

**Evaluating a Mentorship Program Focussed on Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Children  
and Refugee Youth in Winnipeg**

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Winnipeg

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## **Abstract**

This study was undertaken in part to fulfill requirements of the master's degree program in Sociology at the University of Manitoba. The broader applied purpose of the study is to generate baseline data that will be used to evaluate a youth mentorship program at the NEEDS centre agency in Winnipeg, Canada. This evaluation-based study also seeks to provide the management team with a program description, a literature review revolving around notions of resilience and risk, positive youth development, youth development programming, youth mentoring and delinquency prevention as well as mentoring immigrant children and refugee youth. The youth mentorship program is designed to help immigrant children and refugee youth ages 6-18 years to help them settle in Canadian society. The aim of the program is to enable children and youth to build relationships with mentors who take them out in the community to engage in recreational and educational activities. This study seeks to capture a clear picture of the services and support that newcomer children, youth and their families receive in Winnipeg. The study will generate knowledge that will help to guide the development of appropriate services to best meet the needs of program participants. The study will also address this knowledge gap through a qualitative examination of the experiences of individuals and their families seeking help. This was achieved through Zoom based one-on-one interviews firstly with program staff, secondly with mentors and thirdly with parents of program participants. These interviews will form the backbone of the needed firsthand experiences of key stakeholders required in order for the NEEDS centre to more fully assess and potentially make needed changes to its youth mentorship program. Interviews with program staff and mentors focus on programming and organizational activities. Interviews with parents of participants focus on the needs of their children and families.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Professor Russell Smandych for his untiring support of my graduate studies thesis project, as well as other courses he taught and also helped me to select within and outside the Department of Sociology and Criminology. Based on his counsel, the combination of courses I took have proved very beneficial not only for my graduate studies thesis component, but also overall for my academic studies at the University of Manitoba. I could not have asked for a better mentor and supervisor, one who together with his wife, Kathryn Smandych have embraced and continued to support my two teenage daughters, Temwani and Niza from 2018 when they reunited with me in Winnipeg, Canada.

I thank the NEEDS centre executive team for the opportunity given to me to undertake this first of its kind, evaluation-based study of their youth mentorship program. I would like to acknowledge the youth mentorship program administrative, support staff and mentors' team as well as the translators for their support, help and cooperation. Without them I could not have gathered the baseline data I needed to evaluate this invaluable youth mentorship program at NEEDS centre.

I also thank Professor Rick Linden for accepting to be a member of my thesis committee and for providing very constructive feedback. I would also like to acknowledge Professor Michael Baffoe for his invaluable feedback as an external thesis committee member.

Finally, I want to thank my two daughters, Temwani and Niza for the good meals they took turns to prepare for me while I worked at home to complete this research project. Working and studying at home, during this Covid-19 pandemic has definitely helped all of us to be very supportive of each other and to respond to stress in more resilient ways.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Although I am interested in the notion of resilience and the ways in which current youth justice community resource programs are premised on need-based or strength-based models, my view is that we need to go beyond what these needs-based models offer to young people. Some scholars have suggested that whereas needs-based models may help to address the needs of young people, they often reflect the views of adults rather than the views of young people (for example, see Reid and Gillis 2016). Therefore, we need to start looking at alternative ways of addressing what needs to be done in order to more effectively meet the needs of young people, particularly new Canadians. One way I hope to make this important contribution is by utilizing a participatory action research (PAR) Strategy that will democratize the research process. Participants will become co-researchers. I have partnered with Newcomers Employment and Education Services (N.E.E.D.S.) incorporated, a community-based organization that serves the needs of immigrant and refugee youth in Winnipeg. N.E.E.D.S. center runs a youth mentorship program. They have expressed a desire to have their youth mentorship program evaluated. I collaborated with the youth mentorship program in the early design of this research project and data collection. My analysis and conclusions arising from this research project are based on the primary research I conducted through in-depth interviews firstly with the program staff, secondly with the mentors and finally with the parents of program participants. This study is needed because there is a growing population of immigrant and refugee youth particularly from war-torn countries or failing states immigrating to Manitoba. The youth mentorship program also has a huge number of youth on a waitlist for mentors. Furthermore, primary research conducted in Winnipeg shows that most of these young people have peculiar needs such as navigating through the education system, finding employment, lack of knowledge regarding service providers and much more. These needs need to be effectively addressed in order

to keep them from the criminal justice system as well as to help them become more productive and law-abiding citizens (see Fast 2014).

The story of how I came to this research began when I took an advanced-honours reading course. Prior to taking the course I took a youth crime course. Two authors of the textbook we used for the youth crime course discussed the notion of resilience (see Reid and Gillis 2016). I developed interest from that time, in the notion of resilience and how there is a growing body of research in recent decades focussing on resilience especially among youth-justice professionals and researchers. I asked Professor Smandych who taught the youth crime course, if he would be interested to offer me an advanced honours readings course on the notion of resilience. He agreed and we collaboratively came up with themes surrounding the notion of resilience in youth-justice related fields. From the readings course I unearthed several studies and literature which inspired me and heightened my interest to conduct primary research for my Master's degree focussing on the ways in which the notion of resilience could be relied upon to develop exceptional youth mentorship programming particularly for immigrant, refugee children and youth as well as their families in Winnipeg. In order to prepare myself to conduct primary research at the graduate studies level, I enrolled in a number of courses, including a research and evaluation course in social-work practice taught by a faculty member from Social Work, an advanced readings course focussing on critical interrogations of risk and resilience, and courses on evaluating social programs and qualitative research methods for sociological inquiry, all taught by faculty from the Department of Sociology and Criminology.

Because I was already aware that the NEEDS centre was always looking for volunteers to support newcomer youth in the community. I approached the then Manager of the Youth Mentorship program at NEEDS centre, Matthew Fast, whom I had met before at the University of

Manitoba, when he came to recruit university students to be mentors for the youth mentorship program. When I visited the NEEDS centre, I was given a quick tour of the facility and I briefly interacted with the staff who were in charge of all the programs offered at the NEEDS centre. I particularly expressed my desire to evaluate their youth mentorship program. After completing all my theory courses I applied for a volunteer position in the youth mentorship program. My goal was to familiarize myself with the program staff and participants, and also to develop a plan for my research activities in which the key stakeholders, namely the program participants, mentors and staff would be involved as co-researchers. After all the background checks, I was accepted into the program, and I also completed the orientation training for mentors. While waiting to be matched to my mentees, I encountered significant personal and family-life problems, which slowed my progress. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult for me to carry on with my original plan and intentions for my research. Ultimately, the NEEDS centre and the University of Manitoba ethics board approved that I carry on my research activities, without personal interactions with participants because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to do this, I devised an alternative methodology which I will discuss in Chapter 3 of this study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Context**

There has been a growing body of research in recent decades showing that the notion of resilience is useful to study the lives of children particularly those who experience significant life stress related to mental health, poverty, parental separation or divorce, forced migration from war-torn countries and many other social, spiritual and economic challenges. This interest has been taken on particularly by theorists and researchers who believe that the lives of children can better be understood by following an interdisciplinary approach which focuses not merely on individual factors but also the broader societal issues affecting them. Following this approach, sociologists and criminologists believe that children who experience significant stress can be better understood through collaborative resiliency research (Rolf 1999:9). Although researchers do not agree on the definition of the concept of resilience, they agree that resiliency research is a useful framework to engage particularly in our understanding of youth crime and what can be done to more effectively deal with the problem of juvenile delinquency (Roosa 2000; Foster & Spencer 2011; McElwee 2007; Hutcheon & Lashewicz 2014). I will examine the significance of having robust and effective mentoring programming for children, particularly immigrant and refugee youth by drawing on the notions of resilience and risk and positive youth development.

### **2.2 Resilience and Risk**

Larry Brendtro and Scott Larson are inspiring resilience researchers who have highlighted the importance of further developing notions of resilience and risk in order to develop community-based systems and relationships supportive of all children especially those at risk of falling in the cracks of society, who may also end up in the criminal justice system. Drawing on the work of

early theorists Brendtro and Larson (2006) note that children have an innate desire to pursue pleasure and power, and at the core of this lies a need for relationships. At risk children often do not have stable relationships right from their families, consequently they end up being marginalized socially, culturally, economically and spiritually from the institutions that promote human growth and development (Brendtro and Larson 2006:27). These researchers note that when children's desire of wanting to belong is not met in the family, at school, or in the community through stable relationships, at risk kids gravitate towards delinquency. Brendtro and Larson (2006: 27) argue that real solutions to the problem of juvenile delinquency do not lie in the criminal justice system but in the communities, where children need to be connected to caring adults or older peers who can help them navigate through the challenges of their lives. Brendtro and Larson (2006:33) argue that researchers need to develop better ways of helping troubled children who to all human appearances may seem not to care about being loved. According to Brendtro and Larson (2006:33) in this regard, notions of resilience and risk provide ways of identifying and developing the hidden potential and strengths of children which may enable them to obtain positive life outcomes in spite of the challenges they may be facing.

Brendtro and Larson (2006:12) observe that in order to better help troubled children, the way we think about their problems needs to change. In this regard theories that explain deviance and suggest solutions based on the perceived deficits that adults see in children inadvertently promote ostracization. Instead of characterizing children as deficient we need to characterize them as having strengths in spite of the deviant behaviour. This approach also provides care providers opportunities to interrogate themselves and also the care system. The strength-based approach is better because of its potential to uncover care provider and systemic failures (Brendtro and Larson 2006:12). According to Brendtro and Larson (2006:13) the two popular views of responding to

deviance suggest that children either need to be punished or diagnosed with a disorder and then be treated with drugs or therapy. Brendtro and Larson argue that although retribution and rehabilitation appear to be opposed, in reality “both are pessimistic and reactive, focussed on deviance and deficit” (2006:13). Consequently, society denies children basic restorative principles that are supported and well established in the resilience and positive youth development research (Brendtro and Larson 2006:13).

Brendtro and Larson (2006:15) lament that there is a tendency even among youth professionals to accept the view that harsher punitive approaches are needed to instil discipline particularly in those who seem not to respond to traditional approaches of discipline. In addition, some professionals are inclined to believe that coercion is needed in order to promote order and authority, and yet they acknowledge that coercion inhibits educational growth. Research shows that coercive environments inhibit positive growth and promotes aggression and other psychopathological conditions in at risk children (Brendtro and Larson 2006:15). Brendtro and Larson (2006:15) note that youth professionals need to guard against coercive practices which may only serve short-term goals of cuddling our frustrations and anger of dealing with troubled children. Instead youth professionals need to respond with empathy to the pain and needs of young people who may also be reactionary because they believe that nobody cares about them. Brendtro and Larson (2006:15) partly attribute the hostile environment in which coercive practices thrive to public fear about violence and crime often blown out of proportion by politicians and media propaganda. Sadly, even when studies are showing that youth crime is at the lowest level in recent times, there are more calls for harsher punishment and treatment of the problem of juvenile delinquency.

Drawing from recent literature on resilience Brendtro and Larson (2006:43) suggest four pathways to resilience and four needs which children desire to meet. Firstly, children have a desire to belong (I mean something to you), secondly, they strive to obtain mastery (I am good at something) thirdly, children want independence (I have power to make decisions) and fourthly, children strive to be generous (I have purpose in life). According to Brendtro and Larson (2006: 43) based on these four principles of resilience and their related needs, when a child is connected with a mentor (an adult or more experienced peer) such a relationship enables him or her to build trust and promotes a sense of belonging. Furthermore, when the child is helped to recognize his or her talents by the mentor, he or she gains mastery. In addition, when a mentor helps to satisfy the desire in a child to be independent, the mentee is empowered. Moreover, when a mentor fulfills the desire for the mentee to be generous, this instills a sense of purpose. In this way, this empowering approach satisfies not only the need to be resilient in the child but also in the adult doing the difficult work of encouraging and supporting healthy children in our communities. In addition, when all the needs of a child are satisfied and he or she becomes purpose-driven, this enables him or her to help other children to be resilient as well (Brendtro and Larson 2006:45). Brendtro and Larson note that “we know we have done our work when we have taught children to become teachers” (2006:4).

One of the pitfalls of resiliency research is that there are several definitions of the term resilience. For example, Garmezy and his colleagues (1990) have described resilience as a capacity for successful adaptation in face of hardship while Rutter (1990) describes resilience as a positive outcome. Cicchetti and Scheneider-Rosen (1986) and Egeland, Carson and Sroufe (1993) consider resilience to be a transactional process within an organization framework [in which] developmental outcomes are determined by the interaction of genetic, biological and sociological

factors in the context of an environmental support (cited in Glantz and Sloboda 1999:116). These noted variations explaining the construct of resilience have unintended consequences. Firstly, there is a tendency to conceptualize resilience in terms of positive and negative outcomes. Secondly it is difficult to isolate the cultural backgrounds of researchers from that of their participants. Thirdly, cultural variation makes it difficult to conceptualize the notion of resilience across all cultures (Glantz and Sloboda 1999:118). Because resilience research tends to draw on beliefs about societies and their environments, this often leads to blaming individuals, who do not demonstrate resilience because they are compared with others who show characteristics of resilience. Similarly, McElwee (2007) argues that focusing on personal factors often leads to research and practice that often focuses on psychopathology rather than on the structural barriers that inhibit children from thriving. This is unhelpful because the focus is on what is not working well for individuals rather than the broader issues that impact them. Furthermore, this creates confusion and conflicts particularly in diverse cultural societies because the focus is on the capacity of individuals to adapt (Glantz and Sloboda 1999:118). Drawing on an ecological systems developmental approach, other scholars have argued that resilience research also needs to be understood as an integrated science seeking to explain the relationships between and among the social, economic and spiritual institutions that influence children and their families (Masten 2015; Ungar 2008). In this way, “whether resilience is defined in terms of capacity, processors, or outcomes of positive adaptation in contexts of risk, will depend on the co-action of multiple systems as they come together in the function of the individual” (Masten 2015:187). This makes it possible for the notion of resilience to become more dynamic because individuals as well as their contexts keep evolving. In addition, drawing on an ecological systems development theory makes definitions of resilience more practical because they contribute to a multi-level approach (Masten 2015:187).

Other researchers have argued that part of the solution to the flaws identified in the construct of resilience is to attend to the ways in which theoretical considerations are brought to the front. For example, Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) suggest that developing better ways of examining and conceptualizing the notion of resilience would help to develop intervention programs that focus on a broad range of factors (structural) rather than individual factors. Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) make two broad suggestions. Firstly, because important advances have been made over the past decades which show that resilience is more complex than previously thought, researchers need to continue to examine risk as well as protective processes that form the bedrock of our understanding of personal and structural issues connected to resilience. Risks entail processes that contribute to individuals becoming vulnerable to adversities whereas protective processes are those that mediate the risks and thus enable some to thrive amidst adversities (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker 2000:543). Secondly, it is argued that resiliency scholars need to develop more ways of promoting and ensuring that the field of resiliency maintains scientific rigour. This is important because it shows that their work is evidence based and maintains high scientific standards that can be trusted and utilized to influence social policy (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker 2000:556). According to Lerner, Phelps, Forman and Bowers “Findings from resilience research suggest that risk factors are predictive of negative outcomes for only about 20 to 49 percent of a given high-risk population” (2009:534). In contrast, “protective factors,” the supports and opportunities that buffer the effect of adversity and enable development to proceed, appear to predict positive outcomes in anywhere from 50 percent to eighty percent of a highly risk population” (Lerner et al. 2009:534). According to Lerner et al. “these buffers (i.e., protective factors, assets) make a more profound impact on the life course of children who grow up under adverse conditions than do specific risk factors or stressful life events” (2009:534). These findings provide more

optimism for resiliency research than that offered by the literature on negative outcomes and deficit-based perspectives (Lerner et al. 2009:534). In addition, these findings suggest the positive role that youth mentoring programs can play in building resilience in youth while also strengthening the protective factors that insulate them from negative peer associations and delinquent or criminal behaviour.

### **2.3 Positive Youth Development**

According to Lerner, Phelps, Forman and Bowers (2009:524) positive youth development is another approach that seeks to challenge the validity of the negative and deficit perspectives of youth that influenced multi-disciplinary fields in the 1900s. Instead, positive youth development focusses on the strengths of youth and the positive attributes we desire to emerge in our youth. This perspective was popularised by developmental scientists who began utilizing developmental systems, which were thought to be more dynamic in studying human growth and development. Their focus was on the plasticity of human growth and development as well as on the significance of relations between humans and their interactions in their environments (Lerner et al. 2009:524). In addition, the positive youth development approach also emerged in some instances from evaluation-based research that was delivered in community-based settings tailored to meet the needs of what was believed to be a surge of risk related youth behaviours. According to Lerner et al. (2009:524) the “PYD perspective emerged from the work of comparative psychologists (e.g., Gottlieb, 1997; Schneirla, 1957) and other biologists (e.g., Novikoff, 1945a, 1945b; von Bertalanffy, 1933, 1969) who had been studying the plasticity of developmental processes that arose from the ‘fusion’ (Tobach & Greenberg:1984) of biological and contextual levels of organization” (2009: 524). Lerner et al. (2009:524) note that developmental scientists began drawing on these ideas in the 1970s.

According to Lerner et al. (2009:525) because there is no consensus on a common definition of the term positive youth development, it is difficult to review and understand the whole body of knowledge available on this promising concept. Currently, research shows a variety of theoretical roots of the term. This results in variations of operational definitions and has implications for research. For example, the term *positive youth development* is utilized interchangeably with “empowerment (To, 2007), health adjustment, (Shek Siu, & Lee, 2007), positive well-being (Moore & Gleib, 1995), effective development (Weissberg & O’Brien, 2004), positive behaviours (Flay, 2002) and youth development (Larson, 2006; Nicholson, Collins, & Holmer, 2004)” (Lerner et al. 2009:525). Lerner et al. (2009:525) note some researchers utilize the term without specifying what it means. Sometimes when an author defines the term, it frequently cannot be empirically validated. In addition, authors frequently do not distinguish between positive youth development and deterrence of high-risk behaviors (Lerner et al. 2009:525).

According to Lerner et al. (2009: 527) William Damon is one of the key scholars who has been instrumental to the burgeoning of the positive youth development approach. Damon utilizes PYD by analyzing the maturation of noble purpose in youth and young adults. Damon takes the position that “a central indicator of PYD and *Youth thriving* is engagement in pursuits that serve the common welfare, and make meaningful contributions to communities” (Lerner et al. 2009: 527). Damon also examines what leads young people to seek for the fulfillment of communal and global needs rather than their own self pursuits. A related significant concept in his work is the idea of ‘youth purpose’ (Lerner et al. 2009:527). In his work at Stanford Center on Adolescence, Damon and other scholars have analyzed youth purpose by studying youth in the United States. In order to understand the origins of purpose in adolescents, these researchers surveyed a wide-ranging group of youth in elementary, junior high, high school and college, where respondents

were asked to state their level of commitment to 18 categories of purpose (Lerner et al. 2009: 527). These researchers defined a “category” as an area of life which the individual rates to be important and psychologically is actively involved. The categories included: “family, country, personal growth, sports, academic achievement, good health, looking good, arts, making lots of money, lifework, general leadership, romance, political or social issues, happiness, religious faith or spirituality, community service, friends and personal values” (Lerner et al. 2009:527).

According to Lerner et al. (2009:527) Damon and his colleagues also interviewed the youth. The interviews were done with 12 “purpose exemplars.” The purpose exemplars were youth who had displayed an exceptional and stable commitment to some cause. The participants ranged from 12 to 23 years old, in addition they were required to meet the following criteria.

1. Dedication to some specific cause for two years or more
2. Rationales for involvement clearly included intention to contribute to the world beyond themselves
3. High levels of active engagement in their purpose
4. Concrete future plans around their purpose (Lerner et al. 2009: 527).

According to Lerner et al. (2009) Damon and his colleagues also examined the links between spirituality and purpose in these young people. Lerner et al. (2009:527) note that findings from this study show that modern day young people think more profoundly about religion and spirituality, and in some instances spirituality and religion motivates them to find their life purposes. In addition, findings show that spirituality and religious faith sometimes execute analogous roles in maintaining youth purpose for some of the youth compared to others.

Furthermore, Lerner et al. (2009:527) suggest that the link between spirituality, purpose, and varied facets of PYD may show divergent pathways, or models for diverse groups of teenagers.

According to Lerner et al. (2009:528) from this study Damon and his colleagues suggest three models. Model 1: Spirituality guides young people toward an intention to contribute (purpose), which in turn leads to contribution. Model 2: Spirituality invests young people's personal goals with value and meaning, which in turn contributes to these goals becoming inspiring purposes. Model 3: Spirituality supports young people's intentions to develop character (moral), which in turn supports character development (Lerner et al. 2009:528). According to Lerner et al. "while Damon has viewed purpose as an indication of PYD, he notes that a next step in this investigation will require a deeper understanding of the ways that young people are purposeful" (2009: 528). Purpose-driven youth may truly be giving themselves, but whether it is for self-preservation or social-approval reasons, or whether their commitment is an end itself may be significant for their growth and development. Lerner et al. caution that "an important issue for the study of PYD in general is under what circumstances an involvement in the spiritual life leads to contribution" (2009:528).

According to Lerner et al. (2009:528) Peter Benson and his colleagues at the Search Institute have been instrumental in contributing to the lexicon and insights connected to the strengths of young people. Their focus has been on "developmental assets" which is an approach that "emphasizes the talents, energies, strengths, and constructive interests that every young person possesses" (Lerner et al. 2009:528). Lerner et al. note that "Benson and his colleagues at the Search Institute have examined 'external' assets (e.g., support or boundaries and expectations) and 'internal' assets (e.g., personal values)" (2009:528). Benson and his colleagues established seven behavioural indicators of flourishing in their research, which include school success, leadership,

helping others, maintenance of physical health, delay of gratification, valuing diversity and overcoming adversity (Lerner et al. 2009: 528). Lerner et al. note that one of the most significant findings was that “achievement motivation and school engagement, which are internal assets, in combination with time spent in youth programs, which is an external asset, significantly predicted school success for six different racial/ethnic groups of 6<sup>th</sup>-to 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students” (2009: 528). According to Lerner et al. (2009:528) the Search Institute has been assisting communities to establish community-based programs for positive youth development in the United States. As of 2009, more than 300 communities had integrated the asset-building orientation in their PYD work. Lerner et al. (2009: 529) note that Benson and other scholars who are influenced by this asset-building framework focus on maintaining positive assets which youth possess rather than eradicating risk behaviors. The developmental assets view is important because it addresses key components of youth development that are unseen to those who focus their efforts on risk problematic youth behaviour. In this way, preventing problematic behavior does not translate into fulfillment of positive development (Lerner et al. 2009:529).

According to Lerner et al. (2009:529) there is consensus among scholars indicating that community-based programs that focus on developing assets within community contexts are very effective in promoting positive youth development. For example, in a report on program design, implementation and evaluation of community programs for youth, the committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth “conceptualizes positive youth development in terms of a range of skills and knowledge, as well as other personal and social assets required to successfully move from healthy adolescence into competent adulthood” (Lerner et al. 2009:529). Research shows that “community-based activities that provide opportunities for acquisition of those assets put youth at the center of neighborhood life and bring together caring adults to support them, thus increasing

community support that has been weakened by major social shifts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries” (Lerner et al. 2009:529).

In another study, researchers Eccles and colleagues elucidated four categories of individual assets that show health and well-being in teenagers. The four categories are physical development, intellectual development, psychological and emotional development and social development (Lerner et al. 2009: 529). Lerner et al. note that “positive development does not require possession of all assets. Having more assets, however is better than having fewer, and it is beneficial to have assets in all four domains” (2009:529). These scholars note that the assets are not present in a void and do not inherently guarantee the well-being of youth (Lerner et al.2009:530). Drawing on Eccles and colleagues, Lerner et al. (2009:530) note that “youth need access to contexts that facilitate their development through exposure to positive experiences, settings, and people, and to contexts that provide opportunities to develop and refine real-life skills” (2009: 530). It is salient for every community to have in place a broad range of programming for youth which provide all facets of positive developmental environs. Some of the prominent facets that must characterize such developmental models are personal and psychological safety as well as suitable organization and societal norms (Lerner et al. 2009:530). These contexts enable youth to experience supportive alliances, to integrate, to develop competence, to feel enabled by experiencing success as well a sense of importance. Additionally, these milieus need to be symbiotic with efforts and viewpoints of youth’ families as well as the neighborhoods in which both the programs and the young people dwell (Lerner et al. 2009:530). As we will see later in my study, the concepts of youth resilience and positive youth development are critical to understanding the workings of youth mentoring programs. For example, it is significant that in my interviews with program staff at the NEEDS centre, reported on in Chapter 6, staff members frequently noted that positive youth development

was a concept they were familiar and one that was consciously embraced by staff and volunteer mentors involved in the youth mentoring program.

## **2.4 Youth Development Programming**

Youth development programming has been viewed as an important part of youth mentoring initiatives. For example, drawing on the work of Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003a,b), Lerner et al. note that these scholars examined community-based programs and argue that the focus should be “youth preparation and development” rather than “problem prevention and deterrence” (2009:530). In their work Roth and Brooks-Gunn addressed the importance of explaining and clearly articulating the term *Youth development program* and pinpointed three critical qualities which these programs must have. According to Lerner et al. “based on the existing literature, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003a,b) concluded that (1) specific program activities, (2) atmosphere, and (3) goals are the three defining aspects of youth development programs that differentiate them from other programs for adolescents” (2009:530).

Drawing on Roth and Brooks-Gunn, Lerner et al. note that effective youth development programs “are characterized by an atmosphere of hope, caring, safety, cultural appropriateness, and respect for adolescents’ abilities to make choices and bear responsibility” (2009:530). In addition, program activities furnish options for energetic participation as well as confronting fresh difficulties. Roth and Brooks-Gunn “surveyed 71 highly visible and well-regarded youth development programs to determine whether or not the ‘big three’ are found in real life programs” (Lerner et al. 2009: 530). The most listed goal of the surveyed programs was deterrence of high-risk behaviors, followed by skill and competence building as well as encouraging social contact with others. In addition, a majority of programs provided options for developing caring alliances with grown-ups and peers via counselling and mentorship. According to Lerner et al. (2009:531),

Roth and Brooks-Gunn’s conceptualization of the three key defining aspects of youth development programs “offers researchers and youth professionals with a plain and yet robust framework for analyzing the quality of youth development programming.”

## **2.5 Youth Mentoring and Delinquency Prevention**

Research shows that matching adolescents with caring adults or mentors in community-based settings is effective in addressing risk behaviors as well as nurturing positive development (National Mentoring Resource Center, 2020:3). The Big Brothers Big Sisters program emerged in the 1900s because of concerns regarding the welfare of youth who came in contact with the court system. In addition, the origins of youth mentoring programs in the United States can be traced to the youth justice system and the first youth court founded in Chicago in 1899. Probation officers were matched with criminal justice-involved youth in order to guide and support them (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:3). According to the National Mentoring Resource Center, the popularity and effectiveness of mentoring as a preventative strategy of “delinquent behavior is understandable given its low cost and ability to capitalize on the resources of local communities and caring individuals” (2020:3). Research shows that youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system are more likely to be involved with the adult justice system as they mature into adulthood, particularly for African-Americans, other visible minorities, as well as other economically disadvantaged populations. According to the National Mentoring Resource Center “engaging in delinquent behaviour, furthermore, whether brought to the juvenile justice system or not, appears to increase youth risk for negative outcomes (e.g., depression), thus potentially increasing likelihood of continued or intensified conduct problems in a vicious cycle” (2020:3). The current explosion of diversionary programs particularly in the United States can be attributed partly to the realization that being involved with the juvenile justice system negatively impacts

young people. In some cases, young people are diverted from the juvenile justice system to diversion programs at the pretrial phase or predisposition. Others are diverted after their cases have been completely processed through the court system. According to the National Mentoring Resource Center “Mentoring is among the main community-based strategies that been used in diversion programs” (2020:3).

The National Mentoring Resource Center (2020:6) also notes that studies show mentoring programs enable youth to achieve positive educational outcomes such as improved grades and school attendance (DuBois Portillo, Silverthorn & Valentine (2011). Research also shows that mentoring reinforces significant protective factors against delinquency. These protective factors encompass personal and environmental factors “such as self-control, social competence, and stronger relations with parents and other adults (e.g. teachers)” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:6). Other studies also indicate that mentoring improves the “5 Cs” of positive youth development (i.e. confidence, caring, competence, connectedness, and character) as well as various indicators of youth thriving, such as having a motivating passion or interest (“spark”) and the skills for effectively setting and pursuing goals, all of which to varying degrees have been linked to less involvement in problem or delinquent behaviour” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020: 6; see also, Asetine, Dupre & Lamlein 2000; Kogan, Brody & Chen 2011; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper 2002; Grossman & Tierney 1998; DuBois, Neville, Parra & Pugh-Lilly 2002; Lerner, Napolitano, Boyd, Mueller, Callina 2014; Erdem, DuBois, Larose, DeWit & Lipman 2016).

According to the National Mentoring Resource Center (2020:6) put together, these studies demonstrate that mentoring serves as the social capital which enables disadvantaged youth to pursue their life goals through legitimate means. In this way, mentoring decreases the likelihood of juvenile delinquency (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:6). The National Mentoring

Resource Center notes “the same theory and research, however, also point toward potential limits in the capacity of mentoring, received either through a program or under more naturally occurring circumstances, to prevent or reduce delinquent behaviour” (2020:7). Some of the limitations are “time constraints, boundaries on relationships set by programs, and a range of contextual risk factors (e.g., household poverty, community violence), for example, may hinder the ability of mentors to prevent or ameliorate youth involvement in delinquent behaviour” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:7). The National Mentoring Resource Center (2020:7) notes that one way of addressing this limitation is to design mentoring programs that are more focussed on meeting directly the difficulties faced by youth in the community. For example, this can be achieved by integrating “specialized mentor training and support for collective involvement of mentors and mentees in social-political activism” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:7).

According to the National Mentoring Resource Center (2020:9) research also shows that characteristics of mentees and mentors sometimes influence the effectiveness of mentoring for preventing or reducing delinquent behaviour. For example, characteristics of mentees in this review includes their rates of arrest and conviction and other risk factors. The characteristics of mentors include their approach, level of training and educational attainments. Studies reviewed by Tolan and colleagues (2014) “identified several moderating factors associated with differences in estimated benefits of mentoring on delinquency influencing how mentoring program participation reduces or prevents later delinquency, misconduct, or criminality” (National Mentoring Resources Center 2020:10). These authors “did not find benefits to differ according to levels of youth risk, either individual (e.g. behavioural, academic) or environmental (e.g. living in poorly resourced communities) (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:10). Instead the authors “found more evidence that both mentors’ characteristics and the program’s interaction focus moderated

outcomes” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:10). Moreover, “greater benefits accrued to youth when mentors’ primary motivation to mentor was for the purpose of their own professional development, and when programs prioritized mentors providing advocacy and emotional support” (National Mentoring Resources Center 2020:10). According to the National Mentoring Resource Center (2020:10), a notable concern of Tolan and colleagues (2014) was the unavailability of information regarding what exactly happened during those interactions. These authors concluded “that what programs espouse is sometimes confounded by youth characteristics and also may not correspond with what actually happens in relationships” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:10).

The National Mentoring Resource Center (2020:14) notes that youth crime research is full of examples of the significance of investigating intervening processes. For example, the role of mediators. According to the National Mentoring Resources Center “a recent study concluded that the relationship between gang affiliation and delinquency in the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) sample was mediated by particular types of antisocial forms of cognition” (2020:14). Comparably, “Sampson and Wilson offer the theory that a cognitive landscape that accepts offending is a mediator between neighbourhood disadvantage and delinquency” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:14; see also Sampson & Wilson 1995). Moreover, “there is evidence that perceived personal discrimination may be an important mediator of the effects of concentrated disadvantage and racial isolations on delinquency” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:14; see also Martin and colleagues: 2011). The National Mentoring Resource Center notes that “this possibility suggests supporting youth in coping with experienced discrimination as a potential mechanism through which mentoring could contribute to reduced delinquent behaviour” (2020:14). According to the National Mentoring Resource Center (2020:14) researchers have

found a link into the intervening processes that connect mentoring to the advantageous outcomes on delinquent behaviour. For example, “one study found support for improvements in school attachment as a pathway through which school-based natural mentoring relationships may reduce adolescent reports of violence-related behaviour” (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:14). Other studies have shown that matching youths with adults in relationships where young people believe that their mentors regard them highly and think that they are important contributes to decreasing levels of juvenile delinquency (National Mentoring Resource Center 2020:16; for examples see DuBois & Keller 2017). As we will observe in later chapters where I report on my interviews with NEEDS youth program staff and mentors, many of them have voiced similar views regarding the need for ensuring a careful matching of the characteristics and needs of program mentors and mentees and the potential positive role mentoring programs can play in reducing youth gang involvement and crime.

## **2.6 Mentoring Immigrant and Refugee Youth**

It is important in the context of the current study to also review research and statistics dealing with the experiences and challenges faced by immigrant and refugee youth who arrive in Canada either with their families or on their own, as this information provides a profile of the kinds of youth and families who access the services provided by the NEEDS organization in Winnipeg, including its youth mentoring program. According to Nichols, Ha and Tyyska (2020:178) the population of refugee and immigrant youth in Canada has been burgeoning as more refugees and immigrants obtain permanent residence. Data obtained from the Canadian Council on Social Development shows that in 1996, the population of newcomer youth ranging from 15 to 24 years old was 429,100. These first-generation newcomers represented 11.4% of the total Canadian youth population. The 2016 census data shows that the proportion had increased to 17.94 percent (759,025) immigrant

youth in Canada (Nichols et al. 2020:179). As of 2018, Statistics Canada data shows more than two million immigrant youth ranging between 15 and 35 years old (Nichols et al. 2020:179). According to Nichols et al. Canadian immigrant youth need valuable skills and training to enable them access employment and financial independence needed to succeed. In addition, these young people need support as they graduate from grade school to higher education as well as when they seek employment opportunities. Federal and provincial immigration policies favour adult males to settle in Canada for economic reasons. In view of the large population of immigrant youth in Canada, as well as their potential to contribute economically, socially, culturally and spiritually, measures need to be in place to help them succeed. According to Nichols et al. “the limited data available points to marginalization of newcomer youth as a result of streaming them into education programs that lead to low-skilled, low-wages; long standing discriminatory practices in the labour market based on prejudices around immigrants, race, language, and culture; rejection of their foreign education and work credentials; and deskilling, or placement in jobs below their education and skills” (2020:179). Consequently, Canadian immigrant youth are confronted with challenges ranging from school to work, which mainstream youth populations may not encounter.

According to Nichols et al. the age range of “youth” is modifiable and largely depends on a particular country or organization. For example, Statistics Canada’ definition of youth is from 15 to 24 years old. This definition is intended to separate the regular youth from older working adults ranging from 25-54 years old. Canadian scholars prefer “a wider range of 15 to 35 to account for the trend of youth remaining in school and under their parents’ roof, longer, resulting in later entry into the job market and delaying marriage and having children” (Nichols et al. 2020:179). According to Nichols et al. the term *immigrant* also needs to be defined, primarily because “we should distinguish between youth who migrate alone as unaccompanied minors and those who

come to Canada with their parents, because the needs of these two groups are vastly different” (2020:179). In addition, the literature on immigrant youth does not often differentiate between those groups, thus making it challenging to determine their socioeconomic status.

According to Nichols et al. (2020:180) *Newcomer* is a specific term used by Statistics Canada to identify immigrants who have lived in Canada within the past five years. The general term *immigrant* is not associated with the duration of stay in Canada. Nichols et al. note that data from Statistics Canada shows 489,160 youth ranging between the ages 15 and 34 migrated to Canada between 2011 and 2016. The data does not differentiate between newcomer and immigrant youth, which makes it difficult to understand their peculiar needs. According to Nichols et al. “like those who come to Canada on their own, without support of the family, newcomer youth face substantially greater challenges than those who have lived in Canada for more than five years” (2020:18). Because there is no specificity in the studies and statistics concerning their duration of living in Canada, it is better to stick to the term *immigrant youth* (Nichols et al. 2020:180). Nichols et al. note that “immigrant youth come from around the world and are characterized by a variety of races, languages, cultures, socioeconomic status, and culturally determined gender roles, all of which enter into their success in Canadian schools and the workforce.” The ethnic roots of the prominent first-generation Canadians between the ages 15 and 34 are French, English, Filipino, East Indian and Chinese.

Although historically some studies paint a bleak picture of immigrant youth in Canada, recent studies also show that more newcomer youth are transitioning to post-secondary education than their mainstream counterparts (Nichols et al. 2020: 191). In order to effectively address some of the challenges which newcomer and immigrant youth experience in this transition, Nichols et al. recommend establishing “mentorship programs in secondary schools, colleges and universities,

and settlement organizations to help immigrant youth adapt to Canadian society, form social networks, and become established in the labour market” (2020:193). Other scholars have suggested that because resettled refugee youth particularly in Western countries often believe in the value of education as the means to achieve their aspirations and hope for a better life, they need to be supported. According to Morrice, Tip, Brown, and Collyer “Support for young refugees to make successful transitions into and through the education system is critical to their future lives and longer-term integration outcome” (2020:388). Therefore, there appears to be a critical need for a variety of effective mentoring programs that target refugee and immigrant youth.

According to Christensen, Hagler, Stams, Raposa, Burton and Rhodes (2020:959) research shows that targeted models to youth mentoring compared to the dominant non-specific youth mentoring models are more effective in addressing the specific presenting problems and needs of young people. Christensen et al. (2020:960) note that non-specific models have been popular from the early 1900s when mentoring programs first appeared in the United States. These models focus on relationship building between the mentor and the mentee rather than the specific needs young people have. In contrast targeted models focus on “directly addressing the needs of mentees.” Christensen et al. note that “in fact, several recent evaluations of more targeted approaches to youth mentoring suggest their effectiveness” (2020:961). For example, Sowers et al. (2017) evaluated the efficacy of a STEM-focussed mentoring program for students with disabilities. In this study “mentees were matched with a mentor in the STEM field, and mentoring activities and discussions specifically revolved around education and career development in STEM” (Christensen et al. 2020:960). According to Christensen et al. “findings revealed moderate to large effects for a range of outcomes such as STEM-related knowledge, engagement, confidence, and other career planning confidence” (2020:961). Christensen et al. note that other researchers have also suggested that

“when mentoring activities are calibrated and targeted to specific challenges, youth see even stronger positive effects in academic (Wellington-Johnson 1997), psychological (Jent and Niec 2006), and social (King et al. 2002) outcomes” (2020:961).

Moreover, in their meta-analytic study, Christensen et al. used a “comprehensive dataset of all intergenerational, one-on-one mentoring program evaluations published between 1975 and 2018”, to examine “the comparative impact of targeted, skills-based verses non-specific, relational approaches to mentoring” (2020:959). According to Christensen et al. “Analyses of 48 mentoring studies of youth outcomes (average youth age of 12.25 years old) revealed the overall effect size of targeted programs to be more than double that of non-specific relational approaches, with significant moderator effects on academic, psychological, and social functioning” (2020:959). The results of this review demonstrate that youth mentoring programs, where mentors and mentees are paired with the goal of meeting specific needs of young people are better than traditional non-specific approaches which focus on relation building alone as the basis for developing positive outcomes. In view of forced migrations due to war, particularly in the Middle-East and other war zones, researchers have suggested that programs which support children in countries which host or receive refugees need to be made broader “to include the whole family unit, specifically the mental health of caregivers as a means of supporting family well-being” (Akesson & Sousa 2020:1264). Studies show that the family particularly for children fleeing from war and violence “is often the most important -and sometimes the only source of constancy” (Akesson & Sousa 2020:1265). Drawing on theories of child development and resilience these authors suggest that researchers need to explore the strategies refugee parents use to help themselves and their families cope with trauma as well as issues regarding settlement in a foreign country.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Challenges in Studying Resilience

According to Barton (2005:141) although the concept of resilience is important, feasible and explorable, the challenges of carrying out this kind of enquiry are huge. The absolute abundance of potential risk and protective factors and “the possible relationships among them (reciprocal, conditional, etc.), places strains on the most complex multivariate, quantitative models” (Barton 2005:142). Barton notes that “when one introduces time as a variable-that is, that certain processes may apply only at certain times, have lagged effects, or both - another layer of complexity emerges.” Barton argues that although for this reason, “the richest approach would appear to be the prospective, long-term longitudinal design,” this design too has limitations, for example, attrition, cost, and the “sheer length of time required to produce definitive findings” (Barton 2005:142).

According to Barton (2005:142) the gravest impediment of resilience research is conceptual. Barton draws on Rigsby (1994) who makes the same claim. Other scholars have echoed similar assertions for example, Bartelt (1994) and Tolan (1996) note that “resilience is a quintessentially U.S. concept.” Barton notes that these assertions are hard to disprove. According to Barton “the notion of defying the odds, exceeding expectations, overcoming adversity, and the like fits well with an individualistic society’s competitive ethos” (2005:142). Based on this perspective resilience is a cultural construct. Other issues with the notion of resilience are “can researchers adequately operationalize the key constructs in a resilience study? Who defines the dependant variable (success), and at what level must it appear to be considered as an indicator of resilience?” According to Barton “an etic definition imposed by the researcher permits a nomothetic design and analysis and is susceptible to the culture-bound criticism above” (2005:142). Similarly, “an emic definition provided by the *subjects* in the research may be more meaningful

but may not provide the generalizable data needed for robust theory development.” In addition, “interpreting the results of resilience research is inherently ambiguous” (Barton 2005:142). Barton suggests that reframing the concept of resilience by moving away from the medical model which focuses on deficits or risks, to what we know much less about, risks has the potential to move us forward. Researchers need to focus on how risk mechanisms operate (Barton 2005:143). Barton suggests that “it is the dynamic, socially evolving self-concept, as understood from symbolic interactionism, that may be the missing piece of most developmental theory, including resilience theory - that is, the mechanism through which the multiple personal and environmental characteristics are mingled together to influence behaviour” (2005: 143).

### **3.2 Qualitative Resilience Research**

According to Barton (2005:144) in view of the conceptual challenges which resilience grapples with as the field matures, qualitative studies could better take research forward than quantitative methods. Unlike quantitative methods which rely on numbers to explain relationships among variables, qualitative studies seek to generate meaning by drawing on a limited number of participants. Barton notes that “varieties of qualitative methods used in the study of resilience have included interpretive phenomenology (Gilgun 1999), grounded theory (Gordon & Song 1994), and narrative construction (Ungar, 2001)” (2005:141). According to Barton “in each method, primacy is given to participants’ subjective meanings of experiences, and theory evolves from identifying patterns derived from a processing of comparing and contrasting accounts” (2005:141). Following Barton’s (2005) advice, in the interviews conducted for my study I gave participants the opportunity to express their subjective views on the youth mentoring program run through the NEEDS centre in Winnipeg with the aim of comparing and contrasting their accounts.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The design of my study is also based on a participatory action research (PAR) model, which is a form of qualitative community-based research that involves collaboration between participants and researchers in all phases of the research process (Skinner 2012; Van den Hoonaard 2015). The participants of my study have mainly included youth, parents, staff associated with the NEEDS Centre in Winnipeg, who were involved in the research process as co-producers of knowledge. Through this process, they provided me with valuable insights about how to understand the desires and needs of refugee and immigrant youth and help them grow through mentoring programs based on ideas of resilience-building and positive youth development. In this way, the knowledge I acquired has been actively co-created/co-constructed.

The youth mentorship program at NEEDS is designed to help immigrant or refugee youth ages 6-18 years to help them settle in Canadian society. The aim of the program is to enable youth to build relationships with mentors who take them out in the community to engage in recreational and educational activities for a minimum of 6 hours per month for one year. As an initial step towards collaborative research, I applied to be a mentor and my application was accepted. The necessary background checks such as vulnerable persons and criminal record checks as well as child registry checks were completed. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 crisis I was not able to directly participate as a mentor or directly interview youth in the program. As an alternative to this, with the cooperation of staff at the NEEDS centre and faculty members of my thesis committee at the University of Manitoba, I conducted online Zoom-based interviews for the study with program staff, mentors, and the parents of youth who had participated in the mentoring program.

### **3.4 Summary of the Research Process**

The NEEDS centre is a community-based organization located in the downtown area. Their mission is to provide accessible services and support to immigrant, refugee children, youth and

their families through proactive programming tailored to meet varied needs of newcomers. Their goal is to encourage successful integration of newcomers into Canadian society by providing youth programming oriented towards employment, education and social recreation. The programs are developed by a team of psychosocial educators and other professionals.

The purpose of my research is to generate baseline data that can be used to evaluate the youth mentorship program at the NEEDS centre. The management team and staff were involved primarily to initiate contact with participants on my behalf. They emailed invitation letters to all eligible participants for this study. Participants were requested to respond directly to the principal investigator and not to NEEDS centre. This study is needed because there is a growing population of immigrant, refugee children and youth particularly from war-torn countries or failing states immigrating to Manitoba. The youth mentorship program also has a huge number of youth on the wait list for mentors. Moreover, previous research conducted several years ago in Winnipeg shows that most of the immigrant, refugee children and youth have specific needs such as navigating through the education system, finding employment, gaining knowledge about service providers and more. These needs have to be effectively addressed in order to help newcomer youth become productive and law-abiding citizens and develop positive and rewarding lives in Canada as adults.

The youth mentorship program is not a stand-alone-program but rather an activity that is housed under the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program. Throughout this study, I have explored the experiences of immigrant, refugee children, youth and their families who utilize the services provided by the mentorship program. In addition, I explored the experiences of the staff who facilitate and manage the youth mentorship program as well as mentors who help to teach their mentees important life skills required to successfully fit and integrate into Canadian society through educational, recreational activities and outings.

This study has also captured a clear picture of the services and support that individuals and their families receive. The study has generated knowledge that will help to guide the development of appropriate services to best meet the needs of program participants. The study has also addressed this knowledge gap through a qualitative examination of the experiences of individuals and their families seeking help. This was achieved through Zoom based one-on-one interviews, firstly with program staff, secondly with mentors and thirdly with parents of program participants. The interviews have formed the backbone of the needed firsthand experiences of key stakeholders required in order for the NEEDS centre to have a clear picture of the needs of immigrant, refugee children, youth and their families. The interviews with program staff and mentors focussed on programming and organizational activities. Interviews with parents of program participants focussed on the needs of their children and families. There was no personal information collected from the interviewees. As part of the process to conduct virtual interviews, I discussed and reviewed the significance of informed consent in conducting research as well as ethical issues involving humans, with my supervisor and thesis committee members as well as the management team at NEEDS centre. I also completed the course on research ethics (TCPS2: CORE) that is available online (see Appendix A). In addition, I completed the research integrity tutorial (GRAD 7300 A01) in December, 2020.

### **3.5 Research Methods and Instruments**

#### Methodology

This study has three components:

- (a). Interviews with program staff: I conducted four virtual Zoom-based interviews with the staff who facilitate and manage the program.
- (b). Interviews with mentors: I conducted four virtual interviews with mentors.

(c). Interviews with parents of program participants: I interviewed four parents of program participants.

Please see Appendices B to D for the interview schedules.

Please see Appendices E to L for copies of all the research tools, forms and correspondence utilized in the study.

### **3.6 Description of the Participant Population**

The goals of sampling and recruitment were in line with all the important tenets of PAR, such as “community building, empowerment, and more nuanced understandings rather than solely to achieve representativeness or validity” (Potts and Brown 2015:26). The interviews were done virtually by Zoom between March and April 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The youth mentorship program at NEEDS centre is designed to help immigrant or refugee children and youth ages 6-18 years to help them settle in Canadian society. The aim of the program is to enable youth build relationships with mentors who take them out in the community to engage in recreational and educational activities. I interviewed four program staff because these are the professionals working at NEEDS centre, specifically those involved with the management and facilitation of the youth mentorship program. The program staff I interviewed all have a minimum of two years working experience with the youth at the NEEDS centre. I interviewed four mentors because these are adult community volunteers who are carefully selected and trained by the program staff at NEEDS centre. All the mentors I interviewed have a minimum of one year volunteer experience and successfully completed their first term or one year experience volunteering. Lastly, I interviewed four parents of program participants because these are the primary care providers who are more likely to know better, understand and voice the needs of

their children. Of the four parents I interviewed only one did not need a translator. The NEEDS centre management facilitated on my behalf, translation services.

### **3.7 Ethics and Reflexivity**

My research design incorporates important ethical considerations. For example, because it is generally difficult to obtain ethics approval to interview children, I decided to involve their parents.

In this way, although they provided adult perspectives, I believe that their perspectives reflect what they believe to be in the best interest of their children. I obtained the needed research ethics board approval from the University of Manitoba, Research Ethics Board at Fort Garry Campus.

## **Chapter 4: Findings “The Perspectives of Youth Mentorship Program Staff”**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The youth mentorship program is connected to a wide range of programs available for immigrants and refugees at NEEDS centre. The program targets newcomer children and youth between 6 and 18 years as well as their families. I interviewed four youth mentorship program staff members. The aim of these interviews was to capture the views of these staff members who are directly involved with the youth mentorship program. The interviews generated baseline data which I will draw on to evaluate the youth mentorship program. The perspectives of these program staff are important because they are the professionals working at NEEDS centre who facilitate or manage the youth mentorship program. The four participants I interviewed all have worked at NEEDS Centre for a minimum of two years to about 6 years. They all have well-grounded management or facilitating work experiences in other programs within the agency and the youth mentorship program. Their first-hand accounts will help to shed more light on what needs to be done in order to more effectively meet the needs of newcomers, particularly children and youth as well as their families in Winnipeg.

### **4.2 Interview I**

According to my first interviewee the aim of the youth mentorship program is to connect recently arrived immigrant, refugee youth and children between the ages of 6 and 18 years to Canadians or established immigrants who help them to navigate and access resources and also to engage with the community. The program prioritizes newcomer children and youth who have lived in Canada for less than a year because those who have been around for more than a year are more likely to have already established connections to the community. The staff member roles include organizing initial home visits to newcomer families as well as match meetings between mentors and mentees.

In addition, the staff member is involved in the recruitment, screening and training of mentors. The program staff prioritize recently arrived immigrants and refugees because they have no connection to the community. According to this staff member, whenever information concerning the arrival of a newcomer family becomes available to the agency, an appointment is secured over the phone for the initial home visit. During the home visit the program staff informs the family about the youth mentorship program and if they are interested the family is oriented regarding the recruitment, screening and training processes of mentors. Mentors are mostly post-secondary students; some are workers and others are retired. If the family shows interest in the program, the family is informed that the program staff shall initiate a recruitment process for a mentor and arrange for a future match meeting. The newcomer family hosts the meeting, the mentor is also invited, and the program staff is present to facilitate the meeting. The match meeting takes place in the home of the mentee for them to feel comfortable with the mentorship program. In this way, the mentee, the mentor and the family formally begin their mentorship relationship.

When asked about the other staff who are directly involved with the mentorship program and their specific roles and whether they are part-time or full-time, this program staff stated, “We have a manager, assistant manager, a team leader and mentorship facilitators and there are no part-time staff members who are directly involved with the program.” The manager oversees the youth mentorship program, the assistant manager assists with administration and the mentorship facilitators are involved with recruitment, interviews, training, home visits, match meetings and closure meetings. In addition to other responsibilities of facilitating, the team leader coordinates all program activities. Closure meetings are set up primarily at the anniversary date of the one-year commitment made by the mentor to participate in the mentorship program. Closure meetings provide feedback from both the mentee and mentor about what went well and what went wrong

and to ask whether both parties would like to continue with the relationship. According to this program staff member, “Sometimes volunteers and staff members from other departments come to assist particularly, with on site and in-person programs, although we no longer have in-person programs because of COVID-19.” Practicum students are also available to support program participants and mentorship program staff with on-site and in-person activities. When asked how the mentorship program started, this program staff stated, “It started as a link program to connect or link recently arrived refugees to Canadians or already established immigrants.” The goal of the program was to minimize the risk of gang recruitment and involvement for newcomer youth. According to this program staff, “because our clients or mentees are from war torn countries, they are more likely to have exposure to conflict or war situations, so immediately they arrived our aim was to reduce their risk of gang involvement.” Gangs prey on newcomers who do not know their rights and their identity. The program provided enhanced awareness about gangs, what they are and the negative consequences of gang involvement. For example, we cautioned participants that, gang involvement could result in long-term legal implications on the records of newcomers. According to this program staff, “The program then evolved into the youth mentorship program.” With the link program it was more to prevent the risk of getting engaged in criminal activities associated with gangs whereas with the mentorship program “We made it very wholistic its not just necessarily us preventing them from engaging in criminal activities, but they were also helped to adapt and successfully integrate into Canadian society.” For example, the mentorship program helps children and youth succeed in school, make healthy and good relations with positive adult role models as well as helps them to connect with the community. In addition, the youth mentorship program helps the youth to locate and access family resources as well as to have a deeper sense of community belonging.

When asked if there have been many changes to the program over the years, the program staff stated, “The actual change from link to youth mentorship changed the dynamics of service delivery.” According to this program staff “Although the link program was very successful at primarily minimizing the risk of youth gang involvement and associated criminal activities, we realized that there were some gaps which needed to be filled, so we expanded from the original link to the current mentorship program.” The expansion included filling in the gaps which were identified based on the feedback received. According to this program staff, “Mentorship is very broad, it means that we currently help them connect better to Canadian society, including connecting them to positive adult role models, who we believe model them right and prevent them from being involved in criminal activities.” When asked about how families and children come to learn about the mentorship program, this program staff stated, “They learn about the program through home visits, the ones I referred to earlier on.” Sometimes some families just walk in at NEEDS centre and introduce themselves as recently arrived and they ask for help. In addition, the NEEDS centre shares data about recent arrived newcomers with the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) who are the main funders and the Province of Manitoba through Welcome Place (a temporary housing complex for newcomers before they obtain a permanent place of residence in Winnipeg). According to this program staff, “Once refugees arrive they are housed at Welcome Place and when they are in that place the children or youth cannot attend the public school system until they have a permanent address.” The Settlement Workers in Schools in-house program (SWIS) at NEEDS centre invites children and the youth to the agency to learn about Canadian classroom expectations, how to recognize and respect different cultural backgrounds and also to learn the alphabet because most of them come from non-English speaking regions of the world.

When asked to share some of the challenges faced by participants who enter the youth mentoring program, this program staff stated, “language barrier is one of the most significant challenges because our clients mostly come from non-English speaking countries.” The second challenge is having age-appropriate activities for mentees. For example, having a mentor matched to a family of three kids who are of different age range. It is difficult for a mentor to have a lesson that cuts across all age groups given that one mentee might prefer an activity which others find boring or vice versa. Often mentors have difficulties to create content for a wide-ranging age group. Sometimes mentees have behavior problems because of their backgrounds. Some of them have behaviour problems because they are mostly from war-torn countries. According to this program staff, “Although it is challenging to manage their behaviour, we teach them certain expectations which help to manage difficult behaviours.” For example, we teach them that they must remain safe at all times, that they need to have fun, to be respectful to others, to be accountable for their actions and also to act as a team. Sometimes because children are often full of energy compared to adults, they often run around and are prone to injuries. A team of psycho-social experts are available on-site to help with behaviour issues.

When asked do youth sometimes have challenges because they have mentors they have trouble relating to because of cultural, language, or social-economic differences, this program staff stated, “exactly yes especially with respect to language, language has always been the number one challenge in our mentorship program, if not all programs.” Because most mentees come from non-English speaking regions. In spite of this language problem, mentees are always asked which cultural background they are comfortable being matched with. For example, a mentee may say because I speak Swahili I would like to be matched with someone who speaks Swahili. Some of them are comfortable to be matched with someone from any cultural background. When asked

how do you work with mentors and mentees to try to solve the challenges you have just highlighted, this program staff stated, “Beginning with the orientation we provide them with training regarding cultural competence, we teach them how to recognize and respect diverse cultural perspectives.” In addition, “We also teach them the use of non-verbal cues which is very important in bridging the gap or solving the problem of language.” Paying attention to body language, facial expressions, the use of art are all important and critical ways of communicating with someone does not speak ones first language.

Another solution to the language barrier problem is that mentees are encouraged to participate in their local language because the mentorship program is a win situation for both parties. In this way, mentors and mentees learn from each other. According to this program staff, psycho-social educators are also available to provide additional support to some of the challenges encountered by mentees and mentors in their interactions. When asked what are the short-term, medium and long-term goals of the youth mentorship program, this program staff stated that the ultimate goal is to help newcomer children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 years to successfully integrate into Canadian society and to have positive adult role models and to have positive relations with peers and the community. The short-term goals are to enhance awareness regarding gangs and criminal activities in Canada, to enhance knowledge and utilization of community resources, to increase a sense of support and inclusion in the community as well as in schools, and to enhance opportunities to network as well as to have access or growth in terms of community belonging. The short-term goals and medium-term goals sometimes overlap. The medium-term goals include endeavouring to increase the mentees knowledge of problem solving, conflict resolution skills, pro-social life skills, decision making skills and drug refusal skills.

According to this program staff, drug refusal is also a skill because it helps to reduce the risk of being recruited into gangs.

Other medium-term goals are to improve attendance in schools and increase engagement in the learning process during the one-on-one mentorship program. In order to keep up with increased engagement the mentorship program has homework pads where mentees receive support with regards to their homework. This also helps to enforce their successes. In addition, mentees are given more opportunities to participate in youth related activities such as seeking out part-time job or volunteer positions and recreational activities. Mentees are encouraged to be involved with art and recreation because from past experiences in the program, evidence suggests that children love these things. The long-term goals of the program are firstly to encourage positive relationships with adult role models as well as their peers and friends because the priority is always to emphasize positive things. Mentees are encouraged to enhance their ability to maintain positive relationships with their peers because most of them are less likely to trust in people because of histories of past trauma, in particular they come from war zones and unstable societies. Secondly, mentees are helped with homework and other academic related activities, as another long-term goal is to increase their graduation rates and school completion.

When asked how the program staff and mentors attempt to accomplish the short-term, medium-term and long-term goals discussed, this program staff stated, “we do that by working closely with mentors because they are the ones leading the program.” Mentors are asked to submit monthly reports. These reports are submitted at the end of every month. They provide the program management team with knowledge regarding mentee and mentor engagements and activities accomplished for the whole month. The required minimum hours for every mentorship relationship are 6 hours per month. According to this program staff some of the mentors go over and beyond

the minimum 6 hours per month. And sometimes if the mentor is not able to meet the minimum hours, mentors are asked to report reasons he or she was not able to fulfil the minimum monthly obligation. Because many mentors are post-secondary students, it is understandable that at times they are busy with their academic requirements such as when writing exams and other educational related endeavors. Mentors are also supported with free tickets and passes to places of interest. For example, they get free passes to the Winnipeg Jets games, soccer games, mini golf, Manitoba Museum, Human Rights Museum, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, libraries and other interesting places. According to this program staff, the mentorship program also works with other organizations and institutions in order to obtain free passes. These passes become conduits which connect mentees to the community. According to this program staff, in this way, “an important goal of the youth mentorship program is fulfilled, because these are important places that mentees need to know at their age in Winnipeg and Manitoba.” During orientation and training for mentors, great emphasis is placed on exploring areas and places that could help mentees connect to the community.

When asked how familiar are you with the “positive youth development” approach used in some mentoring programs, this program staff stated, “I am familiar with the positive youth development approach, I am quite familiar with that, I understand that it is being youth centred and recognizing the strengths of youths and reinforce their successes and making sure that they build on the strength that they have.” According to this program staff, “Basically one of the rules that we communicate to our mentors during the orientation and training session is to reinforce a mentee’ success because that is one of the main things that they lack in their community because they don’t have positive role model in their life to praise them on the good things or successes that they have, so for example, when they come back from school and they score something like 80 or 90 percent their parents or family might not reinforce that success, they might not praise them so

that is why you are in their life, to identify their strengths and let them know that you can speak English, Swahili then you are an asset to Canada and having that in their minds will help them to actually develop positively.” Reinforcing any success in this way, helps mentees to become proud of their achievements and also inspires them to yearn and to achieve better outcomes academically and in other areas of their lives.

When asked how successful do you feel, your program is in meeting its goals/ helping participants, this program staff stated, “We always support our mentors, we provide them with resources, we provide them with advice and as I said earlier on at the end of the mentorship experience we have a closure meeting.” This helps the management team to learn from the shared experience of the mentee and mentor regarding what worked well and what did not work well. During the closure meeting, both parties are also asked to suggest what they think must be included in the program to improve service delivery. According to this program staff, “We always ask the mentee and mentor during the closure meeting to provide us with feedback because we believe this helps us to meet the objectives and goals of the program, just like I believe all the questions for this interview are coming from the objective of your study, that is definitely going to get us answers that we want in order to better structure the program ourselves.” According to this program staff, “To a very high extent we have been able to achieve our program goals, and this is also obvious in school completion records, less engagement in criminal activities and them being able to form positive and healthy relationships as well as their transitions to other programs such as the youth employment program or the after-school program.” The NEEDS centre also has other programs and mentees are allowed to transition or participate, for example, according to this program staff, “If you see them transitioning to our post-secondary program then it means its a

great success because now we are able to connect them into post-secondary education and for us this is how we measure success.”

When asked in your experience, what would you say are some of the major strengths (or “success and weaknesses (or “failures” of the program), this program staff stated, “Successes I would say one of the successes we have is an increase in the number of mentees in our program, annually on average we have about 74 mentees we support, and the numbers keep increasing because of the benefits they receive.” According to this program staff, one interesting trend is that “the mentees and their families always tell their friends that you don’t know what you are missing, somebody always comes to take our kids somewhere and when they come back they are very happy.” When other families hear about the mentorship program from their friends already enrolled, they contact the NEEDS centre and request for help regarding how their children can also be enrolled in the mentorship program. In this way, the numbers of participants keep increasing. According to this program staff, “increasing in number of mentees is a great success.” Other successes include connecting mentees to events and festivals for example, “We take kids to indigenous festivals, folklorama, to give them a feel of the different cultures here in Canada, we take them to the museum and other educational facilities in order for them to learn.” Mentors also engage mentees in physical activities such as playing soccer. Sometimes mentees are taken to places such as memorial park to play volleyball and basketball. Mentees are also taught pro-social and problem-solving skills, decision making skills, conflict resolution skills, anger management and other important skills they need in order to be independent in the community. According to this program staff all these skills are necessary and form part of the many success and achievement narratives.

According to this program staff, “As for weaknesses we tend to call them challenges instead of weaknesses, the reason we call them challenges instead of weaknesses is because no matter what program you are running you will definitely have challenges because you are working with a diverse population.” In fact, the number one problem as this program staff pointed out before is the language barrier problem. The language barrier problem is not a weakness per se, it is a challenge because no one has control over his or her origins and the language he or she speaks. This program staff noted, “the age difference in terms of age-appropriate activities that I mentioned earlier on among clients in organizing lessons or activities is very frustrating trust me sometimes as adults we lose our energy quicker and in terms of organizing activities, for example, when you tell mentees to keep quiet its like you have said the opposite, that is when they make a lot of noise.” According to this program staff, “Sometimes I understand they actually just want to have fun doing those things, making you look frustrated, but you have to be patient.” It often helps to exercise patience at all times because children and youth are naturally very energetic and curious about many things. According to this program staff, “I also mentioned the behavioral problems earlier on, some clients are very much over the bar and in this regard, we definitely do not discriminate because we acknowledge it and work from a trauma informed perspective.” According to this program staff, problematic behaviour in children is sometimes “a response to something that they have actually gone through and that is why we focus on recognizing these things and making sure they have psycho-social educators to help manage these escalated situations.” In this way, according to this program staff, “We work from a trauma-informed perspective and acknowledge that their behavior is a response to something that they experienced and not necessarily them having fun doing so.” The language barrier problem, age-appropriate activities and behavior problems remain among the most challenges which the mentorship program faces.

When asked why do you consider what you highlighted early on as successes to be a strength, this program staff stated, “They are connected to our program objectives, and they are connected with our goals, so they are successes like I said earlier on, we measure our success based on our program goals because that is definitely connected to our program model.” According to this program staff, “That is why everything that we do beginning with our mentors from orientation, right through tracking whatever is going on related to our program objectives helps to show the strength of the program.” When asked why do you consider what you highlighted before as challenges and not necessarily to be a sign of failure, this program staff stated, “A sign of failure would actually be the fact that it is negatively impacting the mentorship experience.” So far there is no sign of failure. When asked what, if any, process is followed at NEEDS to build on program strengths and address program weaknesses that are identified? This program staff stated, “The process like I said earlier is the monthly report, that is the number one process that is used to ensure the successes are maintained and the challenges are looked into.” At the end of every month each mentor submits a report. The management team gathers success stories from these monthly reports and also what did not go well during the month and the reasons. Based on these monthly reports the management team provides support and guidance regarding how to make the most and best experiences from these outings. According to this program staff the closure meeting is also another process or procedure relied upon to build on the strengths and address program challenges identified. A closure meeting “is like learning from them because that is when we ask questions like through-out the year what was your most exciting moment with your mentor so because we didn’t want to measure a lot of things, just because of this question they always say, I loved a lot of things which means it was a success.” The fact that the mentee does not necessarily identify one moment but simply says for example, “there are a lot of times I enjoyed being with this person and

start talking about when they went to the zoo or different places that they may have visited, tells me that our goal of connecting them to community resources was a big success.” In addition, according to this program staff, in this way, working on a positive relationship between the mentee and mentor is also achieved. Having regular mentorship meetings also helps to build on program strengths and address program challenges that are identified. For example, at one of the regular mentorship meetings one staff member proposed that the youth mentorship program needed to be evaluated. The idea was welcomed by senior management partly because the program has never been evaluated since inception and also because the staff member who brought the idea of evaluating the mentorship program was willing to personally do it. Just before an internal evaluation of the program began, this researcher approached the youth mentorship program management for an opportunity to evaluate the youth mentorship program partly to fulfill the requirements of a thesis component for a master’s degree in sociology and also as a way of contributing to the immigrant and refugee community because I am also a potential immigrant and a full-time international graduate student.

When asked what is the major source of recruitment for participants in your program, this program staff stated that presentations in classrooms at post-secondary institutions are one of the major sources of recruitment for mentors. In addition, when some colleges and universities have job fairs, mentorship staff are invited to make presentations and recruit participants. Also, the Manitoba association newcomer organization (MASO) as well as Volunteer Manitoba normally arranges networking sessions with other organizations. NEEDS centre staff utilize these networking opportunities to inform community members regarding volunteer opportunities at NEEDS centre. With respect to recruitment of mentees the main source is through home visits. Home visits remain the most preferred because other than just making a phone call to a newcomer

family to inform them about the services available at NEEDS centre, home visits offer more opportunities to create and sustain rapport as well as demonstrating a more compassionate approach. Another source of recruitment for mentees are school referrals from some teachers who recommend some students to the youth mentorship program. According to this program staff, some teachers believe that their students benefit from participating in the youth mentorship program. Some mentees are referred to the youth mentorship program by partner and sister organizations. During the current Covid-19 pandemic no recruitment has been taking place. Only virtual meetings are allowed. This has been a major setback to the program. For example, because the program caters for newcomers, most of them have challenges with technology and the devices they use at home are shared so it is difficult for mentees to connect with their mentors. Another challenge of virtual delivery of services and communication is that some children are too young to use zoom technology. For example, this program staff asked, “How does a six-year-old kid use zoom?” According to this program staff, the youth mentorship program is unique because it is the only one available in Manitoba, that is tailored to meet the needs of immigrant and refugee children, youth and their families. Although other youth mentorship programs are available in Winnipeg, they are for mainstream youth populations and do not specifically cater for the resettlement sector. When asked how many youth participate annually this program staff stated on average 74 youth participate. They spend a minimum of six hours per month with a mentor for a minimum of one-year commitment. However, some mentors and mentees go beyond 2-3 years because of the benefits they receive from the program and the kinds of relationships they develop with each other.

When asked what keeps the youth coming to the mentorship program, this program staff stated, “Their relationship with mentors and the support that they get from the mentorship team, so its the kind of positive relationship that they get from the mentors where mentors make them

feel like a big brother big sister because that's the main idea of the mentorship program, they feel like they have got another brother or sister who is Canadian, who knows how to navigate the Canadian system, so it makes them always want to come back." When asked what is the role of mentors and how critical are they to your program, it was noted that mentors play a critical role because they act as resource guides, they reinforce mentee successes and also advocate for their needs. When asked how reliable are mentors in showing up to be with the youth in the community, this program staff stated, "They are very reliable because they understand the win, win situation of the mentorship relationship." They understand that while they are helping their mentees, they are also learning from them. Many mentors go beyond the minimum six hours a month and go beyond the one-year commitment because they are compassionate, and this shows that they really want to learn from their experiences. When asked overall what is the general response of the community to your program, this program staff stated, "The general response is that they are very happy and very appreciative and supportive, especially with the mentors, sometimes during the closure meeting which most of us attempt to avoid in the sense that is the meeting when clients start crying because they feel that they have been supported by this particular mentor." According to this program staff, it is not surprising to see mentees enter the program with minimum expectations and yet at the end they do not want to leave the program.

When asked what strategies have you used in the past and /or use currently to keep your program funded, this program staff stated, "Its to ensure success, success stories are the number one thing funders are looking for because we rely on narrative reporting to our funders mostly Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as well as the Manitoba provincial government." Funders want to know the number of clients served in the past fiscal year and what kind of activities the program utilized to engage with clients. According to this program staff, "Its

all about our successes, we are able to continue with our funding through our success stories.” Most of the money used to run the program is provided by IRCC.

When asked about the agencies that collaborate with the program, this program staff stated the primary collaborators were “Big Brother Big Sister Winnipeg, United Mentorship Network, Welcome Place, and Manitoba Interfaith and Immigration Council” (MIIC). One way of collaboration is having success stories meetings. The goal of these success stories meetings is to share resources and success stories. For example, the youth mentorship program has meetings with Big Brother Big Sister Winnipeg which is a mentorship program for the general public. The NEEDS centre mentorship program is restricted to newcomers and is not for mainstream youth populations. Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic the youth mentorship program has transitioned to virtual collaborative meetings with other organizations and agencies. These collaborative virtual meetings focus on ways of sharing online resources for clients and also further exploring ways of making the best of e-mentoring and delivery of services because it appears that Covid-19 and the effects on youth programs will last for a long time. When asked: “Do any of the agencies you collaborate with clash with your agency’s philosophy? And how do you deal with the clash of philosophy?”, this program staff stated that none of the agencies they collaborate with clash with their philosophy and that there is no competition because IRCC funds the program, and the funder makes sure that the services offered are not duplicated or offered at another agency. The youth mentorship program at NEEDS is the only agency in Manitoba which provides services in the resettlement sector and particularly for children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 years. Other agencies may offer similar services but not to this particular segment of the population and age group of newcomers. When asked how about the relationship between program staff and the police, the staff member stated that they have a very good working relationship with the police,

which included police being invited during the summer and winter to provide presentations, because most mentees have had a different kind of relationship with the police in other countries where they lived before immigrating to Canada, particularly regarding public safety issues and discrimination. In the past fiscal year, the Winnipeg Police Service also invited mentorship staff to make presentations to new recruits, in order to sensitize them about the services provided at the NEEDS centre. The program staff person felt that through this kind of cooperation the youth mentorship program partnered with the police in crime prevention at the community level. When asked if there was anything else the staff person would like to mention about the youth mentorship program, they stated: “I am an immigrant myself; I think this is a great program, having a place to better support newly arrived immigrants and refugees to connect with the community and to have positive community relationships.”

### **Key Findings**

- Priority population: newly arrived immigrants, refugees, children and youth between ages 6 and 18 years
- Program started as “a link program” to minimize the risk of gang recruitment and involvement of immigrant youth
- Program evolved to its current form, incorporated a holistic, inclusive and broader approach to help immigrant, refugee children and youth to successfully integrate into mainstream Canadian society
- Program utilizes key principles of the positive youth development approach as well as a trauma informed perspective
- The program has been successful based on “success stories” of for example, participants graduating from high school and moving on to attend post-secondary institutions,

transitioning from attending the youth mentorship program to other programs such as youth employment, etc.

- The youth mentorship has not been evaluated before; this evaluation is the very first of its kind
- Covid-19 has impacted the delivery of services, although e-mentoring has been embraced there are many challenges of e-mentoring: most participants do not have access to devices and the technology to access virtual services available
- Other known challenges are language barriers, age-appropriate activities to engage all participants and behaviour problems, the program has interventions in place to deal with these challenges
- In spite of challenges there is significant evidence which shows that the youth mentorship program helps to prevent crime in the community, the program fosters a sense of community belonging and provides support to help newcomers successfully integrate into Canadian society through mentors who act as resource guides, reinforce their successes and advocate for their needs.
- The main funders of the program are the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) and the Province of Manitoba.

### **4.3 Interview II**

I interviewed another program staff member who has several years of experience working at the NEEDS centre in the youth mentorship program and other programs within the agency. According to this program staff the mentorship program has a manager who oversees the program and an assistant as well as a team leader and other youth mentorship facilitators. None of the staff is part-time. According to this program staff, from the perspective of recruitment of mentors, the program

staff have been doing very well, particularly with the coming on board of a new staff member who has helped to recruit mentors particularly from social sciences related departments of all post-secondary institutions in Winnipeg. According to this administrative staff, the program also has a dependable staff member who has been on a long term, family related leave of absence from work. The agency also has another staff member, who particularly has been very instrumental in recruiting mentors from the francophone community. This staff member is fluent in French and has particularly connected well with the university of Saint Boniface in terms of communication and recruitment initiatives. This was all before Covid-19 interrupted and negatively impacted all programs and services which were delivered on site and in the community. According to this staff member because of the effects of Covid-19 the on-site Saturday, one-on-mentorship component has been completely shut down. The curriculum for the Saturday on-site component was partially developed by a renowned researcher Dr. Martin Brokenleg. The curriculum utilizes principles of circles of courage. The Saturday program often involves staff members from other departments as well, who come in to help facilitate with various components of the curriculum. According to this staff member the mentorship program staff and management over the years have shifted and moved around to various departments at NEEDS centre because of funding. According to this staff member the youth mentorship program is undergoing some transition again, because most of the funding from government is now targeting and responding to the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic. This staff member stated, “I hope I am not going off topic here by talking about Covid, the main component of mentorship is really that link between mentors and mentees and that one-on-one physical in-person meeting that happens.” This program staff believes that Covid-19 has negatively impacted service delivery because “you can’t see your mentees, you can’t take them out, you know to the park or take them to a movie. What you have is have you make a phone call,

and you can only do that for so long, especially if there are language barriers you know, and especially if the mentees don't have a phone." According to this program staff it is very challenging particularly for families who may have only one mobile phone to share among themselves for personal use, school, work and other communication related needs.

When asked how did the youth mentorship program get started, this program staff stated, "I am not even sure if I am the best person to answer this question, but I think it started 8 to 10 years ago and it was much connected or linked with our program called introduction to Canadian education and we call it intro for short." Staff in the intro program invited newcomer families who were still living in a temporary housing facility to come to the NEEDS centre to be orientated to the Canadian education system before their children could be allowed to attend the regular school system because when they do not have a permanent address they are not allowed to attend the regular school system. These recently arrived children and youth spent their time at NEEDS centre in the intro program until they had a permanent address and then they were taken on by various school divisions depending on where they found permanent accommodation. Recently arrived children and youth in the intro program learned various routines and structures linked to the Canadian school system. These newly arrived children and youth were also introduced to the mentorship program as an additional layer of support to help them better adapt to Canadian life. According to this program staff, "So that's how mentorship got started, it was really to support newcomer families and youth who just needed additional support around the integration piece, there could be other NEEDS centre staff who know more than I do about how the program got started."

This program staff stated although the mentorship program staff, and administration have changed and moved around to different departments, the program itself has not changed its

overarching goal of “linking mentees up with mentors and supporting them through that journey together.” The mentorship program delivers services to newly arrived newcomers to Canada and also some who may need the services although they may have been in Canada for a little bit longer. For example, those who feel isolated or who have difficulties making friends. The program caters to newly arrived newcomer children and youth between the ages 6 and 18 years. According to this program staff, “mentoring is more than just the mentor mentoring someone it is also like their lives are becoming enriched through getting to know the whole family and expecting their successful integration as well.” According to this program staff, most families learn about the youth mentorship program through the intro program. Other ways they would learn about it is through other programs that are offered at NEEDS centre, for example, the youth employment program, the settlement workers and schools program and the after-school program. In addition, other partner agencies like the Family Dynamics Youth Agency Alliance and other organizations that are familiar with the youth mentorship program at NEEDS centre also refer clients their clients.

When asked what are some of the challenges faced by participants who enter the mentoring program, this program staff stated, sometimes youth and children experiencing difficulties to adapting to life in Canada and also those who have trouble making friends are referred to the mentorship program. Other children with emotion regulating problems are also referred to the program. The program helps them to form key relationships with mentors, outside of their families who help them deal with problems of adapting to life and integration in Canada.

When asked if youth sometimes have challenges because they have mentors they have trouble relating to because of their cultural, language, or social-economic class differences, this program staff stated that sometimes that does happen. However, as the relationship with the mentor grows most of the challenges are overcome because it takes time to build a trusting relationship

where the mentee and mentor fully understand and know each other. For example, “sometimes families invite the mentor for dinner to their home, so there is a real cultural sharing and learning experience, that happens informally.” These experiences according to this program staff help to further develop the relationship not just with the mentee but also with the entire family. Often these relationships go beyond the one-year commitment. When asked about how mentors and mentees work to try to solve identified challenges, this program staff stated that when the relationship is brand new, it is often the case that language is the most significant barrier and challenge. Because mentees are from diverse cultures and with limited English language communication skills emphasis during the screening process, orientation and training for mentors, is placed on how to develop better and creative ways of communicating. One way of overcoming the language barrier problem is that mentors are encouraged to use non-verbal cues. Several options may be tried in order to overcome the language barrier, for example, rematching mentors when necessary as well as involving staff members from other departments who often speak several languages and are from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, according to this staff member, monitoring and checking in with the mentees and mentors is ongoing and done to ensure that the relationship is fully supported.

When asked about the short-term, medium and long-term goals of the youth mentorship program, this program staff similarly stated that the short-term, medium and long-term goals overlap. It all starts with strengthening the relationships between mentees and mentors which is a short-term goal. Taking mentees out in the community in order to connect them to community resources and fostering a sense of belonging is a medium-term goal of the program. This helps mentees to overcome feelings of isolation because they spend time with an adult role model and also meet other people in the community. In addition, this helps with the integration process,

because mentees get to know new and interesting places, what is available and what they can do in the community. To help mentees ultimately and successfully integrate into Canadian society is a long-term goal of the youth mentorship program. The program helps mentees to feel valued, that they can contribute to Canadian society and ultimately become Canadian citizens with voting rights.

Another way the program helps mentees to successfully integrate is by encouraging cultural exchange between the newcomers and mentors. This happens naturally for the most part during the interactions, because mentees are learning Canadian values, culture, beliefs and practices and at the same time the mentors are also learning from their mentees vice versa. In this way, according to this program staff, the experiences enrich both parties. Canada gains as a blended and multicultural society, celebrating and practicing the shared heritage of people from several parts of the world. In order to achieve the short-term, medium term and long-term goals of the program, this program staff stated that they try to collect as much information as possible regarding community resources and interesting places to visit. The program publishes a newsletter which contains information about where mentors can take their mentees as well as upcoming festivals and celebrations. The mentorship program also reaches out to business organizations to ask for donations, free tickets and passes to community places and events.

When asked how familiar they are with the “positive youth development” approach used in some mentoring programs, this program staff stated, “I am going to be 100 percent honest with you, I am not familiar with the positive youth development approach, I am kind of coming from maybe a more experiential learning background, I don’t know how much I can elaborate on that, but that we come from a strength-based approach at NEEDS centre, so I don’t know if that’s linked. In response I said, “that is basically what it is, the positive youth development approach focusses

on the strengths, the positives which an individual has and working on surrounding the individual with an environment to help a young person grow.” This program staff stated, “that’s actually good to know, so this happens quite naturally, now that you have said it, I feel like I want to look more now that you have mentioned it.” When asked, in your view, to what extent do staff and mentors at NEEDS adopt a “positive youth development” (PYD) approach to working with participants and families involved in the mentoring program. This program staff stated, “yeah, I think it does happen naturally because of what we say when we recruit people, we use the words we are looking for a positive adult role model and we do extensive screening to vet out concerns we might have in terms of partnering up an adult with a mentee.” Because of this very rigorous process the people who end up volunteering as mentors are people who care and want to invest and develop their community. In this way, the program attracts mentors and staff who care and want to make a difference.

When asked how successful they felt the program is in meeting its goals/ helping participants, the program staff member stated that before the Covid-19 pandemic and associated health orders to stop spreading the virus were rolled out, the youth mentorship program was very successful. Managing the youth mentorship program during the Covid-19 pandemic has been very challenging because of reduced funding levels. The management team is looking into restructuring the program as well as considering more creative ways of delivering services to participants. According to this program staff, before the Covid-19 pandemic the program did well over 100 presentations in terms of outreach and recruitment and sharing its message regarding the significance of youth mentoring particularly in the settlement sector. There was also an increased demand for mentors in the community, particularly with families with more than one sibling. According to this program staff, the mentors and program staff were highly energetic and

motivated, and rose to the occasion to provide support to mentees and their families. However, 2021 has been a very hard and difficult year compared to previous years. When asked what are changes that could be made in your opinion to meet these goals more effectively, this program staff stated, more training for staff and mentors particularly regarding cultural competency, identifying and accessing more community resources as well as helping staff and mentors improve their knowledge base and understanding of a positive strength-based approach to meeting the needs of newcomer children and youth as well as their families.

When asked what they felt were some of the major strengths (or “successes”) and weaknesses (or “failures”) of the program, this program staff stated, “a major strength is when you see mentors and families wanting to stay in touch beyond NEEDS, outside of us and we do see that where you know the relationship really continues and grows for years and years, I would say that’s a major strength.” Interactions between mentees and mentors often develop into long-term authentic and genuine relationships. According to this program staff, because it takes time to develop long-term authentic and genuine relationships, it is difficult to prove this point to funders who demand for reports yearly, to keep funding the program and “we don’t always get to tell those stories necessarily, but I would say that would be a major strength.” Another major strength according to this program staff is “We are partnering people up from different socio-cultural backgrounds where we see real sharing and when that happens, we know it fosters understanding of others and mutual respect.” According to this program staff, another strength of the program is that the business community and other organizations often donate free tickets and passes without the NEEDS centre sometimes even asking for them. It proves that the program is renowned for benefitting the community. Regarding a sign of failure, this program staff believes that is often flipped around, for example, sometimes mentors and mentees do not continue, and sometimes

relationships turn sour. It could only be considered as a sign of failure if the program is not able to rematch or find another mentor. Program staff always find other ways of ensuring the best of every situation either by re-matching or finding alternative ways of fostering positive growth of every mentor and mentee relationship. This is achieved through follow-ups and thorough investigations regarding what did not work well. Program staff also collaborate with other key professionals within the agency who make recommendations that are implemented to ensure successful outcomes for every mentor and mentee relationship.

When asked about the major source of recruitment for participants in the program, the program staff member stated that post-secondary institutions, as well as other partner agencies, for example the Youth Agency Alliance and Newcomer Education Coalition, are all major sources of recruiting mentors. When asked about the number of youth who participate annually, this program staff stated that Covid has negatively impacted service delivery. The on-site based program has been cancelled indefinitely. Before Covid a minimum of 30 youth participated particularly during the summer every weekend on-site. This provided opportunities to meet with their peers as well, before going out in the community with their mentors. The number of youth participating throughout the year on Saturdays would range between 15 and 40. Before going out in the community sometimes mentees would get help with their homework. The other component of the youth mentorship program has a mentor matched with a mentee for a minimum of one-year commitment going out in the community as agreed by both parties at their pleasure, for a minimum of six hours per month. When asked what keeps the youth coming to the mentorship program, this program staff stated, “I can’t speak on behalf of why they keep coming, I would assume that they feel good about coming to the program and enjoy it and they feel connected to the agency.”

According to this program staff mentors are an integral part of the program and without them very little could be achieved. In addition, “they are the focal point aside from the mentees and so making sure that we are recruiting quality people, screening them properly then linking them up and matching them as best we can, is really important to what we do, and it is essentially the heart of program.” The key characteristics desired to be seen in mentors are that they need to be established residents in the community, they need to be willing and open to new experiences, they need to be good role models. Mentors plan outings collaboratively with their mentees. Mentors need to ensure that they assist mentees particularly in areas of their lives they need most help with. This could be with homework or learning a new skill or involvement in sports activities. When asked how reliable are mentors in showing up to be with the youth in the community? This program staff stated, “I think we can’t have someone who isn’t reliable, I think that would obviously impact the relationship they have with their mentee.” For example, a mentor cannot constantly cancel outings because this could diminish mentee confidence and trust in the ability of the mentor to help meet his or her needs. When asked overall what is the general response of the community to your program? This program staff stated, “positive for the most part.” This is evidenced by the good comments and feedback particularly from professors when presentations are made in college and university lecture halls, as well as from students (mentors) when a match comes to an end. According to this program staff, community could also be parents and other family members who often also give positive feedback.

When asked what strategies have you used in the past and /or use currently to keep your program funded, this program staff stated, “we have two big funders which is the department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) and the provincial government.” The program has been receiving consistent funding from the two funders. Although the federal government has been

funding the program for a long time, recent changes to funding and priorities at the federal government level, have necessitated the management team at NEEDS centre to rethink, restructure and diversify funding options. For example, the research and development department, a team of dedicated staff at NEEDS centre charged with the responsibility of researching, writing proposals and sourcing funds, are now looking into alternative sources of funding other than the traditional sources. When asked what assets do you have that help you deliver the goals and objectives of the program (for example, equipment and supplies)? This program staff stated that they have physical space used for on-site programming, a mini gym, classroom space, lots of supplies, paper, pens, scissors, crayons and markers. In addition, they have a well-developed and established curriculum for site-based programs. Moreover they have processes and procedures in place which enable a team of highly trained staff to deliver optimal services. According to this program staff, “our relationships with external community partners is another asset.”

When asked what are some of the agencies that collaborated with the program, this program staff member stated that Family Dynamics was one agency that was familiar with the youth mentorship program’s mission and provided external referrals. It was also noted that in exchange, the youth mentorship program also submitted external referrals to Family Dynamics. The mentorship program also partners with and provides support to school divisions in Winnipeg. For example, NEEDS centre staff offer interpretation services as needed in all school divisions. This helps to break down language barriers between newcomers and the school divisions. School divisions also refer some students to the mentorship program whom teachers believe could benefit. The mentorship program also partners with settlement workers in schools. These settlement workers are familiar with the mission of the mentorship program and the services offered. The youth mentorship program is also part of a few coalitions and committees, for example, the Youth

Agency Alliance. Areas of mutual interest include participating in regular meetings with Youth Agency Alliance partners, research, sharing resources and training. In the past the city of Winnipeg has been a partner. They provided passes and opened up their facilities to newcomer families. In addition, the city of Winnipeg also provided access to libraries, community centres and pools. Other community partners include the United Way and the Winnipeg Harvest. These organizations make donations to the NEEDS centre. In the past the Youth Agency Alliance has made donations for example, tickets for Winnipeg Blue Bombers games, Moose hockey games, and many other community events. Sometimes donations come from private donors. When asked do any of the agencies you collaborate with clash your agency's philosophy, this program staff member stated that none of the collaborating agencies clash with the mentorship program philosophy, primarily because they work with organizations which are youth-oriented, community minded or have similar philosophies.

When asked if there anything they would like to mention about the youth mentorship program, this program staff member stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected the youth program. The program is currently undergoing a very difficult and hard transition. They are trying to create ways of keeping people engaged. They have started virtual hangouts where mentors, mentees and staff were brought together on Saturdays, as a way of bridging the various gaps of not coming together physically. Bringing people together on Zoom is also important for the mentorship program at NEEDS centre because it is also a way of attracting more funding to improve service delivery. When asked about when NEEDS started virtual programming to link people together, the program staff member noted that the first one was in October 2020 and the last one was in January 2021. The program is also currently operating under significant funding constraints.

## Key findings

- Although Covid-19 has negatively impacted service delivery, the program still has highly trained and self-motivated staff
- Youth mentorship is not a stand-alone program, it is linked to other programs within the agency
- The mentorship targets newcomer children and youth aged between 6 and 18 years old, helps them to access and navigate community resources and provides additional layers of support needed for successful integration to mainstream Canadian society
- Youth mentorship facilitates the formation of positive relationships between adult role models and newcomer children and youth, these mentors take their mentees for outings in the community
- Mentors are critical for the program to successfully deliver services
- Although language is a major barrier faced by mentees, the program has devised intervention measures
- Youth mentorship at NEEDS centre is premised on a strength-based curriculum (circles of courage) partly developed by Dr Martin Brokenleg, the program also utilizes principles of positive youth development
- Some changes that could be made to better serve the needs of participants are more cultural competence training, more training focussing on resiliency and positive youth development models, as well as identifying and accessing more community resources
- Evidence of major strengths include the fact that the formal relationships between mentors and mentees go beyond the minimum one-year commitment, an inclusive and blended diverse working environment which brings together program staff, mentors and mentees

and business community, other organizations and private donors who support the program financially as well as with material resources

- Although e-mentoring is a viable option to deliver services in Covid times, the major constraint of the program remains reduced funding levels from funders, the key funders of the program are the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) and the Province of Manitoba.

#### **4.4 Interview III**

My third interview was with another program staff who has worked at NEEDS centre for several years in the mentorship program and in other departments or programs within the agency. This program staff member has played key roles in facilitating and leadership roles in the mentorship program. According to this program staff, records show that the mentorship program started in 2011. The aim of the program was to help newcomer youth to become aware of the available resources in the community which could help them from being involved in gangs, crime and the criminal justice system. This was based on the evidence and assumption that gangs target newcomer youth because of their curiosity and limited knowledge about what to do, in order to be successful in Canada. According to this program staff, the program started as way of reaching out to newcomer youth before gangs recruited them. Initially, this link program, helped newcomer youth to become fully aware regarding the threat of gangs and the negative consequences associated with gang involvement and crime. The program also helped newcomer youth to access and navigate community resources and also connected these young people with positive adult role models who acted as guides in the community and provided additional support to help them adapt better and blend into Canadian society.

When asked to provide information about other NEEDS staff who were directly involved with the program, what their specific roles were, and whether they were full-time or part-time staff, this program staff stated that since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic staffing has been very challenging. Although the mentoring program was designed to provide one-on-one (in-person) support, the program staff (which include a manager, assistant manager, a team leader and other facilitators) are now supporting participants remotely, and the Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected the delivery of services. According to this program staff, supporting participants virtually during the Covid pandemic and with increasing financial constraints has been challenging. To better serve participants, the mentorship program has merged with the afterschool program as a way of cushioning the funding shortfalls. The merger was necessary because the two programs provide related or similar services. None of the staff involved in the mentorship program are part-time. When asked have there been many changes to the program over the years, this program staff stated, “Yes, especially with the coming of Syrian refugees around 2016 and 2017.” The resettlement sector was overwhelmed with the spike in numbers of newcomers coming to Winnipeg. The mentorship program expanded to include 3 or 4 more program facilitators in order to deal with the influx of newcomers. The program was well funded.

When asked what types of families and children the program serves, the program staff member stated that although they generally serve immigrant, refugee youth, children and their families the program also caters for other immigrants who are accepted as Canadian permanent residents based on other pathways. For example, refugee claimants already in Canada or those who are accepted as permanent residents based on their potential to contribute to the economy or those who are sponsored by private organizations, community groups and family members who are already established in Canada. When asked how do families come to learn about the program staff

member answered the question similarly to the first two staff members I interviewed, noting that it was often through community partners like Welcome Place, Family Dynamics, and city of Winnipeg school divisions.

When asked about some of the challenges faced by participants who enter the mentorship program, this program staff stated, language is a major barrier faced by participants. This is obviously a challenge because they are newcomers to Canada. Another challenge is, adapting to cultural differences. According to this program staff, “culture is deeper than we imagine, it takes many years to adapt to a different culture.” It is often the case that children adapt better and faster to cultural differences. Newcomer youth also risk being recruited by gangs. When asked how program staff work with mentors and mentees to try to deal with challenges of this type, several examples were mentioned, including that: the NEEDS centre provides interpretation services in about 25 languages from around the world; mentors are taught to use gestures to communicate, in order to overcome language barriers; and mentees are often matched with mentors with similar cultural backgrounds, and those who have no preferences are assigned or matched with mentors of their choice.

It is clear that mentors are carefully selected. These are community adult role models who develop positive pro-social relationships with their mentees and also help them to access and navigate community resources. In this way, newcomer youth are shielded from gang recruitment and involvement. When asked to what extent do NEEDS program staff try to match mentors and mentees who have similar cultural and language backgrounds, this program staff stated that they have an intensive screening and interviewing process that is even more than it takes for a job interview. It is intensive because they need to know the mentor really well, as well as the skills set,

knowledge and also preferences for the kind of mentee he or she would be comfortable to work with.

When asked about the short-term, medium-term and long-term goals of the youth mentorship program, the program staff member stated that these goals are based on the resettlement needs of participants. The mission of NEEDS centre is to provide accessible services to immigrant, refugee children, youth and their families. The mentorship program plays a critical role to accomplish this mission. The short-term goal is to provide one-on-one support to participants, to help the mentees address their immediate resettlement needs. This could be for example, helping the mentee with how to set a personal goal or priority for academic pursuits, sports, recreation, outdoor activities and employment. The medium-term goal is to help mentees transition from getting the support to becoming independent and working on their own. The long-term goal is to help mentees to become well integrated, successful and productive Canadian citizens. According to this program staff, most mentor-mentee relationships go beyond the minimum one-year commitment. For example, there are mentors and mentees who have maintained their relationships for 5 years. They still invite each other for important family events such as birthday celebrations. These relationships have developed into stronger family-like relations. In this way, the mission of NEEDS centre to help newcomer children and youth successfully integrate into mainstream Canadian society is achieved.

When asked how familiar they were with the “positive youth development” approach used in some mentoring programs, the program staff member stated they were familiar with it and understood “that it is following a strength-based approach.” It involves focussing on the assets which young people have, for example, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, the ability to speak two or more languages, resilience, flexibility and family values. Working from a positive

youth development perspective means helping young people to identify and harness their strength and whatever seems to be working well in order to take their lives in a positive direction. When asked, in your view to what extent do staff and mentors adopt a “positive youth development” (PYD) approach with participants and families involved in the mentorship program, this program staff stated that they use and value this approach in all they try to accomplish with participants. For example, the program staff understand that these children and youth come from very disadvantaged backgrounds, so the program activities take on a participant focussed perspective that takes into account their life experiences and how to make the best of every situation and help them to become successful academically and in other areas of their lives. According to this program staff, adding layers of support for newcomer children and youth to achieve their full potential lies at the heart of what mentors and staff do.

When asked how successful they felt the program was in meeting its goals in helping participants, this program staff member stated, “This program is unique, and I am happy to be always a part of it because I regularly witness newcomer children and youth develop positive relationships with adult role models who help them with resettlement challenges and also to live meaningful and productive lives.” When asked what are changes that could be made in your opinion to meet these goals more effectively, the program staff member stated that as a non-profit making organization, the NEEDS centre has a structure and the tools to help newcomer children and youth. In order to help form a healthy and productive community, more volunteers or mentors need to be recruited and more funds need to be allocated. According to this program staff, more community partnerships, more access to community resources as well as more advertising and media campaigns are required to improve service delivery for newcomer children and youth in Winnipeg.

When asked in about what they felt were some of the major strengths (or “success”) and weaknesses (or “failures”) of the program, this program staff member stated: “Our strength lies in the fact that we understand the needs of newcomers from a grassroots perspective, we have the experience, the structure in place, networking and partnerships with community organizations as well as relationships with private citizens who support us.” In addition, “We have the support of our funders, different levels of government who [provide] support, and post-secondary education institutions.” According to this program staff, these are considered strengths because that is what motivates and inspires them to do more and better particularly for newcomers. In addition, this program staff stated that instead of talking about “program failures, I would say challenges.” Because the youth mentorship program is a not-for-profit entity, one of the most significant challenges is not having enough funds to provide better services to newcomers. According to this program staff, if the program has more funds, most of the challenges will resolve. For example, the on-site Saturday program has been cancelled indefinitely because of the Covid pandemic. According to this program staff, more funding could help the program come up with alternative ways of service delivery and partnerships with other organizations. When asked what, what if any, process is followed at NEEDS to build on program strengths and address program weaknesses that are identified, this program staff stated since, “I work in the implementation level and program policy, someone from the senior management team could better answer that question.”

When asked about the major source of recruitment of mentors for the program, this program staff stated that post-secondary institutions are a major source of recruitment for participants, and that program staff particularly focus on recruiting mentors from the social science related departments. Mentors make a commitment of minimum one year. Regarding mentees, the major sources of recruitment are through home visits, referrals from partner organizations and

school divisions as well as referrals or recommendations from families with children who are already enrolled or participating in the mentorship program. When asked overall what is the general response of the community to your program, this program staff stated that the fact that volunteers come to help and mentor newcomer children and youth demonstrates that the program has been well received and appreciated in the community. Mentors give their time and energy free of charge. The mentorship program is fortunate to attract people from all walks of life including, post-secondary students, retirees, teachers, professors, psychologists and many other professionals.

When asked what strategies have been used in the past and/or currently to keep the program funded, this program staff member stated that this question could be better answered by the funding team because they are the ones who know about the funders and the strategies used to keep the program funded. However, the program staff person was able provide information on the resources available to help to deliver the goals and objectives of the program (for example, equipment and supplies). For example, this staff member noted that the program has two vans, particularly for group mentoring activities, and that it provides free passes and bus tickets for community outings and events. According to this program staff, mentors and the community must also be considered as assets because without the community and mentors the program cannot exist. When asked is there anything else they would like to tell me about the youth mentorship program, this program staff stated that the program is in dire need of more volunteers. According to data available in 2020, there were 35 clients on the wait list. Because enrolling participants demands for more resources, the program also needs to receive more funding in order to provide better services. In recent years the program has suffered from the problem of reduced staffing levels because of financial constraints. According to this program staff, this needs to be taken as a “collective responsibility.” Helping newcomers to integrate better into Canadian society must be taken as a responsibility of

all Canadians because it helps to create healthier and safer neighbourhoods, prevents newcomer youth from falling in the cracks of society and becoming involved with the criminal justice system.

### **Key findings**

- Program started in 2011 as a link to community resources, helping newcomer youth to be aware of and avoid gangs
- Program evolved into mentorship
- The Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected the delivery of services: remote working
- More demand for services particularly during the Syrian refugee crisis of 2016-2017
- Program targets school-age newcomer children and youth
- Some challenges faced by participants include language barriers, adapting to cultural differences and the risk of being recruited by gangs
- Program designed to intervene regarding the challenges faced by participants
- Mentors are critical to the program because they act as adult community role models and also help newcomers to navigate and access community resources
- Most mentors volunteer beyond the one-year commitment, they help newcomers to adapt and integrate into mainstream Canadian society
- Program is based on a strength-based model, has adopted the PYD approach and also works from a trauma informed perspective
- Program is successful in meeting its goals and objectives
- What needs to be done to more effectively meet the needs of newcomers: more community partnerships, more access to community resources, more advertising and media campaigns needed to improve service delivery
- Mentors and the community need to be also considered as “assets” of the program

- 35 clients are on the wait list for mentorship (as of 2020)
- Need to recruit more mentors
- More funding needed to cope with the demand for mentors
- Reduced funding and staffing levels negatively impacts service delivery

#### **4.5 Interview IV**

My fourth interview was with an administrative staff who has worked at NEEDS centre for several years. This administrative staff has also worked in several programs within the agency as well as in the mentorship program. Although this administrative staff has been reassigned to work in a different role and department the insights shared help to shed more light on what needs to be done in order to more effectively deliver services to participants of the youth mentorship program. According to this administrative staff, when the mentorship program started it was an activity in a larger program. It was not a stand-alone program. After a while it was moved and merged with other activities like the youth program, recreation and sports. Because of recent funding cuts, particularly with the contribution agreement with the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the main funder of the mentorship program has changed. It is currently under the Settlement Workers In School (SWIS) program. This means that the mentorship program is now an activity under a very large umbrella program, the SWIS program.

When asked about the other staff who are directly involved with the program, this administrative staff stated that there is a manager overseeing the program, an assistant manager, a team leader and mentorship facilitators. When asked about how the program got started, this administrative staff stated that the program was under what used to be called Introduction to Canadian Education program. This was an entry program for newly arrived refugees. The program oriented the children and youth to life in Canada in general and also prepared them for formal

enrollment into the public school system. When these children and youth started attending the formal public school system, they were also enrolled into the mentorship program if they showed interest. They were matched with community role models who helped them to get settled in school and also to know the community. According to this administrative staff, eventually the mentorship program was moved and become a stand-alone program with its own leadership and management team. The change was necessary because of the understanding that the program was not just an activity but also needed to be independent with its own leadership team.

When asked have there been many changes to the program over the years, this administrative staff stated that there have not been many changes. The program has consistently maintained two components. The one-on-one part, where a mentor usually a settled immigrant or Canadian citizen and mentee are matched for one year, and the mentee receives help with school related requirements and is also taken for community outings; and the other part, which involves group mentoring once a week on Saturday on-site, where the children and youth participate in a variety of recreation and educational activities. However, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Saturday on-site part was cancelled. According to this administrative staff, because mentorship is relationship based and works well when there is the physical interaction between the mentor and mentee, the pandemic has made it very difficult for relationships to thrive. Although e-mentoring is a viable option this administrative staff stated, “there is only so much you can do across the screen.” Virtual mentoring is challenging, it takes longer to build rapport and trust because there is no physical interaction. Because program participants and their mentors cannot meet in person the program has transitioned to group e-mentoring. The youth are paired with mentors virtually and engage more in English practice, story-telling. The mentees also receive help with their homework virtually.

When asked what types of families and children the program serve, this administrative staff person stated that it is essentially immigrant and refugee families and school age children. Although there are several categories of immigrants and refugees the program does not choose who to help for as long as someone needs support and resources. When asked how do families and children come to learn about the program, they stated that sometimes it is by word of mouth from other families who are or have participated in the program, community referrals, partner agencies referrals, referrals from other programs within the NEEDS centre and also referrals from the public school system (the four school divisions).

When asked what are some of the challenges faced by participants who enter your mentoring program, this administrative staff, like the program staff who were interviewed, noted that language barriers are a big obstacle to communication primarily because many refugees come from countries where English is not their first language. Sometimes because clients have limited English language capabilities they tend to say yes to everything even when they do not understand because they do not want to sound silly or not intelligent. At the beginning of the mentor-mentee relationship often miscommunication abounds. Building trust also takes longer because most of the participants come from traumatic backgrounds. Sometimes cultural differences make it difficult for both parties (mentors and mentees) to understand each other. When asked how do you work with mentors and mentees to try to solve challenges of this type, this administrative staff person stated that because we understand that they are coming from traumatic backgrounds, staff are very patient in communicating with them and also work with them from a trauma informed perspective. They also encourage mentors to always confirm with the mentee what he or she said and to always check in with the family particularly regarding expectations and what they need.

When asked to what extent do NEEDS program staff try to match mentors and mentees who have similar cultural and language backgrounds, this administrative staff stated the recruitment and screening process is rigorous. Firstly, the program staff prioritize marketing the program to university students who are in social sciences related fields such as theology, social work, psychology to name a few. This is important because the program staff want to make sure that the interests of mentors best fits and aligns with their personal and career ambitions. Secondly, because the mentorship program is largely unsupervised, program staff are careful, they want to make sure that mentees are in trusted hands. The screening questions are framed in ways which help program staff to create personal profiles of mentors based on their preferences. This information is used to match potential mentors and mentees. Program staff also create personal profiles of mentees which are shared with mentors before matching them. In this way, the program staff are able to match mentors and mentees who best fit and work together.

When asked about the most important goals of the program, this administrative staff stated that one of them was pairing newcomer children and youth with trusted adults who help them to foster a sense of belonging to Canadian society and ultimately become law abiding and productive Canadian citizens. When asked how do program staff and mentors attempt to accomplish this, this program administrative staff stated the program pairs these young people with mentors who develop positive relationships with them and provide support academically and also show them community resources to meet their immediate and long-term needs. In this way, mentors are a layer of support who provide assistance to newcomers and also help them to make good decisions. Although the mandatory commitment for the mentor-mentee relationship is a minimum of one year, most mentors and mentees continue with their relationships outside of the commitment they made with NEEDS centre.

When asked how familiar they were with the “positive youth development” approach used in some mentoring programs, this administrative staff stated, “I am familiar, I would say its working from a strength-based perspective, focusing on the strengths and assets of youth, being patient, treating them with respect and helping them to be successful.” When asked about their view on the extent to which staff and mentors at NEEDS adopt a “positive youth development” (PYD) approach to working with participants and families involved in the mentoring program, they stated that all interventions in the program are designed to help newcomer children and youth adapt better to Canadian life and advance into positive directions. For example, instead of labelling them as troubled and difficult kids, because we know and understand their traumatic life experiences, interventions focus on their strengths and attempt to help them grow and develop in positive ways.

When asked how successful they felt the program is in meeting its goals in helping participants, the administrative staff person stated that the program is efficient and for the most part is very successful in helping participants, particularly helping them to develop better coping mechanisms against indulging in crime and other social vices. When asked what changes could be made to meet these goals more effectively, they responded somewhat critically that “the government needs to provide more funding and must stop considering what we do” is “just an activity, because the program creates a healthier and safer community.” This administrative staff lamented that especially in this current era and discourse surrounding racism, discrimination and prejudices and the fights we have seen since the death of George Floyd and growing anti-racism movements, we need to bring communities together and create spaces and programs for diverse communities. According to this administrative staff, the youth mentorship program is beneficial not just for immigrants and refugees, but for the entire Canadian community. There is less crime

when people have positive influences in their lives. This is why the youth mentorship program is very important and must be sustained by more generous funding. According to this administrative staff in order to cushion the impact of funding cuts alternative sources of funding need to be further pursued.

When asked about what they considered to be some of the major strengths (or “successes”) and weaknesses (or “failures”) of the program, this administrative staff stated, “We have many families who want to continue, they really see the benefits of having to continue their relationship with the mentor and vice versa.” This continued interest is an indication of the benefits of the mentorship program. In a special way the parents and guardians have respite volunteers who provide care for their children particularly at a very critical time when they are new and also this a time when parents are also busy participating in other programs to improve themselves or even working. The youth benefit as well because they are introduced to the community. They get to participate in different recreational activities in the community. The program also provides free bus tickets and passes to community events. The mentee chooses which activities to participate in, whereas the mentor is available as a guide. The program suffered severe setbacks in 2020 in particular because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although virtual mentoring is a good option, many kids already spend lots of time online attending their classes which have to do with online delivery of classes from the public-school system. Because of this many are already fatigued with their online classes and often do not look forward to virtual mentoring. Although many agencies have suffered from major funding cuts during the Covid-19 pandemic, NEEDS centre is very fortunate to be one of the agencies that did not lose a lot of its core funding. According to this administrative staff, the program does not have sufficient staff capacity to supervise mentees particularly when they are in their break room during online mentoring sessions. This is one of the drawbacks of

virtual mentoring. Another drawback of virtual mentoring is that many families share laptops or cell phones among family members. Because of this, many mentees are not able to meet with their mentors during group mentoring sessions. The mentorship program has been referring participants to other community organizations which have computer loan programs or donation programs.

Because communication has been a challenge during the Covid-19 pandemic, two WhatsApp groups were created, one for mentors and the other for mentees. This has been an added layer of support to enable communal sharing of ideas from both parties (mentors and mentees). To cushion the impact of Covid-19 because people can no longer meet in person, the mentorship program has devised alternative ways of recruiting mentors. One way that this has been done is to create and condense a power-point presentation with a video which is sent to a university or college instructor who can play the presentations as part of his or her lesson for a day. The mentorship program is still trying and experimenting with all alternative modes of delivering services. According to this administrative staff it has been a big learning curve for mentors, staff and mentees, particularly with online delivery of services.

When asked what is the major source of recruitment for participants in your program, this administrative staff stated that the program heavily relies on volunteers, they cannot function without mentors. The major sources of recruitment for participants (mentees) are through the SWIS program, school divisions, family members who recommend their friends to the program, internal referrals and external referrals from other agencies and partner organizations. When asked what keeps the youth coming to the mentorship program, it was stated, “Its the connection that that the mentee and mentor establish with each other.” Its not uncommon for these relationships to go beyond the minimum one-year mandatory commitment. Some mentors also take up an entirely different family after the initial one-year commitment. When asked what are the key desired

characteristics of mentors involved with the youth in the community, this administrative staff stated that generally they want established immigrants or Canadian citizens who can serve as role models in the community. When asked how reliable are mentors in showing up to be with the youth in the community, the administrative staff person stated, "For the most part, we don't have issues with mentors per se. Its sometimes the kids, they say something that they don't follow through with." The staff encourage mentors to be patient and understand that sometimes kids will not fulfill their parts. Mentors are expected to report a minimum of 6 hours per month and often most mentors go beyond the minimum hours per month. When asked overall what is the general response of the community to the program, this administrative staff stated that the response is overwhelmingly positive going by the numbers of people who respond when program staff go out to recruit volunteers. Although many cannot make it to volunteer with the regular mentorship program because of their limited availability, they are often asked to volunteer in other areas of the program for example, helping with homework whenever an opportunity arises for them to help. Another sign that the program is well received in the community is that after explaining the benefits of the program to university professors and college instructors they recommend the program to their students and invite the mentorship program staff to make presentations in classrooms.

When asked about the strategies used in the past and/or currently to keep the mentorship program funded, it was stated that because the core funders, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) are always looking for numbers in our reports to justify funding, a key part of our strategy is that we explain in our narrative reports the trends we observed in terms of the actual needs of participants and the community and also provide them with the actual numbers to justify funding the program. In addition, the challenges experienced with service delivery are explained clearly as well as what the program staff, mentors and management team are doing to

meet the needs of participants and the community. Explanations in reports are important because it is a way of showing that the mentorship program management and staff understand and know the needs of participants and the community and are in a position to advocate for them. According to this administrative staff, “That is why monthly reports submitted by mentors are important and we pay attention at the end of the month to read those reports and make follow-ups and we make sure that the information also goes into our funder’s reports.” In this way, what is reflected in the reports to core funders is based on what was accomplished during the month, what is currently going on to meet the actual needs of participants, their challenges and how much it costs.

When asked what assets do you have to help you deliver the goals and objectives of the program (for example, equipment and supplies)? This administrative staff stated, “I would categorize them as both human and physical assets.” The program has a lot of staff members with immigrant and refugee backgrounds. There is that lived experience component where one can really relate with a participant because he or she is an immigrant or was a refugee too. In addition, having program staff with the lived experience of an immigrant or refugee has the potential to easily attract and appeal to newcomers. According to this administrative staff in this way, newcomers are more inclined to listen to them because they are models or living examples of being successful as well as integrated into mainstream Canadian society. According to this program staff other assets are relationships with community partner organizations for example, Cineplex donates free movie tickets to participants and also hires them. The program also has partnerships relations with many other organizations and agencies who actively support the program by donating money and other material needs. When asked of the agencies they collaborate with which ones seem the most effective and why, this administrative staff stated, “I do not want to say one organization is most effective because we know that all organizations work within what they are able to support

or help us with.” When asked if any of the agencies they collaborate with clash with the program’s philosophy, the administrative staff person stated, “I don’t think we clash because we always work within the settlement sector, although sometimes it may feel like we are competing for the same funding from the government.” In terms of service delivery, the NEEDS centre and other organizations within the settlement sector always collaborate and do not compete for participants. When asked is there anything you would like to tell me about the youth mentorship program, this administrative staff state stated, “I do not want to see the mentorship fall through the cracks, I want the program to thrive because I share the passion of the people who started the program.”

### **Key findings**

- Program targets school age newcomer children and youth
- Program has consistently maintained two components (1) one-on-one mentoring (2) group mentoring
- Saturday group mentoring cancelled because of the impact of Covid-19
- Although e-mentoring is a good option, has many challenges such as families sharing electronic devices for communicating, and mentees not able to connect with mentors because not having a computer, another challenge kids already fatigued by remote learning not interested in e.mentoring, not enough staff to support e.mentoring
- More funding needed in order to successfully transition to e.mentoring successfully
- Common challenges faced by participants: language barriers and cultural differences
- Program works from a trauma informed perspective: participants have histories of trauma
- Mentors are positive community adult role models they are critical to service delivery, cannot do without them

- Mentors help to foster a sense of belonging to Canadian society and also help mentees to become productive law-abiding Canadian citizens
- There is support to show that the program is an effective crime prevention strategy
- Program based on a strength-based model and incorporates principles of positive youth development
- Program has devised alternative method of recruitment because people can no longer have in person interactions, created power-point slides a video sent to instructors to play in classrooms as part of lesson
- Core funder IRCC program has not lost a significant amount of funding compared to other agencies in the settlement sector
- Monthly reports submitted by mentees are critical in tracking what is happening on the ground and the needs of participants and the community
- Program has a significant number of staff with the lived experience of being an immigrant or refugee, this helps to appeal to newcomers and also these staff members may make better appeals that can be heard by funders and other potential supporters and funders
- Alternative sources of funding needed, to cushion the impact of funding cuts from traditional source

## **Chapter 5: Findings “The Perspectives of Mentors”**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Although mentors are volunteers and do not receive remuneration for their work the youth mentorship program at NEEDS centre cannot achieve much without them. The program relies on mentors. Mentors are carefully selected and trained by the administrative staff of the youth mentorship program. I interviewed four mentors. The aim of these interviews was to capture the views of these mentors, in particular their perceptions regarding the youth mentorship program and about what they believe can be done to improve service delivery for newcomer children, youth and their families. The four mentors I interviewed are well established immigrants or Canadian citizens who are passionate about making a difference in the lives of newcomer children, youth and their families. They are all well-educated and have a minimum of one year mentoring experience. Their perspectives are important because of the key roles they fulfill as community role models as well as resource navigators for newcomer children, youth and their families.

### **5.2 Interview I**

The mentor I interviewed first is a 47-year-old immigrant of African descent. He is married and has two preteen children. This mentor identifies as male and immigrated to Canada in 2018. He has a Bachelor of Science Undergraduate degree in sociology, a master’s degree in sociology and is a Ph.D. holder in sociology. Before immigrating to Canada this mentor taught university students for more than a decade. He practices the Christian faith and has always been very passionate about helping young people to develop their full potential and become law abiding and productive citizens. When asked about his role in the program, this mentor stated that primarily his role is to provide support to his mentees. He elaborated that support is provided in different forms. For example, “ensuring that mentees have access to certain things they need, impacting them positively,

enhancing their development, advising them, counselling them and guiding them to ensure that they are doing the right thing.” This mentor was in this role from August 2018 to July 2019. When asked what motivated him to become a mentor, he stated that because of his profession as a teacher and lecturer, he has often been involved in working with young adults. According to this mentor, his passion for teaching goes beyond the classroom. He stated, “I like to make the youth feel that they have achieved and gained something through me.” This mentor noted that growing up as a youth in his home country, he always looked for opportunities to help others. He became even more passionate about mentoring young people after obtaining advanced degrees at the graduate level. He believes that because others helped him to succeed, he also must pay back by contributing towards the development of other young people. This mentor stated that as a lecturer, he takes teaching university students not just as a job, or just merely providing academic advice, he takes his job as a calling. This mentor also volunteers as a youth leader in his church as well as a member of a youth executive partnership in the community. According to this mentor, volunteering at NEEDS centre has been a worthwhile experience for him because he believes in supporting young people by influencing them to make good decisions which ultimately impact their lives in more positive ways.

When asked what type of training he received after being accepted to become a volunteer, this mentor stated that the training was very rigorous. The first training session lasted for about five hours. He was also given a manual. According to this mentor this was an indication that the curriculum for the program is based on well-grounded research and theory. Part of the initial training provided also emphasized creating awareness particularly regarding some of the legal implications of youth mentoring. According to this mentor the training helped him to be well prepared to fulfill his mentorship duties. When asked about his perceptions regarding the quality

of his training experiences, this mentor stated that the training was comprehensive, robust and worthwhile. According to this mentor, the facilitators were very articulate and knew what they needed to impart to the mentors in order to have the expected outcomes of the youth mentorship program. When asked do you think you need more post-match training experiences, this mentor stated, “I think that the training is good enough because it meets the purpose and objectives of the program.” According to this mentor, he did not identify any gaps in the training provided. In all it was very comprehensive. When asked about his specific roles as a mentor and how critical to the program is the role played by mentors in carrying out these roles, this mentor stated that his specific roles are to “impact newcomer youth the right way so that they fit into a new society and community.” Because these are newcomers, they do not know their environment well in terms of the community resources that are available to cater for their needs. According to this mentor helping newcomer youth to access and navigate community resources is critical because “they do not know much about their new environment and particularly how to transition from newcomer to established and well-integrated members of Canadian society” This means that the mentor needs to build healthy relationships with the mentees and their families by getting to understand them and know them better as well as making them feel wanted and appreciated as a part of Canadian society.

When asked, how important is it that you show up for all your outings with mentees, and whether someone take his place if he was not available, this mentor stated that showing up for all outings is very important because this is how newcomers are assisted to become familiar and aware of the available community resources. In this way, because these mentees become aware, they can then more easily access these community resources independently or with their families. According to this mentor, the outings are planned one month ahead of schedule. This helps to

promote accountability for both parties (the mentor and mentees) as well as the program facilitators. In addition, this helps the mentor and mentees to prepare and make good use of the time they spend together. According to this mentor, moreover this helps the mentee to become more time conscious and builds a sense of responsibility regarding how time is used. This mentor noted, "I am a very responsible man and when you are responsible, its not enough for you to say I am a responsible person, you have to show in your actions that you are responsible, sometimes I had to drive in the snow to meet up with my mentees." According to this mentor, the mentees were surprised that he did not cancel outings based on adverse weather. In this way, he was able to inculcate in the mentees a sense of responsibility as well as to build a more positive and trusting relationship with them. According to this mentor, because the mentorship relationship is a one-year commitment, with a mandatory minimum six hours which needs to be reported every month, it is often not necessary to have a mentor replaced by another because he or she cannot make it to a particular outing. Mentors are allowed to reschedule outings. This mentor often exceeded the minimum six hours required to report per month. Often one outing lasted even up to nine hours.

When asked about some of the challenges experienced by mentees, this mentor stated that language barrier is one of the most significant communication problems mentees face because most of them are from non-English or non-French speaking countries. According to this mentor, "when there is a language barrier it means one cannot communicate or express himself." For example, this mentor had two mentees (siblings) a 14-year-old and a 9-year-old. The 14-year-old spoke limited English whereas the 9-year-old could not speak. There was not much he could do with them especially with the 9-year-old because of the language barrier. Another challenge faced by mentees that is linked to the problem of communicating is the problem of integration. According to this mentor, it is difficulty for newcomers to fit into a new society particularly into the school

system if they cannot speak French or English. It generally takes longer to be integrated into mainstream society if one has limited communication capabilities. Another challenge faced by mentees is the issue of wrong impressions. This mentor elaborated, “by wrong impressions I mean the mindset which people come with when they come to Canada, it is the belief that when one arrives in Canada then their problems end.” According to this mentor many are disappointed when they discover that living in Canada is not as easy as they originally assumed, a life without problems. For example, many find it difficult to cope with the reality that unemployment and poverty exists in Canada as well. According to this mentor, newcomer youth often get disappointed when their preconceived notions of success do not match up with what they confront in Canada. According to this mentor, “having someone, like a mentor who is able to support them and show them the resources they need in order to successfully integrate into Canadian society is very important.”

When asked about how he works with them to solve these challenges, this mentor stated that regarding the language barrier, “my approach is firstly I tell them that English is not my mother tongue, I have my own language just like you have your language, I learned English, and I am able to communicate, so anybody can learn and speak English.” According to this mentor, this approach worked on his mentees. He encouraged them for example, whenever they went out in the community to develop a habit reading. They could sit in McDonald’s, and he encouraged them to read what was written on the cup. This mentor also regularly took his mentees to the Millennium and St Vital public libraries. Because this mentor developed a culture of reading, within a couple of months to about four months both mentees significantly improved their English language and communications skills. This mentor also regularly checked on the progress his mentees were making in school. According to this mentor, his mentees were often very enthusiastic to talk about

their progress in school. This was an indication that language was becoming less of a barrier even in school. In addition, because of this heightened trust in the mentor, the parents of the mentees also relied on this mentor for information regarding some of their needs. For example, if the parents did not know a particular place where they wanted to go for help they often asked this mentor. According to this mentor taking these mentees to a lot of places in the community helped to foster in them a sense of belonging to the community. For example, when he took them to the airport or the Folks, they often narrated these experiences to their peers at school. This was an indication that these mentees were becoming proud Canadians. Because these mentees were able to develop English language and effective communication skills, their performance in school also improved, in addition, as they steadily became aware of the available community resources it also helped to foster a sense of belonging. According to this mentor, in this way, these mentees and their parents were able to cope with some of their settlement challenges and were better positioned to transition, adapt and integrate into Canadian society.

When asked to narrate any serious challenges that he thinks negatively impact the effectiveness of the program, this mentor stated that the mentoring program does not have any serious challenges that negatively impact its effectiveness. According to this mentor the NEEDS centre provides enough support for mentors and mentees to accomplish all planned activities and outings. For example, they provide bus tickets, show tickets, movie tickets, tickets for sports and games, tickets for several other community events and places. This mentor noted that in fact the program facilitators are very supportive. When they receive monthly reports, the program staff always make follow-ups to address concerns raised in the report and they often communicate even when they are no concerns raised to make sure the mentor-mentee relationship is going on well. In addition, they often reminded this mentor that if there was anything that needed to be addressed

that he should always feel free to reach out for support and help. When asked do you feel that the NEEDS centre provides enough support to immigrant and refugee youth in the community, this mentor stated, “I might not be able to say in absolute terms because I understand that they have other programs with them which do not involve me as a mentor.” However, this mentor noted that on two occasions as he interacted with his mentees, he brought to the attention of the program staff some of the needs which the family narrated, for example, this family needed the internet and other things. The NEEDS centre helped this family to have the internet and also provided the other things they needed. According to this mentor, although he cannot quantify the needs which the NEEDS centre provided to his mentees, when it comes to mentorship he believes that he got 100 percent, all the support needed to carry out his duties as a mentor.

When asked to narrate his best volunteer experience, this mentor stated, “my best volunteer experience is being with my mentees, just talking and interacting with them, our relationship grew I became a big brother” In addition, “every two months I went to their house, got to interact with their parents and other extended family members, and sometimes we watched a movie together from my country.” According to this mentor these experiences created a strong bond, “a sense of belonging, feeling them to be a part of me, and vice versa, it was fun.” In this way, this mentor noted, “We became just like one big family.” When asked in your view, what are some changes that could be made to the youth mentoring program that might be able to enhance its effectiveness, this mentor stated, “I am not sure if NEEDS centre has a follow-up program, for example, I had one year mentorship with them, after the one year I have met my mentees twice, what about the organization are they in touch with those boys? Because I believe that they still need some guidance.” This mentor recommended that follow-ups must be strengthened after the initial one-year commitment, particularly if the mentees are 18-year-old youth or younger. According to this

mentor, integration needs to be viewed as a process. He witnessed his mentees make significant progress during the one-year commitment, and he would like to see more follow-ups made to ensure that mentees continue on a positive life trajectory. When asked is there anything else you would like to tell me about the youth mentoring program, this mentor stated, “It is a very laudable initiative because when newcomers come into Canada, most of them have unpleasant, terrible and nasty experiences from their countries of origin, so they need a lot of support and guidance.” In this way, their chances of successful integration into Canadian mainstream society are enhanced.

### **Key findings**

- Mentor’ key roles: provide support and guidance to mentees in navigating, locating and accessing community resources
- What motivates a mentor to volunteer: background, religion and educational attainments as well as a passion to make a difference in the lives of young people and in the community
- Training for mentors is comprehensive, robust and rigorous
- The mentorship relationship fosters strong family-like bonds and a sense of belonging
- Building a positive and trusting relationship takes time
- This mentoring program is a ‘hybrid’ focussed on relationship building and also meeting the settlement needs of mentees and family
- Challenges faced by mentees: language barrier, which impedes success in school and also hinders successful integration into Canadian society, unemployment and poverty are also big problems which newcomers confront
- Although the youth mentoring program effectively supports newcomers, follow-ups need to be strengthened particularly after the one-year commitment to ensure that mentees continue on a positive life trajectory

- Successful integration needs to be viewed as a process which may take several years to achieve

### **5.3 Interview II**

I interviewed a 35-year-old mentor of Caucasian descent who identifies as a male and has been married for most of his adult life. He has an undergraduate degree in English and politics, a master's degree in English and is a PhD holder in English literature. He is an instructor at one of the post-secondary education institutions in Winnipeg. He is a member of a protestant Christian church. When asked about his role in the program, this mentor stated that although the official match ended, he is still in contact with his mentees (male siblings). This mentor started volunteering nine years ago when his wife was a program facilitator at NEEDS centre. At the time he had two mentees who immigrated from Nepal. According to this mentor, it was the kind of situation where a few refugees had landed from the same country at the same time. His mentees were then 8 and 9-year-old kids. In 2018 one of the administrative staff of the youth mentorship program tracked down this mentor because the family had a few things going on and they needed support. This administrative staff asked this mentor if he was willing to resume mentoring the older sibling, although this family has been in Canada for almost a decade. This mentor accepted the request because he thought it would be a really exciting opportunity because he knew them. They did not speak very much English at all when he first met them in 2012, and it was really exciting to reconnect especially with the older brother. This time knowing him as a grown teenager. This mentor ended up doing two matches, which were back-to-back for two years. According to this mentor, although the second match ended a year ago they are still doing a few different things at least once a month. The younger brother is now in grade 10 and the older is in grade 11.

When asked what motivated him to become a mentor, this mentor stated, “originally it was something that I am very interested in and do care about, but mostly it was because my partner was working as the facilitator, and it just seemed like a good way to help her out and also do something that seemed like a lot of fun and was so nice.” When asked about his perceptions regarding the quality of the training experience he acquired, this mentor stated that although it was a long time ago, the training provided helpful information and lots of good ideas about what sorts of activities to do with mentees. According to this mentor what he liked most about the training is that mentors were given lots of options. There was nothing prescriptive. He was encouraged to try different ways and styles of building the mentor-mentee relationship. This mentor found this to be true as he experimented, particularly with the two brothers who liked different activities when they grew up. The training prepared him not to be restrictive in the sorts of activities that the individual matches could turn into. When asked if he needed more post-match training experiences, this mentor stated that the initial training was good enough. For example, one of his mentees was more of a shy person than the other, he did not often take a lot of initiative and it had been almost a year since he last heard from him. Recently, this shy mentee reached out again. According to this mentor this is an indication of a really big breakthrough for this mentee and a sign that the training the mentor originally received to nurture this mentee is effective. According to this mentor, the fact that this mentee reached out even after a year meant that he still felt comfortable reaching out because of the support he got at every step of the way.

When asked about his specific roles as a mentor and how critical to the program is the role played by mentors in carrying out these roles, this mentor stated, “It’s a little bit different for me because the official part of the matches is over and also because the role changed quite a lot over the years and in the different times, originally it was more.” According to this mentor when they

were first matched several years ago, this mentor provided breaks to the mum of his mentees. They did lots of physical activities together, went to different places and played soccer at the park. At the time it was difficult to communicate to both because they were very young and did not speak much English. According to this mentor, in recent times the role changed a lot because they are both adolescents and they just had really sort of strong preferences one way or the other. One enjoys quieter activities and the other loves the out-doors, for example, going for a hike or going out for a walk or getting out of the city a little bit. This mentor stated that in all, the roles keep changing depending on the situation. One advantage of the program is that once the matches are set there is not much involvement with the NEEDS centre, the program facilitators let the mentor and mentee develop their own relationship and get to know each other without too much interference. In this way, the relationship develops more independently and is probably a better approach. When asked how about the importance of showing up for all outings with his mentees, and whether someone could take his place if he was not available, this mentor stated that it is very important for a mentor to show up for all outings. According to this mentor, because his partner was a facilitator during the first match, and she was still working in that job for a couple of years after the first match. She was there for some of the visits for the weekends. There was some flexibility where she might take one of them to do something different from what he was doing with the other brother. According to this mentor, for the most part of it, it really depended on the connection that they developed more on a personal level. This mentor noted “It was not just that it could be anybody going to pick them up and play soccer with them.” In this way, it was dependent on having that relationship already established.

When asked about some of the challenges his mentees face, this mentor stated that although he is not a psychologist or psychiatrist, he thinks that because they are refugees, it appears that

they come with some “emotional baggage” sometimes a little bit withdrawn, and having trouble being motivated, not having much of an appetite or not really wanting to do anything. According to this mentor he could clearly see this in one of them, whereas the other sibling was more outgoing, he also had his own struggles. For example, “he could never stop talking, this presented a little bit of a challenge.” The two brothers clearly had different needs, whereas one was accessing other resources from different programs the other, did not really have other things going well. According to this mentor, towards the end of the matches he attempted to rework and collaborate more one-on-one with them. For the quieter mentee he provided him with his number and encouraged him to call or text whenever he wanted to do something together. Although it took a very long time for this mentee to take that offer, this mentor is glad that recently this mentee has been reaching out more and they have been picking up activities he really wants to do. When asked about how often he sees or works with them, this mentor stated, “Probably two times a month in both of the matches, currently I am just making follow-ups, it had been a long time where I had not seen or heard anything from the quieter mentee, but then over the last month, we have done something every week, so its pretty common.”

When asked if there were any serious challenges that negatively impact the effectiveness of the program, this mentor stated that there are no serious challenges that negatively impact the effectiveness of the mentoring program. However, this mentor noted that although there is a generational gap and diversity between mentors and mentees, who are mostly refugee youth, which may involve some risks or some small things to be considered, overall the benefits are much greater. According to this mentor one thing that changed from the first match that he had to the second one, which was not a change for the better, was that there were more resources back in 2012 compared to the present. Although free tickets are still available to visit and attend community events, in

2012 there was an additional budget where a mentor and mentee were able to have \$30 or something to buy snacks or if there was an activity not covered in the regular budget. According to this mentor that was helpful because it opened up some possibilities particularly for example, if the mentor was also a student and did not have sufficient personal funds to buy a meal or spend money on an activity with the mentee. Sufficient resources to keep the youth mentoring program still going remains a challenge. This mentor lamented that there is a perception particularly in government funding that youth mentoring is not essential, that it is a nice extra thing that could happen. According to this mentor, mentoring is very important although often it appears like no real tangible results are evident. Some argue that although the relationship between the mentor and mentee is built, it is very hard to measure. Because of this challenge it is difficult to convince some people that relationship building is valuable and that this is something that matters to the mentors and mentees even if no one can put a price tag or quantify it. According to this mentor in spite of some of these challenges, the NEEDS centre still provides very good support to mentors. This mentor appreciates the support he receives and does not feel like there was anything lacking that negatively impacts the effectiveness of the program.

When asked if he felt the NEEDS centre provides enough support to immigrant and refugee youth in the community, this mentor stated, “I would probably say like as far as their responsibility goes, I think they do, but if the question were, do I think that the federal and provincial governments do I would say no.” According to this mentor, he knows that provincial government’ priorities over the years particularly regarding funding social services like the youth mentoring program have changed a lot, in fact there was a time that it appeared that the NEEDS centre was going to close because of funding cuts. However, because a new government was elected at the national level, the political will and priorities switched for a huge push to bring in more refugees.

Luckily, that meant that the NEEDS centre could continue to grow and support more refugee youth. According to this mentor the NEEDS centre is holding its part of the bargain or the societal contract. This mentor noted that the major challenge is knowing whether or not there is a reliable political will to keep programs like the mentoring program and a lot of other services they do not have steady funding. According to this mentor it is unfortunate that instead of focussing on doing their work the NEEDS centre and other grass-root organizations spend a significant portion of their time fund raising and applying for grants. Although it is understandable that they have to survive yet this is not ideal, these programs need to receive more funding so that they are more equipped to meet the needs particularly of vulnerable populations and newcomer families.

When asked about his best volunteer experience, this mentor stated that one of those experiences is that recently one of his mentees has been reaching out more him, and they have been doing more things together than ever before. This is an indication that his mentee has been positively impacted. This mentor noted that his worst volunteer experience was when he and his mentee had made a plan to meet, and his mentee did not show up or communicate about what was going on. When asked in your view, what are some changes that could be made to the youth mentoring program that might enhance its effectiveness, this mentor stated although some things could be tweaked and improved a little bit, in a general way no big change to the program itself is needed. According to this mentor the onus is on the community in Winnipeg to lobby for more support from the municipal, provincial and federal governments. The community needs to ensure that mentoring is something that happens not on short-term basis but more on permanent, long-term basis. In this way, even if there will be another humanitarian crisis in the future for example, what happened in Syria several years again when thousands of refugees fled from war-zones and immigrated to Canada, there will be existing infrastructure rather than starting from the scratch. It

would be better if there was a greater sense of permanence and commitment from larger, more powerful government sources to say this is something that matters to us. Supporting refugees well throughout their transition requires a strong political will because it takes years to kind of set and work. When asked is there anything else you would like to tell me about the youth mentorship program, this mentor stated that focussed programming rather than just making sure that refugee children have a school that they can go to or that there is a roof over their heads, will do more to support them better in their transition to main-stream Canadian society. In this regard the youth mentoring program at NEEDS centre does a good job to offer comprehensive supports which also help to keep refugee youth from gang involvement and crime, but their efforts are undermined because of limited funds and finding cuts especially in the current era of the Corona virus pandemic.

### **Key findings**

- Mentor passionate about mentoring refugee youth, wants to make a difference
- Training provided was very helpful and prepared the mentor to fulfill his duties well
- Mentor acts a community role model as well as helps with locating, navigating and accessing resources
- Mentor is well educated
- Positive relationship between mentor and mentee promotes the desire to remain in contact even after the matches are officially over
- The mentor and mentees independently plan their activities without the interference of program staff
- Some of the challenges faced by mentees: emotional and other psychological problems possibly related to their traumatic experiences as refugees, mentees also have language barrier and communication problems

- Presently the program has fewer resources compared to 2012, they have inadequate resources to keep the program going
- Relationship between mentor and mentee is valuable even if the relationship cannot be measured or quantified in monetary terms
- According to their best ability the NEEDS centre provides enough support for refugee youth in the community
- Provincial and federal governments need to provide more support and funding
- A strong political will is needed to maintain stable long-term supports for youth mentoring or other social programs
- Grass-root organizations including NEEDS centre spend a significant portion of their time fund raising instead of focussing on their actual work to meet the needs of program participants
- The community needs to lobby for more long-term funding rather than short-term from municipal, provincial, and federal governments
- Existing infrastructure for supporting refugees needs to be maintained and improved on a long-term basis rather than wait for crisis to happen in order to develop, the Syrian humanitarian crisis should serve as a reminder to maintain and develop infrastructure
- Focussed programming and comprehensive supports are needed in order to keep refugee youth from gang involvement and crime
- Funding cuts have also been exuberated by the Covid-19 pandemic

#### **5.4 Interview III**

I interviewed a 26-year-old mentor born and raised in Winnipeg. She identifies as female and is single. She is not a religious person and has a Metis heritage. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree

and is halfway through the juris doctor program. When asked about her role in the program, this interviewee stated that she does not mentor anymore but mentored from 2013 to 2019. I interviewed her because she had mentored for 7 years. She stated that as a mentor she was paired with government sponsored refugee children. Her mentees were usually siblings from one family. She stated that a volunteer facilitator would normally meet with her for the introduction and then about every second week, this mentor would take the kids to activities around the city with the intention of exposing them to as much as possible. This mentor stated that she thought of this as introducing them to a different culture and societal norms. She believes that this was just like a source for them to have fun, because transitions can be difficult so then it was a lot about providing some stability to newcomers and trying to be a good example. It was about being intentional with the things that she spoke about. For example, the importance of school and making friends as well as emphasizing productive and positive things in their lives that they could work towards when she was not around. Every kid was matched with this mentor for one year. She stated that she had two matches cut short because one of them moved to another city and the other unfortunately got into some trouble with authorities.

When asked about what motivated her to become a mentor, she stated that she wanted to give back to the community. She was inspired by her friend who was a student at Red River College and also volunteered at the NEEDS centre. When asked about the type of training she received after being accepted to become a mentor, she stated that she attended one or two orientations in 2013. She was given reading materials which emphasized on how to keep a child safe as well as other helpful information for mentorship. In addition, criminal record checks were taken to ensure that the volunteers were good people. When asked about her perceptions regarding the quality of the training experiences, this mentor stated, "I thought it was good, I don't remember

that much but I remember not being stressed out or confused about my role.” According to this mentor, overall the training experiences clearly outlined what was expected from mentors. When asked if she thought that she needed more post-match training experiences, this mentor stated she felt okay and comfortable because she comes from a family with lots of children. When asked about her specific roles as a mentor and how critical to the program is the role played by mentors in carrying out these roles, she stated a mentor is a community role model who also relieves parents by taking their children for outings so that they have more opportunities to do other things in the home alone or in the community without worrying about taking care of their kids. When asked about the importance of showing up for all her outings with mentees, she stated that although mentees did not always speak to that, they were times when they indicated that they appreciated the stability and consistence and the ways in which the mentor demonstrated that these outings were critical for their welfare and transition to Canadian society. Showing up for all outings makes a huge difference because it often sticks with the mentees even after the matches are over some mentees still connect with the mentor and often say that they miss the stability and consistency of the outings. Because the matches were for a one-year commitment it was not necessary to have someone else take her place if she could not make it to some outings. When asked about how often she got to see them or work with them, she stated about every second week, so it was every other Saturday and there was a minimum 6-hour requirement per month, which she divided in to three hours every other weekend.

When asked about some of the challenges that her mentees faced, she stated that a lack of resources made it hard for some kids who were trying to fit into the public school system. Some parents were working multiple jobs and most of them had a tumultuous home life. Not all the time but quite often, some of them were unable to do things like going to movies or even the Children’s

museum. The outings definitely helped them to connect more with Canadian ways of life and in particular to know the city. Many of these kids struggled with what had affected them from the outcome of being refugees. Some of them came straight from a civil war or where there was a lot of danger and violence. One of them was in trouble for some kind of fall out emanating from his past traumatic experiences. When asked how she worked with them to solve some of the challenges they faced, she stated that she did not talk about their past experiences with them other than just hearing their background stories from the volunteer facilitator. She did not want to be upsetting these children.

When asked about specific program challenges that negatively impacted the effectiveness of the program, she stated that she would not say so, because the mentorship role by itself was fairly autonomous. According to this mentor there wasn't much oversight other than the monthly reports she submitted. However, she noted that a couple of years into volunteering the funding was taken away. Mentors could no longer receive reimbursement for taking kids on activities and outings. According to this mentor that just made it a little bit more challenging, although she could still take the kids for example to free pools. Sometimes she paid bills out of her pocket after the funding cuts. However, if the family asked for another sibling to come, or if the kid wanted to bring a friend, she was not always able to do what they wanted to do. When asked do you feel that NEEDS centre provided enough support to mentors, she stated "Yeah, I would say so I felt that way for sure, I worked there through 3 different facilitators, and I think I had good connections with each of them." This mentor was able to even get references from these facilitators, which was a good indicator of a solid and good working relationship.

When asked do you feel that the NEEDS centre provided enough support to immigrant and refugee youth in the community, she stated "I think so." For example, the after-school program

was useful because the kids talked about it a lot. When she picked them from their homes and asked about how the week was, they would always include comments about the after-school program. If they were not at the after-school program then they would bring up what they had done there in the past. According to this mentor this was an indication that their day to day lives were filled with stories about the overall positive impact of the NEEDS centre. This mentor stated having more mentors could have been more helpful because some families always wanted their kids, siblings and friends to get picked up. According to this mentor if there were more options for kids to be mentored, may be that would have been helpful. When asked about her best volunteer experience, this mentor stated that although there was a language barrier with her first mentee, she was like the sweetest girl she ever met, a couple of months into mentoring she started drawing arts and making crafts and there was one in particular that she drew where the mentor and mentee were holding hands, a posture which showed that there were best friends. According to this mentor this drawing demonstrated that the friendship was growing positively in the right direction and that connection matters.

When asked about her worst volunteer experience and what made it bad, this mentor stated that it had nothing to do with the NEEDS centre. One day she could not get hold of her mentee, it turned out that the mentee was apprehended and taken to a juvenile detention. This mentor stated that she hated that because it felt really unfair, and it felt like the resources had failed that family. When asked, in your view, what are some changes that could be made to the youth mentoring program that might be able to enhance its effectiveness, this mentor stated that some more mentorship group activities for example, a couple of mentors can team-up for a Christmas party or go out more frequently for group outings so that it feels more like a community outing that way. When asked, is there anything else you would like to tell me about the youth mentoring program,

this mentor stated, that mentoring did a lot for her on a personal level, she still maintains contact with a couple of kids on Facebook. By this she knows that her life and the lives of these mentees were positively affected, and it even influenced her career choices. This mentor hopes that the program can continue because she believes that it is very important.

### **Key findings**

- Most mentoring relationships continue even after the matches are officially over
- Mentors act as community role models, help mentees to access, locate and navigate community resource
- A mentor also provides respite or relief to struggling parents so that they focus on doing other things in the home or community without worrying about caring for their children
- According to this mentor, her motivation for mentoring was giving back to the community and making a difference
- The quality of training for mentors is very good, and clearly outlines the goals and objectives of the program
- Challenges faced by mentees included: lack of resources (poverty) makes it hard for kids to fit into the public school system, mentees face language barriers, and mentees struggle with past traumatic experiences related to being refugees coming from warzones and situations where crime and violence abound
- Mentorship program designed to be fairly autonomous with limited supervision from the NEEDS centre
- Although funding cuts negatively impact service delivery, overall, the NEEDS centre is doing its best to deliver services
- More funding is required to enhance service delivery

- Overall there are indications of positive outcomes for most mentor and mentee relationships
- More group activities/ outings are needed to foster a deeper sense of belonging to the community
- Volunteering at the NEEDS centre has influenced career choices of this mentor, she is also well educated

### **5.5 Interview IV**

I interviewed a 23-year-old mentor who identifies as a female. She is single, of African descent and a Christian. She originally came from Ghana about 5 years ago. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology and criminology. She currently works full time with a community-based organization. When asked about her role in the program, she stated that she has been involved with the program since the fall of 2017 and started volunteering in January 2018. She was motivated to be a mentor as a result of a presentation which one of the NEEDS centre staff conducted to recruit university students. Because she was considering a career path into mental health, youth, addictions or the justice system, she thought that volunteering at NEEDS would help with her future career aspirations. When she applied for a volunteer position at NEEDS centre she was accepted. After the background checks she attended a couple of training sessions, and she was also given opportunities to interact with kids in the after-school program. Because she also lived in South Africa and had personal experience with immigration the program staff thought that she would be a good fit, so they provided her with extensive training virtually and in-person. The training covered topics like helping kids with homework and also supporting them in their transition and integration into the larger Canadian community. The training was thorough, she learned how to communicate culturally sensitive information to diverse groups in ways that respect

culture, religion, personal preferences and spiritual values of refugees and immigrants. She also got practical training regarding for example how to take a bus or how to go to the zoo and also practical ways of helping newcomer youth to value and acknowledge their culture while at the same time assimilating and accepting other cultures. She also learned how to help newcomer youth with prioritizing organization and life skills, how to make meals, how to look for a job and find resources that help to generate resumes. The training she obtained covered a broad scope of topics tailored to meet the needs of newcomer children and youth.

When asked if she thought that she needed more post-match training experiences, this mentor stated that because the training was extensive and in-depth as well as hands on, there was no need to have more post-match training experiences. When asked about her specific roles as a mentor and how critical to the program is the role played by mentors in carrying out these roles, she stated that it was definitely important. She primarily helped newcomer youth to settle in the public school system, helped them to find employment, as well as generally settling down into daily routines such as how to communicate with a stranger, how to develop relationships and make friends and living a new life in Canada. She also helped them to thrive not just academically in the after-school program but also thriving in sports and other extra-curriculum activities. According to this mentor the program is designed to help in ways that help newcomer youth to harness their strength, to focus on what they are good at doing and then providing support and guidance in order for them to best fulfil their potential. When asked about the importance of showing up for all her outings with mentees, and whether someone can take her place if she can't make it, this mentor stated that consistence is an important requirement or attribute because most of these immigrant and refugee kids have been moved around so many times and they struggle with trusting people because of their past experiences. It is not acceptable for a mentor to be a no show unless absolutely

necessary because working with kids and getting to know them and to earn their trust takes time. Similarly, showing up late or leaving early are hallmarks of inconsistencies which are not acceptable particularly if one wants to earn the trust of his or her mentees. It is not advisable for anyone to take a place of a mentor unless the person has been approved and trained by the NEEDS centre.

When asked about some of the common challenges faced by mentees, this mentor stated that many have a language barrier and also struggle with overcoming accents, some struggle with making friends and some struggle with homework. When asked about how she works with them to solve some of those challenges, she stated that regarding accents, she encourages her mentees to understand and know that they do not have to feel bad for sounding different because nobody ever sounds like someone else. She encourages them to appreciate and feel confident in and about themselves. According to this mentor what matters most is a clear expression of words and not the way the words sound. Regarding making friends she encourages them to make friends for the right reasons, firstly, a friend is someone who needs to help one grow and develop into a better person, secondly a good friend must respect you and finally a good friend needs to maintain clear boundaries. She advises her mentees to always make sure that they are asking for consent from the friends and their parents because legally they are under the age of the majority. Regarding homework she encourages her mentees to always seek for help and support. In this way, mentees are encouraged to take the initiative and work together with the mentor to solve problems. This helps the mentees to become more independent and gain the skills needed to master problems. When asked how often she sees or works with mentees, she stated that approximately 6 to 8 hours per month and she checks in on them periodically.

When asked about specific program strengths or challenges that negatively impact its effectiveness, this mentor stated that the NEEDS centre provides wholistic support, not just for school related issues but also for family and other things they need in order to settle and blend better into Canadian society. This mentor noted that the program needs to be publicized more so that people are aware of the amazing work being done in the community. Her mentees have done very well in school, they have integrated into the community, made good friends and they participate at their church. They also help their mom a lot. According to this mentor seeing them achieve their goals and become successful not only has been rewarding but also the best volunteer experience a mentor can ever look forward to have. One of her mentees who is 12 years old is already looking at the universities she wants to attend. Although the match officially ended after one year in February 2021, this mentor, her mentees and family have maintained contact with each other. When asked about her worst volunteer experience and what made it bad, this mentor stated that she did not have a worst experience, but an experience that she thinks did not get the results wanted. Because sometimes she works with youth between ages 14 and 18 years. Some young people in this age group sometimes feel that they are much older than they really are. She narrated that she worked with a 16-year-old girl who had a lot of potential, but struggled with keeping appointments, showing up late, not being dedicated and not finishing her schoolwork. According to this mentor, this was not the worst volunteer experience, rather it was a learning process or experience for her.

When asked, in your view, what are some changes that could be made to the youth mentoring program that might be able to enhance its effectiveness, this mentor stated, as before that publicizing the program is very important because there are some people who do not come as refugees, but who are accepted as permanent residents of Canada using other criteria other than

refugees. According to this mentor, in order to successfully integrate these youth may also need to be supported, because although they might have the finances, assets or other support networks in other areas and yet they could be struggling socially. When asked is there anything else you would like to tell me about the youth mentorship program, this mentor stated that she believes that it is a very good program and that she is happy to be a part of it and that her involvement with the mentoring program has helped her find jobs and also helped her to become a better person.

### **Key findings**

- Key roles of mentors: role model, helping mentee to access, navigate and locate community resources
- Mentor is well educated and wants to make a difference in the community
- Training provided for mentor was extensive, in-depth and hands on and helped mentor to fulfill her duties
- Program designed to harness the strength of newcomer youth by focussing on what they are good at and providing guidance and support
- Mentor needs to show up consistently for all outings and only trained and approved mentors can be substituted to replace a mentor who cannot make it
- Common challenges faced by mentees, language barrier, foreign accents, some struggle with making friends and home-work
- Mentees are encouraged to seek support and collaborate with their mentor in order for them to develop skills which nurture independence
- The program provides holistic support not just for school related issues but also for the family and other things needed to settle and blend into mainstream society

- There is evidence showing the program effectively supports newcomer children, youth and their families to transition, blend and settle in the community for example: mentees doing very well in school, integrated into the community as evidenced by participation in church activities and attendance as well as making good friends and hanging out regularly with them and helping their parents
- Even after the official matches are over mentors, mentees and the family remain in touch
- Mentors and mentees collaboratively make plans and execute plans independently without being supervised for the most part by the NEEDS centre
- The mentorship program needs to be advertised widely so that the public are aware of the amazing-good work being done in the community
- Volunteering has helped mentor to find jobs and the experience has inspired her to become a better person seeking for the good of others and the community

## **Chapter 6: Findings “The Perspectives of Parents of Program Participants”**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The youth mentorship program at NEEDS centre mostly targets recently arrived immigrant, refugee children, youth and their families. The program targets newcomers because they do not have connections to the community as well as resources needed for them to successfully transition and integrate into mainstream Canadian society. Other recently arrived immigrants who may not be refugees per se are allowed to participate in the program. For example, those who are accepted as permanent residents of Canada based on their ability to contribute to the growth of the Canadian economy. Others are sponsored by private citizens or family members who are either permanent residents or Canadian citizens. Most refugee families are from non-English speaking countries. Because most of the parents of program participants have limited English language proficiency, the NEEDS centre offers and provides interpretation support. I interviewed four parents. Of the four parents interviewed, only one did not need interpretation support. All the parents I interviewed arrived in Canada between 2015 and 2016. Of the four parents I interviewed, two originally came from Syria and the other two immigrated from Eritrea. Eritrea has been in turmoil for many years. This was also at the peak of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, when thousands of refugees fled from their homelands, and were admitted into Canada and other countries. I interviewed the parents of program participants because they are primary care givers and would provide insights which are in the best interests of their children and families.

### **6.2 Interview I**

I interviewed a 37-year-old married, Muslim man originally from Syria. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in English and taught in Syria for five years. His family fled from a war zone in 2013. They fled into Jordan and lived there for three years. They applied at the regional

offices of the United Nations in Jordan, to be considered for permanent settlement as refugees in a peaceful country. In 2016, they were accepted and granted permanent residency status by the Canadian federal government. They have lived in Winnipeg for the past five years. The Canadian Lutheran Church sponsored them. They have two children, the older started in grade two when they immigrated to Canada and the younger one stayed home. Because his children were very young they quickly learned how to speak English and acquired a Canadian accent within a short period of time.

When asked about how he learned about the youth mentoring program offered by NEEDS centre, this parent stated that because his family was sponsored by the Canadian Lutheran Church, they are the ones who referred him to the program and also told him about other services available for new-comer families in Winnipeg. He personally registered at the NEEDS centre and his family was accepted into the program. When asked about what he liked most about the youth mentorship program, he stated that being matched with a mentor was very helpful because he and his family did not know the city well. According to this parent, the mentor used to come to their house to pick up their son once a month. For a minimum of six hours the mentor went with their son to community outings. They went to theaters or museums as well as other community places and attended many community events. This helped their son to become familiar, comfortable and knowledgeable about the city. According to this parent, having a mentor for their son who also came to Canada as an immigrant, was an added benefit to his family. This inspired him to think more positively about life in Canada, particularly that the mentor was an established immigrant herself who was a living testimony or proof of the possibilities of a better life in Canada. Moreover, he did not have a car, or a job, so seeing a successful immigrant who had a car and a job and was

their son's mentor motivated him to work hard too and aspired to make a difference in the future settlement of other newcomers. His son, an 8-year-old at the time, was also inspired.

When asked about other NEEDS centre programs which he or his children used, he stated that his son also participated in the after-school program. He narrated that his son liked the after-school program because he had opportunities to meet and make friends with other new-comer children. Before the Covid-19 pandemic they had field trips and visited many places. He played games with other newcomer children, and they also had a lot of after-school program activities they did together. When asked about what his son has told him about his experience in the youth mentoring program, he stated that every time he returned from an outing with his mentor, he was always very happy and narrated stories about what he saw and learned from the visit. When asked did your son enjoy being with his mentor, he stated, "yes" every time he came back from an outing he would say that he had fun and would narrate about all the places they visited. When asked about what his son enjoyed the most and what he enjoyed the least, he stated, "getting to know the city, going to places like museums and other community places, there is nothing that he enjoyed the least." According to this parent, there was never a single outing which he complained about. When he returned he would always say that he could not wait for the next outing with his mentor. When asked in what areas of your son's life did the program help with, he stated that the program helped him to know the city and he became familiar with key community places where he could visit for leisure and also actively participate. This helped to create a sense of belonging to the community.

When asked about his son's relationship with his mentor, he stated that it was great because the mentor was able to build the relationship in a very short period. The mentor smiled a lot, was very kind and helpful. The mentor became a family friend and was occasionally invited for meals, and she also invited them for meals at her home. According to this parent, the mentor showed that

she deeply cared about their child as well as about them as parents. The mentor always showed up on time for outings. When asked if there were things about the mentor that he did not like, he stated, “nothing at all.” When asked about what he thinks his son learned from the mentor, he stated that although his son was young, he was inspired by the stories she narrated about being an immigrant herself and looked up to her as a model of success because she was now helping them to become equally successful and integrated into Canadian society. According to this parent, the mentor was a very trustworthy individual. When asked about what the mentor could have done to enhance the relationship, he stated that spending more time interacting and doing things together could have been preferred. However, this parent noted that he was happy with the minimum six hours the mentor spent with his son. He understood that the mentor was also very busy with her family and other commitments.

When asked about the most favorite thing that his son liked to do with his mentor, he stated that playing games, skating and outdoor activities helped him to become very happy. When asked to describe the impact of the youth mentorship program on his son, he stated that going out with the mentor into the community, learning and knowing about the city helped his son to blend, develop a sense of belonging, adapt and also adopt a new way of life in Canada. When asked about what he feels needs to be done in order for the NEEDS organization to more effectively meet the needs of children, he stated that other than the minimum six hours per month he wishes that mentors could spend more time with their mentees and families because they act as an invaluable layer of support for newcomer families.

### **Key findings**

- With a supportive environment, young children quickly learned how to speak English and acquired a Canadian accent within a short period of time

- Family was sponsored by the Canadian Lutheran Church who also provided contact information about services available for newcomers in Winnipeg
- The mentor was a community role model who helped the mentee to learn and know more about the city as well as access community resources available for newcomers
- The mentor was a kind, trusted, compassionate and loving adult role model who proved not only helpful to the mentee but also the entire family, the relationship developed into a family like bond as evidenced by reciprocal visits and having meals at the home of the mentor and mentee with all family members
- Community outings enhanced not only the joy and happiness of the mentee but also the entire household as evidenced by the jovial countenance and positive comments of the mentee after every trip (happiness and joy is infectious)
- The community outings helped to create a sense of belonging and also inspired the mentee and family to blend into mainstream Canadian society
- Having an “immigrant mentor” inspired the family to look forward to working hard, becoming productive citizens with the potential of making a difference in the future settlements of other newcomers
- The after-school program synergized the mentorship program: provided opportunities to meet other newcomer children and also created opportunities to make friends
- Whenever possible mentors need to spend more time with their mentees and families because they are an invaluable layer of support for newcomer families

### **6.3 Interview II**

I interviewed a 50-year-old married Muslim man. This parent has a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education. He together with his family fled from the battle zones of Syria and were admitted into Canada in 2016.

When asked about the experience which he and his family have had with the youth mentoring program and how he learned about the program, he stated that when they arrived in Winnipeg, they were accommodated at Welcome Place. The NEEDS centre staff reached out to them at Welcome Place to inform them about the services available for newcomers. Having listened to the benefits of the youth mentoring program and other services, this family decided to enroll their children. When asked about what he liked most about the youth mentorship program, he stated that even after they left their temporary residence at Welcome Place and found a permanent dwelling place, the NEEDS centre staff continued to support and help their children with homework and other settlement needs. In fact, the NEEDS centre staff kept asking this family about how they were settling in as well as the progress their children were making in school.

When asked about other NEEDS centre programs which he and his children used, he stated, “the employment and after-school program.” The NEEDS centre staff helped his children to find employment. When asked about what his children have told him about their experience in the youth mentorship program, he stated that his children were happy and comfortable because they were well supported not only with homework but also with everything they needed in order to become productive permanent residents. When asked about what his children enjoy the most and also what they enjoy the least, he stated that his children enjoyed particularly interacting with their mentor and accessing support with homework. According to this parent, his children did not have any complaints and that there was nothing from their experience which they enjoyed the least. When asked about the areas of his children’s life which the program helped with, he stated that the program helped his children to be involved in pro-social activities. The relationship with their mentor grew stronger to a point where when the mentor dropped them off at home from an outing the children would often tear up and say that they wanted the mentor back. Outings in the

community helped his children to know the city and also the resources available for them in order to successfully transition and integrate into mainstream society.

When asked do you feel the mentor cares about your children, he stated that the fact that they became so fond of their mentor that they always looked forward to spending more time together means that there was a very strong bond and close relationship. When asked about the qualities he liked about the mentor, he stated that the mentor was always supportive particularly with their homework, he is a very kind, compassionate and easy to relate and interact with. When asked about any things he did not like about the mentor, he stated that the mentor was excellent. When asked about what his children learned from their mentor, he stated that the most important thing for him was that his children learned about the value and importance of education. According to this parent, education opens up doors and opportunities for usefulness and living a very happy and fulfilling life particularly for newcomers. When asked do you trust your children's mentor, he stated that he would not allow four of his children to go out and be with a mentor if he did not trust him. Moreover, this parent believes that mentors are carefully chosen by the NEEDS centre and that only trusted persons are allowed to mentor children.

When asked what could your children's mentor do better to enhance the relationship, he stated the mentor was already doing all and the best to enhance the relationship. When asked about the most favorite thing that his children would prefer doing with their mentor, he stated that after completing homework, they preferred cutting papers and drawing because it made them feel happier. When asked about how he would describe the impact of the youth mentoring program on his children, he stated that given that he could not help his children with their homework, the youth mentorship program filled in the gap to provide not only support with homework but also with other settlement needs for his children. For example, his children made friends with other

newcomer kids whom they interacted with in group mentoring activities as well as the afterschool program. Moreover the mentor took his children out for movies, to the zoo and other community places which could have been difficult for the family to access especially with limited funds. According to this parent, making friends and meeting with other newcomer kids has been a huge added layer of support for his children. When asked about what he felt the NEEDS centre needs to do in order to more effectively meet the needs of his children, he stated that although the Corona virus pandemic has disrupted program activities, he is confident that the program is well designed to meet the needs of his children.

### **Key findings**

- The youth mentorship program staff monitored the progress which the children were making in school and regularly checked in with the family regarding other settlement needs
- The youth mentorship program synergized with the afterschool and employment program in meeting the needs of the family
- Because the father has a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education, he was not able to help his children with their homework, and the youth mentoring and afterschool programs filled in the gap
- The mentorship program enhanced participation in pro-social activities such as making friends and meeting with other newcomer children who were an added layer of support
- The mentor was very kind, compassionate and caring person who helped the children with homework, locating, accessing, and navigating community resources for the newcomer family
- The mentor developed a strong bond and trusting relationship with the children as evidenced by crying because they did not want the mentor to leave when he dropped them off from an outing and they always looked forward to the next outing or event

- In order to be happy and productive permanent residents, being educated is critical for newcomers
- The outings with the mentor reduced the personal financial burden on the family because they did not pay or contribute to expenses for the visits in the community, moreover the outings helped the children to know the city and what is available for them in order to transition and integrate better into mainstream society
- Parent believes that although the Corona virus pandemic has negatively impacted service delivery, the program is well designed to meet the needs of newcomer children and his family

#### **6.4 Interview III**

I interviewed a married middle-aged man originally from Eritrea. He is member of the Orthodox Christian church and serves as a deacon. Although he never attended formal education, he got his religious education. He immigrated to Canada in 2015. When asked about the experience that he and his children have had with the youth mentoring program and how he learned about the program, he stated that the NEEDS centre staff knocked on their door to introduce themselves to them and narrated the benefits of having their children participating in the introduction to Canadian education program as well as the youth mentorship program. Their children were pleased and accepted the offer to be matched with a community role model. They were told that the mentor would help them learn more about Winnipeg and the resources available which could make their adjustment and settlement easier. When asked about what he liked the most about the youth mentorship program, he stated that being newcomers to Canada, and without sufficient knowledge about life in Winnipeg, the mentorship program helped his family learn about how things work in Canada. The mentors were like uncles and aunties who took care of their children. They took them

to restaurants, swimming pools and other community events and facilities. Similar to what other interviewees have stated, the mentorship relationships went beyond the initial one-year commitment. And even during the current Covid-19 pandemic, although in person meetings are cancelled, the mentors still communicate with their children virtually.

When asked what other NEEDS centre programs he and his children used, similar to the response of the previous interviewee he stated that it was the afterschool program and the employment program. When asked about what his children have told him about their experience in the youth mentoring program, he stated that their experience has been fantastic, full of fun, happiness and satisfaction. When asked what his children enjoy the most and what they enjoy the least, he stated that regarding the first part, they miss the in-person interactions. The restrictions that have been placed on in person interactions because of the pandemic is the least enjoyable experience they have ever had because although they can still communicate virtually, it is not the same as in-person interactions. When asked in what ways the youth mentoring program help or influence his children, he stated that firstly, because they are taught to be responsible and act within the boundaries of human freedoms and rights, his children understand that violating other people's rights and societal norms is not acceptable. Secondly, they are shown different places and resources available for newcomers and thirdly, because he could not afford to take his children around the community because of insufficient funds, the program has given his children access to community resources just like kids who are born and raised in Winnipeg.

When asked about the areas of his children's lives which the program helps with, he stated that they are helped in all key areas of life for example, in education, careers, employment and financial planning. Although the time they spend with mentors is limited, they teach them how to take care of themselves, transition and adjust successfully in their new community as well as being

law abiding and productive newcomers. When asked whether being in the mentorship program changed the relationship his children now have with him and other family members, he stated that because they originally came from a communal society, initially they found it difficult to relate and connect with others particularly those with a western cultural orientation which discourages a communal mindset and values personal freedoms and rights. Because westerners are not very open about contact and communication with their neighbours, their children were initially homesick, but soon the mentors began taking them out into the community. The interactions enhanced their joy and happiness and also created a sense of belonging and connection to the new community. According to this parent, this impacted the family as well because when the kids came back happy from the outings, the parents were also happy. This is similar to assertions expressed by another parent that happiness is contagious.

When asked about how he feels about the mentors and whether they care about his children or not, he stated that the relationship which the two mentors (a married couple) have with their kids has exceeded his expectations. According to this parent, the mentors are like an extended family. In this way, the mentors' family has become a part of their family and vice versa. When asked about the qualities he likes about the two mentors, he expressed similar sentiments as expressed by the other parents who stated that the mentors are compassionate, caring, and authentic individuals who deeply care and want their mentees to successfully transition and integrate into mainstream Canadian society. When asked if there were any things about the mentors which he did not like, he stated that the couple have developed a much closer relationship with their mentees akin to a parent and child relationship. According to this parent these mentors are doing everything possible as much as they would do for their own kids to help them become successful, law abiding and productive members of the community.

When asked about what his children have learned from their mentors, he stated that they have learned how to communicate effectively, the value and significance of Canadian education, and being inclusive and respectful of diverse cultural, values and religious practices. In addition they have learned how to navigate and access community resources as well as reaching out and making friends in the community. When asked about what their children' mentors could do better to enhance the relationship, he stated that they should keep doing what they have been doing, and that both parties need to remain more open and consistent particularly in communicating and understanding each other better. When asked about the most favorite thing which his children like to do with their mentors, he stated that recreational and outdoor activities make them happier.

When asked to describe the impact of the youth mentorship program on his children, he stated that because they spent a lot of time with their mentors it was not difficult for them to acquire a Canadian accent. In addition, this parent believes that his children have developed a great sense of belonging and have adopted and blended well in all key aspects of Canadian social, cultural, spiritual and economic domains. When asked about what he feels needs to be done for the NEEDS organization to meet the needs of the children more effectively in his family, he stated that he would like to see the program extend its outreach to include and deliver services to as many newcomers as possible. Because he and his family have benefited tremendously for the past five years, he would like to see more newcomers now and, in the future, benefiting more from the expansion and consistent delivery of services.

### **Key findings**

- Although the parent (father) did not attend formal education in his home country, he got the religious education

- The family accepted the offer from the NEEDS centre staff to have their children matched with mentors (a married couple) who helped them to locate, access and navigate community resources for newcomers
- The mentorship relationship went beyond the one-year commitment, and has continued to date
- The mentorship program synergized with the afterschool program and the youth employment program to meet the needs of the newcomer children
- Although the Covid-19 pandemic has placed limits on in-person interactions mentors and mentees communicate regularly virtually
- The mentorship program has influenced newcomer children to become responsible, productive and law-abiding members of the community
- The mentorship program takes away from the parents the financial burden of paying for expenses of taking children out to community events and places
- Participating in recreational and outdoor activities makes the children happier
- Mentees have learned from their mentors how to effectively communicate, the value and significance of Canadian education and being inclusive and respectful of diverse cultural, values and religious practices
- The consistent interactions between the mentors and mentees influenced the latter to quickly acquire a Canadian accent and broke down the language barrier
- Because of the close relationship between mentors and their mentees, the latter quickly developed a sense of belonging, adopted and blended well in all key aspects of Canadian social, cultural, spiritual and economic domains

- The mentorship program needs to expand its outreach to include and deliver services consistently to as many newcomers as possible

## **6.5 Interview IV**

I interviewed a 41-year-old married Muslim man originally from Eritrea. He completed grade 12 secondary education in his home country. He immigrated to Canada in 2015. When asked about the experience he and his children have had with the youth mentoring program and how he learned about it, he echoed similar sentiments expressed by previous interviewees that it was through Welcome Place. When asked about what he liked most about the youth mentoring program he stated that the program was family-centred. Moreover, this parent like those I interviewed earlier stated that his children also attended other NEEDS centre programs for example the afterschool program. This parent has seven children, the oldest is a 16-year-old and the youngest is a year old. When asked about what his children have told him about their experience in the youth mentoring program, he expressed similar sentiments expressed by other parents I interviewed that they had outings with the mentor in the community and she also helped them to improve their English and communication skills.

When asked do your children enjoy being with their mentor, he stated, “yes, very much so.” When asked about what his children enjoyed the most and what they enjoyed the least he echoed similar views expressed by other parents. This parent stated that they valued the time spent with their mentor, doing recreational and outdoor activities, visiting several community places and attending events. When asked in what ways does the youth mentoring program help or influence your children, he expressed similar sentiments expressed by other parents that the program inspires them to participate in pro-social activities, to take the right paths, avoid negative influences and friends, value education, follow rules and societal norms and to work very hard. When asked in

what areas of your children's lives does the program help with, he stated that they receive help with language and communication skills, homework as well as accessing, locating and navigating community resources. For example, they are shown how to use the public transit system, how to communicate with strangers and also how to maintain their safety while visiting and attending community places and events.

When asked whether being in the mentorship program changed the relationship their children have with him and other family members, he stated that because the children are shown and taken to different community resources, they in turn share that knowledge with their parents, and this ultimately helps the entire family because they rely more on each other to access, locate, and navigate community resources for themselves. Moreover, this also creates strong ties to the community and a sense of belonging. When asked about the relationship between his children and their mentor, he expressed similar sentiments expressed by other parents, that after the one-year initial commitment ended, the children and their mentor continued communicating, visiting places and attending events together. However, due to public health orders imposed to contain the Corona virus pandemic, the mentor can no longer visit in-person, she often calls to check on them.

When asked what qualities he likes about the mentor, he expressed similar views echoed by other parents that she is honest, caring, authentic, trustworthy, and supportive not only to his children but also to him personally, for example, she helped him to prepare resumes, apply for jobs, and connected him with potential employers. When asked are there things about the mentor that you do not like, similar to views expressed by other parents, this parent said, "not at all." When asked about what his children learned from their mentor, he stated that because she did everything far and beyond what she had originally committed to, his children have also learned to fulfill tasks far beyond expectations. Because she has always been respectful and involved his children

regarding where to go and what to do, and she also checked in with him before making a decision, his children have also learned to be very respectful, and they often ask for parental advice and guidance. They have learned how to collaborate and communicate better as well as valuing and being respectful of different cultural, religious and belief perspectives.

When asked what could your children's mentor do better to enhance the relationship, he stated, "she was on top of everything." When asked about the most favorite thing which his children would like to do with their mentor, he expressed similar views echoed by other parents that the children treasured every moment they spent with their mentor. They particularly enjoyed outdoor and recreational activities in the community. When asked to describe the impact of the youth mentorship program on his children, he stated that the impact will be lifelong. Since as newcomers the parents did not know the city and the available resources, the mentor took their children for outings and showed them around the city, which helped them to transition and blend better, develop a sense of belonging. It also helped them toward becoming more goal oriented, law-abiding and productive members of the community. When asked about what he felt needs to be done in order for the NEEDS organization to more effectively meet the needs of the children in his family, he stated that everything was good and that he did not have any ideas to suggest. His only wish is what other parents have already expressed in previous interviews that more newcomer children and families need to be included for them to benefit from service delivery the same way that his children and family have benefited by participating in the program and that he hopes that the youth mentorship program at the NEEDS centre will continue thriving now and in the future.

### **Key findings**

- The youth mentorship program is family-centered and adds additional layers of support which enable newcomer children and the family to access, locate and navigate community resources; the mentor plays a critical role in achieving these objectives
- Easy access to community resources create strong ties to the community and a sense of belonging
- The mentor also helped to breakdown the language barrier and improve English language and communication skills
- Mentees enjoyed and cherished every moment they spent with the mentor, and particularly enjoyed outdoor and recreational activities in the community
- The program inspires mentees to participate in pro-social activities, to take the right paths, avoid negative influences and friends, value education, follow rules and societal norms and to work very hard
- The program has helped the mentees to focus on their educational endeavors and also provides supports and interventions tailored to meet academic needs and other needs in other key domains of life
- After the first-year initial commitment the mentor/mentee relationship has continued developing to date (it is now a 5-year relationship)
- The mentor is honest, caring, authentic, trustworthy and supportive not only to his mentees but also to the father; has helped him to prepare resumes, apply for jobs and connected him with potential employers
- Mentees have learned the following from their mentor: to fulfill tasks far and beyond expectations, to be very respectful and ask for parental advice and guidance, to collaborate

and communicate better, to value and to be respectful of different cultural, religious and belief perspectives

- The impact of the mentorship program on the children is lifelong; helped them to transition and blend better into mainstream society, to develop a sense of belonging, and to be goal orientated, law-abiding and productive members of the community
- More newcomer children and families need to be included in the program for them to benefit from service delivery. This will require more support and financial resources to keep the program growing and operating on a long-term basis.

## Chapter 7: Discussion of Overall Research Findings

In this chapter, I will discuss the overall research findings and how they contribute to knowledge and practice related to mentoring programs for children and youth from immigrant and refugee families. I will compare and contrast the perspectives of the three-key identified stakeholder groups, namely program administrative staff, mentors, and the parents of program participants. Of the 12 individuals I interviewed, four were program administrative staff, four were mentors, and four were parents of program participants. All groups identified the following as challenges faced by mentees:

- A history of trauma, psychological and behavioral problems
- Language barrier and communication problems
- Completing homework is often challenging
- Many have difficulties making friends
- Unemployment issues
- Poverty and a lack of resources
- Risk of being recruited by gangs
- Covid-19 has impacted the delivery of services

The youth mentorship program curriculum is premised on principles of positive youth development as well as the circle of courage philosophy, partly developed by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg and Steven Van Bockern. Drawing on the work of early childhood educators, youth studies and resilience researchers, in their book, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future* (2002) these authors have identified four needs which need to be met for optimal human growth and development of all children. These needs are belonging, mastery, independence and generosity.

The circle of courage suggests that meeting these four needs is one sure way of fulfilling the full potential of every child. Elsewhere Brendtro and Larson (2006: 43) have made similar assertions. Because immigrant, refugee children and youth often come from highly stressful, violent and conflict prone backgrounds, the youth mentorship program is also premised on a trauma-informed perspective. The aim of incorporating this perspective as well as principles of positive youth development and the circle of courage is to ensure the best interventions and positive outcomes for children with life trajectories marred by trauma, psychological and behaviour challenges. These findings from my study are consistent with the research of Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (2002), Brendtro and Larson (2006), Lerner et al. (2009) and several other researchers outlined in the literature review section of my study.

My study has revealed that overcoming the language barrier sets immigrant, refugee children and youth on a path of success and achievement not just in the school system but also prepares them to take their place and to participate in all key social, cultural, spiritual and economic forming institutions of Canadian society. The language barrier if not addressed may spiral and affect school performance. In addition, it may impede the ability to make friends. Consequently, this may lead to isolation and expose newcomer youth in particular to the risk of gang recruitment and involvement as well as putting them at increased risk of gravitating towards vices such as truancy, drug use and other social ills. Moreover, the language barrier affects the ability to communicate with others far beyond the education system to every aspect of life where contact and communication with others is necessary. These findings are consistent with the literature I reviewed.

Poverty and a lack of resources are among the most significant challenges which immigrant, refugee children and youth face in Canada. In order to ameliorate the impact of poverty on

newcomers, my study has revealed the need to have more community partnerships, and more access to community resources. In addition, more advertising and media campaigns are required to improve service delivery. More support or relief for struggling parents needs to be in place to enable them to focus on personal development goals and skills building in the home or community without worrying about caring for their children. The interventions need to be broad and inclusive and must focus on the whole family unit. These findings are also consistent with the literature which I reviewed for my study.

The program administrative staff and mentors identified the following unique challenges the mentorship program faces which impact delivery of services:

- E-mentoring and virtual delivery of services
- Cancellation of onsite weekend group mentoring meetings
- Long waitlist and not having enough mentors
- Inadequate staffing levels and the need to recruit more volunteers
- Fewer resources presently compared to the past
- Change of governments and political will impact service delivery
- Funding

This study has underscored the value of education in improving the lives of immigrant and refugee youth and their families. The program administrative staff, mentors, and parents of program participants I interviewed, note that for the most part, education is the key that helps unlock the social, cultural, spiritual, and economic domains of Canadian society. As this study has unveiled, surrounding newcomers with a supportive environment in all the key domains of human development helps them to develop a sense of belonging and identity as well as helps them to transition and integrate better into Canadian society. The additional layers of support also help

newcomers to become law-abiding and productive members of Canadian society. In this regard, mentors will remain critical, as this study has shown. Without mentors the youth mentorship program cannot successfully deliver its services whether in person or virtually. In addition, although the youth mentorship program is designed to be fairly autonomous with limited supervision from program administrative staff, all levels of staff play very crucial roles to keep the program operating. This study has revealed that strong family-like bonds not only between mentors and mentees, but also including program administrative staff, helps to foster a deeper sense of belonging particularly in the mentees and their families. They feel valued, welcome, and appreciated particularly for the diversity and mixed cultural blend which immigrants and refugees bring to Canadian society.

The program administrative staff, mentors and parents of program participants overwhelmingly note that the mentorship program is family centred and that the interventions in place prior to the Corona virus pandemic effectively addressed some of the needs of immigrant children, the youth, and their families. With the Corona virus pandemic still affecting Winnipeg and other Manitoba communities, e. mentoring remains a viable option for delivering virtual services to youth and families involved in the NEEDS youth mentorship program. However, this can only be achieved with increased funding particularly supporting newcomer families with affordable internet services as well as devices for accessing virtual services. In addition, staffing levels need to be increased as well as more mentors need to be recruited and trained in order to shrink the waiting list and to meet the needs of as many newcomers as possible. Related also is the need to have consistency in service delivery as well as expansion of outreach to priority populations. The target populations are newly arrived immigrants or refugees who have been in Canada for one year or less. As this study and the literature reviewed have shown, newly arrived

immigrants and refugees have less attachments or connections to the community. For this reason, this segment of newcomers need to have more interventions in place to enable them to transition and integrate successfully into Canadian society.

This study has revealed that successful integration needs to be viewed as a process which may take several years to achieve. Consequently, a strong political will is needed to maintain stable long-term supports for youth mentoring or other social programs. Municipal, provincial and federal governments need to provide more support and funding. Although funding cuts have been made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic, governments need to be forward looking, because existing infrastructure for supporting refugees needs to be improved on a long-term basis rather than wait for a crisis to happen in order to develop. The Syrian humanitarian crisis should serve as a reminder to maintain and develop infrastructure for newcomers.

This study has also revealed that grass-root organizations including the NEEDS centre spend a significant portion of their time fundraising instead of focussing on their actual work to meet the needs of program participants. This is unfortunate, given that refugees and immigrants are accepted to be permanent residents of Canada by the federal government of Canada. And often the provincial government makes recommendations to the federal government regarding who should be admitted into Canada either as a refugee or immigrant. Therefore, both parties, the province of Manitoba and the federal government of Canada need to do more by increasing funding rather than reducing it as has been the case in recent times. Increasing funding will empower the NEEDS centre to provide more supports and interventions for immigrant and refugee families. As this study has shown, focussed programming and comprehensive supports are needed in order to keep refugee youth from falling in the cracks, as well as gang involvement and crime. Immigrant and refugee-aid organizations and concerned community members must also do their part. They

need to lobby for more long-term rather than short-term funding from municipal, provincial and federal governments, and continue to develop and support successful initiatives like the NEEDS youth mentorship program.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **8.1 Conclusions**

The youth mentorship program started in 2011 as a link to community resources. It was established to help newcomer youth to become aware of and avoid gangs. The program evolved to include mentoring because of the primary research done at the time, which established a need to integrate a holistic, inclusive and broader approach to help newcomer children, youth and their families successfully blend into mainstream Canadian society. The priority population has always been newly arrived immigrants, refugees, children and youth between ages 6 and 18 years. The program has been shown in this study to utilize key principles of the positive youth development approach and the circle of courage philosophy as well as a trauma informed orientation. This is the first time that this program has been evaluated since inception. This evaluation-based study is important because it uncovers the experiences of three key stake holders, namely the program administrative staff, mentors and parents of program participants. Uncovering the experiences of these key stake holders is important because they provide first-hand accounts regarding what needs to be done, particularly in Winnipeg, in order to more effectively meet the needs of immigrant, refugee children, youth and their families.

Findings from this research will be shared with the NEEDS centre, who operate and manage this youth mentorship program tailored to meet the needs of immigrant, refugee children, youth and their families. These findings will help the NEEDS centre to improve service delivery to its targeted population. The findings will also help to inform the core funder, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the province of Manitoba, other community partners and private citizens particularly about the good work being done to support newcomers in the community and also the ways in which the work can be harnessed and improved upon.

This research shows that it takes time to build relationships particularly between mentors and their mentees and that these relationships cannot be quantified in terms of money or numbers. The program has been successful based on “success stories” of for example, participants graduating from high school and moving on to attend post-secondary institutions, transitioning from attending the youth mentorship program to other programs such as youth employment and many others. This research has shown that before the Covid-19 pandemic the youth mentorship program overall, had indications of positive outcomes for most mentor and mentee relationships. In spite of funding cuts and other challenges, this research shows significant evidence that the youth mentorship program helps to prevent crime in the community, the program fosters a sense of community belonging and provides support to help newcomers successfully integrate into Canadian society through mentors who act as resource guides, reinforce their successes and advocate for their needs.

This research has also uncovered some changes that could be made to better serve the needs of participants such as the need for more cultural competence training for mentors, more training focussing on resiliency and positive youth development models, as well as identifying and accessing more community resources. Moreover, this study has unveiled evidence of major strengths of the program. These include the fact that the formal relationships between mentors and mentees are often very successful and go beyond the minimum one-year commitment. In addition, there is evidence of the existence of an inclusive and blended diverse working and community-support environment that brings together program staff, mentors and mentees, as well as business community and other organizations and private donors who support the program financially as well as with material resources.

One of the limitations of this study is the fact that of the four parents interviewed only one did not need an interpreter. Fortunately, however, the NEEDS centre facilitated the research process by bringing on board translators who provided interpretation services. Another limitation of the study is that the interviews were done virtually and not in person because of the Covid-19 pandemic. For this reason, it was difficult to capture non-verbal cues from the interviews. Moreover, although my original intention for this study was to volunteer in the program as a mentor in order to familiarize myself with program participants, their parents as well as staff at the NEEDS centre, under Covid-19 restrictions this plan had to be abandoned. In future planned evaluations of the NEEDS mentorship program it would be valuable to try to increase the number of participants in the study and carry out more of the qualitative data collection in person.

## **8.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

Because my study has shown that the current Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the ability of the NEEDS centre to deliver services particularly to immigrant and refugee children and their families, future research needs to focus on how to develop and implement robust virtual or e-mentoring programming for newcomers. This future research may help to fill in some of the gaps created by the current Covid-19 crisis. Because in-person youth program activities have been suspended indefinitely, until Covid-19 resolves or is better managed, there is need to explore e-mentoring, particularly how to develop and deliver services which effectively meets the needs of immigrant and refugee children and their families in unprecedented times such as the times we are living in. Moreover, worse pandemics in the future could negatively affect service delivery. Therefore we need to focus on building virtual newcomer youth programming capabilities which will respond effectively to current and future public health crises in more proactive and resilient ways. Furthermore, although it is difficult to obtain approval for studies which involve children or

vulnerable populations such as newcomers, their voices still need to be heard. Their perspectives must remain the bedrock of research, in order for studies to be relevant and meet the needs of these vulnerable populations or newcomers into Canadian society.

## Appendix A

### TCPS 2: CORE Certificate



## **Appendix B**

### **Interview schedule for administrative staff at NEEDS Centre**

#### **Preamble**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the purpose of evaluating the youth mentorship program. I am looking forward to learning more about your experiences at NEEDS centre, as well as the youth mentorship program. I anticipate that this interview will take about 60 to 75 minutes of your time, with your permission, it will be recorded (otherwise I will take notes). I remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary. A consent form was emailed to you. You are free to decline to participate or answer any question posed to you. You have the right to withdraw your consent to participate anytime (including once the interview is underway), without prejudice or consequence.

#### **Questions (may be followed up by probes)**

##### **I. Program background and staff**

(1). What do you know about the youth mentorship program's background and development?

Probes:

- How long have you worked with NEEDS and what is your role in the mentorship program?
- Please tell me about other NEEDS staff who are directly involved with the program, what are their specific roles? Are they full-time or part-time staff?
- How did the program get started?
- Have there been many changes to the program over the years?
- What types of families and children does the program serve?
- How do families and children come to learn about the program?

## **II. Common challenges experienced by youth mentoring program participants**

(2). What are some of the challenges faced by participants who enter your mentoring program?

Probes:

- Do youth sometimes have challenges because they have mentors they have trouble relating to because of their cultural, language, or socio-economic class differences?
- How do you work with mentors and mentees to try to solve challenges of this type?
- To what extent do NEEDS program staff try to match to mentors and mentees who have similar cultural and language backgrounds?

## **III. Goals of the program**

(3). What are the short-term, medium-term and long-term goals of the youth mentorship program?

Probes:

- What are the most important goals of the program?
- How have program staff and mentors attempted to accomplish these goals?
- How familiar are you with the “positive youth development” approach used in some mentoring programs? [Provide a summary of the philosophy underlying PYD if program staff being interviewed are not familiar with the approach]
- In your view, to what extent do staff and mentors at NEEDS adopt a “positive youth development” (PYD) approach to working with participants and families involved in the mentoring program.
- How successful do you feel, your program is in meeting its goals/ helping participants?
- What are changes that could be made in your opinion to meet these goals more effectively?

#### **IV. Specific program strengths and weaknesses**

(4). In your experience, what would you say are some of the major strengths (or “successes”) and weaknesses (or “failures”) of the program?

Probes:

- Why do you consider these to be a strength?
- Why do you consider these to be a sign of failure?
- What, if any, process is followed at NEEDS to build on program strengths and address program weaknesses that are identified?

#### **V. Participation and community response**

(5). What is the major source of recruitment for participants in your program?

Probes:

- How many youth participate annually?
- How long do they participate in the program?
- What keeps the youth coming to the mentorship program?
- Does your program rely on (community role models) mentors?
- How do you recruit mentors?
- What are the key characteristics of mentors you desire to be involved with the youth in the community?
- What is the role of mentors and how critical are they to your program?
- How reliable are mentors in showing up to be with the youth in the community?
- Overall what is the general response of the community to your program?

#### **VI. Funding and assets**

(6). What strategies have you used in the past and/or use currently to keep your program funded?

Probes:

- Who are the funders of the program?
- What assets do you have that help you to deliver the goals and objectives of the program (for example, equipment and supplies)?

## **VII. Collateral agencies**

(7). What are some of the agencies that collaborate with your program?

Probes:

- What are some ways that you collaborate with different agencies and is there a noticeable effect? Of the agencies you collaborate with which ones seem the most effective and why?
- Do any of the agencies you collaborate with clash with your agency's philosophy? And how do you deal with the clash of philosophy?

Please list the key community agencies that collaborate with you or those you collaborate with in order to provide services to participants?

## **VIII. Additional comments**

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the youth mentorship program?

## **Closing**

Thank you very much for your time and thoughtfulness. I appreciate you sharing this information with me.

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview schedule for mentors at NEEDS centre**

#### **Preamble**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the purpose of evaluating the youth mentorship program. I am looking forward to learning more about your experiences at NEEDS centre, particularly with the youth mentorship program. I anticipate that this interview will take about 60 to 75 minutes of your time, with your permission, it will be recorded (otherwise I will take notes). I remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary. A consent form was emailed to you. You are free to decline to participate or answer any question posed to you. You have the right to withdraw your consent to participate anytime (including once the interview is underway), without prejudice or consequence.

#### **Questions (may be followed up by probes)**

##### **I. Introductory**

(1). Background information: sociodemographic data: age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, religion, educational attainments?

##### **II. Mentor roles**

(1). What is your role in the program?

Probes:

- How long have you been involved with the program?
- What motivated you to become a mentor?
- What type of training did you receive after you were accepted to become a volunteer?
- What are your perceptions regarding the quality of your training experiences?
- Do you think that you need more post-match training experiences? Tell me more?

- What are your specific roles as a mentor and how critical to the program is the role played by mentors in carrying out these roles?
- How important is it that you show up for all of your outings with mentees? Can someone take your place if you can't make it? Please explain?

### **III. Common challenges experienced by mentees**

(2). What are some of the challenges your mentees face?

Probes:

- How do you work with them to solve those challenges?
- How often do you see/work with mentees?

### **IV. Specific program challenges/strengths**

(3). Do you think the mentoring program has any serious challenges that negatively impact its effectiveness?

Probes:

- Do you feel that the NEEDS centre provides enough support to mentors?
- Do you feel the NEEDS centre provides enough support to immigrant and refugee youth in the community?
- How have you helped your mentees?
- Tell me about your best volunteer experience?
- What was your worst volunteer experience and what made it bad?
- In your view, what are some changes that could be made to the youth mentoring program that might be able to enhance its effectiveness?

### **V. Additional comments**

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the youth mentorship program?

**Closing**

Thank you very much for your time and thoughtfulness. I appreciate you sharing this information with me.

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview schedule for parents of program participants**

#### **Preamble**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the purpose of evaluating the youth mentorship program. I am looking forward to learning more about your experiences at NEEDS centre and about how your child (or children) has liked being in the youth mentoring program. I anticipate that this interview will take about 60 to 75 minutes of your time, with your permission, it will be recorded (otherwise I will take notes). I remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary. A consent form was emailed to you. You are free to decline to participate or answer any question posed to you. You have the right to withdraw your consent to participate anytime (including once the interview is underway), without prejudice or consequence. I encourage you to be completely honest. There are no right or wrong answers. Your comments will not affect the services you receive at NEEDS centre.

#### **Questions (may be followed up by probes)**

- (1). Background information: sociodemographic data: age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, religion, educational attainments, length of time living in Canada?
- (2). I am interested in learning more about the experience that you and your child (or children) have had with the youth mentoring program. How did you learn about the youth mentoring program offered by NEEDS?

#### **Probes:**

- Was it easy for you to find information about the program?
- What do you like most about the youth mentorship program?

- What other NEEDS centre programs have you and your child (or children) used?

(3) What has your child told you about their experience in the youth mentoring program?

Probes:

- Does your child enjoy being with his or her mentor?
- What does your child most enjoy? What does your child least enjoy?
- In what ways does the youth mentoring program help or influence your child, if at all?
- In what areas of your child's life does the program help with?

(4). Has being in the mentorship program changed the relationship your child now has with you and other family members? If so, can you provide examples?

(5). How is your child's relationship with his or her mentor? Please tell me about it?

Probes:

- Do you feel that the mentor cares about your child (children)?
- What qualities do you like about the mentor?
- Are there any things about the mentor that you do not like?
- What has your child (children) learned from their mentor?
- Do you trust your child's (children's) mentor?
- What could your child's (children's) mentor do better to enhance the relationship?
- In your view what is the most favorite thing that your child (children) would like to do with their mentor?

(6). How would you describe the impact of the youth mentorship program on your child (children)?

(7) In your view what, if anything, do you feel needs to be done in order for the NEEDS organization to more effectively meet the needs of the children in your family?

**Additional comments**

Is there anything I have missed that you think is important for you to tell me?

**Closing**

Thank you very much for your time and thoughtfulness. I appreciate you sharing this information with me.



## Department of Sociology and Criminology

### Appendix E

Bernard Zulu  
315 Isbister Building  
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#### Consent Forms for Virtual Interviews with Program Staff

**Project Title:** Evaluating a Mentorship Program Focussed on Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Children and Refugee Youth in Winnipeg

**Researcher:** Bernard Zulu, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca)

**Thesis Supervisor:** Dr Russell Smandych, Professor, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: [russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca](mailto:russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca)

This consent form, one copy of which is left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This consent form is for a program evaluation I am conducting for the youth mentorship program at NEEDS centre. This study is important because I would like to learn how you as member of staff perceive the youth mentorship program and inform NEEDS centre how they may improve service delivery. Participation in this study will involve the completion of an interview. The interview will take approximately 60 to 75 minutes of your time and will be audio or video recorded and transcribed for analysis. During the interview you will be asked questions

pertaining to the youth mentorship program and other services accessed by immigrant, refugee youth and their families. At any time, you can stop the interview and are free to not answer any question posed by the researcher. Your decision to participate or not will in no way affect your employment. Any information that could identify you personally will be kept confidential and the audio-video recordings of the interviews will first be transcribed and then uploaded to a computer that is password protected. The transcripts and consent forms will be number coded and stored separately in a locked cabinet in my study room at my home, if this is unfeasible, I will move the documents to a secure location at the University of Manitoba in the Department of Sociology and Criminology. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to these documents and all of the transcripts, recordings and consent forms will be destroyed on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2022.

The information that you provide may be combined with information from the other program staff participating in the interviews. A summary report of the results of the interviews will be made emailed directly to you in September 2021. A report of the study findings will be written and presented to NEEDS centre. The final report will not include any identifying information in either publications or presentations. However, it is possible that another staff member at NEEDS centre might recognize your identity through comments that you make during the interview that are included in my reports/presentations. If you are not comfortable having information shared in this way, you should not participate in this interview.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, sponsors or involved institutions from their legal professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study

at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you wish to withdraw from participating in this study at any time, please email Bernard Zulu at [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca) or email my thesis supervisor Dr. Russell Smandych at [russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca](mailto:russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca). The data provided will be removed from the study and destroyed. Please note that any child maltreatment revealed will be reported to the relevant authorities. Please save a print copy of this consent form to keep for your records and reference.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact the researcher, Bernard Zulu or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Russell Smandych who can be emailed at [russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca](mailto:russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca). For this study, I am requesting for your consent to audio or video record the interview. If you agree to participate in this interview, please place your name and signature in the appropriate spaces below.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Would you like to have a copy of the summary of the results of this research sent to you?

Yes

No

If “Yes”, mail/email address to which summary can be sent:

Approved by: Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

Complaints: Human Ethics Secretariat, 204-474-7122; Email: [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca)



Department of Sociology and  
Criminology

Appendix F

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**Consent Forms for Virtual Interviews with Mentors**

**Project Title:** Evaluating a Mentorship Program Focussed on Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Children and Refugee Youth in Winnipeg

**Researchers:** Bernard Zulu, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: umzulu@myumanitoba.ca

**Thesis Supervisor:** Dr Russell Smandych, Professor, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca

**Approved by:** Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

**Complaints:** Human Ethics Secretariat, 204-474-7122; Email: humanethics@umanitoba.ca

This consent form, a copy of which is left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I am conducting research that will help NEEDS centre to explore your experiences as a mentor involved with the youth mentorship program. This study is important because I would like to learn how you as a mentor, perceive the youth mentorship program and inform NEEDS centre how they may improve service delivery. Participation in this study will involve the

completion of an interview. The interview will take approximately 60 to 75 minutes of your time and will be audio or video recorded and transcribed later. During the interview you will be asked questions about the program and other questions relevant to completing this evaluation study. Your participation is voluntary, and you do not have to participate in the interview if you do not want to. You are free not to answer any question you do not want to, and you can stop the interview at any time, your decision to participate or not will in no way affect your employment. Any information that could identify you personally will be kept confidential. The audio-video recordings of the interview will be transcribed and uploaded to a computer that is password protected. No names or other identifying information will be included in the transcript. The transcripts and consent forms will be number coded and stored separately in a securely locked cabinet in my study room at home, if this is unfeasible, I will move the documents to a secure location at the University of Manitoba, Department of Sociology and Criminology. Only the researcher and supervisor will ever be able to see your interview. All of the transcripts, recordings and consent forms will be destroyed on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2022. The information that you provide may be combined with information from other mentors participating in the interviews.

A report of the study findings will be shared with NEEDS centre who controls its circulation at their own discretion. No names or identifying information will be included in the report, publications or presentations. However, it is possible that someone from NEEDS centre might recognize your identity through comments that you make during the interview that are included in my reports/presentations. If you are not comfortable having information shared in this way, you should not participate in this interview. Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor

release the researcher, sponsors or involved institutions from their legal professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you wish to withdraw from participating in this study at any time, please email the researcher, Bernard Zulu at [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca) or email my thesis supervisor Dr. Russell Smandych at [russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca](mailto:russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca). The data provided will be removed and destroyed. Please note that any child maltreatment revealed will be reported to the relevant authorities. I will provide you with a signed digital copy of the consent form after it has been filled out. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may email the researcher, Bernard Zulu at [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca) or contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Russell Smandych who can be emailed at [russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca](mailto:russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca). For this study, I am requesting for your consent to audio or video record the interview. If you agree to participate in this interview, please place your name and signature in the appropriate spaces below.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Would you like a copy of the summary of the results of this research sent to you?

Yes      No

If “Yes”, mail/email address to which summary can be sent:



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Department of Sociology and  
Criminology

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## Appendix G

### Consent forms for Virtual Interviews with Parents of Program Participants

**Project Title:** Evaluating a Mentorship Program Focussed on Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Children and Refugee Youth in Winnipeg

**Researchers:** Bernard Zulu, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca)

**Thesis Supervisor:** Dr Russell Smandych, Professor, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: [russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca](mailto:russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca)

This consent form, one copy of which has been emailed to you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I am conducting a virtual or telephone interview in order to learn from you as a parent, your personal experiences at NEEDS centre particularly with the youth mentorship program. This study is important because I would like to learn how you as a parent, perceive the youth mentorship program and inform NEEDS centre how they may improve service delivery.

Participation in this study will involve the completion of a one-on-one interview. The interview will take approximately 60 to 75 minutes of your time and will be audio or video recorded and

later transcribed for analysis. The interview questions will be about your personal and family experiences with the youth mentorship program. You are free to not answer any question you do not want to, and you can stop the interview at any time. Your decision to participate or not will in way affect any services that you may be receiving from NEEDS centre or the youth mentorship program, or any other agency or organization. Please note that some questions may evoke memories of past trauma, especially when I ask you about your experience of seeking help and receiving support. To mitigate this, I will provide a list of support services before the interview commences.

Any information that could identify you personally will be kept confidential. The audio-video recordings of the interview will be downloaded to a computer file that is password protected. These recordings will be transcribed. No names or other identifying information will be included in the transcript. The transcript and consent forms will be number coded and stored separately in a securely locked cabinet in my study room at home, if this is unfeasible, I will move the documents to a secure location at the University of Manitoba Department of Sociology and Criminology. Only the researcher be able to see your interview. All of the transcripts, recordings and consent forms will be destroyed on 31<sup>st</sup>March, 2022. Please note that I am not asking any questions about child abuse but are required by law to report child abuse or situations dangerous to children/persons in care to Child and Family Services. This refers to people who are currently children, not to past abuse to people who are now adults. These are the same laws followed by service providers. In addition, the information that you provide may be subject to a lawful subpoena by a court of lawful and relevant jurisdiction. Compliance with such subpoena would always involve a consultation with the university's legal counsel by the principal investigator.

The information you give will be combined with information collected from other parents who will participate in the interviews. The final report will be presented to NEEDS centre. The purpose of this report is to assist NEEDS centre to provide the best services for participants and their families. No names or identifying information will be included in the findings. However, it is possible that someone from an agency where you have received service might recognize your identity through comments that you make during the interview that are included in my reports/presentations. If you are not comfortable having information shared in this way, you should not participate in this interview.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood and consent to participation and can withdraw consent at any time. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to not answer any questions or leave at any time without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you wish to withdraw from participating in this study at any time, please let me know. My email address is [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca) or email my thesis supervisor Dr. Russell Smandych at [russell.smanyach@umanitoba.ca](mailto:russell.smanyach@umanitoba.ca). The data provided will be removed from the study and destroyed. Please save a print copy of this consent form to keep for your records and reference. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact the researcher, Bernard Zulu via email at [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca) or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). You are also welcome to contact my thesis supervisor for any questions or concerns. His name is Dr. Russell Smandych,

email address: russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca. For this study, I am requesting for your consent to audio or video record the interview. If you agree to participate in this interview, please place your name and signature in the appropriate spaces below.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Would you like a copy of the summary of the results of this research sent to you?

Yes      No

If "yes", mail/ email address to which summary can be sent:

Approved by: Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

Complaints: Human Ethics Secretariat, 204-474-7122 or Email: [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca)

## Appendix H

### Invitation Letter for Youth Mentorship Program Staff

**Project Title:** Evaluating a Mentorship Program Focussed on Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Children and Refugee Youth in Winnipeg

**Researcher:** Bernard Zulu, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca)

I am conducting an evaluation study of the youth mentorship program. I am interested in learning about the experience of individuals and families who utilize the services provided at NEEDS centre, particularly the youth mentorship program. I would also like to learn from you as well about your experiences as a professional working at NEEDS centre. This study is important because I would like to learn how you as a staff member perceive the youth mentorship program and use the data I collect to inform the NEEDS centre on how they may improve service delivery. I am recruiting participants for virtual or telephone interviews. Participants need to be willing to share their perceptions and experiences regarding the youth mentorship program and other services accessed by immigrant and refugee youth and their families. The interviews will take 60-75 minutes and will be conducted via zoom or telephone.

Your participation in the interview and any information that could identify you personally will be kept confidential. If you are interested in participating or you would like more information, please contact the researcher, Bernard Zulu, email: [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca). This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

## Appendix I

### Invitation Letter for Youth Mentorship Program Mentors

**Project Title:** Evaluating a Mentorship Program Focussed on Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Children and Refugee Youth in Winnipeg

**Researcher:** Bernard Zulu, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca)

I am conducting an evaluation study of the youth mentorship program. I am interested in learning about the experience of individuals and families who utilize the services provided at NEEDS centre, particularly the youth mentorship program. In addition, I would like to learn from you about your personal experiences as a mentor. This study is important because I would like to learn how you as a mentor perceive the youth mentorship program and inform NEEDS centre. The data I collect will inform the NEEDS centre on how they may improve service delivery. I am recruiting participants for virtual or telephone interviews. Participants need to be willing to share their perceptions and experiences regarding the youth mentorship program and other services which the youth and their families access. The interviews will take 60-75 minutes and will be conducted via zoom or telephone.

Your participation in the interview and any information that could identify you personally will be kept confidential. If you are interested in participating or you would like more information, please contact the researcher, Bernard Zulu, email: [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca). This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

## Appendix J

### Invitation Letter for Parents of Youth Mentorship Program Participants

**Project Title:** Evaluating a Mentorship Program Focussed on Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Children and Refugee Youth in Winnipeg

**Researcher:** Bernard Zulu, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba; email: [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca)

I am conducting an evaluation study of the youth mentorship program. I am interested in learning about the experience of individuals and families who utilize the services provided at NEEDS centre, particularly the youth mentorship program. This study is important because I would like to learn how you as a parent of a program participant, perceives the youth mentorship program and inform NEEDS centre how they may improve service delivery. I am recruiting participants for virtual or telephone interviews. Participants need to be willing to share their perceptions and experiences regarding the youth mentorship program and other services they and their children access at the NEEDS centre. The interviews will take 60-75 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom or telephone.

Your participation in the interview and any information that could identify you personally will be kept confidential. If you are interested in participating or you would like more information, please contact the researcher, Bernard Zulu, email: [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca). This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

## Appendix K

### Community Crisis Resources

**This resource has been included because some interview questions may evoke memories of past trauma, particularly with parents of program participants.**

Counselling Service/Community Crisis Resources

Crisis Response Centre 24/7 Walk-in Service

817 Bannatyne Avenue Crisis Service

Mobile Crisis: 204: 940-1781

Klinic Crisis Line 24/7: 204-786-8686

TTY 204-784-4097

Klinic Community Drop-in Program for in-person assistance. Call 204-784-4067 for hours and location

**If this is an emergency- phone your local police department or 911**

## Appendix L

### Script for debriefing

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the purpose of evaluating the youth mentorship program. I have learned more about your experiences at NEEDS centre, as well as the youth mentorship program. The purpose of this study is to gather baseline data that will be used to evaluate the youth mentorship program. I will compile the findings of this study in a report which I will present to the NEEDS centre agency. This research also fulfills the thesis component requirements for my MA in sociology at the university of Manitoba. Any further dissemination will be subject to the agency's approval. The purpose of this dissemination is to maximize the potential for improvements to services for youth mentorship participants and their families, resource development and policy change. No names or identifying information will be included in the report. If you are not comfortable with these plans, you are free to withdraw your participation.

Your involvement is still voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw the data you have provided prior to debriefing, without a penalty. Withdrawing will not adversely affect your employment (**program staff**) or your relationship with NEEDS (**mentors**) or the services you receive at NEEDS (**for parents of program participants**).

Strict confidentiality will be maintained. Although I know your names, your names and other identifying information you have shared with me will not be revealed to NEEDS or other service providers. Only I and my thesis supervisor have access to information which directly identifies you. All interviews will be number coded. The audio and video recordings of the interviews will be downloaded to a computer file that is password protected. I will transcribe the recordings, and should any names or locations be mentioned during the interviews, they will be

replaced with pseudonyms. Only I and my thesis supervisor will know specific responses and will have access to the completed interviews. The audio and video recordings of the interviews will be stored on my password protected computer and will be erased on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2022.

The interview documents and their transcriptions will be stored in a securely locked cabinet in my study room at home. If it's unfeasible, I will move the documents to a secure location in the department of sociology and criminology at the university of Manitoba. Consent form will also be locked in a cabinet and will be kept separate from all interview documents and transcriptions. Lists of names and contact information for all who participate in the interviews will be stored separately in a locked cabinet. I will never divulge who participated or did not participate in an interview to anyone else. The final report prepared for the research will not contain names or other identifying information. All lists and contact information will be destroyed on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2022.

I hope that you found your experience participating in this interview to be interesting. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. **(participant feedback invited).**

If you have questions later, please do not hesitate to contact me, my email is [umzulu@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umzulu@myumanitoba.ca) or contact my thesis supervisor Dr. Russell Smandych, email: [russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca](mailto:russell.smandych@umanitoba.ca).

### **Closing**

Thank you again for your time and thoughtfulness. I appreciate you sharing this information with me.

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