



Big Brothers Big Sisters of Saskatchewan- Community Initiatives Fund Evaluation Report



RECIPROCAL
CONSULTING.

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Introduction & Evaluation Approaches

Since 2020, Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) agencies across Saskatchewan have been working together to facilitate healthy relationships between mentors and youth. Thanks to funding from the Community Initiatives Fund (CIF), evaluation has been a part of this work since its inception. Namely, evaluation tools were developed and implemented to track elements of developmental relationships, which is a heavily researched set of outcomes that typically occur in mentor-mentee relationships. It is understood through five main areas¹:

1. Express Care

- a. Show me that I matter to you.
 - Be Dependable - Be someone I can trust
 - Listen - Really pay attention when we are together
 - Believe in Me - Make me feel known and valued
 - Be Warm - Show me you enjoy being with me
 - Encourage - Praise me for my efforts and achievement

2. Challenge Growth

- a. Push me to keep getting better.
 - Expect My Best - Expect me to live up to my potential
 - Stretch - Push me to go further
 - Reflect on Failures - Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks
 - Hold Me Accountable - Insist I take responsibility for my actions

3. Provide Support

- a. Complete tasks and achieve goals.
 - Navigate - Guide me through hard situations and systems
 - Empower - Build my confidence to take charge of my life
 - Advocate - Defend me when I need it
 - Set Boundaries - Put in place limits that keep me on track

4. Share Power

- a. Treat me with respect and give me a say.
 - Respect Me - Take me seriously and treat me fairly
 - Include Me - Involved me in decisions that affect me
 - Collaborate - Work with me to solve problems and reach goals
 - Let Me Lead - Create opportunities for me to take action and lead

5. Expand Possibilities

- a. Connect me with people and place that broaden my world.
 - Broaden Horizons - Expose me to new ideas, experiences and places
 - Inspire - Inspire me to see possibilities for my future
 - Connect - Introduce me to more people who can help me develop and thrive

The central approach to measuring developmental relationships is through asking questions around each of these five areas to both mentors and mentees using multiple tools. These tools were created with BBBS and have been used consistently for two years. They were also built to include perspectives from parents and guardians as well as qualitative data to companion the quantitative data. As a summary, the methods used to create this report included:

¹ As cited by BBBS Calgary at: <https://bbbscalgary.ca/mentoringrelationships/>

- **Developmental Relationship surveys (intentionality tools) that measure the five developmental relationship areas** (data from a combined 414 youth, guardians, or mentors is included in this report)
- **A parent & guardian survey**
 - A survey aimed at gathering perspectives on the five developmental relationship areas from parents or guardians of mentee participating in programming (60 responses from January 2021 – March 2022 are included in this report [31 from 2022])
- **The most significant change technique**
 - Completed with both mentors (61 total responses) and youth (33 total responses)
 - Gathers impact-related qualitative information by asking two open ended questions. For example, mentee were asked:
 - Since you met your mentor, what has been the biggest growth you've seen in yourself?
 - Why does that growth matter to you? Why was it important that change happened to you?

The results from these three methods are woven together and presented as a single narrative throughout this report while being framed according to CIF's priority areas. To obtain specifics or more information on the methods used, contact Micheal Heimlick at micheal@reciprocalconsulting.ca

Did Children develop their social, emotional, language, and communication skills? – Challenge Growth & Express Care

When asked to share what their biggest area of personal growth has been since participating in the developmental relationship programming, many mentees reported improvements in their social, emotional, language, and communication skills. Specifically, mentees reported an **increase in relationships and relationship skills**, where they noted an improvement in communication, and in having their mentor as a reliable person they can trust. Mentees also reported an **increase in socializing**, meaning comfort and enjoyment in socializing and talking with new people:

"I would just say it kept me going, it helped me to be more friendly and come out of my shell" – Mentee

Further, mentees reported an improvement in emotions, where they generally feel less anxious and happier as their biggest growth since meeting their mentor. When asked why that growth is important, mentees reported an **increase in connection to others**. Mentees explained this looks like making more friends, an ability to relate and trust other people, and feel accepted by others. Mentees also noted an **increase in communication skills** where they generally communicated better and are more thoughtful about their words. Finally, mentees reported this growth is important as they **treat others kindly**, are less grumpy, and get into less conflict.

Mentors and guardians also recognized significant changes in mentees' social, emotional, language, and communication skills. Mentors largely reported mentees having **deeper connections**. Specifically, mentors noted mentees opening up and being vulnerable in their conversations about topics such as school, life, friendships and bullying:

"My mentee has slowly been opening up more. He was telling me a story the other day and his smile was so big and he was very giggly, something that hasn't happen in the last couple of months of our time together." - Mentor

Mentors further explained that mentees appear to have developed trust with them which, in turn, allowed the mentee to share personal experiences and generally be more comfortable. It was also described that mentees are engaged in the relationship wherein they come out of their 'shell' evidenced by starting to take initiative with activities and conversations. Further, mentors reported mentees **expressing themselves** in the sense of increased expression of opinions, feelings, and generally showing personalities more. Mentors gave more laughter, having fun together, and sharing a hug as ways that mentees were expressing themselves.

Both mentors and guardians reported an increase in mentee **communication skills**. As examples, this group stated that mentees started to talk more and to new people, are more aware of their responses to others and are taking more initiative to connect with others. Mentors believed this was an important step for mentees because they learn to verbally express their emotions and feel they have a safe space to talk about how they are feeling. Mentors also noted an improvement in mentee speech development, and how this will be important to build confidence while speaking as it is a lifelong skill and essential to success:

"I think it matters because it allows her to know that her voice and opinion matter and she can have the confidence to voice an opinion when it matters and believe in herself." - Mentor

Both mentors and guardians also shared how the biggest change they have seen in the youth has the creation of a **healthy relationship**. In other words, they described that having a role model to look up to and a healthy relationship with someone they trust outside of the home was hugely important. This is because it helps to ensure the mentee does not feel alone and that they have someone they can trust and relate to. Mentors and guardians also noted how this healthy relationship allowed for mentees to build confidence and make new friends. Mentors largely spoke about how mentees have allowed the mentor 'in', which has been vital and evident to develop trust, and be comfortable to talk to their mentor, and for the mentor to help provide guidance:

"I think as a mentor, one of the impacts I want to have on my mentee is to ensure that they are comfortable around me and they know that I am a safe space. My mentee having the ability to grow in this space shows not only that she finds that [safe] space in our relationship but also that we are honest and transparent with each other." - Mentor

"I think that communication skills are really important, paired with a trusting relationship. [Mentee] is able to comprehend the world around her and values good people in her life. Having the ability to seek healthy friendships and relationships are going to be a critical part of her development in her teenage years." - Mentor

"I believe this matters because it is important to be able to make good relationships and being comfortable around people is important in that. It's also important to be able to talk to people about what is going on in their lives for good mental health." - Mentor

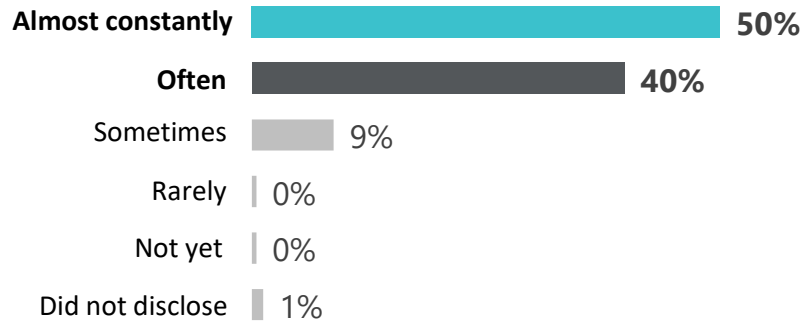
Finally, parents and guardians spoke about how they have seen mentees' **positive emotional development** grow since meeting their mentor. Parents and guardians shared how their child or grandchild has been happier and more engaged with others. Finally, parents and guardians outlined how this change in their child, grandchild, or student is important because it **supports families** - particularly single parent families:

"It's very important because I'm a single mother and it helps my son a lot that he has a male mentor, Big Brother." - Parent or guardian

“My son now has a male relationship that is all his which he has been missing since the passing of his father. A positive male role model is vital in a boys life. It’s great to see him look forward to things and share in that excitement.” – Parent or guardian

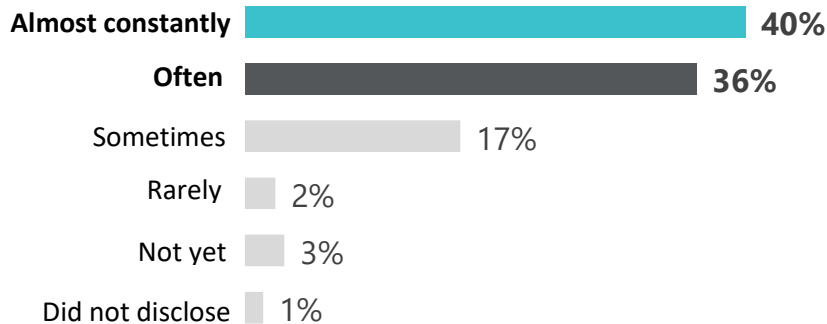
Evidence from the most significant change technique was backed by survey and DR relationship tool evidence, which outlined that combined 90% of respondents believed that their relationship almost constantly (50%) or often (40%) expressed care.

Nearly all respondents said that their mentor almost constantly or often expressed care.



Finally, as evidence of development of social, emotional, language, and communication skills, a combined 76% of respondents said that their DR relationship almost constantly (40%) or often (36%) challenged growth in the mentee.

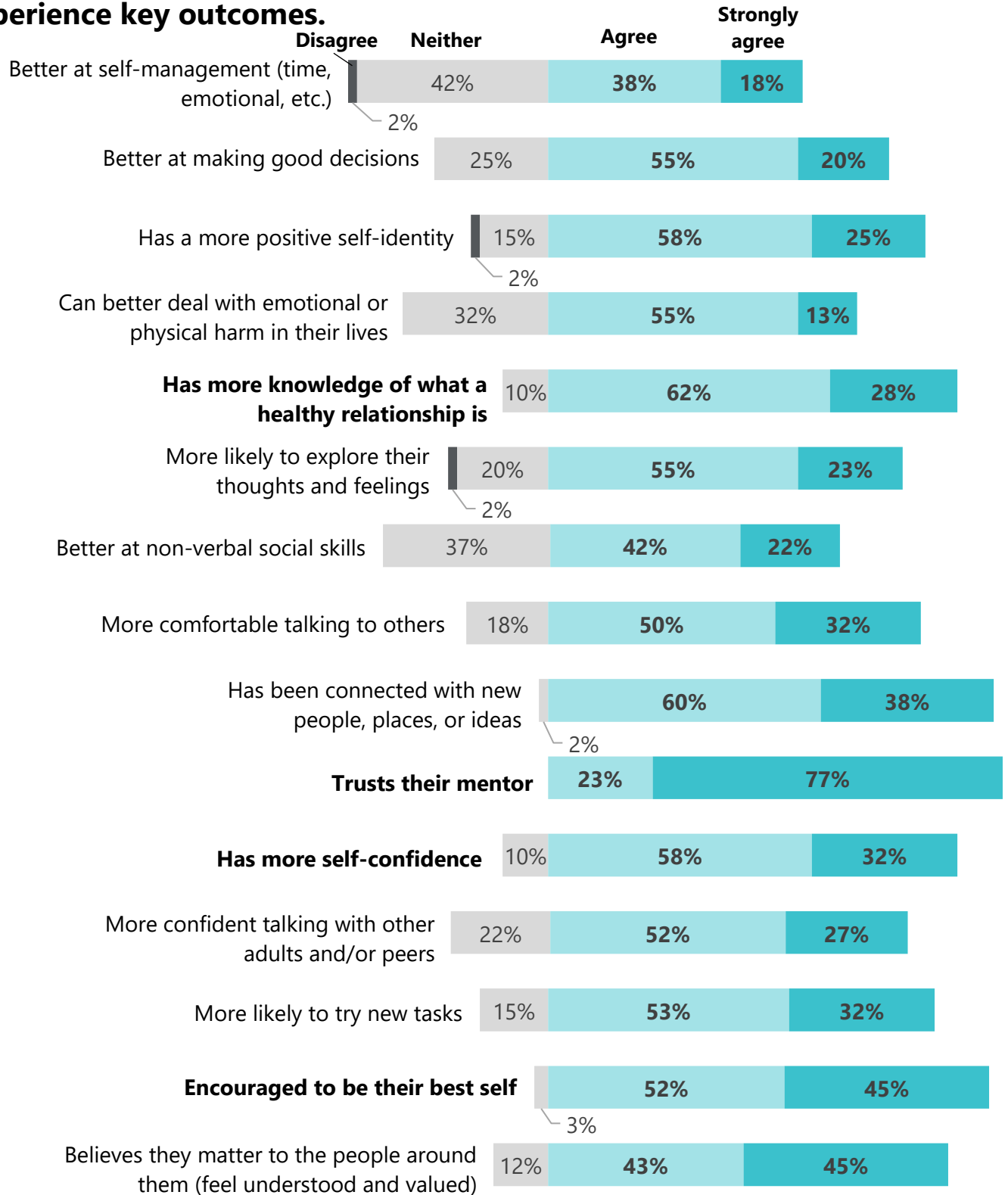
Many respondents said that their mentor almost constantly or often challenged growth.



Additionally, quantitative evidence from the parent & guardian survey showed that they believe mentees are experiencing a number of positive outcomes from DR relationship programming. Although many agreed or strongly agreed that all the outcomes related to the five DR elements appear to be happening, the ones that stand out from the rest are:

- **Mentees have more knowledge of what a healthy relationship is** (also seen in the qualitative evidence; 62% agree, 28% strongly agree)
- **Trust in their mentor** (23% agree, 77% strongly agree)
- **Mentees have more self-confidence** (58% agreed, 32% strongly agreed)
- **Mentees are encouraged to be their best self** (52% agreed, 45% strongly agreed).

Many parents and guardians **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that developmental relationships programming has helped their child experience key outcomes.



Did Children and youth participate in learning, culture, and recreation programs? – Expand Possibilities

Through the most significant change data, many mentees reported an **increased interest in activities** (e.g., recreation programs). It appears that offering mentees the opportunity to try new things through DR relationships have helped them to become interested in new hobbies, interests and activities. Examples given included working on vehicles, playing sports, and learning to take care of a dog

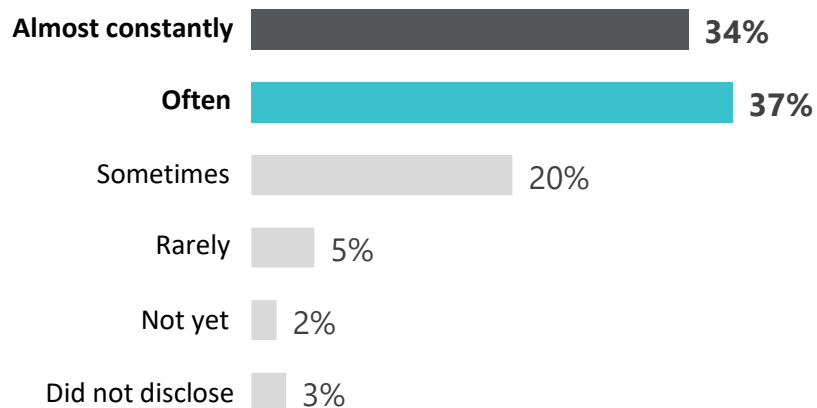
“[I] like having a big sister to go out and have fun go to different places” - Mentee

Mentees thought this was important because it:

- Helped get mentees are getting out of their comfort zone and willing to try new things
- Assisted in gaining real-world experience
- Helps them participate in school
- Helps them be more active
- Was fun (mentees stated having more fun when they are outgoing and participating in new activities with their mentor)

Similarly, mentors, parents, and guardians also noted mentees engagement with **new activities**. They shared how they noticed the youth wanting to try out new things and getting outside and doing activities with their mentor, backing up what mentees were saying. Interestingly, mentors described how engaging and having interest in new activities has supported mentees’ **curiosity** (e.g., they are asking more questions and are open to trying new things). Mentors and parents or guardians found this support of exploration to **broaden the youth perspectives** and experiences by getting out and into the community. This sentiment is backed up by DR tool evidence, which shows that a combined 71% said that the DR relationship almost constantly (34%) or often (37%) expanded possibilities for mentors and mentees.

Many respondents said that their mentor almost constantly or often expanded possibilities.



Finally, mentors, parents and guardians spoke about how being interested and engaged in new activities, exploring the community, and broadening perspectives has supported youth’s life goals. For some this meant helping the mentees realize their potential as individuals (including being more thoughtful, respectful

and accountable). While for others this meant having post-secondary aspirations and helping mentees decide what they want to do for their future as they get older.

“By having confidence in yourself, you keep so many doors open for your future. You change from ‘I can’t do it, so why should I even try?’ to ‘I would love to try, and see where it takes me!’ This matters.” - Mentor

“She is very personable and she will more than likely come into a career where this is an asset. Getting used to talking to people, approaching people, there is no limit to the places she can take her career as she expands her network.” – Mentor

Did Children and youth gain the knowledge, skills, and supports to develop positive mental health, self-esteem, and healthy lifestyle behaviours? – Share Power & Provide Support

In the most significant change data, many mentees reported gaining knowledge, skills and the necessary support to **improving their behaviour**. Specifically, many mentees shared that they are better at being open with trying new things, to talking to their mentor, and comfortable stating what they want. Mentees also shared how their relationship with their mentor allowed them to learn to be more thoughtful and mindful of others. Some mentees also spoke about learning to be more kind, nice, calm, and less reactive to conflict. Mentees also spoke about how **their confidence has improved**. The majority of mentees spoke about how they used to be shy, but are now more confident in themselves, how they speak, and around their peers. To mentees, this increased confidence has allowed them to be more comfortable with who they are as individuals.

“It matters because having [my mentor] allowed me to find my voice” – Mentee

“My mentee has gained a lot of self-confidence. He feels that he is able to do anything he sets his mind to and achieve it with hard work!” – Mentor

“His confidence has grown so much! He isn’t nearly as shy as he was when we first started meeting.” – Mentor

“Her ability to be herself around everyone she meets instead of just the people she is comfortable around. She has become so confident in the last few years.” – Mentor

This change in behaviour and growth in confidence appears to have allowed youth to feel more **empowered**. Mentees also spoke about how feeling empowered has allowed them to be more independent where they are comfortable to go out with their mentor by themselves (while also enjoying it). They also noted how their increased confidence allows them to speak up more and so on when they need to. Mentees also described how DR programming has been **grounding** for themselves, where they outlined how they have been able to overcome social anxiety and are able to be more present in the moment. Similarly, mentors, parents and guardians spoke about how they also witnessed improved confidence evidenced through expressing themselves, being comfortable with being themselves, and improved self-esteem:

“She is more assertive in her opinions which builds a better foundation for her to become a strong adult” – Parent or Guardian

“She believes in her abilities more now than she had before. She started facing some of her fears, i.e. riding a bike, and overcame them.” – Parent or guardian

“Having a voice is very important. Standing up for yourself, being able to express opinions, it is a life skill. Having the self-confidence and seeing yourself as important is so valuable. Feeling like you matter in the world.” – Parent or guardian

“Confidence in kids helps them to value themselves and their abilities. It helps with their self-esteem and allows them to be comfortable with who they are, believe in themselves and feel proud of anything they accomplish.” – Mentor

Mentors, parents and guardians also outlined that DR relationship programming has helped the youth be more reasonable and positively engage with others. For example, youth became excited to share about their week, were generally in a more positive mood, and engaged with adults in a constructive way compared to before their time in the program. Mentors, parents and guardians’ credit this change to developing accountability to their mentor for their behaviour where they want their mentor to think the best of them.

Mentors also noted how their mentees found a renewed sense of worthiness where their thoughts and feelings were deemed important and valued. Further describing this, mentors spoke about how this was critical for youth to feel safe to be themselves. For example”

“[This change is] important because she can use this confidence and trust in herself that she has gained in other areas of her life as she gets older. She can trust herself to blossom in social situations instead of becoming anxious or afraid of what might happen. She has so much more fun when she feels comfortable to be herself, so this confidence will be a great thing in her life going forward.” – Mentor

When asked about the most significant change, many mentors, parents and guardians spoke about the ways in which they witnessed youth **mature** since their involvement with the developmental relationship programming. Parallel to this, mentors shared how their mentees have ‘grown up’ and matured in their time together. Specifically, they described witnessing them become young adults who are caring and respectful of themselves and others. This maturity extended to an **increased level of mentee independence** and included making their own decisions, thinking about their future, and transitioning from foster care to independent living. For example:

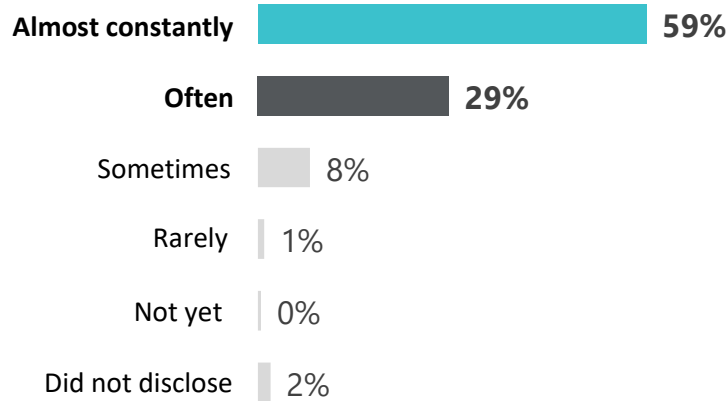
“This growth has helped her to make new friends and find a group of people that she really connects with. Her confidence at home and at school or out in public is such a huge change compared to when we met her – her shyness used to define her schedule, her routine, and her hobbies. And now she is excited to try new things and meets so many great people along the way.” – Mentor

“I think that establishing consistency in relationships has the subsequent effect of my mentee becoming more open to others, feeling more included at school, and being more trusting to receiving support.” – Mentor

“My mentee struggled with many facets in life; I’m so proud of her that she shares and reaches out to make the best decisions for herself. It matters because she matters!” – Mentor

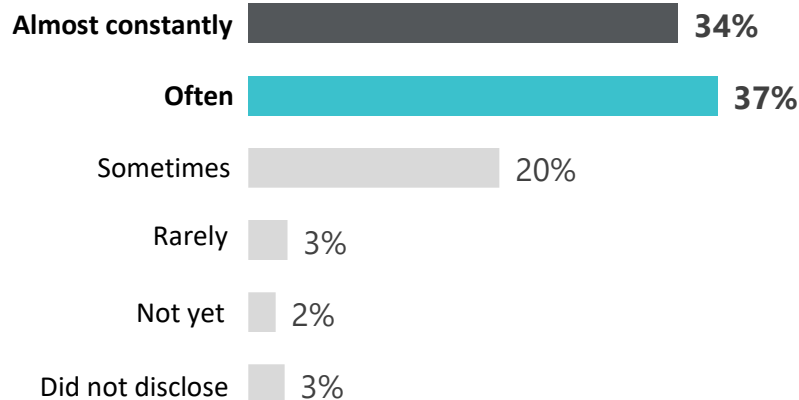
As with the previous two categories, quantitative evidence from the DR tools backed many of the sentiments outlined above. Namely, a combined 88% of respondents said that mentees and mentors almost constantly (59%) or often (29%) shared power in their DR relationships. This is a likely contributor to an increased sense of decision making and empowerment outlined above.

Many respondents said that their mentor almost constantly or often shared power.



However, many of the findings, including a sense of empowerment, are likely facilitated by the nature of the relationship between mentors and mentees. In addition to the positive evidence already outlined, a combined 71% of respondents said that their mentor almost constantly (34%) or often (37%) provided support to them. Therefore, a supportive DR relationship is a likely contributor to many of the outcomes already outlined.

Many respondents said that their mentor almost constantly or often provided support.



What Outcomes Did Mentors Experience?

When asked to share the largest personal growth for themselves since meeting their mentee, many mentors reported how being a mentor has **broadened their perspective**. Mentors often shared how they have learned to be more open minded and accepting of differences. Encouragingly, this extended to realizations of how different other people’s realities are from their own. Many mentors shared how this was particularly useful in understanding the potential struggles of youth and their experiences and perspective in life and, consequently, made them better mentors (described as being more empathetic).

Further, many reported improvements in their **communication skills**, and particularly in effectively communicating with kids:

“Trying to understand that kids do not let on all that they are feeling. Talking to my little sibling more.” – Mentor

“I have become a much more empathetic person. Listening to my mentee tell me that she lacks friends at school or has troubles at home with her family has made me much more aware and empathetic of the struggles that youth face every day. During my childhood, I didn’t pay much attention to other’s social circumstances or who was or was not lacking friendship and companionship. Now as an adult, I am much more keen of others and the barriers they face to making the same types of relationships that I had the privilege of making during my childhood.” – Mentor

Mentors shared how this is important for understanding and helping others. Particularly, empathy keeps them grounded and humbled within their community and has made them a more caring person. They also shared how this has made them more compassionate and aware of the people around them and what they have to offer.

For some, an improvement in communication skills also meant an improvement in listening skills. This meant being better at asking questions and listening fully prior to acting. It is likely that this helped many mentors experience becoming a **role model** for their mentees. Operationally, this included showing up consistently and understanding how to interact and remain relevant for their mentee. One mentor shared:

“I think just being more open-minded and expanding my knowledge about what a mentor looks like. Sometimes it can be offering advice and sharing your knowledge about your own experience but a big part of my mentorship is having a good time with my mentee.” – Mentor

Mentors spoke about how learning to be a role model meant accountability of their actions and inactions. This meant working to be consistent, responsible, and emotionally open to try and have a positive impact:

“Even though I don’t have a degree and I’m not a ‘worldly’ person-my commitment to an hour a week just visiting, doing crafts or getting beat at checkers can make a positive impact in a child’s life.” – Mentor

Learning to become a role model also meant mentors had to learn to role model self-care, and to learn to not use self-deprecating humor to discourage negative behavior. Mentors shared that learning to be a good role model is important because they saw it as a venue to be a leader and help direct a young person in the right areas. Mentors also shared how it was important to resist the narrative of what an ‘ideal’ mentor looked like (e.g., someone with specific skills or experience), but rather someone who shows up with an open mind and willingness to help.

Additionally, many mentors spoke about how they became much more **self-aware** since meeting their mentee. This included a self-awareness of capacity, boundary setting and implementing, patience with their mentee, and feeling more comfortable with youth. Mentors spoke about how this is important for their self-growth as they want to improve themselves and learn from others and grow as a person. Respondents also shared how this is important for helping them with other relationships in their life as they are better listeners and more willing to dedicate time to relationships that they might not have before meeting their mentee. Mentors also noted they learned fluidity and how to pivot conversations and activities when needed. To them, it helped them become more patient listeners with their mentees and others in their life.

Finally, mentors shared how their own **self-esteem** and self-confidence has improved largely due to being pushed out of their comfort zone through DR programming. Mentors also noted an improvement in their



mental health because of their desire to maintain a healthy mind for their mentee, as well as learning how to set and implement healthy boundaries. These outcomes appear to have helped mentors feel rewarded and fulfilled, as many mentors shared how they have cultivated a passion to help and support others, and take pride in making a difference:

*“It [mentoring] gives me a sense of purpose and reason for doing what I’m doing and major emotional fulfilment and reward out of it” – **Mentor***