



The Pathfinders Re-Entry Mentoring Program supports individuals transitioning from incarceration back into society.

## 4. Pathfinders Re-Entry Mentoring Program

It focuses on helping participants achieve financial stability, build resilience, and avoid recidivism through mentoring. Mentors are volunteers who work alongside Pathfinders' coordinators to offer personalized guidance, helping mentees navigate challenges like employment, housing, and social reintegration. The study explores the effectiveness of this mentoring model, its unique approach to social service advocacy, and the relationships between mentors, mentees, and coordinators.

### 1. Reasons for Reduced Retention

- **Immediate Needs and Crises:** Participants often face urgent challenges (e.g., homelessness, joblessness) that divert attention away from the mentoring program.
- **Scheduling Conflicts:** Mentees, particularly those employed or fulfilling parole requirements, struggle to maintain regular contact with mentors due to time constraints.
- **Perception of Mentoring as a Burden:** Some mentees see mentoring as an additional obligation in their already overwhelming schedules, leading to disengagement.

### 2. Elements for Keeping Retention

- **Social Service Advocacy:** Coordinators connect mentees with crucial resources such as housing, clothing, and transportation assistance, which helps alleviate immediate survival pressures and allows mentees to focus on long-term goals.
- **Group Mentoring Sessions:** Mentees who participated in group sessions expressed a sense of community and support that kept them engaged, especially when sessions were held in informal settings like restaurants.
- **Personal Relationships with Coordinators:** Mentees highly valued the ongoing personal support from coordinators, who often acted as a second mentor.

### 3. Strategies and Best Practice Recommendations

#### Successful Strategies

- **Coordinators' Role in Advocacy:** Pathfinders' coordinators not only facilitate mentoring but also provide extensive social service advocacy, which helps mentees access essential services. This dual role improves retention by addressing immediate barriers to success.
- **Volunteer-Based Mentoring:** Utilizing volunteers as mentors rather than professionals reduces power imbalances and allows mentees to feel more comfortable opening up.

#### Unsuccessful Strategies

- **Lack of Flexibility in Scheduling:** One-on-one mentoring was less successful for participants with conflicting obligations. Programs that did not offer flexible meeting times or formats (such as virtual meetings) saw higher dropout rates.
- **Limited Post-Release Support:** Mentors assigned post-release often struggled to keep mentees engaged, as the immediate demands of re-entry (e.g., parole requirements, employment) took priority.

#### Prioritizing the Findings

The most impactful insights for improving retention, especially for community organizations working with low-income Canadians, are:

1. **Holistic Support Through Social Service Advocacy:** Mentees highly valued the extensive support offered by Pathfinders' coordinators, who connected them with housing, transportation, and financial resources. This advocacy helped stabilize participants, making them more likely to stay engaged in the mentoring program.
2. **Group Mentoring as a Retention Tool:** Group mentoring sessions created a sense of community and camaraderie, which made mentees feel supported and kept them engaged. This approach also helped those who had difficulty committing to one-on-one sessions due to scheduling conflicts.
3. **Volunteer Mentors Create Trust:** The use of volunteers allowed mentees to feel more at ease, reducing the perceived power dynamics present in professional mentoring. This trust was key to building meaningful, long-term mentor-mentee relationships.

#### Best Practices Context

- **Advocacy and Resource Coordination:** Pathfinders' success lies in its ability to provide mentees with access to essential services. For low-income Canadians, this model of advocacy ensures participants can focus on financial stability without being overwhelmed by immediate crises.
- **Group Mentoring for Flexibility:** Programs serving vulnerable populations should consider offering group mentoring as an alternative to one-on-one sessions. It provides flexibility and fosters a supportive environment, addressing some of the logistical barriers participants face.