FRONTLINE WORKERS' WORKSHOP

MENTORING VULNERABLE YOUTH







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I. INTRODUCTION

This toolkit was created by CultureLink in partnership with the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) and Youth Employment Partnerships (YEP).

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy aims to build resiliency and access to supportive systems for youth most vulnerable to in-volvement in serious violence and crime (MVP youth). TYES includes 28 recommen-dations and 110 actions the City of Toronto will take to provide better services and outcomes for vulnerable youth. TYES was adopted unanimously by City Council in February 2014. The TYES Creative Report can be found online at: toronto.ca TYES is on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram at: TorontoTYES

Youth Employment Partnerships is a

neighbourhood-based youth employment network that offers job placement and staffing services to organizations throughout Toronto. Supporting hundreds of employers and thousands of Toronto youth annually, YEP connects employers with local or city wide employment services. Striving to improve employment retention, YEP has the flexibility to offer subsidized or unsubsidized job placements to all eligible Toronto employers with many additional benefits and supports to job seekers and employers for each new hire during the first few months of employment.

This toolkit was developed out of CultureLink's participants' feedback from the MOOC's community, CultureLink's MOOC course: Engaging and Empowering Vulnerable Youth (2017), as well as experiences working with mentors serving vulnerable youth in diverse communities.

More information about CultureLink can be found online at: https://www.culturelink.ca/about-us/



II. UNDERSTANDING VULNERABLE YOUTH

Who are vulnerable youth? Some youth have greater challenges in transitioning due to interesting vulnerabilities. TYES engages youth most vulnerable to involvement in violence and crime. Who am I? Who am I becoming? These are normative questions youth ask in search of their identity and sense of belonging. Most youth are able to grow out this stage with a more integrated sense of individual and collective identity and well-being. MVP youth are at greater risk and are at risk of individual and social disengagement.





Recognizing the role of risk and protective factors

As youth grow and reach their developmental competencies, there are contextual variables that promote or hinder the process. These are frequently referred to as protective and risk factors.

Below are described some risk and protective Factors that increase or lower the possibility of increase or lower the risk of vulnerability in youth development (adapted from https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/risk-and-protective-factors-youth and CultureLink's MOOC: Mentoring Vulnerable Youth)

- Temperament traits: low positive mood, withdrawal.
- Poor concentration
- Low self-esteem, perceived incompetence, negative explanatory and inferential style.
- Anxiety
- Low-level depressive
- Insecure attachment
- Poor social skills: communication and problemsolving skills
- Extreme need for approval and social support.

INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS



- "Risk is a biological, psychological and environmental factor that contributes to the development of a stressor, or makes it worse, or makes it last longer. The greater the accumulation of these risks, the greater the presumed risk of "wounding"."
- Ethnic, linguistic and/or religious minorities
- Lack of care and supervision
- Separation of family members
- Single parent family
- Dysfunctional/divisive family
- Negligent or incapable parents
- Parent-child conflict
- Poor parenting
- Child abuse/maltreatment
- Divorce
- Marital conflict/Family conflict
- Family members suffering from major mental or physical illness
- Parental drug/alcohol use
- Parental unemployment
- Migration

FAMILY RISK FACTORS



Vulnerable youth are not only facing normative life transitions and changes typical for their age, but also they have to simultaneously cope with additional external and internal risk factors that expose them to higher risk.

- Peer rejection
- Stressful events
- Poor academic achievement
- Poverty
- Community-level stressful or traumatic events
- School-level stressful or traumatic events
- Community violence
- School violence
- Traumatic events

ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS



- A protective factor can be defined as "a characteristic at the biological, psychological, family, or community (including peers and culture) level that is associated with a lower likelihood of problem outcomes or that reduces the negative impact of a risk factor on problem outcomes."
- Positive physical development
- Academic achievement/intellectual development
- High self-esteem
- Emotional self-regulation
- Good coping skills and problem-solving skills
- Engagement and connections in two or more of the following contexts: school, with peers, in athletics, employment, religion, culture

INDIVIDUAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS



By protective factors, we refer to biological, psychological and environmental components that contribute to preventing a stressor, or lessen its impact, or ameliorate it more quickly.

- Family provides structure, limits, rules, monitoring, and predictability
- Supportive relationships with family members
- Clear expectations for behavior and values
- Stable living conditions/ Income and housing security

FAMILY PROTECTIVE FACTORS



Protective factors include a person's temperament /personality traits (coping skills, belief in one's ability to solve problems, level of activity, selfesteem, attributions), family relationship and communication patterns, external social supports (a mentor, teacher, social worker with ability to provide social support and model coping skills and resilience) and environmental resources (society and its institutions; schools, recreational and neighbourhood enrichment programs,)

Presence of mentors and support for development of skills and interests

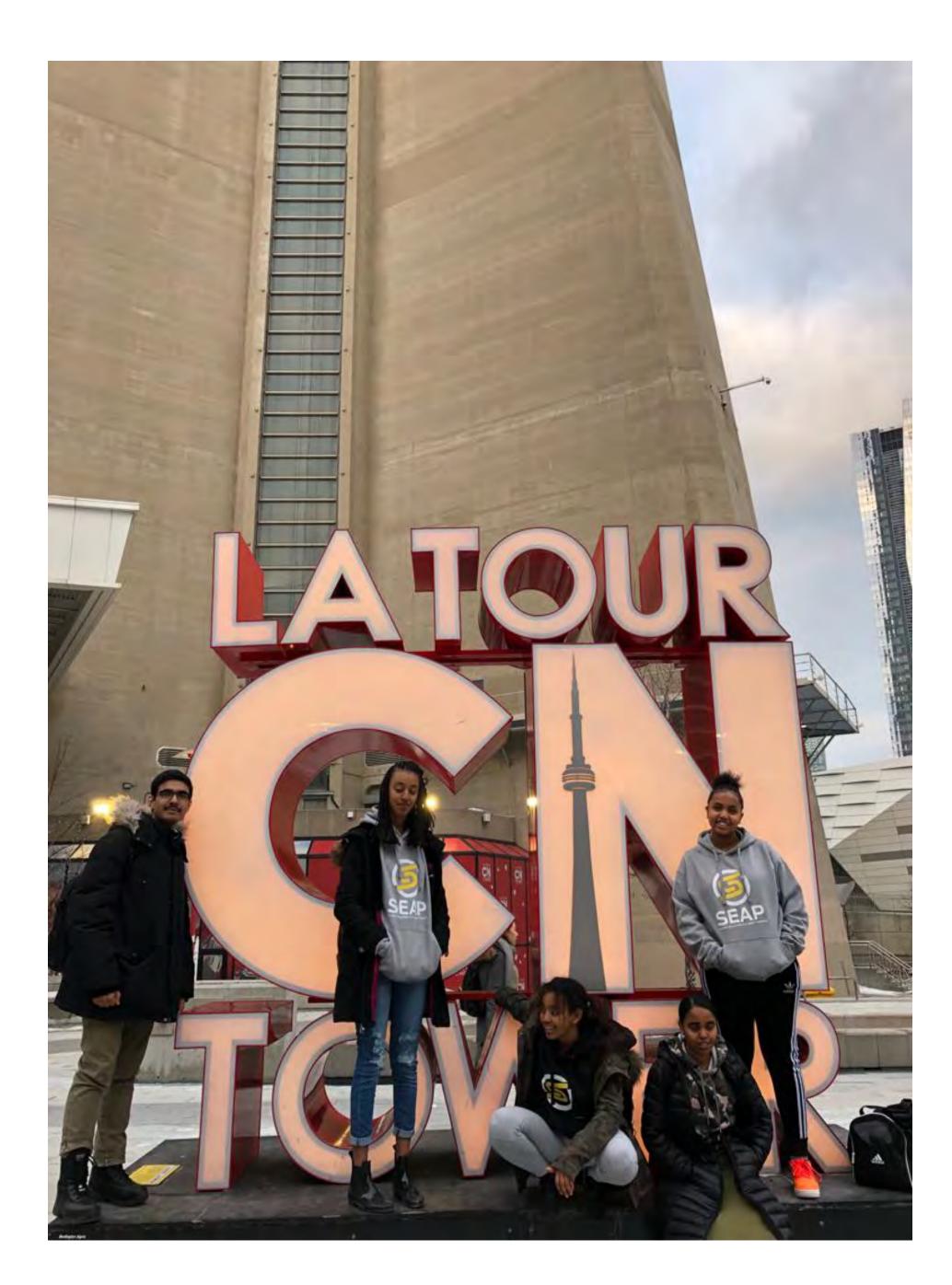
- Opportunities for engagement within school and community
- Positive norms
- Clear expectations for behavior
- Physical and psychological safety
- Barrier-free, well-coordinated, integrated youth services
- Safe and friendly neighbourhoods
- Diverse and inclusive workplaces and neighbourhoods
- Strong cultural and ethnic community support

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

III. MENTORING

VULNERABLE YOUTH

Research shows that mentors can provide critical supports that are needed to increase protective factors and youth level of resilience. When youth lack community, family, relationships supports, they are often at risk of physical, social, and psychological deterioration.



Resilience is defined as "an individual's ability to successfully adapt to life tasks in the face of social disadvantage or highly adverse conditions. Resilience is one's ability to bounce back from a negative experience with 'competent functioning'. One of the commonly identified factors in resiliency literature is the presence of an adult in the child/youth's life to fuel motivation and foster the development of life skills needed to overcome barriers (Check & Connect, The role of a Mentor, University of Minnesota, 2014).



Mentoring, building positive relationships, offers a powerful counter-force to vulnerability and risk by providing protective forces that help youth become more resilient in dealing with life's challenges.

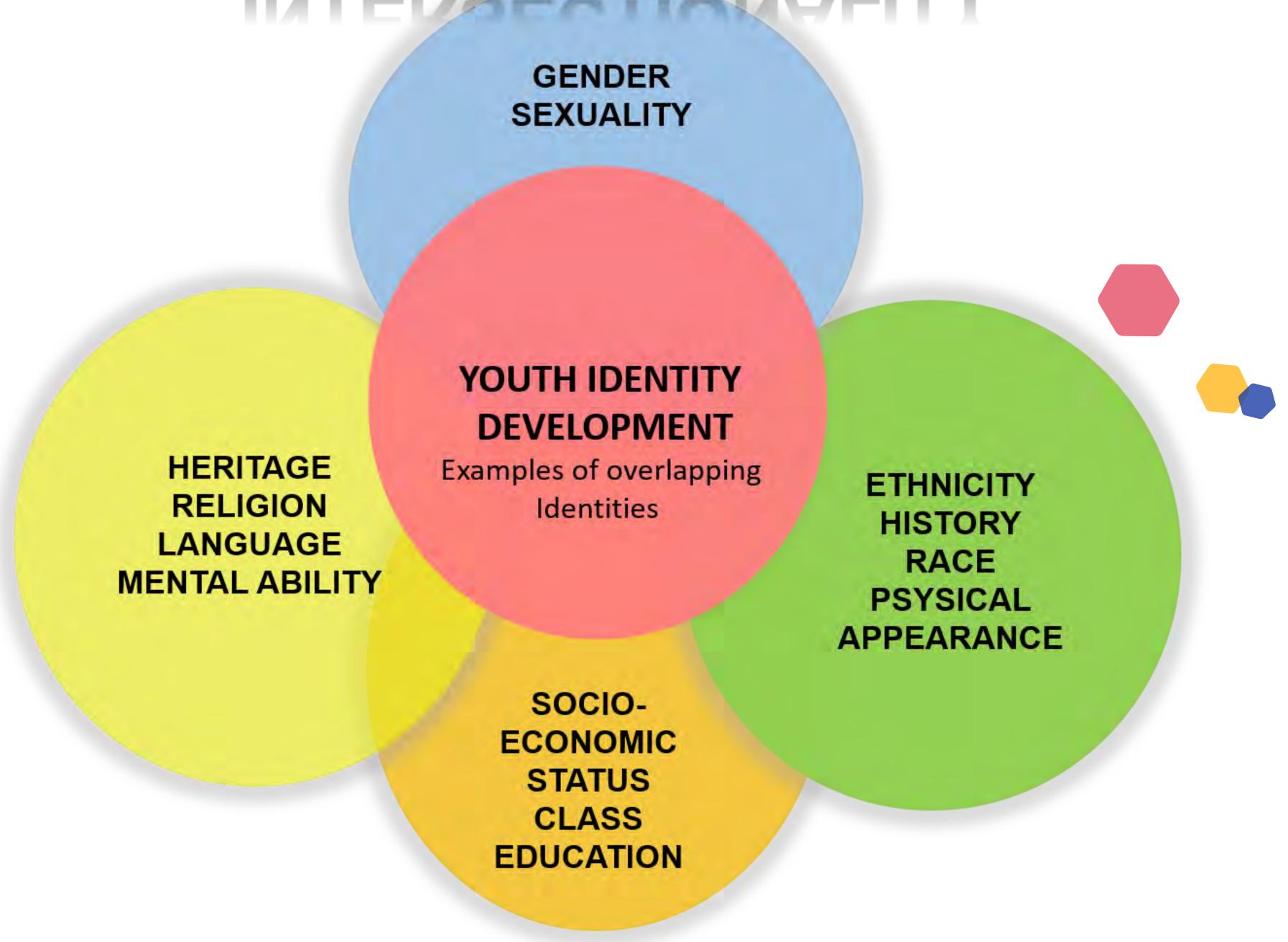
Our Mentoring Model: A Community Mentorship Initiative



CultureLink's anti-oppression framework is the cornerstone of our mentoring model and the fundamental ethical principle that guides our interactions with all our participants. The Anti-Oppression framework is a tool to see how people experience oppression in the world and the way oppression shapes their identity. This approach is fundamental to understand youth identity and the factors affecting their positive development.

Identity Development

INTERSECTIONALITY



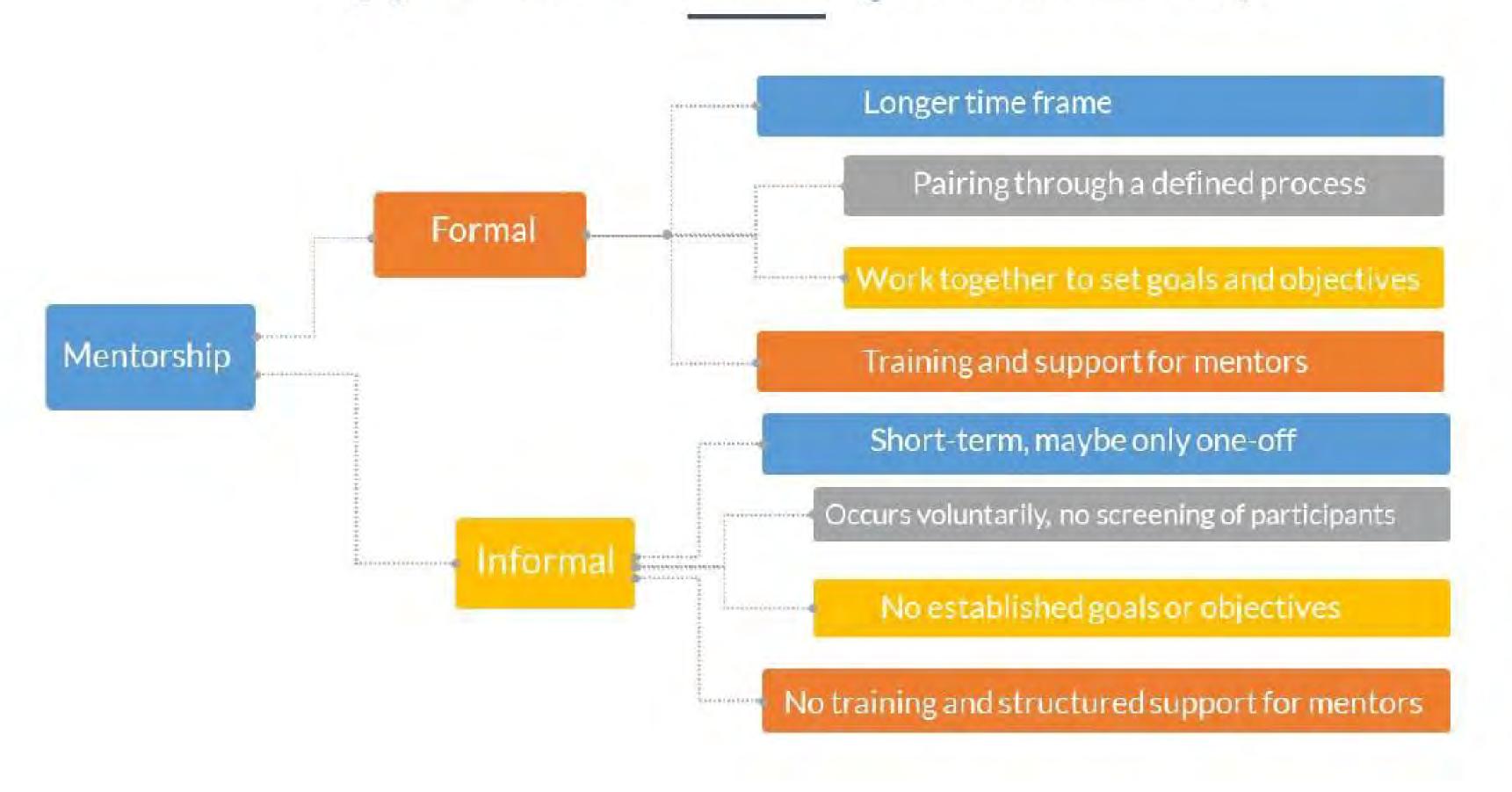
Mentors need to be aware of intersectionality to understand identity development and power dynamics from a complex, systemic, ecological and multi-approach perspective, and understand the complexity of issues affecting youth and their individual and social engagement. Anti-oppression identifies the experiences of people based on their race, their gender identity, sexual identity, their physical and mental ability, their choice of religion, their socio-economic status, their physical appearance, and so forth. It is crucial to see youth from these different identities to do not oversimplified our understanding of their feelings, thoughts, and life experiences.

Community Mentorship Model

Our mentoring model can be defined as a community mentorship intervention; it is a comprehensive and structured/designed intervention to foster life skills to overcome barriers and reach full potential.



Types of Mentoring Relationship



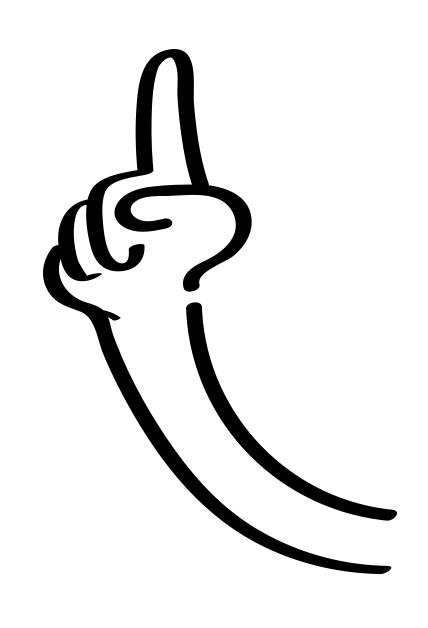
CultureLink's MOOC course: Engaging and Empowering Vulnerable Youth. CultureLink, 2017. ©CultureLink 2017 All Rights Reserved

Our mentoring model is designed to support mentors in formal mentoring relationships; nevertheless, all the tips and techniques can be used no matter the type of mentoring people are interested in doing.

MENTORING MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

IMPORTANT POINT!

The structure instilled in the formal mentoring relationship ensures that mentors are properly trained and well supported and guided for the tasks assigned. Having a structure increases the likelihood of the mentors making a tangible difference in a young person's life over a relatively long period of time.





Keeping Written -Electronic records

Record-keeping, whether electronic or paper-based, is essential for a program to ensure consistency in enforcing policies and procedures.

Mentor Screening Folders

- Application form
- Reference check records
- Interview summaries with interviewers' comments
- Police Background Checks (Criminal Background Check Clearance)

Mentee Referring Documents

- Assessment and Recommendations from the referring agency
- Intake forms (program registration form)
- Needs assessments (self-referring cases)
- Parents or guardians consent form (must be signed before being filed)

Mentor Engagement Agreements

- Mentoring Contract
- Confidentiality Agreements

Mentorship Supervision Forms

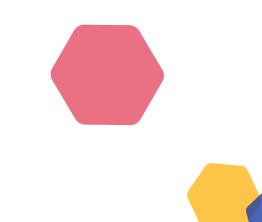
- Mentoring meeting records
- Preview the document
- Incident reports (situational)
- School attendance tracking (optional)
- Parent interview records (optional)
- Periodic supervision meeting notes
- Performance evaluation forms

Mentors' recruitment &

Screening



Mentors are an important resource for any youth-serving organization, especially when most mentors are volunteers. It is the organization's responsibility to have **policies and procedures** in place to make sure that mentors have a welcoming and supportive work environment.





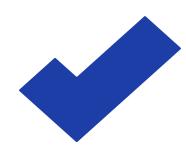
Risk management policies and procedures are critical to safeguard children and youth.



Specific mentors' volunteer position description must be available for recruitment, and to clarify roles and responsibilities.



Screening processes must be in place: interview process, whether face-to-face or over-the-phone; personal and professional references; Police background check for vulnerable sector.



A confidentiality agreement must be in place and signed once mentors are accepted.

Mentors' On-boarding &

Training

- A welcome meeting and tour are important as part of the on-boarding process;
- An overview on the youth-serving organization - mission, vision, history and other programs;
- Introduction to the mentoring program (including the program's mandates, job functions of all program staff and how they relate to the mentors' work);
- Reinforce key commitment requirements for mentors;
- Mentor role and responsibilities;
- Positive youth development theories and practices;
- Key mentoring techniques and action planning for a structured mentoring;
- Monitoring and Reporting structure and communication protocols;
- Boundaries and self-care;
- How the mentors' performance will be evaluated;
- Other organizational procedures.



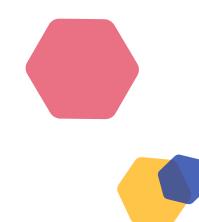
Throughout the Mentoring Process



The matching and mentoring process: a number of things are considered when making the match, such as: age, gender, linguistic and cultural background factors, geographic locations and availability of both parties.



The **match meeting** should help set parameters for the mentoring relationship: frequency of meetings, a review of the confidentiality agreements, when and how to contact the caseworker.





Regular monitoring: mentors will begin regular meetings with their mentees. The caseworker should check in on a regular basis. It is their role to make sure the mentorship is going well and that mentors have the skills and resources to manage the tasks.



Evaluation: Mentors should know how they are going to be evaluated before they start their work with their mentees. The evaluation can be formal or informal. Typically, in every follow-up meeting with the mentor, the caseworkers should include evaluation and provide feedback. Mentors have the right to receive timely feedback from their caseworker so they can improve their work.



Appreciation: Mentoring vulnerable youth is a noble and serious undertaking. It requires attitude, commitment and the right set of skills to fulfill the tasks. Most mentoring programs host mentor appreciation events to recognize their great efforts to support the community they served.

IV. THE ROLE OF THE

MENTOR

The role of mentors vary greatly depending on the type, focus or structure of the mentoring relationship as well as the age and level of vulnerability of mentees. The general role of a mentor is that of mediating the individual/social engagement. A mentor can be defined as an advocate... as a person responsible for helping the youth develop positive patterns of individual and social engagement. The term mentor implies an active involvement in youth's life to foster the development of life skills needed to overcome barriers.



Mentors' roles may evolve over the course of the mentoring relationship. Based on our mentoring model, we define the mentor's role as follows:

- A role model
- A resource connector
- A life skills coach
- A supporter or cheerleader
- A guide and monitor for planned progress
- An advocate
- A trusted adult in whom the youth can confide

Personal & Social Characteristics of an Effective Mentor

Above all, the most important qualities a mentor needs to have are a positive attitude about youth development, the willingness to be a mentor (rather than being obligated), being congruent/genuine, empathetic, and express unconditional positive regard (accepting the youth completely in a non-judgmental way). We can say that a mentor for vulnerable youth must believe in youth's resilience and believe that:

- All youth, particularly those living in at-riskcircumstances- have abilities and strengths, and can make progress and change their lives if well supported;
- Behaviours and attitudes are learned and developed, and it takes time and persistence to change them;
- Diversity is a strength of our society. A mentor should celebrate all differences with their mentees and help them turn diversity into assets;
- Mentoring is essentially an act to empower youth so they can successfully move through adolescence into adulthood. Only empowered youth can really take charge of their lives. A belief in the power of problem solving and willingness to persist despite behaviour and decision-making outcomes is fundamental (Check and Connect, 2014).
- A willingness to cooperate with other stakeholders is essential to help youth overcome barriers. Advocacy skills, including ability to compromise, negotiate and confront conflict are required.

Mentor's Responsibilities

- Meet with the mentee regularly it is crucial to have scheduled encounters;
- Build trust with the mentee using various forms of engagement;
- Establish boundaries;
- Set short- and long-term goals with the mentee;
- Make a work plan based on the goals of the mentee;
- Ensure the work plan is implemented with fidelity;
- Track mentee's progress and communicate with the caseworker on an ongoing basis;
- Report unresolved conflicts to the caseworker;
- Follow all guidelines set by the support organization regarding "Duty to Report";
- Coach mentees on life skills such as conflict resolution and time management; help youth to persist in the face of challenges;
- Help mentees and their families (especially newly arrived refugees and immigrants) to navigate government systems and connect them to pertinent services;
- Collaborate with other service providers to help the mentee break barriers to accessing services; share information about system issues affecting youth;
- Nurture the mentee's self-regulation and coach them to solve problems independently;
- Protect the confidentiality of the mentee;
- Report mentoring hours, activities and outcomes to the caseworker;
- Participate in program evaluations.

Youth/Mentee's Responsibilities

To be involved in a mentoring relationship must be seen as a privilege for both the mentor and the mentee. Both parties need to make an effort in order to make the mentoring relationship work. It is important that the mentees progressively take an active lead in their life changes and engagement



We should encourage the mentees to assume the following responsibilities in the mentoring relationship:

- Be kind and considerate towards their mentor;
- Honour their commitments: attend their mentoring meetings and be punctual;
- Be willing to engage in constructive feedback;
- Learn to persevere and not to give up easily;
- Be open to trying new things;
- Agree to set goals with the mentor and make a plan together, and progressively take the lead in their life changes.

Professional boundaries:

Limits and extent of mentoring

The mentor/mentee relationship is a special type of relationship where the youth enters into the relationship entrusting the mentors with their own well-being expecting that mentors will provide with a safe environment in which they can work on the issues affecting their lives. This relationship places them in a position if more vulnerability to closeness.

It is very important for

mentors to define and

topics.



Professional boundaries:

Dos



Define role as mentors; abide by the **Code of Ethics** set for the staff and volunteers by the supporting organization;

Discuss preferable ways to communicate;

Discuss expectations of frequency and duration of meetings, as well as availability;



Discuss confidentiality with the youth. Abide by the principle of who "needs to know." Note, however, that mentors are mandated reporters. Should it be necessary to report a situation, explain the circumstances to the youth (and family, when appropriate).



Share understanding of confidentiality; understand what confidentiality means to the youth;

Share any preferences, or common/expected peeves;

Be firm and consistent not only with maintaining and enforcing boundaries, but at all times;



Be aware of the power imbalance between mentors and your mentees. Make suggestions and avoid giving orders/prescriptions;

Keep in mind that the relationship has been established to support youth, not the other way around. **Seek help** from the organization if **feeling overwhelm** or **burnout**;



Role-model and encourage youth to set their own personal boundaries;

Respect and embrace cultural differences.

Professional boundaries:

Don'ts



Don't solve mentee's problems. Better to guide and support them so they learn how to tackle problems on their own;

Don't take on roles or tasks that are beyond the scope of mentoring;



Don't buy gifts for your mentee or their family or accept gifts from them;

Don't lend money to your mentee or their family;



Don't impose your religious or political views on your mentee or their family members;



Don't make romantic or sexual advances towards your mentee. If you and your mentee are both adults and find romantic feelings developing for each other, you need to report the situation to your caseworker and the caseworker will formally end the mentoring relationship.



V. BUILDING TRUSTING

RELATIONSHIPS

Building trusting relationships
 with vulnerable youth requires
 recognizing that quality
 relationships cannot be forced;
 they develop naturally over time
 and require persistence,
 consistency and continuity.



Mentors need to understand that it takes time to get to know the youth and get their trust and openness, and need to reach out the youth even when they appear uninterested or indifferent.



- Ongoing communication;
- Honest communication;
- Solution-oriented;
- and persistent outreach are critical.

Youth can sense when people are not being sincere, and they highly appreciate authenticity and transparency. Even if mentors have innocent intentions, when they put on a facade, they are creating distance between them and the youth they need to be connecting with.

Self-awareness is key to managing non-verbal communication!

The Mentorship relationship:

Phases



PREPARE& BEGIN:

Mentoring is a process not an event. Based on the needs assessment, the mentor may be given some information about the reasons why the mentee was selected and some of the areas of concern. Mentors may also learn whether the mentee is still attending school and if they are, information on their attendance, behaviour and academic performance may be shared with them. Mentors can use the information as background information but should try to approach their first meeting with the mentee with an open mind (Latimer, 2016).

During the first meeting, the following should be discussed:

- The timing should be convenient for both; we also recommend keeping the meeting to no more than an hour. Mentees may have spent all day in school or working so sitting for another hour may be all they can manage without fading.
- Confirm contact information; send reminders before meetings;
- Discuss confidentiality.



Mentors shall seek a place where there is some privacy and at the same time where they can be visible to others, both for their own security and for that of the mentee. We recommend discussing the location with the mentee and the supporting organization. Accessibility and safety are crucial aspects to consider.

The Mentorship relationship:

Phases



BUILD & SUSTAIN:

"The mentee you are working with has parents or guardians who are responsible for them. Your mentee needs a strong foundation of support that includes you, their family, the referring agency and their school. You cannot be an effective mentor working on your own. Connecting with family is important so you can provide your mentee with the best chance for success. As a mentor, your relationship with the mentee and their family is a professional one. You will want to practice "professional caring". I define professional caring as caring about your mentee and bringing your best self to the relationships while maintaining a professional distance (Latimer, 2016)."



Here are some ideas to help you build a strong, open and trusting relationship:

• Communication, Active Listening and expectation:



Creating a welcoming environment where your mentee can let down their defenses, share information and relax with you is an excellent goal for any mentor. Listening to what your mentee is sharing without showing or passing judgment is one of the most powerful ways to create just such a space.

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Build & Sustain:

Hold clear expectations for the youth. Believe that the youth can be engaged and attain his/her personal goals. Respect for the youth is characterized by open, honest communication and ensuring the presence of supports for the youth to reach their goals. Guidelines for the mentor include (Latimer, 2016):



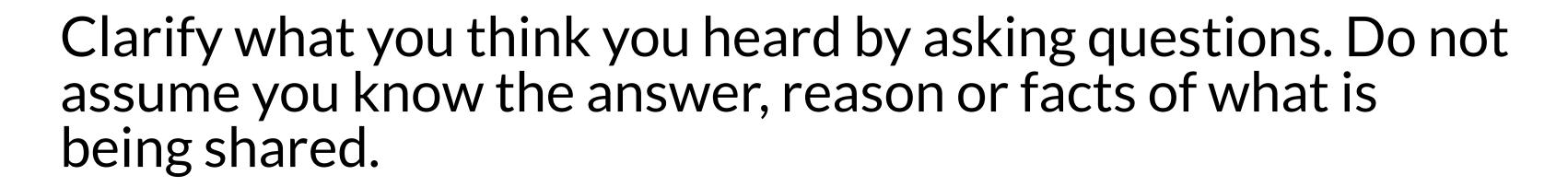
Focus, focus, focus. Start by having an internal conversation before the session begins. Remind yourself of your purpose for being here and let everything else go.



Reflecting is another useful tool. Reflecting back to the other person what we think we heard them say to demonstrate empathy and active listening.



Reflecting gives your mentee a chance to correct or confirm that you have heard what they wanted to communicate. So paraphrase the words and confirm the emotions expressed.





Use open-ended questions to solicit more information, yes/no questions to confirm your understanding.

When your mentee has finished sharing, stress on finished, take a minute to summarize everything to make sure you have heard everything they have shared.



Help the youth to define the desired behavior as well as the specific steps to achieve the behavior (do not prescribe).

Emphasize what is desired from him/her/they, not what was done wrong.



Provide the supports (or see that they are provided) needed by the youth to reach the stated expectation/goals.

Be a persistent source of support.



Expect respectful behavior from the youth; use interactions as opportunities to model appropriate social skills.

Acceptance and accountability:

Building trusting relationships with youth requires to demonstrated authentic acceptance for the youth and their family and holding the youth accountable for their actions at all times. Guidelines for mentors include:



Accept the youth and family as they are. Understand that the parent is being the best parent they can be. Do not attempt to "fix the family". Rather, keep the focus of contact and communication on engaging the youth.



Accept the youth, and do not condone inappropriate behavior. Work to understand the youth's perspective on the situation, which involves active listening.



Hold the youth accountable for his/her actions using a problem solving dialogue and action planning. Articulate expectations for youth behavior and model them via personal follow-through with the youth and family.

Be nonjudgmental and use non-blaming communication, regardless of the youth's presenting behavior.

Accessibility and Flexibility:



Be accessible to the youth, the family, and other important stakeholders. Maintain a flexible meeting schedule.



Ensure some availability in the evening and on weekends.





Offer a variety of ways for the student and family to initiate contact-phone, email, home visits.

Commitment and Persistence:

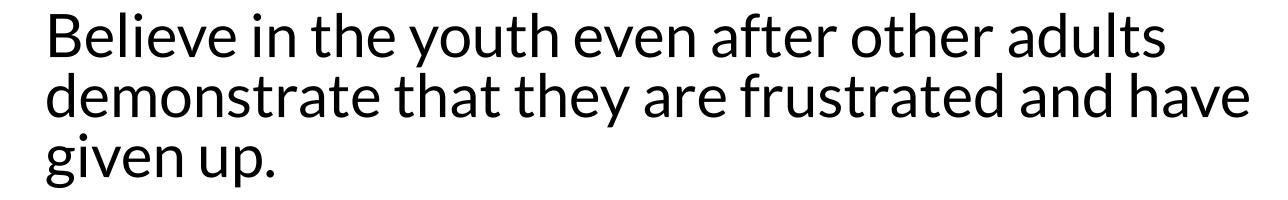
Make a long-term commitment to the youthspecifically, for a minimum of one year. Having the same person interact and plan with the youth and family fosters trust and maintains optimism. Guidelines for mentors include:



Stay with a youth when "the going gets tough." Realize that trusting relationships require hanging in there with the youth-even when the youth's behavior is not changing or is challenging.



Do not give up; continue to problem solve, develop plans of action, and communicate with youth, the family, and other important stakeholders to keep the youth engaged.





The impact of role modeling:



Model desired behavior for the youth and provide the youth with scenarios to practice responses.

Model how to problem solve to resolve concerns.



Remain calm and professional, talk through situations, and use thinkaloud procedures.

Provide instrumental support by helping the youth directly with problems-this facilitates problem solving toward personal goals.



Model optimism- the perspective that there is a way to figure this situation out and advance the youth toward greater productivity in their lives.

Model punctuality, respect, and dependability. ü Model work ethic-effort, persistency, and self-regulation.

The Mentorship relationship: Close and Redefine

Mentoring programs come with an end date. Both mentor and mentee should know what that date is and be mindful as time progresses. Ending the relationship is usually a time of celebration. Be prepared and help the mentee be prepared by addressing the end of the relationship ahead of time. Youth are not usually good planners so gentle reminders as the time approaches will be useful (Latimer, 2016).



Mentors need to have organizational support and awareness of existing resources to facilitate the process of referral. It is essential for mentors to embrace a team approach and make good use of the organizational support behind them.





The Frontline Workers' Training Series provides workshops, toolkits and short videos for City and community-based frontline workers on a range of topics designed to increase the capacity of workers to provide impactful services for MVP youth (youth most vulnerable to involvement in violence and crime).

The workshops are coordinated by the City's Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) and Youth Employment Partnerships (YEP), and delivered in partnership with community agencies.









www.culturelink.ca

CultureLink is a settlement and community organization with 30 years' experience in developing and delivering services to meet the needs of diverse communities. Passionate about providing innovative services, we adapt to changes and create new programs that best respond to and address our clients' specific needs.

