



Mentoring Refugee, Immigrant & Newcomer Children and Youth

**11 Ways to Overcome
Challenges**



11 Ways to Overcome Challenges in Mentoring Refugee, Immigrant and Newcomer Youth

Siloing Causes Overlap and a Lack of Coordination

Many have flagged the overlapping programs and program times of various mentoring opportunities; there is a shared belief that greater coordination is required.

Work with other agencies in your community to set up a calendar of mentoring program and opportunities. As much as possible, make sure they're offered on different days and times.

Mental Health and Well-Being

This is an issue that everyone agrees needs more understanding and awareness. While you and your volunteers are not expected to be experts in this area, know where to find resources and refer people.

Particularly amongst refugees, family trauma will often carry over and affect the engagement of a youth and their parents.

Look for resources in your community, such as those offered by the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#).

Capacity, Both for the Organization and Individuals Involved

Your organization may only have a handful of staff, and even with program funding struggle to find capacity to administer and deliver that program. You may also end up over-relying on a handful of key individuals, be they staff,

community leaders, or mentors. This can cause burnout or disengagement over time.

Understand the commitment involved in your program, and only take on what you can manage. Work closely with volunteers to understand their capacity, and ask them to help recruit or refer additional mentors.

Make use of [AMP materials](#) to help promote your program, and to recruit and train more volunteers.

Misconceptions

There is a lack of understanding amongst both participants and their families and mentors about what's involved. This can be anything from program eligibility to a belief that mentoring is something for other cultures or socio-economic groups.

For mentors, this usually stems from a lack of information up front, specifically regarding the time frame and other parameters of their commitment.

Be clear about the time commitment involved. Share program materials and information with families to create confidence in your program.

Program Policies and Paperwork

This administrative burden creates problems for both the individuals and groups offering the programs, and the participants and their families. There may be a language barrier, and the amount of paperwork a new arrival to Canada deals with is often overwhelming.

Some paperwork, such as permission slips, is important. Be aware of the amount involved and focus on the key information.





Matching the Right Volunteer to the Right Role

Organizations regularly struggle with finding the right match.

Get to know your volunteers, and what they're looking for from this experience.

Employable Skills

Newcomers, particularly refugees, often encounter a skills or credentials gap. Studies have shown that this is a top priority for Syrian newcomers in particular.

Reach out to local businesses about volunteering, and opportunities and mentor newcomers and refugees in the workplace.

Cultural Alienation or Lack of Acceptance

In some cases, a refugee or newcomer may not feel comfortable accessing cultural or mainstream services. One example is LGBTQ community members, who may have left their home country because of oppression and risk. Many are more likely to seek out their local Pride Centre or a similar LGBTQ-serving organization.

Get to know your program participants, and find a mentoring match that works for them. Intercultural mentoring opportunities are a good fit in these cases.

English Language Skills

Developing English language skills is a priority, and often a prerequisite for academic or employment success. Youth may have challenges creating opportunities to develop their English skills.

Programs like conversation clubs help newcomers and refugees with their language skills.

Lack of Available Adult Mentors

In some communities, the population may be weighted towards families, and lack a significant population of adult mentors with the time to volunteer. This creates a burden on the mentors who are available, and limits program growth and success.

Consider alternatives, like peer-to-peer or older youth mentoring younger youth.

Serving Newcomers and Refugees Where a Critical Mass Doesn't Exist

If your community has a small populations of newcomers and refugees, they can run into challenges of connecting with potential participants, or accessing cultural knowledge.

Make use of the resources your community has. Promote intercultural mentoring, and connect with agencies in other communities to learn about how they're reaching newcomer groups.



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