

ETHNO-RACIAL YOUTH MENTORING MANUAL





Context, Core Values & Practice Guidelines

ERYM

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Goals of the ERYM Program

The program has two goals:

- To foster a relationship between Ethno-Racial youth, particularly those who may be at-risk, with a caring adult.
- To foster a relationship between the mother of a youth program participant with a mother mentor.

Core Values & Practice Guidelines

As you consider this program for your organization, we invite you to take an approach of openness, of being ready to question your bias, perspectives and opinions. This work will change you, your organization and how you see the world. It is a worthy journey, one from which we have learned a great deal. We know that to do the work well, those who will be leading and working with these youth and families must be willing to enter differently into the work and be ready to shift their approach to how we have traditionally worked with youth and families.

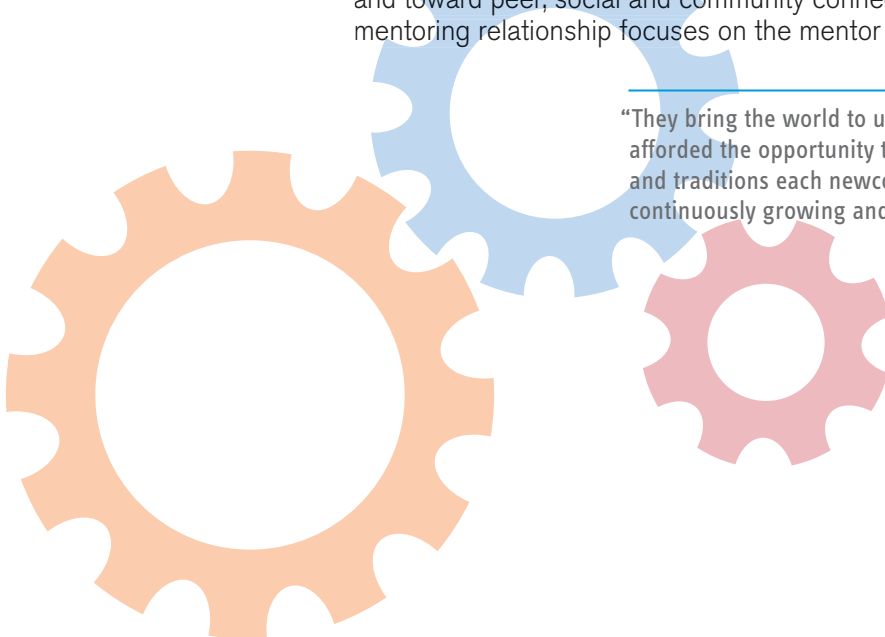
1. See What is Right With the World

WE HONOUR, RESPECT, CELEBRATE AND VALUE
EACH INDIVIDUAL AND HIS/HER CULTURE.

PRACTICE GUIDELINE 1: It is imperative that the strengths of each youth and mother are understood and this goodness is celebrated. In our attempt to work with ethno-racial families, it is easy to move toward a place of pity - feeling sorry about their past and current reality. While having empathy is important, realizing, naming and working with each person's strengths and resilience is essential. This can become more challenging if we do not see the world through the prism of culture where we begin to understand that there are many ways to interact with the world – each worthy of expression and respect.

Once we begin to see strengths, we begin to realize that the relationship that is being built needs to move away from dependency (doing for) to empowerment (doing with and moving back so they can do for themselves). Connections beyond the mentor/mentee relationship and toward peer, social and community connections are encouraged and fostered. The mentoring relationship focuses on the mentor supporting the youth's goals and life direction.

“They bring the world to us. As a Canadian, I am grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to learn and appreciate the diverse beliefs, customs and traditions each newcomer brings to this country. Our cultural mosaic is continuously growing and enriching life here in Canada.” ~ *Youth Mentor*





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2. Understand the Impact of Migration

WE RECOGNIZE THE CHALLENGES AND COURAGE OF MIGRATING TO A NEW COUNTRY; PARTICULARLY WE RECOGNIZE THE LOSS OF IDENTITY, SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL STATUS.

PRACTICE GUIDELINE 2: Very few immigrants are prepared to face the profound impact of all that is lost in coming to Canada. While there may be many gains, few experience the transition as only positive. Reflecting on what that loss would mean for each of us, may assist us as we walk with individuals for whom this is a reality. The rebuilding of social networks, identity and status is essential work in these mentoring relationships. As well, providing meaningful and appropriate opportunities to understand, link and integrate into the Canadian reality where new relationships can be forged.

“Adjusting to a new culture, learning a new language, making new friends and adapting to new surroundings are all very difficult obstacles to overcome. Realizing how much my mentee has achieved by being able to make these adjustments speaks volumes to her character and personality and makes me appreciate all her strengths.” ~ *Youth Mentor*

3. Interdependence versus Individualism

WE VALUE INTERDEPENDENCE AND CHALLENGE THE NORTH AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE OF INDIVIDUALISM.

PRACTICE GUIDELINE 3: For many newcomers the concept of individualism is foreign. While our North American understanding of raising our children to be independent may be an important value for many of us, it can cause friction for cultures in which interdependence has a higher value. This interdependence is manifested in a variety of ways that we may judge as unhealthy, smothering and over-protective/involved. It is important to shift our lens and see beauty in this collective understanding of the ‘we’ as being as important as the ‘I’. Family is broad, wide and all encompassing; family-centred is seen through the lens of community, connection, and closeness rather than the nuclear, traditional definition of family.

“This program, in my point of view, is designed perfectly, using a link for newcomers to get involved and creates strong roots, supporting them while they grow in our community.” ~ *Mother Mentor*

“...each person enriches our culture by expressing and teaching their ways to the larger population which promotes acceptance and education of the values that others have.” ~ *Youth Mentor*



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4. Fostering Resilience

NEWCOMERS ARE RESILIENT. WE CELEBRATE THIS TRUTH AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE.

PRACTICE GUIDELINE 4: Resilience is the capacity for individuals, families and communities to “bounce back”. Our capacity to bounce back is connected to our internal assets/resources and our community supports and resources to assist us when we struggle. Every interaction with participants (both youth and mothers) is about intentionally fostering resilience. All involved need to work from this lens.

“Resilience is: The capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources that sustain well-being; the capacity of individuals physical and social ecologies to provide those resources and; the capacity of individuals, their families and communities to negotiate culturally meaningful ways for resources to be shared, “ ~ *Dr. Michael Ungar*

“I see a lot of gentle, quiet persistence... I see my mentee’s incredible ability to work through problems and move on in life.” ~ *Mother Mentor*

5. It’s All About Relationship & Connection

WE TAKE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD MEANINGFUL, LASTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTICIPANTS.

PRACTICE GUIDELINE 5: All activities and programs are opportunities to build relationships. If mentors during the group programming are ‘holding up the walls’ they are not doing their job. All activities are designed to maximize interaction between youth/mothers and mentors. Training so that mentors understand this fundamental difference between coordinating an event and seeing the event as an opportunity to build relationship is essential to the success of the program. Building skills around how to actively engage youth and mothers is critical. These skills can be practised during the group activities and often mentors can learn by examples from one another as they watch how other mentors interact with youth/mothers in the group.

The value of this natural, informal relationship building cannot be underestimated as the mentoring relationship is built on these interactions. Unlike other programs, matches between mentors and mentees occur organically and are led by the youth and mothers; matches are not made using paper, but rather through relational matching. Trusting that young people and mothers will naturally gravitate toward the ‘right’ mentor, the timing and connection occurs informally initially.

“With every visit with my mentee, I find myself staying longer and longer. There are more things we can discuss more comfortably now and we allow ourselves just to be in each other’s company. I involve myself with her children as well and that is where the connection further deepens.” ~ *Mother Mentor*





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6. Safe, Caring Environments of Belonging Nurture Trust

WE UNDERSTAND THAT NEWCOMERS NEED TIME TO BUILD TRUST AND WE CREATE SAFE, CARING SPACES WHERE THIS CAN OCCUR.

PRACTICE GUIDELINE 6: Being aware of the loss factor in the lives of newcomers and the common reality that the new world feels foreign, it is understandable that building trust takes time. As with any vulnerable population creating environments of safety, caring and belonging will bear the fruit of trust – essential for meaningful mentoring relationships.



“Overtime our relationship has deepened. Connections don’t happen overnight and I strongly believe that if the goals of this program are to be reached, this can only be done with sustained relationships. Increasing familiarity has helped to deepen this relationship and again, this comes with time and interacting on a consistent basis.” ~ *Youth Mentor*

“... she opened up to me about missing her grandparents from her home country. I think at this point we started to have a real bond and it was a sign that she was able to trust me and confide in me.” ~ *Youth Mentor*

7. Sacredness of Story

WE HOLD THE STORIES OF PARTICIPANTS WITH DIGNITY AND SHARE OUR STORY WITH THE SAME RESPECT.

PRACTICE GUIDELINE 7: In creating trust, we are entrusted with life stories. It is essential to create the space to hear and share stories. The tragedy of isolation is that no one witnesses our lives. To mentor is to bear witness to another’s story and to walk with that person as the story unfolds. While mentors may not fully comprehend the experience of coming to a new country or perhaps the traumatic experiences of loss, the role of the mentor is to hold the story with reverence, confidentiality (as appropriate)¹⁰ and respect. How we speak of our mentees, what we share about their stories is always with respect, dignity and honour.

The mentoring relationship differs from that of a service provider in that there is an assumption of reciprocity. Within appropriate boundaries, mentors are encouraged to share their story. It is within this co-sharing of life that reciprocal giving and taking occurs. Mentors gain, learn and change alongside their mentees.



“For my particular mentee, just communication can make a big difference... we can share our experiences and stories with each other and see even though we come from different places, we are a lot alike and there is comfort in not being alone.” ~ *Youth Mentor*

¹⁰ This will be discussed in training



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8. Modelling the Way

WE PLACE HIGH VALUE ON, AND COMMITMENT AND RESOURCES TOWARD, MENTORING THE MENTORS.

PRACTICE GUIDELINE 8: The art of mentoring well is one that needs to be nurtured. This work cannot be done without ongoing feedback, support, coaching and monitoring. Creating time to meet with the mentors, unpack their experiences, reflect and discuss possible options in the relationship is indispensable. The leadership role must model the way and embody the values and principles of the program. We have found that there are incredible learning opportunities - we do not know it all. The program evolves with the input of participants; there needs to be a stance toward learning, shifting and adjusting. This stance of constant learning from our experience and through one another, learning occurs in all directions, new mentors learn from the program coordinator, other mentors and participants themselves.

“The program coordinator is always in touch with the mothers and they trust her. That facilitates a lot of our work.” ~ *Mother Mentor*

THE ETHNO-RACIAL YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM:

“I think what is really working about this program is that there is a lot of support for the mentors. The program coordinator is always available to talk to and discuss any concerns or ask for help with their mentoring relationship.” ~ *Mother Mentor*

Mentoring Youth Component

- Is based on relational matching versus paper matching. That is, youth are introduced to mentors at the monthly activities to see if youth and mentors connect. This natural connection is essential for long lasting relationships and is not rushed. Youth are given the opportunity to change mentors if that connection is not present.
- Once the match is made, the mentor makes weekly connections in between monthly activities. On a weekly basis, each youth mentor connects one-on-one (via internet, phone or in person) with up to three young people. The hope is that youth participants will be supported and assisted by their mentor to develop goals and begin to plan for their future.
- Includes a variety of encounters with youth that include one-on-one, group activities, and mentor led outings (where the mentor can take more than one youth to the outing as they may be mentoring up to three youth).



“Getting to know the mentee in both the group setting and one-on-one setting allows the mentors to see the mentees in two different lights, and observe and learn from the dynamics of fellow mentor/mentee relationships.” ~ *Youth Mentor*

Overview
of the
Program
Model



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- Is anchored in the group activities where relationships begin and trust is built. This group component is critical for the development of social connections beyond the mentoring relationship as participants become friends.
- Involves thoughtful planning for transitions and closure of mentoring relationships so that youth experience a healthy way to say good-bye.
- Once a mentoring relationship has ended, youth continue to be involved in the monthly group activities with the goal of connecting with another mentor as soon as possible.



“I believe the social gatherings are a key ingredient in the success of this program. Often times, immigrants may feel alone, and that no one truly understands the hardships they have undergone. Thus, being united with others with the same feelings allows mentees to be themselves.”

~ Youth Mentor

Mother to Mother Component

- Includes an optional mother mentoring component based on the same philosophy of relational matching versus paper matching. Mothers are introduced to potential mentors at the monthly gatherings. Often mothers are more comfortable with the group setting and it may take some time before they embrace a mentor. Relationships between mothers have flourished creating natural social networks beyond the program. Mentor-mother relationships work best one-on-one due to the complexity of their life situation. This element has also been life-giving for both the mother and the mentor.

“Group meetings enable more friendships to form – this is excellent. Explicit expectations of mentors are important.” ~ Mother Mentor

“One-on-one matching with group activities is a good model.”
~ Mother Mentor

“If you can understand the person’s heart language, you’ll understand their heart. Expressing non-concrete thoughts and feelings is more difficult than talking about tangible things.” ~ Mother Mentor

“I think it really makes a difference to my mentee that she has someone to call a friend.” ~ Mother Mentor





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The Mentors

- Are grounded, highly motivated adults who understand, respect, and are able to work with Ethno-Racial families. They are recruited, screened and trained for the mentoring role and are asked for a one year commitment. Screening is based on best practice, experience and expertise of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of London & Area. Training includes presentations and discussions about cultural sensitivity, working with Ethno-Racial youth who may be at-risk, and socio-economically disadvantaged.
- Youth mentors and mother mentors receive support and coaching during their involvement with the program.



“It is a rich experience for both sides on sharing and reducing the cultural impact, as well as improving language skills. In the program, we are people who want to share and support and that is why we don’t think about where people are born or what language they speak. We see human beings who we can learn from and support.” ~ *Mother Mentor*



“Each person contributes unique perspectives and ideas to their community. Every strength and every challenge makes a person who they are and therefore contributes to their uniqueness and extraordinary ability to enrich our collective Canadian culture.” ~ *Youth Mentor*



“I’m so thankful to be part of this group of women. There, I met my great friend and mentor that I love. I have also met another participant who is now a great friend too. Everything started because we were talking about our children’s behaviours. We were worried because they don’t play with other children outside school. I suggested about putting the boys together to see what happens and we met at Tim Horton’s. We sat with the boys together and they were very shy just looking at us. After a few tense minutes, they started talking about video games and boys’ stuff. We meet at least once a week and our sons are doing great. They laugh, play, run and we mothers are happy. We have hopes that their friendship gets stronger through the years.” ~ *Mother Participant*





Program Developmental Evaluation: Executive Summary

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The Ethno-Racial Youth Mentoring Project was a three-year initiative of the London InterCommunity Health Centre, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Multiculturalism Program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

The project was built upon the principle that mentoring and building social networks are critical to the development and maintenance of health and emotional well being. For youth, having a mentor and building social networks encourage a sense of belonging and promote resiliency and problem solving skills.

Building on the success of the Health Centre's previous work with newcomers and its work with at-risk youth, the Ethno-Racial Youth Mentoring Project had two primary goals: to foster relationships among Northeast London's ethno-racial youth aged 9 – 13 with caring adults; and to foster relationships between the mothers of the youth program participants with experienced and supportive "mother mentors."

The developmental evaluation for the ERYMP drew upon an extensive database of feedback provided by 14 of the mother mentors and 18 of the youth mentors, who were invited to contribute monthly (from January to December 2013) to an online log of their experiences. They responded to a series of 10 specific questions about the program's strengths, some of the obstacles it faced, its capacity for empowering participants, and its effect on the mentors themselves. Over the course of that year, these hundreds of often candid and very concrete responses chronicled the deepening of the mentor-mentee relationship, provided insights into what was (and sometimes was not) working well in these interactions, and pointed to how some of its personal and social impacts were already being observed. Taken all together, that database provided an extremely valuable longitudinal view of how mentors viewed the project "from the inside," and how the project objectives were being lived out in their day-to-day contacts with their mentees. The experience of youth and mothers was captured through focus groups and interviews with 7 mothers and 19 youth.

PLEASE NOTE: This executive summary offers only a brief overview of the more in-depth findings from the Program Developmental Evaluation.

Summary of Youth Component

Mentors' & Mentees' Experiences

The feedback received from the youth mentors and youth themselves highlighted a number of positive gains for the youth involved stemming from their experience with the project.

Many youth mentors spoke about how the one-on-one relationship of friendship and support between mentors and mentees had enabled the mentees to share honestly about their lives, their family situations and the challenges they faced. According to the mentors, many of the youth involved with ERYMP displayed greater confidence and self-assurance, including a greater degree of comfort and fluency in English, as the project progressed; as the relationship grew, the mentors were able to assume a less directive role, allowing their mentees to "spread their wings" a bit more in terms of their own decision-making. The mentors facilitated greater familiarity with the city, its businesses and services, serving as guides and (when necessary) as translators, and exposing the young people to a cross-section of London and what it has to offer. They also supported their mentees in acquiring a range of important life-skills (grocery shopping, meal preparation, computer skills, seeking out employment and preparing for job interviews, stress reduction, conflict management, public speaking, family budgeting and activity planning), as well as honing their abilities in sports, recreational activities and social interaction. All of these initiatives contributed to a



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heightened sense of autonomy on the part of the mentees overall, and the young people stated that they appreciated invitations to become involved in group activities, to the degree they were comfortable with them.



“Before I went to the program, I didn’t get out as much.
Now I do, we get to do a lot of great activities” ~ *Youth*

Key to the mentoring relationship were the mentor’s ability to listen, to engage and to affirm, and to maintain a regular, predictable rhythm of visits and phone “check-ins” that the young people could rely on. Both mentors and mentees seem to have invested emotionally in the relationship, and, because the young people could sense this, it often bore fruit in greater trust and honesty, and the ability to speak concretely about what was happening in the mentee’s life. The mentor’s own personal qualities were an important element in the success of the relationship, and a disposition of warmth, availability and genuine friendship on the mentor’s part was frequently rewarded by acceptance and greater openness. Where possible, cultural and linguistic sensitivity on the mentor’s part was a valuable catalyst in strengthening and supporting the bond between the adult and the young person. There is clearly need for an appropriate balance between respect for the mentee’s cultural background, and efforts to help them feel gradually more “at home” in Canadian society.

While there were many obvious successes that can be pointed to, there were also challenges. At times, language differences needed to be bridged (more than half of the mentor respondents mentioned this), and direct communication between the mentor and mentee was not always easy, because of differing schedules, limited access to the phone or lack of convenient transportation (especially during the winter).

It is clear that the growth spurred by the relationship was not merely on one side, and that the mentors themselves grew, through an appreciation of their mentees’ life-experience, personal qualities, resilience and determination, as well as the way in which the mentoring relationship fostered a broadened sense of global realities and cultural richness. Although there was an inherent “inequality” given the nature of the relationship, nevertheless many mentors experienced a gradual “levelling,” in which they felt an authentic friendship develop, which went beyond the formal “mentor/mentee” dynamic. Clearly, the care put into selecting appropriate mentors yielded very positive results in most cases, and the mentors came away enriched by their participation in this project as well. Many of them stressed their gratitude for the support they received from project staff, especially where impasses arose or difficulties presented themselves.

The overall tone of the feedback received from mentors and that of youth themselves is extremely positive, and suggests that this initiative was a rewarding and gratifying experience. Clearly, it has been a significant success in terms of helping this group of newcomer youth to feel more welcomed and “at home” in their local community, to develop their own sense of self, to gain confidence in their own potential and leadership, and to experience the support of sensitive, caring adults who, in many cases, also gradually grew into friends, advocates and mentors. In terms of the individual relationships involved, and in terms of the project and its goals, the ERYMP from the perspective of the youth mentors and youth themselves was a very successful project, and many of the mentors and youth involved in it expressed an interest in being involved in similar initiatives in the future.



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Summary of Mother Component

Mentor & Mentees Experiences

Similarly, many of the mother mentors and mothers spoke very positively about their participation in the ERYMP project, and a number of the topics which arose with the youth component also arose in the responses from the mother component.

Empowerment took many different but related forms in the relationships between the mother mentors and their mentees. The primary support that these mentors were able to offer was social and emotional; by their presence, regularly-scheduled visits and contacts, they provided a sense of reassurance, affirmation, and a respectful, listening ear for the needs and concerns of their mentees. Their friendship and support, their personal warmth and positive regard helped to convey a message of inclusion and solidarity, which generally led to a deepened sense of trust, and the ability to share openly about their respective lived experiences. While availability was highly valued, ensuring appropriate boundaries and realistic expectations were, however, necessary prerequisites for these relationships to be healthy and life-giving. Mothers expressed an ease with their mentor, a confident, a person they could share their story in a way that they had not been able to in Canada before this program.

For many of the mentees, supporting them on the path toward greater insertion in Canadian society took two concrete forms:

- (1) assistance in developing greater English fluency, and
- (2) an increased awareness of services, resources and legal avenues that were accessible to them in the local community. Mentors frequently served as liaisons with local service agencies and community groups, and helped their mentees to gain a greater familiarity with the city overall.

In several cases, mentees also benefitted from the relationship in terms of gaining new job-related skills, or through assistance in understanding and entering the local labour market. Encouraging the newcomer women to take part in supportive group settings often helped to diminish their feelings of isolation and social exclusion, and enabled them to surface areas of struggle or pain. Overall, these experiences and the acquisition of needed skills contributed to a greater sense of well-being and self-sufficiency; the mentees were able to experience their own abilities and potential in new and empowering ways. Inasmuch as a number of the immigrant mentees were coming out of traumatic or violent situations in their past, the mentors' role in offering encouragement and praise, and in pointing to mentees' areas of strength and resiliency, were often a contribution that was greatly appreciated. As stated by one mother: "without her I don't do anything, I don't go anywhere, she has helped me connect to the community. I feel less stressed when we talk."

Many of the mentees spoke of the sympathy and support they have received in the community, although many have also suffered because of the stereotypes or discriminatory attitudes of others. Overall, language seems to be one of the major barriers holding mother mentees back from a greater participation in their community, and in Canadian society more generally. Other challenges include adapting to a new and very different culture, a less-than-welcoming/helpful attitude on the part of some agencies' staff, the inability to reach each other easily by phone, and unhelpful social attitudes which tend to privilege differences over areas of commonality. Frustrations over time (busyness, and accommodating differing schedules) and distance (navigating the challenges of public transit) sometimes inhibited or complicated the mentor-mentee relationship.



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Mothers also expressed great satisfaction with the youth mentors and their involvement in their child's life. This new friendship in their children's lives created a sense of peace and satisfaction knowing that there was another caring adult who had the best interest of their children in mind. Mothers appreciated both the group and individualized component of the program for themselves and for their children as it not only connected them to the mentor but also to other members of the community. One mother noted that her son had been on the wait list for Big Brothers Big Sisters for four years and they could not find an appropriate match. In this program her son found a match immediately and this friendship has really benefitted her son in a very positive way.



“Without her I don't do anything, I don't go anywhere, she has helped me connect to the community. I feel less stressed when we talk.”

~ Mother Mentor

One of the areas repeatedly highlighted in the responses of both mentors and mentees was the importance of the personal relationships which grew between the mentors and mentees, and the mutuality that frequently developed in these relationships: the mentors found themselves sharing about their own lives and feelings, and being enriched and challenged by the qualities and experiences of their mentees. The reciprocal aspect of their relationships often enabled them to perceive parallels or analogies between their lives that helped them to better understand each other. The project had significant benefits for both groups of participants; in addition to the benefits for the newcomer mothers, it has enabled the mentors to see the world more broadly, and has renewed their appreciation for Canada's ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Both broadly speaking, and in terms of more specific outcomes, the mother-mentoring components of the ERYMP seems to have been extremely effective. It has created a rich new network of supportive friendships, has enabled mentees to experience themselves as valued parts of the London community, has reaffirmed their gifts, offered them new avenues of involvement, and has begun to lay a solid foundation for them to continue building a successful and enriching life in London, for themselves and for their families.

