The inaugural National Mentoring Symposium was held in Banff, Alberta from November 5 to 7, 2013. The symposium celebrated 100 years of mentoring across Canada by showcasing innovative mentoring partnerships, practices, programs and research and to set the stage for mentoring in the future.

The Alberta Mentoring Partnership, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada and the Government of Alberta provided funding for this first ever symposium.

Feedback on the symposium was obtained through:

- An onsite survey administered through the symposium app, the average response rate was 32%.
- Providing responses to the sentence prompts “I have learned …” and “I am inspired to …” posted in the main plenary room.
- An online follow up survey emailed to all symposium delegates (excluding youth forum members), 43% of delegates responded to the survey. Most questions were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely).
- The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research provided in kind evaluation support for the symposium.

Who attended?

- A total of 242 delegates (217 delegates and 25 youth forum members) attended the symposium.
- Attendees came from a variety of roles including service providers (front line and management), other roles, government representatives, researchers and business owners. Respondents had been in their role for an average of 8 years.
- Most participants were from Alberta (73%).
- 41% stated that their ministry, agency or organization was a partner with the Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP).
- 29% (37% AMP) of attendees were mentors.

How did people feel overall?

- The majority of delegates felt that the symposium was an overall success, with 83% (82% AMP) stating it was very or extremely worthwhile to attend.

“It was amazing how well it was put together from the accommodations, to the speakers, and variety of sessions to attend. Thank you!”
How did people feel overall? (Continued)

- Attendees also shared how they were inspired by the symposium sharing “I am inspired to … make my mentoring program even better” and “create a ripple effect and make a change!!”

- There was also a desire for the symposium to continue in the future, with participants stating “Please continue this event if possible!”

“I hope that this conference is the first of many. It would be great to have more Canadian content next time - research and programs featured.”

How did we do in conveying mentoring research?

Objective: To learn from the latest findings in mentoring research, and identify needed directions for new research.

- The research institutes were well attended, with an average attendance of 48 delegates per session.

- Respondents learned about the value of mentoring (85% very/extremely; 98% AMP), the latest research findings (63% very/extremely; 74% AMP) and about innovative research (60% very/extremely; 55% AMP).

- 68% agreed/strongly agreed (63% AMP) that they would take action on what they learned about mentoring in terms of research.

“I have already reached out to connect with some of the researchers to build partnerships on future projects.”

“I have learned … about initiatives in our country that I didn't know existed.”

“There was a big gap between the research being presented and the program application where most of us attending work.”

How did we do regarding programs sharing their work?

Objective: To provide an opportunity for mentoring programs to share their work and what they have found to be effective in their practice.

- 78% agreed/strongly agreed (76% AMP) that they would take action on what they learned at the symposium in terms of their practice.

- 59% (very/extremely; 53% AMP) of respondents learned about new resources to support their mentoring work.

- Participants learned first hand knowledge (60% very/extremely 69% AMP).

- Finally, 64% (very/extremely; 64% AMP) increased their knowledge of the core components of mentoring.

- Participants learned how to knowledge (55% very/extremely; 71% AMP).

“There was lot of general information being presented but those of use developing policy and program delivery plans need examples of specifics – we have a pretty good handle on what we need to do, help with the doing would be appreciated.”

How did we do in exploring how mentoring works in different populations?

Objective: To explore the application and impact of mentoring in the context of various populations of children and youth and across a continuum from promotion and prevention to intervention.

- 53% (very/extremely; 69% AMP) of attendees reported increasing their knowledge of how mentoring can be applied to different populations.

“I have learned about the possibility of e-mentoring for remote populations.”
How did we do in exploring how mentoring works in different populations? (Continued)

- 64% (very/extremely; 74% AMP) learned of the impact of mentoring with different populations of children and youth.

“I will incorporate information about mentoring aboriginal youth and immigrant youth in the peer mentoring program that I am involved in.”

How did we do regarding providing a forum for youth?

**Objective:** To provide a forum for youth who have been mentored or who are mentors to share their perceptions and experiences.

- 68% (very/extremely; 73% AMP) increased their knowledge of youth forum member’s perceptions and experiences with mentoring

“The Youth Forum was awesome! It would have been good to introduce the youth at the beginning so that we would know who they were/what their role was so that when we saw them throughout the conference, I would have taken the initiative to meet and get to know them.”

How did we do regarding providing opportunities for networking?

**Objective:** To provide opportunities for informal networking and explore interest and potential mechanisms for ongoing linkages and sharing of practices among mentoring programs in Canada.

- The symposium encouraged networking among attendees, with most delegates connecting with new (someone they hadn’t met before) service providers (77% very/extremely; 81% AMP).

- Many participants used the cracker barrel session, as well the health breaks and meals to network with others, delegates commented: “This was a great opportunity to collect business cards and information”.

- However, there were some comments that additional down time would have further facilitated networking (e.g. “I would have appreciated more time to mingle with other people at the conference”).

- Also some respondents commented that the opening reception was not conducive to socializing, due to its formal nature (e.g. speeches) and difficulty with the room layout.

What did we learn from AMP partners?

**Objective:** To provide opportunities for informal networking and explore interest and potential mechanisms for ongoing linkages and sharing of practices among mentoring programs in Canada.

- When AMP partners were asked about what training topics they would be interested in the future, partners expressed the most interest (agree/strongly agree) in information on:
  - evaluating mentoring programs (87%)
  - reviewing new, evidence-based approaches (89%)
  - using technology in the mentoring relationship (80%)

- Most would like the training sessions delivered by in person sessions (87% agree/strongly agree) followed closely by webinar (86% agree/strongly agree).

- 72% (agree/strongly agree) expressed interest in the partnership providing focused networking opportunities in the future.

The top 5 sessions attended by AMP partners were:* 

1. Prioritizing Youth Safety with Research-Based Mentor Screening Practices
2. Marketing, Media and Modern Consumers: An Open Discussion
3. Serving Target Populations Through Partnership
4. RESEARCH INSTITUTE: Between Data and Decision: Translating Research into Program Improvements and Innovations
5. RESEARCH INSTITUTE: Understanding the Formation and Dissolution of Big Brothers Big Sisters Community mentoring Relationships

*Number of AMP partners in attendance/total attendance for session
Finally, partners were especially interested in annual in person sessions to network (86% agree/strongly agree), followed by community of practice webinars (72% agree/strongly agree).