http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/pdf/NCB_RSCH_9_FINAL_FOR_WEB.pdf

This research summary from the United Kingdom highlights the evidence of what works in supporting young care leavers' successful transition to independent living. Part of the success of 'leaving care services' are the relationships young people cultivate while in care and moving out of care. Mentors are described as operating between professional and informal support. Young people valued the advice they received from mentors during their transition to independence. They perceived that mentors helped them with important practical advice, and acknowledged that they would benefit from better matching, greater flexibility and fewer time restrictions. Most of the direct support given to young people during their transition was provided by residential or foster care providers.

Garringer, M. (2011) It may be the missing piece: Exploring the mentoring of youth in systems of care (Reflections from the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring). National Mentoring Center. Portland State University.

This article reflects on the themes and information presented at the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring. The presentations highlighted the diversity of system involved youth and their intersection with mental health services, homelessness prevention programs, drug and alcohol treatment, public welfare systems, clinical therapy and mental health services, special education, and immigration and neutralization systems. Any discussion around best practices is dependent on a wide range of factors – age, abuse, history, placement, etc. Systems also overlap and studies show that a youth who is involved with one system is very likely to be involved in others as well, further complicating mentoring programs. Three audiences are looking for guidance: wrap around services that have integrated mentorship into a variety of clinical, educational, and life-skill related supports; stand-alone mentoring programs trying to adapt their current model to better serve youth in care; and policymakers and funders looking for fresh ideas and reliable program practices. This article provides main considerations for traditional mentoring programs wanting to serve youth in care, as well as takeaways for multi-service programs and policy makers and funders.

Gilligan, R. (1998). Enhancing the resilience of children and young people in public care by mentoring their talents and interests. Child and Family Social Work (4), 187-196.

Mentoring of young persons in care in cultural, sporting and other activities by concerned adults – members of the child's social network or volunteers – can foster the potential of the young person, build self-esteem, strengthen mental health and open new social relationships beyond the care system. Mentoring refers to the encouragement and support of the young person in care's talents, interests and leisure activities by a committed adult. It is suggested that the potential of this neglected dimension of care can only be fully realized through alert professional practice, imaginative engagement with potential 'natural' mentors, supportive agency policy, effective care planning systems, and relevant training and professional supervision for social workers. A mentoring relationship with someone other than a caregiver or a professional with obligations to the child is more desirable since it gives the young person access to an additional positive relationship. Mentoring relationships are a way of attending to the social and emotional support needs of young people in care and involving ordinary members of the community. Formally organized schemes for the recruitment and support of mentors may yield less fruitful and profound relationships than may emerge informally in a child's network. Methods to recruit an appropriate mentor are explored along with the role of the primary people in the child's life.

Laursen, E. K., & Birmingham, S. M. (2003). Caring relationships as a protective factor for at-risk youth: An ethnographic study. Families in Society, 84(2), 240–246.

The resiliency literature documents that adult caring relationships are key to the development of resilience in children. The present ethnographic study of 23 youths' perceptions of caring adults explored the meanings they ascribe to caring relationships in helping them face adversity. The study confirmed that caring adults can serve as a protective factor for at-risk youth. In addition, the study delineated seven characteristics of those caring relationships: trust, attention, empathy, availability, affirmation, respect, and virtue. The presented results suggest a road map for self-reflection and skill development for those who seek to have a positive impact on the lives of challenging youth.

Munson, M., & McMillen, J.C. (2009). Natural mentoring and psychosocial outcomes among older youth transitioning from foster care. Child Youth Serv Rev, 31(1), 104-111.

This study examined the non-kin natural mentoring relationships between older foster care youth and their mentors, along with the associations between these relationships and psychosocial outcomes. Natural mentors were defined as unrelated adults that are older than the participants that are willing to listen, share experiences, and guide the youth through their lives. Mentoring was related to important psychological and behavioural outcomes among youth in the present study. A non-kin mentor at age 18 was related to fewer depressive symptoms, less perceived stress and greater satisfaction with life six months later. A long term mentor was related to less perceived stress and a lower likelihood of being arrested at age 19. Long term mentoring relationships were not related to differences in substance use or employment. The foster care system may benefit from enhancing services by providing relational components to already existing services. Possible mentor-type interventions, which could incorporate youth that previously made the transition as role models, may lead to a

youth's enhanced understanding of the transition experience, coupled with an enhanced ability to trust in relationships.

Phillips, L.A., Oca, S., Geenan, S., & Powers, L. (2013). Better futures: Helping young people in foster care with mental health challenges prepare for and participate in higher education. Focal Point: Youth, Young Adults, & Mental Health. Education & Employment, 27(1).

This article describes the mental health issues experienced by many youth in foster care. These youth may be more likely to struggle in school due to limited supports to navigate barriers. Many lack a consistent adult to encourage them in school and advocate for them. The goal of the Better Futures Project is to empower and support young people in foster care with serious mental health issues to prepare for and participate in college or vocational school. Better Futures is conducting a preliminary study of the effects of the intervention model. Across all project components, youth meet and learn from near-peers (peer coaches) who encourage youth around self-care and work with their mental health care providers and foster parents to support them. They try to remain in contact during stressful experiences and crises, focusing on highlighting youth's strengths and supporting them to continue working toward educational goals.

Reid, C. & Dudding, P. (2006). Building a Future Together: Issues and Outcomes for Transition-Aged Youth. Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being. Ottawa, ON.

The purpose of this paper is to explore why youth aging out of the Canadian child welfare system do not fare as well as their peers. This paper aims to bring together the current research, experience of the authors and the voices of youth themselves to provide a knowledge base to help build stronger policies and practices for youth exiting child welfare systems across Canada. Education, housing, relationships, life skills, identity, youth engagement and emotional healing are the seven pillars of necessary support, with financial support as the foundation to enable the recommended supports to be predictable and sustainable. Mentoring and peer programs are listed as providing opportunities to share experiences and build friendships amongst other youth and adults who can relate. The province of Alberta is named as being at the forefront in implementing mentoring programs and as currently working with 300 youth bursary recipients being mentored in a variety of areas. This article is referencing the Advancing Futures Bursary Program. The recommendation is made that mentorship programs must be developed and supported so every youth in care in Canada has access to a mentoring relationship when required.

Rhodes, J., & Dubois, D. (2008). Mentoring relationships and programs for youth. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 17(4), 254-258.

It is only recently that social and behavioural scientists have focused their attention on a more rigorous examination of mentoring for children and adolescents. In this article, the authors review the highlights of this research and critically examine recent trends in practice and policy

in view of current directions in research. A longitudinal study found those in a mentoring relationship in adolescence exhibited significantly better outcomes within the domains of education and work, mental health, problem behaviour, and health. The magnitude of these associations was fairly small. A meta-analysis of 55 mentoring programs found benefits in the areas of emotional/ psychological well-being, involvement in problem or high-risk behaviour, and academic outcomes. However, the effectiveness of mentoring programs was found to be relatively small. Beneficial effects are based on a strong connection characterized by mutuality, trust and empathy. Positive effects were greatest in relationships that lasted at least 1 year. Policies that demand greater adherence to evidence-based practices and the use of rigorous evaluations are needed to ensure that quality receives as much attention as does quantity. If youth mentoring relationships are to offer optimal and sustained benefit to young people, theory and research will need to assume a more central role in the development and growth of interventions to cultivate and support such caring relationships between adults and youth.

Satchwell, K. (2006). Mentoring Literature Review.

This literature review points to research indicating the concurrent and multiple issues affecting boys in foster care including fetal alcohol syndrome, narcotics addictions, and AIDS. The research indicates that one of the most potentially effective interventions for at-risk children is to offer a caring and responsible adult role model who can make positive, lasting impressions on the child. All youth require caring adults to help them develop the resilience that they need to face the challenges of life.

Spencer, R., Collins, M.E., Ward, R., & Smashnaya, S. (2010). Mentoring for young people leaving foster care: Promise and potential pitfalls. The Free Library. Retrieved August 6, 2013 from http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Mentoring for young people leaving foster care: promise and potential...-a0230865300

This article discusses the challenges of meeting the conditions of an effective mentoring program when working with transitioning youth. The authors identify and critique the research literature on the effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth more generally and the implications of this evidence for programs serving youth leaving foster care utilizing an ecological approach. It is typically presumed that the psychosocial and vocational challenges faced by these youth are related to the lack of strong, healthy and stable relationships. Mentoring has been identified as a potential way to meet the critical need for supportive connections. There is currently little empirical evidence regarding whether and how mentoring may enhance the well-being of transitioning youth. The authors draw on general mentoring research by Rhodes and Dubois (2006) identifying consistency, duration and emotional connection as key characteristics of effective mentoring relationships. The authors identify barriers to meeting these goals including the complex circumstances faced by transitioning youth impacting the development and consistency of relationships; histories of maltreatment and insecure attachments; detrimental impact of premature endings; the intersection and dynamics of the family relationship; and the heterogeneity of the population. Further

evaluation of programs is required. Mentoring is critiqued as an individual-level solution to systematic problems requiring macro efforts to occur simultaneously.

Taussig, H., Culhane, S., & Hettleman, D. (2007). Fostering Healthy Futures: An innovative preventative intervention for preadolescent youth in out of home care. Child Welfare. 86 (5), 113-131.

[Fostering Healthy Futures](#) is a randomized controlled trial of an innovative prevention program for preadolescent youth (ages 9-11) placed in out-of-home care. Half of the youth are randomly selected to participate in a nine-month prevention program, which is manualized and consists of mentoring and therapeutic skills groups. The theoretical model underlying FHF is based on resilience literature. In developing the program, focus groups identified that key participants felt that mentoring and skills groups would be beneficial for youth. Mentors were drawn from schools of social work. The structured mentoring component involves one-on-one mentoring focused on creating empowering relationships with youth, ensuring youth receive appropriate services, helping youth generalize skills learned in skills groups, engaging in extracurricular activities and promoting positive attitudes.

The Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth. Mentoring Youth in Foster Care. Research Brief. Retrieved from July 29, 2013 http://msiy.edc.org/resources/MSIY%20Publications/MSIY_Brief_Mentoring %20Youth% 20in%20Foster%20Care.pdf

This brief highlights the strengths and challenges of youth in care, discusses best practices for mentoring these youth, and outlines the components of effective training for mentors including unique characteristics of effective foster care mentoring programs and vital best practices.

The Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth. Recruiting Mentors for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice or Foster Care System. Research Brief. Retrieved from http://msiy.edc.org/publications/MSIY%20publications/ MSIY_Recruiting%20Mentors%20for%20System%20Involved%20Youth.pdf

Recruiting mentors to work with system-involved youth can be challenging. Potential mentors may fear that mentoring these youth requires specialized knowledge or training that they don't possess. This publication provides guidance on recruiting mentors to work with system-involved youth including: identifying the people you want to recruit; reaching the people you want to recruit; marketing the benefits of working with system-involved youth; and recruiting men, minorities and people in rural areas.

The Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth. Supporting Mentors of Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice or Foster Care System. Research Brief. Retrieved from Http://msiy.edc.org/resources/MSIY%20Publications /Supporting%20Mentors%20of%20System%20Involved%20Youth.pdf

Youth facing considerable life challenges are most likely to benefit from a strong mentoring relationship. This publication focuses on how strategies related to training, supervision, support, accountability, and recognition can serve to increase mentor retention.

Williams, C. (2011). Mentoring and social skills training: Ensuring better outcomes for youth in foster care. Child Welfare. 90 (1), 59-74.

Youth in foster care face significant life challenges that make it more likely that they will face negative outcomes (i.e., school failure, homelessness, and incarceration). While the reason(s) for out-of-home placement (i.e., family violence, abuse, neglect and/or abandonment) provide some context for negative outcomes, such negative outcomes need not be a foregone conclusion. In fact, interventions created to serve at-risk youth could ostensibly address the needs of youth in foster care as well, given that they often face similar social, emotional, and other challenges. Specifically, the author posits that supporting foster care youth through the use of mentoring and social skills training could reduce the negative outcomes far too common for many of these youth.

Youth Leaving Care Working Group. (January 2013). Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System: Final Report. Ontario, Canada.

The Youth Leaving Care Working Group was established by the Minister of Children and Youth Services in conjunction with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Its mandate was to act on the first recommendation of [My Real Life Book – Report of the Youth Leaving Care Hearings](#) that the province of Ontario should recognize the current system needs to fundamentally change to better prepare young people in care to succeed. A section of the blueprint focuses on relationships: "supportive, long lasting relationships are critical to the success of children and youth in and from care." Recommendations include that every child and youth in and from care has permanent lifelong relationships that meet their personal and cultural needs, and grow up with many opportunities to develop permanent, supportive relationships with others. A specific recommendation is to partner with community agencies to provide opportunities for children and youth in care to be matched with peer-mentors who have been in care or adult mentors from the community through formalized mentoring organizations that can meet their individual needs.

Zimmerman, P. (2006). Building intensive relationships with at risk children: The literature and research at a glance.

This article looks at some of the mentoring and resilience literature concerning building positive and significant adult-child relationships and outlines some of the factors involved in intensive adult-child mentoring relationships can become a 'lifeline' to high-risk children. Research on mentoring and resilience shows that later, non-familial relationships both strengthen and advance ongoing child development. Children exposed to early and ongoing difficult life events are more likely to have problems forming and sustaining trusting and healthy relationships with adults. Harsh, abusive and neglectful care-giving experiences can

cause a child to perceive the world as a cold and dangerous place. Such experiences can also result in physical, social, emotional, and cognitive developmental and functional delays and/or difficulties. From a behavioural perspective, these youth may present as indifferent, defiant, disrespectful, and resistant. From a mentoring practice standpoint, these types of functional problems make forming meaningful, long-term mentor/ mentee relationships far more challenging, and require large doses of patience, openness, and perceptiveness on the part of the mentor.

Presentations, Webinars, and Courses

Ahrens, Kym. "Natural Mentors for Youth in Care." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. July 22, 2011.

Dr. Ahrens draws on studies by Rhodes et al. (1999) which shows that mentoring relationships with youth in care can have a positive impact on social skills and self-esteem. She indicates that other research (Brittner et al.) shows that mentoring relationships with youth in care that disrupt early (specifically within 3-6 months) can have increases in delinquent behaviour and other negative behaviours. Dr. Ahrens research looks at what lessons can be taken from natural mentoring relationships with youth in care. Initial barriers identified for forming relationships included fear of emotional risk, fear of indebtedness, a fear that the mentor will fail them, resistance to directed advice, and an adult who does not understand their culture or background in the foster system. Initial facilitators to these relationships included a persistent and patient mentor, adults who display authentic affection and emotion, adults who share their own experiences, common past experiences or current interests, and when a youth is in a vulnerable transition period. Ongoing facilitators included adults who set clear expectations, are consistent, display confidence, plan activities that incorporate the youth's interests, are responsive to the youth's needs and method for maintaining ongoing contact. Dr. Ahrens identifies practical upshots around things to consider when choosing mentors, providing specialized training and ongoing support, a youth training component, considering matching youth during times of transition, and considering improving linkages with the child welfare system.

Alberta Mentoring Partnership. (March 16, 2010). Resilience: Building the Social Capacity to Thrive and the Role of Significant Adult Influences. Success in School for Children and Youth in Care Provincial Protocol Framework Initiative [presentation]. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/1232942/resiliencypresentationlearningeventmarch2010.pdf

This presentation, found on the Alberta education website, provides information on the Alberta Mentoring Partnership and focuses on the resiliency and strength-based practice. The presentation describes three types of significant adult relationships: strategic, formal, and informal. Mentoring is defined and research on its positive outcomes is described in relation to enhancing resiliency in others.

Berger, C., Collins, M.E., & Spencer, R. (2011) Mentoring youth in foster care: Emerging research and lessons from the field [webinar powerpoint slides]. Retrieved from http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_1338.pdf

This webinar describes foster care youth, challenges, instability and negative outcomes when transitioning out of care. Creating matches for these youth can be especially challenging with potential harm from early endings and inconsistent mentoring. There is currently little research on the nature and efficacy of mentoring programs for foster care youth and only a couple of studies have control group comparisons. More information is presented on general mentoring research and how it may apply to foster care youth, natural mentors, facilitators of connections, and elements of effective practice for mentoring foster youth. Mentoring is furthermore described as something that should be in conjunction with, and not substituted for, other supportive services.

Butts, Jeffrey. "Mentoring in Juvenile Justice." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. July 22, 2011.

Dr. Butts speaks about his work with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Youth need help with day to day challenges, overcoming past challenges, and concrete help to introduce stability in their lives. Mentoring has become a beacon of hope in juvenile justice systems and very influential on policy makers. The success of mentoring has the downside that there has been some political contention as services in the United States have been cut while mentoring continues to be supported. Mentoring is being seen as a pathway to funding; people are trying to include mentoring into their program models to obtain funding. Dr. Butts asserts that mentoring is a way to make juvenile justice programs stronger. Mentoring is a natural fit for these programs. Youth justice interventions should involve enhancing positive youth development including opportunities to learn about career, to have success in learning, to have experience and an outlet for artistic expression, physical activity and an enduring relationship with a pro-social adult. Mentoring has become a cornerstone for youth justice programs.

The Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring. *Mentoring Youth in the Foster Care System: From Research to Practice*. Boston, Massachusetts. University of Massachusetts Amherst. 2013.

MENTOR/ University of Massachusetts Amherst Boston Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring short course is an intensive 1.5 day course providing expert lecturers and group discussions aimed at deepening practitioners' capacity to train and supervise volunteer mentors working with youth who are in the foster care system to promote more effective mentoring programs and stronger relationships between mentors and foster youth. This short course will take place September 30 and October 1, 2013.

Keller, Thomas. "Mentoring: Learning, Understanding, and Sharing." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. July 22, 2011.

Dr. Keller applies his research with school-based mentoring and mentor attunement to the experiences of youth-in-care. This approach involves taking time to learn about the youth or child, a desire to understand and connect with youth, being attuned to the responses of the mentees and being persistent and open to trying new things. In research focusing on youth transitioning out of care, Keller defined three groups: 1) distressed and disconnected; 2) competent and connected; and 3) struggling but staying. When supporting youth in care, it is important to remember the diversity of the group. Mentoring has such potential because it allows mentors to respond to the needs and circumstances of youth on an individualized basis.

Kohl, R., Troupe, A., & Taussig, H. (2013). "Mentoring Youth in Foster Care". Microsoft Powerpoint.

This presentation from the National Mentoring Symposium describes various mentoring programs for youth in care. The BEST kids mentoring program works to promote better futures for youth in the District of Columbia's child welfare system by developing and supporting mentoring relationships with caring, consistent adults. The BEST kids program utilizes volunteer mentors for one-to-one mentoring and experiential learning peer groups for children ages 6 and up. Mentor Michigan's foster care initiative has involved identifying Michigan programs serving youth in foster care, identifying the capacity of these programs, identifying the barriers to serve more youth, and developing relationships between mentoring programs and local DHS offices (to increase referrals and communication). This initiative has also included training mentoring programs on DHS practices, DHS on mentoring programs, and foster care specific training to mentoring programs. They have also supported these programs with tools and resources from www.mentormichigan.org. Dr. Taussig presents on the Fostering Healthy Futures program where she discusses the assessment process and the program's two main components: therapeutic skills groups and mentoring. The role of the mentor involves creating a web of support for children, improving social skills, and providing advocacy. Dr. Taussig addresses the qualitative and quantitative results describing positive perceptions by participants and their families, improved mental health outcomes and enhanced placement and permanency outcomes.

Leve, Leslie. "Mentoring in a Muli-Dimensional Intervention." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. July 22, 2011.

Leslie Leve presents a rigorously researched intervention being administered at the Oregon Social Learning Center – Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) which runs for 4-6 months with two main components: a parenting group for foster parents and a child-adolescent skill building component. In the child and adolescent skill building component, a coach or mentor provides one-on-one support for one or two hours each week. They expose the youth to positive role models, new activities and pro-social skills. The same program is done with pre-school and elementary-school aged youth in a group format. Youth in foster care as well as in the juvenile justice system showed a decrease in criminal referrals, days in detention, association with delinquent peers and pregnancies. There were increases in placement stability, connection to mentoring adults, and school engagement. For female youth in care, there was a

decrease in internalizing problems, externalizing problems, delinquency, risky sexual behaviour and drug-use. There was an increase in placement stability and pro-social behaviour.

Munson, Michelle. "Mentors… Like a Parent." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. July 22, 2011.

Dr. Munson focused on meaningful "natural" mentoring relationships that developed without much, if any, program-based support. In Munson's first study, she looked at the role of "key helpers" for youth and young adults with multiple-system involvement and mental health diagnoses. 73% of the youth reported the presence of a key helper. These natural mentors provided mutuality and understanding, consistency in support, encouragement, positive role modeling, honesty and love. Key aspects of the relationships included consistency, a shared background, and unconditional acceptance. Munson is working at taking the traits of these naturally-successful mentoring relationships and building them into a mentoring program model. As the mentoring field continues to expand to serve increasingly high-risk populations, it may be worth asking: is a program-based mentor the best fit or might we be better off identifying those natural 'key helpers' and making sure they have the support needed to keep those relationships thriving?

Powers, Linda. "Mentoring Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. July 22, 2011.

About 40% of youth in foster care and 50% of incarcerated youth require special education with emotional, behavioural and learning disabilities. 70-80% of youth in care have a DSM diagnosis. Data shows that youth with disabilities in care compared to those without disabilities have increased negative outcomes, especially when transitioning out of care. These youth are considered high-risk. In a series of small, rigorous studies on mentoring, positive results for this population have been noted. Things that they have learned from these studies include: use goals/ outcomes to guide program design; involve mentors who can relate to the youth's experiences and the program's goals; mentors need training and ongoing support;

Powers, Linda. "Lessons from Mentoring Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. 2012.

30-70% of youth in foster care have disabilities with the majority being emotional, behavioural, and learning disabilities. Mentoring is described as a method for self-determination – helping young people make decisions, learn and succeed in their lives. In two studies looking at youth being mentored individually and in group formats, impacts included an increase in self-determination, lowered levels of feelings of depression, and improved academic behaviours. Peer mentoring was cited as an experience that can offer knowledgeable, credible and powerful influence for mentees.

Smyth, P. Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Region 6. "Making the Connection: Working with High Risk Youth". Microsoft Powerpoint.

This powerpoint, provided for Children and Youth Services staff working under the CYFEA defines high risk youth and examines theoretical and practice principles for working with this population. Peter Smyth examines the use of harm reduction, a resiliency approach, utilizing community relationships and partnerships, and relationship-based intervention. He outlines strategies for working with high risk youth and defines the seven characteristics of caring relationships (trust, attention, empathy, affirmation, availability, respect and virtue).

Taussig, Heather. "Words that Matter in Mentoring." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. July 22, 2011.

Heather Taussig presents on the work she has been doing with children who have experienced maltreatment and have lived in some form of out of home care. Fostering Healthy Futures is a multi-component program for children in care ages 9-11 in the Denver area. The 30-week program involves a therapeutic skills group led by a clinician and mentors that provide personal support, friendship and opportunities to practice these skills. Mentors are graduate students who spend 16-20 hours a month working with their mentees and attend 40 hours of training prior to working in the program. Mentees spend almost 3 hours a week discussing their mentees with clinicians and participate in ongoing training and skill-building. Taussig has conducted intensive research testing the effectiveness of the program showing a higher quality of life, lower anxiety, and increased social support for youth. Youth also had fewer placements within the system and were two and a half times more likely to be reunified with their family. Taussig provided the following tips: the types of maltreatment children experience matter when developing an intervention; programs should clearly identify the desired outcomes of the mentoring component; and planning for sustainability and long-term partnerships is critical.

Townsen, Erika, & Wagner, Andrew. "Come and Find Me." Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research. Portland State University. July 22, 2011.

The Foster Club 'All-Stars' program provides leadership development to youth who are aging out of the foster care system. The program trains All-Star participants to travel around the country and advocate on behalf of foster youth in each state, speaking with policymakers, legislative bodies, and others in positions to improve the child welfare system. Former youth in care and current Foster Club All Stars (fosterclub.org) provided insight into their time in care including difficulty creating relationships based on trust and a lack of support. They shared the following information regarding mentors: consistency is very important; mentors normalize their experience and help remove stigma; listening was a key part of building trust in the relationship; mentors were tenacious about keeping the relationship going; youth in foster care may need assistance learning to reach out for help as they may feel powerless or unworthy of support. Further recommendations are provided for mentoring programs including: collaboration between mentoring agencies and child welfare agencies; develop an understanding of the special needs of youth and training mentors on these topics; providing extra time to mentees to develop trust within the relationship; and connect with youth groups and youth leaders to provide support on a peer mentoring level.

Alberta Youth In Care Resources

        Government of Alberta. (September 10, 2010). Success in school for children and youth in care. Provincial Protocol Framework. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/4881925/ppf.pdf

Success in School for Children and Youth in Care – Provincial Protocol Framework (PPF) is a joint initiative of Alberta Education (AE) and Alberta Children and Youth Services (ACYS) to support improved school outcomes and high school completion rates for children and youth in provincial government care. The PPF describes the roles and responsibilities of the two ministries in implementing policies and procedures to provide the foundation for collaboration efforts at all levels of their respective systems to achieve this goal. The primary purpose of the PPF is to identify and enable strategies to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in care, and to promote consistency of practice across the province.

        Government of Alberta. Success in school for children in care: Engaging positively with young people in care. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/1232938/ engagingwithyoungpeoplee0331.pdf

This article offers support to core team members (ex. caseworkers, caregivers, and teachers) for supporting educational success for youth in care through relationship building.

        Government of Alberta. Success in school for children in care: Tips for caregivers. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/1232926/tipsforcaregiverse0331.pdf

There are many opportunities for caregivers, such as foster parents, group home staff, and extended family, to help children and youth in care be successful in school and in life. Caregivers help young people in care discover their strengths and abilities and increase their confidence in decision-making. Caregivers celebrate successes with young people in care, and help them learn how to overcome challenges and adversity. This article looks at how caregivers can support educational success for young people in care.

        Government of Alberta. Success in school for children in care: Tips for educators. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/1232930/tipsforeducatorse0331.pdf

When children and youth in care speak about their school experience, many share that they feel stigmatized, labelled and disconnected. As with other students, they also say they want to succeed in school and have adults in their lives who care, support, mentor and advocate for them. This article looks at how educators can support educational success for young people in care.

        Government of Alberta. Success in school for children in care: Tips for helping young people to advocate for themselves. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/ 1237376/tipsforselfadvocacye0331.pdf

This article offers support to core team members (ex. caseworkers, caregivers, and teachers) to assist children and youth in care to advocate in educational or other settings to increase likelihood of success as well as enhance their maturity and development.

Government of Alberta. Success in school for children in care: Working together successfully. Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/1237380/tipsforworking together e0331.pdf

This article offers support to core team members (ex. caseworkers, caregivers and teachers) to create powerful relationships and collaborations. Strategies are presented based on research and successful practices and are intended to assist communities and teams as they plan together to help young people in care.

Government of Alberta. Summary of Education Results for Children and Youth In Care Report (March 26, 2010). Retrieved from http://education.alberta.ca/media/1136282/ summarycyicdatareport.pdf

Alberta Children and Youth Services (ACYS) and Alberta Education are working together to improve high school completion and other educational outcomes for children and youth in care. To support this joint work, the ministries of ACYS and Education signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to allow data matching in order to generate education results for children and youth in care. This report covers the school years from 1995/96 to 2006/07.

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. (April 2013). Where do we go from here? Youth Aging Out of Care Special Report. Alberta, CAN.

Based on focus groups with youth receiving services under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, three themes emerged: 1) Youth need additional access to programs and supports; 2) youth need genuine connections to supportive adults in the community; and 3) youth need increased resources to help them become independent. Youth described their desire for connections to trusted and caring adults who they could go to for advice and support as they transitioned to adulthood. This report refers to the [Advancing Futures bursary](#) which provides youth with access to funding for upgrading and post-secondary education. It provides examples of an Edmonton-based youth in care mentoring program (Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton), and a southern Alberta program that provides wraparound services to homeless young people.

Youth in Care Canada
http://www.youthincare.ca/

Across Canada, there are a number of local, regional and provincial Youth in Care Networks and groups. These networks give youth opportunities to speak out on important issues regarding being in the system, develop important life skills, and make lasting friendships with other youth who have similar life experiences. General contact information can be retrieved from

info@youthincare.ca. At this time, the Alberta Youth in Care and Custody Network is not accessible.

Guides for Practice

LEARNS. Mentoring children in foster care: Consideration and partnership strategies for Senior Corps Directors. Retrieved from http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/files/ legacy/filemanager/download/learns/Mentoring_Children_in_Foster_Care_Final_Revised.pdf

This toolkit is designed to help Senior Corps (and organization that connects today's 55+ with the people and organizations that need them most) directors recruit, train, and place volunteers in mentoring programs serving foster youth. It also examines how to identify, partner with, and begin placing volunteers in high quality programs serving foster youth. Special considerations for mentoring foster youth include consistency, the right skills and temperament, understanding that delivering services can be difficult, and connecting to clinical support.

North, D., & Ingram, B. (2003). Foster youth mentorship training for program managers. Mentoring Plus Workshop Series: Series 5. Evaluation, Management, Training.

This resource is designed for mentor program managers in the state of California who serve or who wish to serve youth in foster care. The workshop is comprised of seven modules: a child's path through the foster care system; the role of a mentor in the life of foster youth; what mentors can offer foster youth; helping foster youth prepare for the future; building trust into your mentor program design; creating a foster youth friendly mentor program; and next steps. The workshop also includes Foster Youth Mentorship Training for use with mentors that provides trainer's notes and presentation slides. Program development resources include descriptions of mentoring programs serving this population and a partnership model and pilot program draft document.

NYC Administration for Children's Services
Best Practice Guidelines for Foster Care Youth Mentoring
http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/become_mentor/best_practices_addition.shtml

Outlines the best practices for implementing a mentoring program as a part of a child welfare agency including: guaranteeing mentoring is supported agency-wide; appropriate recruitment, screening and training principles, and working with case workers.

Current Mentoring Organizations Serving Youth In Care

Adoption and Foster Care Mentoring
http://www.afcmentoring.org/

Mission: to empower youth in foster care to flourish through committed mentoring relationships and the development of essential life skills.

A Boston-based organization that exclusively serves youth in care ages 7 and older through one-on-one mentoring as well as group mentoring services to youth ages 14 and older with a focus on transitioning out of care (life skills workshops, paid internship, peer network). AFC will continue to serve youth as long as they wish to participate in the program.
http://www.afcmentoring.org/wp-content/uploads/DC-Full-Revised-2-pg.pdf

Advancing Futures Bursary Program
http://humanservices.alberta.ca/family-community/15616.html
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaZVn0Q0qJg

The Advancing Futures bursary program was established in 2004 to increase opportunities and improve outcomes for at-risk or high-risk youth in care. The program focuses on transitioning youth from care into adulthood while funding them to complete a post-secondary education and obtain a marketable skill. In 2012-2013 the program provided close to $6.5 million dollars in funding and transitional supports such as how to access employment, education and life skills to 585 students. Each of the 585 students is assigned to a program coordinator who provides coaching, mentoring and transitional supports. In June 2010, in partnership with Advancing Futures, ATB Financial introduced the ATB Financial Youth Education Support Program (YES Program). The 2010 YES Program provided six students with a financial bursary to pursue a four year degree or two year diploma at an Alberta post-secondary institution. The YES Program included a mentoring component and students were provided with guidance throughout their educational pursuit and are also offered part-time employment. Advancing Futures bursary continues to provide transitional supports to these students and ATB Financial provides the mentoring and employment opportunities. Over the past 3 years ATB Financial has increased their commitment and added one additional youth per year. In 2012-13 ATB Financial committed over $105,000 towards the YES Program. In 2013-2014 ATB will provide 8 AFB students with bursaries and we will also introduce a 'career planning' component to the program. Below is a video that was created to profile the partnership between ATB YES program and AFB from a student's perspective.

Contact: Jackie Astle, Manager Youth In Transition, Ministry of Human Services, (780) 644-2559, jackie.astle@gov.ab.ca

BEST Kids
www.bestkids.org
BEST Kids, Inc., is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides mentoring to foster care children in the District of Columbia's Child Welfare System. One of the strongest single protective factors a child can have is a close relationship with a caring adult who serves as a mentor and role model. Despite this, long term, consistent, one-on-one mentoring is almost non-existent for foster care children. We are the first pilot program in the District of Columbia to provide volunteer mentors dedicated to mentoring children in foster care. Operating under

the first ever Volunteer Mentor Partnership (VMP) Grant with the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency, BEST Kids mentoring program is able to provide volunteer mentors for children as young as six and continue, as needed, until they reach the age of twenty-one years old. BEST Kids asks mentors to commit to at least one year of mentoring and to perform, on average, 10 hours a month of face-to-face contact. The program's mission is to promote better futures for youth in the District of Columbia's child welfare system by developing and supporting one-on-one mentoring relationships between the youth and caring, consistent adults.

Better Futures

This program serves transitioning youth, specifically those with a history of mental health conditions. Better Futures focuses on higher education attainment. The mentors are peers who share the same background: almost all have been in foster care, many have a history of homelessness or mental health issues, and all have gone on to college. Mentors use self-disclosure to role-model and normalize the experience of transitioning out of care. The youth also participate in a week-long institute over the summer that provides workshops and training opportunities on a variety of relevant topics. Initial findings suggest improved self-determination and post-secondary planning.

Hear about the program through the eyes of a youth participant:
http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/fpS1303.pdf
"Like everyone else, foster youth need support from the people around them. Without support a dream will stay a dream and never become a reality. I know from experience, however, that just one person saying, "You can do this," can tune out some of the "You're never going to get there" messages that are commonly conveyed to youth in care. It just takes one person to inspire youth to create a future for themselves."

Child Welfare League of America
http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/peermentoring.htm

Fostering Healthy Connections through Peer Mentoring: Foster Youth Give Each Other a Helping Hand
In partnership with the FosterClub, funding has been secured for a three-year initiative in which former foster youth mentor children and youth currently in the foster care system. Goals include improving behavioural and educational outcomes as well as strengthening interpersonal relationships. CWLA will provide a mentor and mentee curriculum, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and youth-friendly online resources and materials.

Emancipated Youth Connections Project

Jacobson, C. (2008). Emancipated Youth Connections Project: Final Report/ Toolkit. The California Permanency for Youth Project. Oakland, CA. Retrieved August 23, 2013 from http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/pdf/CPYPFinalReport-ToolkitWeb.pdf

The vision of the California Permanency for Youth Project is to achieve permanency for older children and youth in California so that no youth leaves the child welfare system without a lifelong connection to a caring adult. The goals fall in two categories: 1) participants searching for family members; and 2) participants hoping to find a non-relative 'parent' or 'lifelong mentor' figure. When described by youth, it was clear that they were hoping for a relationship much broader than the one typically provided by a mentor. They desired someone more like a parent figure but were uncomfortable using the term 'parent.' The author recommended that child welfare professionals need to consider a variety of permanent relationships. Although mentor relationships are often temporary, it is possible to connect youth to mentors who will make lifelong commitments. The client will lead the way to the needed connection.

Foster Club All Stars
www.fosterclub.com
The Foster Club 'All-Stars' program provides leadership development to youth who are aging out of the foster care system. The program trains All-Star participants to travel around the country and advocate on behalf of foster youth in each state, speaking with policymakers, legislative bodies, and others in positions to improve the child welfare system.

Fostering Healthy Futures (FHF)
http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/fostering-healthy-futures-fhf/detailed

The Fostering Healthy Futures 9-month preventative intervention is designed for preadolescent children aged 9 to 11 years recently placed in foster care due to child maltreatment. The FHF intervention includes two major components: skills groups and mentoring. Skills groups were designed to bring children in foster care together to reduce stigma and provide opportunities for them to learn skills in a supportive environment. Mentoring was designed to provide children in foster care with an additional supportive adult who could serve as a role model and advocate. The intervention demonstrated a significant effect in reducing mental health symptoms, especially those associated with trauma, anxiety, and depression.

Mentoring USA
Foster Care Programs
http://www.mentoringusa.org/our_programs/Program_Descriptions

Mentoring USA's Foster Care program is uniquely designed to provide structured, one-to-one mentoring for youth in care through New York City. These programs follow the same important guidelines as the Mentoring USA General Programs do, all while expanding service to youth up to 21 years of age. When foster care children turn 21 years old and 'age out' of the system, they are presented with a whole new set of challenges, many of which their mentors can help them overcome. As part of the foster care programming Mentoring USA also offers unique programs that link adopted youth with adults who were adopted. Mentoring USA's Foster Care program passionately aims to provide these youth with someone who cares, in order to develop a long term relationship increasing the likelihood of future success

Mentoring System Involved Youth Inventory of Foster Care and Reentry Mentoring Programs
http://msiy.edc.org/publications/MSIY%20publications/MSIY_Inventory%20of%20Foster%20Care%20%20Reentry%20Mentoring%20Pgms.pdf

My Life Program
Mentors (coaches) help youth achieve self-identified goals for early adulthood. Mentors are primarily graduate students and paid staff who are compensated for their time and use a set curriculum called Take Charge to guide their goal-focused work. Mentors are highly trained and supervised; their coaching sessions are often filmed and reviewed by clinicians and they complete fidelity checklists and activity logs. Youth also participate in group mentoring workshops by foster care alumni and volunteers. Participants show increased perceptions of self-determination and quality of life, as well as improved transition planning. They also tend to have higher employment rates after leaving the program. Mentors are trained to persist and work through the initial resistance many traumatized youth have to trusting adults and forming relationships.

U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center. (2009). Case Studies in Youth Mentoring: Building lasting matches through quality training and support. Powerhouse Mentoring Program for Foster Youth.
www.powerhouse.org
The Powerhouse Mentoring Program began providing mentoring services to foster care youth aged 13-21 in Multnomah County in October 2000. The mission of the Powerhouse is to provide community-based mentoring to teens in foster care to enhance their successful transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Two part-time staff members are responsible for all phases of the mentoring program which serves approximately 25 youth annually. The average length of matches is 28 months. This report attributes the success of the program to their intensive, specialized training program and ongoing support for mentors. Mentors learn about the youth they will be serving and how they can build a relationship with them

The Technical Assistance and Training Program for Mentoring System-Involved Youth. Inventory of Foster Care Reentry Mentoring Programs. Retrieved from http://msiy.edc.org/ publications/MSIY%20publications/MSIY_Inventory%20of%20Foster%20Care%20%20Reentry % 20Mentoring%20Pgms.pdf

This document identifies mentoring programs in the United States that serve foster youth with contact information.

True Colors Mentoring: Sexual Minority Youth and Family Services
http://www.ourtruecolors.org/Mentoring/

One-on-one mentors meet with youth individually as well as in group activities. The majority of the youth come from the Department of Children and Families.
Mentor Manual: http://www.ourtruecolors.org/Mentoring/PDF/Mentor_manual.pdf

General Information Regarding Youth in Care

Atkinson, M. (2008). **Aging out of foster care: Towards a universal safety net for former foster care youth. Harvard Civil Rights – Civil Liberties Law Review (43), 183-212**

This article focuses on the lack of a safety net for youth aging out of the foster care system and the increased likelihood that they will suffer from homelessness, be involved in criminal activity, be uneducated, be unemployed, experience poverty, and lack proper health care. This article identifies the specific needs and outcomes of youths who age out under current foster care policies. The writer makes an argument for a universal safety net for former foster care youth including such services as mentorship, daily life skills training, housing support, job training, healthcare, counseling services, educational scholarships, and emergency contacts. Atkinson notes group homes, where older youth are often placed, often hinder the development of relationships with members of the community and give youth fewer opportunities to become adopted or develop adult mentors. Congregate care facilities are often staffed with young workers and sustain high employee turnover rates, preventing youth from developing lasting relationships with responsible adults, one of the key factors typically associated with aging out successfully.

Geenen, S., & Powers, L. E. (2007). **"Tomorrow is another problem" The experiences of youth in foster care during their transition to adulthood. Children and Youth Services Review, 29, 1085–1101.**

This study gathered qualitative information about the experiences of youth transitioning out of foster care into adulthood, from the perspectives of youth themselves, as well as foster parents and professionals. Data was gathered from 10 focus groups comprised of a total of 88 participants, including youth currently in foster care, foster care alumni, foster parents, child welfare professionals, education professionals, Independent Living Program staff and other key professionals. Findings of key themes included: (a) self-determination; (b) coordination/collaboration (c) importance of relationships; (d) importance of family; (e) normalizing the foster care experience; (f) the Independent Living Program and (g) issues related to disability.

Keller, T., Cusick, G., & Courtney, M. (2007). **Approaching the transition to adulthood: Distinctive profiles of adolescents aging out of the child welfare system. Soc Serv Rev Author Manuscript. Retrieved August 08, 2013 from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/ PMC2802332/**

The transition to adulthood is marked by new roles and responsibilities in such interrelated domains as education, employment, and family formation. This study investigates the capacity of adolescents on the verge of emancipation from the child welfare system to navigate this transition. The authors argue that by identifying distinctive subpopulations characterized by particular combinations of strengths and challenges provides a basis for tailoring programs and services to the needs of different types of youth in the system. The purpose of the study is to

investigate heterogeneity among youth who are on the verge of exiting the child welfare system. The analysis suggests four subpopulations defined by distinctive profiles on indicators reflecting multiple domains of life experience: distressed and disconnected; competent and connected; struggling but staying; and hindered and homebound. Identifying the particular needs and challenges of subpopulations has implications for efforts to match adolescents aging out of the child welfare system with appropriate services.Competent and connected youth are described as being the most likely to benefit from opportunities and services that enable them to nurture their talents, form mentoring relationships, engage in youth development programs, attend college, and participate in vocational training.

Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2012). My real life book: Report from the youth leaving care hearings. Retrieved from http://www.provincial advocate.on.ca/documents/en/ylc/YLC_REPORT_ENG.pdf

This is a collective Life Book written by youth served by the Children's Aid Society system in Ontario as a way of documenting the stories presented at the Youth Leaving Care Hearing which took place November 18th and 25th at Queen's Park. This report is written by youth in and from care, with the support of the Advocate's Office. One theme that emerges is that 'youth are vulnerable.' The main difference between the vulnerability of a child in care and a child at home is the support system and environment they live in. Another theme is that of isolation. This is described as preventable as it takes one person to reach out and help, listen, actually hear what is said and then guide youth in the right direction. The theme that 'no one is really there for us' is described. A steady and stable relationship with at least one person is said to make all the difference in the world. A professional recommended that children need someone that will be there in the long term that will help them achieve their goals. The youth also described requiring more support in transitioning out of care at age 21 – with job training, financial assistance, life skills education, and support for medications, dental care and mental health. Recommendations made is to make sure youth have permanent relationships with positive relatives, adults, mentors and peers; support children and youth in care to identify mentors; offer more peer mentoring or role models to check in with and talk to; support any meaningful relationship a youth has through transition, a strong relationship will facilitate transition.

Newspaper Articles

Kennedy, K. "Gay Foster Kids' Discrimination Battle Heats Up In States." *Huffpost Gay Voices* **[Miami]. June 22, 2013. Retrieved online from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/22/gay-foster-kids-discrimination-_n_3483473.html?utm_content=buffer5776d&utm_source=buffer &utm_medium =twitter&utm_campaign=Buffer**

Discrimination against gay and lesbian youths in foster care has led to federal health professionals sending a letter in 2011 encouraging states to develop training for caseworkers and foster parents on the issue. Advocates in some states have increased efforts to train

caseworkers, recruit foster parents and assign mentors. The largest issue for these youth is homelessness. This article draws attention to the non-profit mentoring organization True Colors that works closely with Connecticut child welfare workers. Massachusetts opened a co-ed group home for gay foster youth. Child welfare officials there also recently started a mentoring program along with life skills classes. Recruiting foster parents and mentors has been challenging, according to the Executive Director of Adoption and Foster Care Mentoring.