



GEM Lab

Canadian Centre for
Evidence-Based
Mentorship Solutions

Mentorship in a Virtual World

September 2021

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A Letter from GEM

Girls E-Mentorship Innovation (GEM) is a top 100 rated charity offering a research-based mentorship program for high school girls facing socioeconomic barriers to build their professional skills and achieve their academic and career potential.

GEM was founded in 2012 from a vision that all young women should have the opportunity to succeed despite where they've come from or what barriers they've faced. Developed with educators, social workers and policy experts in conjunction with high-school girls using collaborative design-thinking, GEM's dynamic mentorship program was created for girls, by girls, to build their strength to overcome barriers as they transition into adulthood. GEM believes that women mentoring girls is essential in fostering the success of the next generation, and critical to creating gender equity, and building inclusive economic growth in Canada.

This report was written in the summer of 2021 after GEM's first official online cohort. Using external data and data collected through our own program evaluation process, this report outlines the impact of a transition to virtual mentorship on the mentor/mentee relationship and the program in general. Based on GEM's experience with virtual mentorship, this report provides best practices and recommendations for virtual mentor/mentee relationships and virtual mentorship programs.

It is our hope that by publishing this report, organizations across Canada can benefit from our extensive research in the field of mentorship and provide evidence-based mentorship services to support adolescent girls and women.



Wendy Sung-Aad
Executive Director



Rochelle de Goias-Jackman
Founder and Board Co-Chair

Executive Summary

This report will begin with an examination of external studies on both in-person and virtual mentorship models. It will then examine virtual learning in the GEM context through a comparison of the outcomes for the 2019-20 in-person cohort and the 2020-21 virtual cohort. This report will conclude with an examination of feedback from our program participants in the areas of the mentorship relationship, learning and curriculum, events, program outreach and recruitment, and internal community-building. Based on the findings discussed in these sections, this report will present several recommendations for best practices for the virtual mentorship model.

Research Findings

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to transition online and stay at home in order to stop the spread of the virus. This lack of connection and required isolation among adolescent youth led to a number of adverse mental, physical and emotional health outcomes, as identified in GEM's report, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescent Youth in Canada." According to Kaufman et al, "social isolation can lead to low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, abuse, and suicidal ideation, particularly for adolescents who rely heavily on peer interactions."¹ Because of the consistent support and sense of community that are inherent in mentorship programs, involvement in such programs can be extremely beneficial for youth in times of crisis.²

GEM's internal findings presented throughout this report are consistent with the external research: mentorship programs, both in-person and virtual, lead to positive personal and professional outcomes for youth. Conducting mentorship programs virtually, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, can allow for greater accessibility among participants and improved educational outcomes for youth. Conducting mentorship virtually can also lead to challenges, however, with communication and the mental health of participants. While online events were engaging and informative, virtual participants were less able to network and develop relationships when compared to in-person participants. By implementing the following best practices and recommendations, virtual mentorship participants can overcome these challenges and reach their fullest potential.

Recommendations

Based on the quantitative outcomes, the qualitative feedback, and the conversations had during participant focus groups, the following recommendations are presented for virtual mentorship.

Building a Virtual Mentor/Mentee Relationship

1. **Communication:**
 - a. Encourage mentors and mentees to maintain consistent communication with each other.
 - b. Encourage both parties to contact the GEM Team if they are struggling to communicate.
2. **Relationship-Building:**
 - a. Encourage mentors to break the ice, share personal experiences, and try to develop a friendship with their mentee.
 - b. Encourage mentors to contact the GEM Team if they are having a challenging time breaking the ice.
3. **In-Person Meeting:**
 - a. Encourage mentors and mentees to meet face-to-face via video conference at the beginning of the relationship, even if they prefer to communicate via phone calls later on. This will help to promote accountability and a closer personal bond.
 - b. When safe, it is encouraged that mentors and mentees meet at least once in-person at the beginning of their relationship. Even if the mentorship program continues to run online, encouraging mentors and mentees to meet in-person will promote accountability and help build a stronger personal connection.
4. **Monthly Meetings:**
 - a. Develop a sample agenda for monthly meetings to help mentors and mentees stay on task throughout the relationship.
 - b. Encourage mentees to reflect on what they want to take away from the mentorship experience prior to the start of the relationship. Remind mentees to return to this reflection throughout the year and ensure that they are taking full advantage of the experience.
5. **Professional Connections:**
 - a. Encourage mentors to introduce their mentees to other mentors based on career interests.
 - b. Encourage mentors to take advantage of Mentor City peer support groups and the Mentor Network to connect with other mentors.

Recommendations for Virtual Mentorship Programs

1. **Events:**
 - a. Add polls and other interactive features to PowerPoint presentations to promote engagement.
2. **Program Administration/Relationship Management:**
 - a. Set clear expectations for mentors and mentees about time commitment and communication to avoid inconsistencies and burnout. Encourage participants to contact the GEM Team if their mentor or mentee is non-responsive.

- b. Implement Mentor City as a centralized location for all program communication, announcements, and resources.
- c. Provide mentors with a “list of ideas for safe and appropriate ways of connecting with mentees, both in person and digitally,” according to local public health guidelines.³

3. **Networking:**

- a. Create more opportunities for building community among mentors and mentees.
 - i. Host informal social events and speed-networking events in addition to existing curriculum-based events.
 - ii. Create peer support groups for mentors on Mentor City.
 - iii. Create professional networking groups for mentor and mentee pairs on Mentor City.
 - iv. Create a Whatsapp group for all mentees to connect on.

Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world transitioned from in-person events to virtual in the spring of 2020. Organizations around the world, including Girls E-Mentorship (GEM), shifted all programming and curriculum to a virtual format in order to stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2. While the transition to a virtual program presented numerous challenges, it also provided GEM with an opportunity to expand its impact. Without the limitations that come with booking in-person venues, GEM was able to nearly double our cohort size during 2020-21, from 78 mentees to 120 mentees. In 2021, eighteen months after the world's first lockdowns were announced, the COVID-19 pandemic still continues to impact everyday life in Canada and around the world.

It is clear that the transition to virtual learning and programming will not be a temporary solution to a passing virus. Instead of returning to an in-person model of mentorship, GEM will welcome 150 mentees into its second virtual cohort in September 2021. In order to continue to provide mentees with the opportunity to build their professional skills and achieve their academic and career potential, it is important to reflect on the lessons learned from the first year of virtual learning and programming.

This report will begin with an examination of external studies on both in-person and virtual mentorship models. It will then examine virtual learning in the GEM context through a comparison of the outcomes for the 2019-20 in-person cohort and the 2020-21 virtual cohort. This report will conclude with an examination of feedback from our program participants in the areas of the mentorship relationship, learning and curriculum, events, program outreach and recruitment, and internal community-building. Based on the findings discussed in these sections, this report will present several recommendations for best practices for the virtual mentorship model.

The Traditional Mentorship Model

The impact of mentorship programs on youth has been well documented in academic literature. This section will begin with a general discussion on the positive characteristics of the mentor/mentee relationship model.

Characteristics of Positive Long-Term Relationships

Renée Spencer, in her article for *Youth and Society*, identified four positive characteristics of long-term mentor relationships that resulted in positive outcomes for youth.⁴ First, authenticity, or “engaging with a relational partner in a genuine way,” was identified by youth as being “critical to developing trust in their mentors.”⁵ Mentors were required to exhibit “relational anticipatory empathy,” which is defined as balancing the need for emotional responsiveness towards one’s mentee with the potential consequences of expressing one’s opinions.⁶ This was especially necessary when mentors and mentees were from different socio-economic backgrounds. Second, Spencer identified empathy as being important for youth in mentoring relationships. Mentors expressed empathy by attempting to understand their mentees’ challenges in the context of their lives, encouraging “overall positive development” as opposed to “fixing” smaller problems.⁷ Mentees who noticed this approach by their mentors “thrived on the sense of self-confidence this knowledge elicited in them.”⁸ Third, collaboration was described as a crucial part of the mentoring relationship for youth. In such relationships, “the pairs joined together to promote the growth and development of the adolescents” based on the “knowledge they had about the skills, capacities, and interests of the other.”⁹ Finally, youth noted that a companionship and the “feeling that they mattered to their mentor ... [was] psychologically nurturing and sustaining.”¹⁰

What Youth Consider Essential in Mentorship

In their study with youth from age thirteen to twenty years old, Greeson and Bowen sought to determine how youth describe their relationships with mentors, what youth consider essential components of these relationships, and how youth benefit from these relationships. Throughout this study, youth identified bi-directional trust, a sense of love and caring, as well as a parent-child dynamic as being important in their relationship with their mentor.¹¹ According to Greeson and Bowen, these qualities indicate a “hierarchy or ‘ladder’ of development” – mentors and mentees must first establish trust, then a sense of love and caring before they can achieve a parent-child dynamic in their relationship.¹² Pushing youth to attach too quickly will lead to negative outcomes. The youth in this study identified four different types of support that youth identified as being critical in their relationship with their mentor.¹³ First, they identified emotional support, which is defined as the availability of the mentor when an issue arises. Second, they identified informational support, which is identified as the ability of the mentor to provide information and

support based on their own experiences. Third, they identified appraisal support, which is defined as the ability of the mentor to offer their opinion on how to handle a particular situation. Finally, they identified informational support, which is defined as the material items and assistance with basic tasks that the mentors were able to provide.

Positive Developmental Impacts of Mentorship

According to Ahrens et al, when mentors and mentees are able to achieve a positive, supportive relationship, there are several positive developmental impacts for youth.¹⁴ First, mentors provide “socio-emotional development,” especially with skills that are important to “healthy relationships such as healthy conflict resolution, anger management, and setting boundaries with peers.”¹⁵ Second, mentors can support their mentees’ cognitive development, teaching their mentees planning and problem-solving skills, as well as independent living skills.¹⁶ Finally, mentors can help their mentees “understand their own potential/self-worth and connect them with other people and/or resources.”¹⁷

Therefore, involvement in a mentorship program can have a significant impact on the personal and professional development of youth. Authenticity, empathy, collaboration, consistent communication, bi-directional trust, and support are characteristics that will allow youth to develop a strong relationship with their mentor. The next section will discuss the virtual context of the mentoring relationship.

The Virtual Mentorship Model

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person mentorship programs were far more common than e-mentorship programs, with the online programs largely “limited to special populations, such as youth with disabilities, and to programs oriented toward career development in certain areas such as STEM.”¹⁸ In recent years, research has indicated that the online mentorship model can benefit “youth with stigmatized identities (such as sexual and gender minority youth),” as it allows youth to “connect with mentors discreetly without needing to meet in person.”¹⁹

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person events throughout the world were cancelled or required to transition online in order to abide by public health guidelines. Youth were enrolled in online education and extracurricular activities when such a transition was possible. This lack of connection and required isolation among adolescent youth led to a number of adverse mental, physical and emotional health outcomes, as identified in GEM’s report, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescent Youth in Canada.” According to Kaufman et al, “social isolation can lead to low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, abuse, and suicidal ideation, particularly for adolescents who rely heavily on peer interactions.”²⁰ Because of the consistent support and sense of community that are inherent in mentorship programs, involvement in such programs can be extremely beneficial for youth in times of crisis.²¹

Transitioning to a Virtual Model of Mentorship

Julie E. Speer, Max Lyon, and Julia Johnson “explored how graduate student mentors and undergraduate student mentees at Washington University in St. Louis adapted to virtual mentoring during the COVID-19 pandemic.”²² In this study, 92% of participants indicated that they were required to transition to an online mentorship model as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to their findings, the majority of participants who were required to transition from in-person to virtual mentorship reported positive overall experiences in the context of their relationship, communication, and productivity with their mentor.

(A) Relationship

92% of respondents “indicated overall positive relationships” and 62% of respondents “indicated that their relationships improved” since the transition to a virtual model.²³ Respondents attributed this positive change to the “‘less formal’ nature of virtual mentorship in general, and videoconferencing in particular.” One respondent noted that “my mentor’s family often walks in the background of video calls, which causes meetings to have a more personal and less stiffy formal feel.”²⁴ Similarly, mentors enjoyed getting to learn more about their mentees’ personal lives: “I get to see [pet] photos and learn more about my mentee and her life.”²⁵ For other mentees, however, the transition to a virtual model had a negative impact on their

relationship with their mentor: “the lack of in-person connection hinders building meaningful relationships with mentors.”²⁶ Mentors noted similar struggles to “connect with their mentees: ‘I’ve been having trouble scheduling a common time to contact and meet with my mentee.’”²⁷ Mentors also expressed “concern for their mentees’ mental health and well-being.”²⁸ One mentor reported “having to more thoroughly account for mental and emotional health of my mentee during the pandemic.”²⁹

(B) Communication

77% of respondents who switched to virtual mentoring due to COVID-19 reported “good to very good” communication with their mentor/mentee.³⁰ Once they switched, however, “only 40% indicated positive (better to much better) improvements in communication.”³¹ Participants reported that email and videoconferencing were the most common methods used to communicate with their mentor/mentee, with videoconferencing being the best method and email being the second best of communication.³² Some mentors actually reduced the level of communication they had with their mentee in order to lower the mentees’ perceived workload, but this resulted in the mentees feeling “lost” in their relationship. Mentees also missed the informal relationships and sense of community that develop naturally among participants of in-person programs. Mentorship programs will need to be more intentional when facilitating dialogue among participants – “intentionally taking advantage of informal relationships and communication opportunities may have positive impacts on mentees.”³³ For mentor and mentee pairs, “maintaining communication is absolutely vital.”³⁴

(C) Productivity

69% of respondents who switched from in-person to virtual mentoring due to COVID-19 ranked the productivity of the experience positively.³⁵ Most participants noted “that the change in productivity was generally negative” in a virtual setting.³⁶ Some students, however, found that their productivity increased: “I actually better accomplished my goals during the pandemic. while I miss being in the lab, I really liked remote work because it forced me to think about my work more conceptually and engage with the material.”³⁷ On a positive note, mentees maintained that their relationship provided them with “feelings of productivity during a challenging time,” that it “contributed to learning transferrable skills like adaptability, and allowed them to gain insight into the full goings-on of professional work environments.”³⁸

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Mentorship Relationship

In their study, Kaufman et al explored mentorship experiences for youth during the COVID-19 pandemic by examining “(1) the role of the pandemic on mentor-mentee interactions and relationships and (2) the ways in which mentors could be supported during the health crisis to better meet youth needs.”³⁹

They identified four themes throughout their study: “communication patterns during the pandemic, mentor concerns, types of support mentors provided to their mentees, and mentor needs.”⁴⁰

(A) Communication

Kaufman et al found that throughout the pandemic, mentors connected with their mentees via online video and messaging platforms at a similar frequency to before. Some mentors did experience challenges communicating with their mentees due to a number of issues, including mentees’ lack of access to a computer or an internet connection, mentees’ lack of privacy at home, and scheduling conflicts due to changing school expectations.⁴¹

(B) Mentor Concerns

Mentors reported a number of concerns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including mental health, food insecurity, and physical health. According to Kaufman et al, mental health concerns were largely related to the “isolation the pandemic created and the close quarters families often lived in, [which] inherently constrained privacy and potentially limited youth’s freedom of expression.”⁴² Mentors also reported a lack of access to support or help for some of their mentees living in unsafe conditions during the pandemic. Insufficient food was another concern that mentors reported among their mentees, largely because families no longer had access to food supplies from schools and community organizations. Finally, mentors reported a lack of exercise and physical activity among their mentees. Mentees also experienced “potential virus exposure through working parents or teenage siblings.”⁴³

(C) Mentors As Support

Throughout the pandemic, mentors in this study reported “acting in ways that provided solutions to specific concerns or struggles.”⁴⁴ While some mentors provided their mentees with groceries, masks, and school supplies, other mentors provided academic support to their mentees who struggled with the transition to online learning. Mentors also reported helping their mentees’ families with “job applications, health insurance concerns, or receiving stimulus checks.”⁴⁵ Being flexible throughout the pandemic allowed mentors to provide critical support to their mentees and fill any gaps in their lives.

(D) Mentor Needs

Mentors in this study expressed several areas where they could use additional support during the pandemic. First, mentors would benefit from ideas for safe, outdoor activities that they could enjoy with their mentee. Second, mentors across the board noted that they would highly benefit from an online support group for mentors. This would allow them to “share ideas, discuss experiences, and connect with other

mentors about their own stress and anxiety.”⁴⁶ Other mentors highlighted that “continuous collaboration could provide encouragement and strength, contributing to their own health as well as their effectiveness as mentors.”⁴⁷

“A thoughtful and thorough approach to creating a safe and comfortable space can result in meaningful connections, but understanding and implementing best practices for connecting online is necessary in order to avoid an early dissolution of relationships.”⁴⁸

The results of this study are consistent with the feedback expressed by both Mentor and Mentee participants in GEM’s focus groups, conducted in June 2021. The following sections will discuss these results in the context of virtual mentorship and present several recommendations for best practices.

Reflections on the Virtual GEM Program

GEM conducts extensive evaluations for each cohort to assess their personal and professional development throughout their mentorship relationship. GEM's post-program evaluation can be divided into two categories: the quantitative outcomes that are observed in Mentees as a result of program curriculum and one-on-one mentorship, as well as the qualitative feedback from Mentees on the most valuable aspects of their time in the program. This section will present the data gathered from participants and reflect on both the limitations and benefits to facilitating a virtual mentorship program.

Cohort Size

GEM saw a 53% increase in cohort size as a result of the transition to an online cohort, with 78 Mentees admitted to the 2019-20 cohort and 120 Mentees admitted to the 2020-21 cohort.

There are two noteworthy limitations that resulted from this growth. The first limitation would be the challenge associated with building a sense of community among a larger number of program participants. This challenge was compounded with the difficult nature of building a sense of community among virtual program participants. The second limitation would be that due to the larger number of mentees, the GEM Team had a reduced capacity to develop connections with and support each individual program participant. Given the size of the 2020-21 cohort, the GEM Team was only able to develop close connections with those program participants who frequently spoke in GEMinars, attended voluntary events, and applied for scholarships.

There are also two benefits, however, to such a substantial increase in program participants. First, more young women were able to benefit from GEM's curriculum and professional mentorship program. Second, GEM was able to recruit more mentors and expand its Mentor Network, which will provide mentees with a wide variety of industries to learn about and network with.

Attendance and Events

GEM holds 5 GEMinars throughout the year, hosted by esteemed corporate sponsors that include LinkedIn, Deloitte, Google, Royal Bank of Canada, Unilever, HP Canada, and Cisco. Attendance at GEMinars for both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 cohorts remained consistent, despite the increase in cohort size and the transition to an online model. The highest attendance for both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 cohorts was GEMinar 1 in September, at a rate of 97% and 94% respectively. The lowest attendance for both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 cohorts was GEMinar 3 in January, at a rate of 79% and 75% respectively.

As indicated above, attendance rates for both the 2019-20 in-person cohort and 2020-21 virtual cohort remained consistent through the transition to a virtual program, with a slight decrease in attendance for the 2020-21 virtual cohort. This can be attributed to two factors. The first factor would be the reality of online events, which require less commitment to register. This has led to higher levels of attrition between the number of registrants and the number of participants that actually attend. The second factor would be the nature of the 2020-21 program year – this cohort faced a number of unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including negative mental health outcomes associated with the ‘quadmester’ structure in Ontario secondary schools and the inevitable Zoom fatigue and burnout faced by students.

After the first official online mentorship cohort, the GEM Team recognizes several benefits and limitations to the transition to virtual events. The most significant limitation that resulted from the transition to virtual learning and events was the loss of in-person networking and connecting among program participants. Mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort were not given the opportunity to connect in person, develop friendships, and cultivate their professional networks in the same way that 2019-20 and other in-person cohorts have. Furthermore, it was more challenging to conduct group activities and encourage collaborative thinking during online events.

The first benefit to the virtual model, however, is that a greater number of participants can be invited to attend without the limitation of a physical event space. GEM was thus able to admit more mentors and mentees into the program for the 2020-21 virtual cohort. Second, GEM’s corporate sponsors were able to organize larger and more diverse career panels for GEM participants because they were not as limited by geographic location and personal scheduling conflicts as is typical for in-person events. Finally, the GEM Team was able to record the online sessions in the 2020-21 virtual cohort and share those recordings with participants who were unable to attend the event. This allowed for mentors and mentees to catch up on missed curriculum and content throughout the course of the year.

Quantitative Learning Outcomes

Participants in GEM’s mentorship program are evaluated on seven primary areas at the beginning and end of the program: the high school experience, post-secondary planning, job readiness, goal-setting, self-knowledge, professional skill development and readiness for the future.

Statistic		2020-21	2019-20
High School Experience	Have trouble with their high school classes	20% (Decreased by 14% throughout the program)	15% (Decreased by 22% throughout the program)
	Feel overwhelmed by all they have to do	69% (Decreased by 18% throughout the program)	77% (Decreased by 15% throughout the program)

Post-Secondary Planning	Know the direction they want to take after high school	95% (Increased by 14% throughout the program)	95% (Increased by 15% throughout the program)
	Are concerned they will not get into post-secondary school	15% (Decreased by 39% throughout the program)	20% (Decreased by 43% throughout the program)
	Have difficulty concentrating on their future	36% (Decreased by 12% throughout the program)	28% (Decreased by 15% throughout the program)
	Worry about their future	69% (Decreased by 22% throughout the program)	80% (Decreased by 15% throughout the program)
Job Readiness	Have an adequately prepared resume	95% (Increased by 28% throughout the program)	88% (Increased by 22% throughout the program)
	Know how to professionally present themselves for a job interview	97% (Increased by 25% throughout the program)	97% (Increased by 32% throughout the program)
	Feel confident in their interview skills	93% (Increased by 64% throughout the program)	91% (Increased by 38% throughout the program)
	Know how to professionally prepare an online profile	99% (Increased by 64% throughout the program)	97% (Increased by 62% throughout the program)
	Feel confident communicating professionally via email	100% (Increased by 12% throughout the program)	100% (Increased by 17% throughout the program)
	Feel confident communicating professionally in person	100% (Increased by 18% throughout the program)	95% (Increased by 20% throughout the program)
	Have extensive knowledge of various industries	93% (Increased by 63% throughout the program)	89% (Increased by 58% throughout the program)
	Have a wide understanding of current career roles and opportunities	94% (Increased by 44% throughout the program)	91% (Increased by 48% throughout the program)
	Worry they won't get a good job	41% (Decreased by 35% throughout the program)	52% (Decreased by 31% throughout the program)
Goal Setting	Are able to set goals and achieve them	94%	100%

		(Increased by 5% throughout the program)	(Increased by 11% throughout the program)
	Know how to stay motivated even when they have difficulty reaching their goals	90% (Increased by 20% throughout the program)	98% (Increased by 35% throughout the program)
Self-Knowledge	Have a clear idea of what their personal strengths are	95% (Increased by 13% throughout the program)	98% (Increased by 25% throughout the program)
	Feel confident in themselves and their abilities	97% (Increased by 20% throughout the program)	95% (Increased by 28% throughout the program)
	Feel confident advocating for themselves	96% (Increased by 29% throughout the program)	97% (Increased by 34% throughout the program)
Professional Skill Development	Understand and can apply self-direction and optimism	97% (Increased by 24% throughout the program)	97% (Increased by 29% throughout the program)
	Understand and can apply professional communication	99% (Increased by 17% throughout the program)	100% (Increased by 29% throughout the program)
	Understand and can apply resilience	99% (Increased by 20% throughout the program)	98% (Increased by 20% throughout the program)
	Understand and can apply perseverance and grit	98% (Increased by 10% throughout the program)	100% (Increased by 12% throughout the program)
	Understand and can apply collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity (3 C's)	99% (Increased by 5% throughout the program)	98% (Increased by 55% throughout the program)
Readiness for the Future	Feel prepared for the next chapter in their life	98% (Increased by 30% throughout the program)	95% (Increased by 34% throughout the program)
	Have a good sense of what they need to do to achieve their goals	98% (Increased by 13% throughout the program)	100% (Increased by 18% throughout the program)

Participants in both the 2019-20 in-person cohort and 2020-21 virtual cohort therefore reported positive outcomes based on their experience with the GEM curriculum. Participants in the 2019-20 in-person cohort, on the one hand, reported stronger improvement in their outcomes than participants in the 2020-21 virtual cohort in four of the seven areas: goal setting, self-knowledge, professional skill development, and general readiness for the future. Participants in the 2020-21 virtual cohort reported stronger

improvements in their outcomes than participants in the 2019-20 in-person cohort in two of the seven areas: post-secondary planning and job readiness. The cohorts reported equal levels of improvement in one of the seven areas: the high school experience.

The following chart shows the specific outcomes, sorted by the level of improvement for each cohort. A cohort was determined to show a stronger level of improvement if their percentage was greater than 5%. If the level of improvement for both cohorts were within 5% of each other, the level of improvement was classified as being virtually the same.

Greater Improvement in 2020-21 Cohort	Greater Improvement in 2019-20 Cohort	Virtually the Same Level of Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel overwhelmed by all they have to do • Worry about their future • Have an adequately prepared resume • Feel confident in their interview skills • Have extensive knowledge of various industries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have trouble with their high school classes • Know how to professionally present themselves for a job interview • Feel confident communicating professionally via email • Are able to set goals and achieve them • Know how to stay motivated even when they have difficulty reaching their goals • Have a clear idea of what their personal strengths are • Feel confident in themselves and their abilities • Feel confident advocating for themselves • Understand and can apply self-direction and optimism • Understand and can apply professional communication • Understand and can apply collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity (3 C's) • Have a good sense of what they need to do to achieve their goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know the direction they want to take after high school • Are concerned they will not get into post-secondary school • Have difficulty concentrating on their future • Know how to professionally prepare an online profile • Feel confident communicating professionally in person • Have a wide understanding of current career roles and opportunities • Worry they won't get a good job • Understand and can apply resilience • Understand and can apply perseverance and grit • Feel prepared for the next chapter in their life

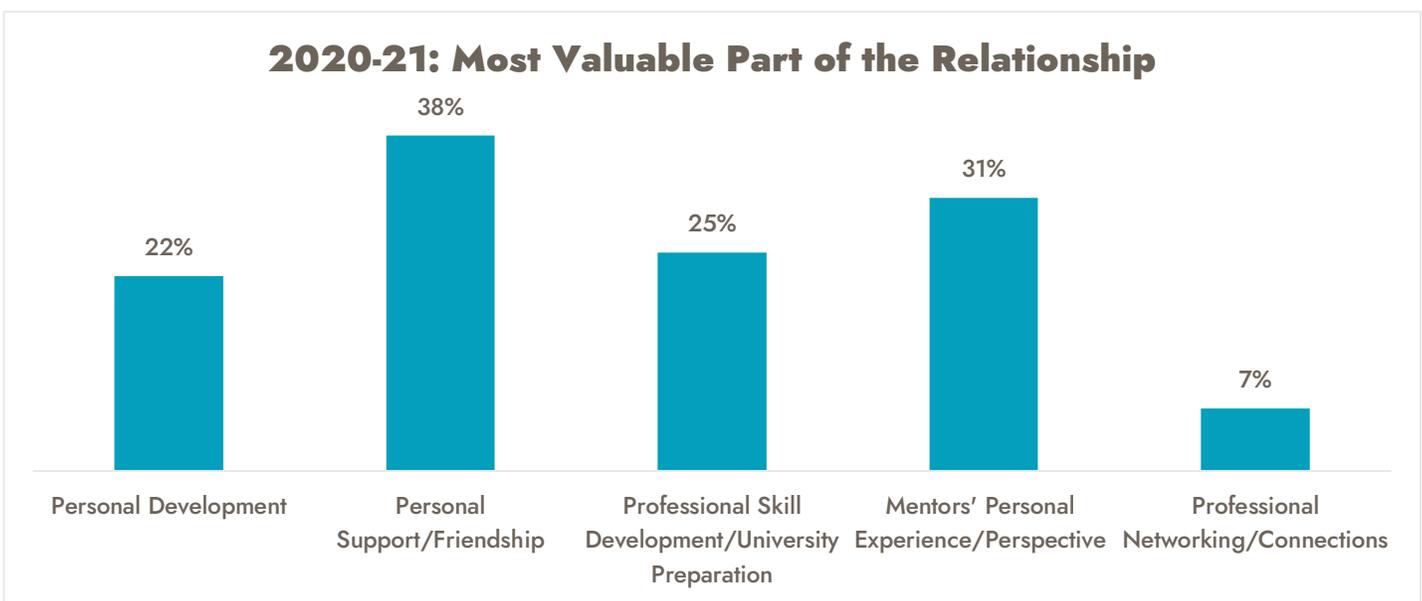
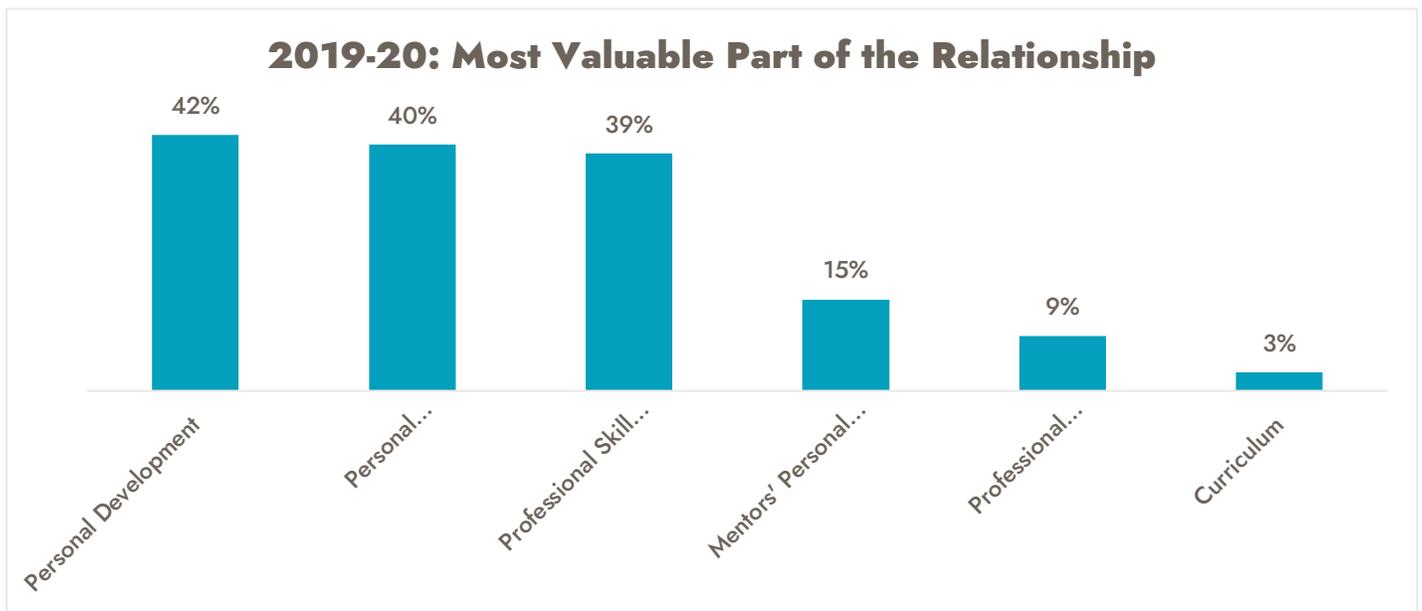
It should be noted that the individual outcomes of each mentee in both the 2019-20 in-person cohort and 2020-21 virtual cohort are virtually the same – the majority of mentees in both cohorts reported favourable outcomes in each of the seven areas. The mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort, however, reported a lower baseline on average than the mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort. This led to a notably greater improvement in outcomes for the 2019-20 in-person cohort when compared to the 2020-21 virtual cohort. As the GEM program grows and outreach efforts expand, more and more youth facing socio-economic barriers in the Greater Toronto Area submit an application to join the program. The growth rate for the size of the cohort, however, is lower than the growth rate for the number of applicants. For this reason, the GEM Team has to be more selective when determining which applicants are admitted into the program, which is a plausible explanation for 2020-21 virtual cohort’s higher baseline for quantitative learning outcomes.

Qualitative Mentee Feedback

At the end of the program year, program participants were asked to provide paragraph-style feedback on two areas of their experience: their relationship with their mentor and their experience in the GEM program. The data from these questions was codified based on mentees' individual responses.

Relationship with GEM Mentor

Question 1: Consider your relationship with your GEM Mentor. What was the most valuable part of your experience together?

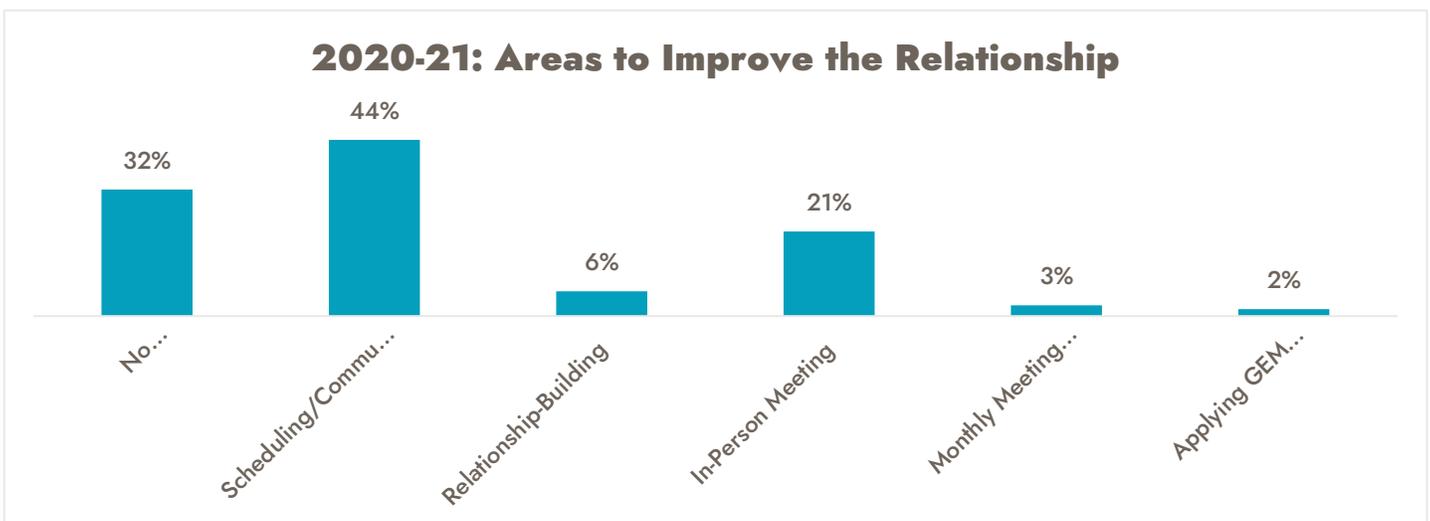
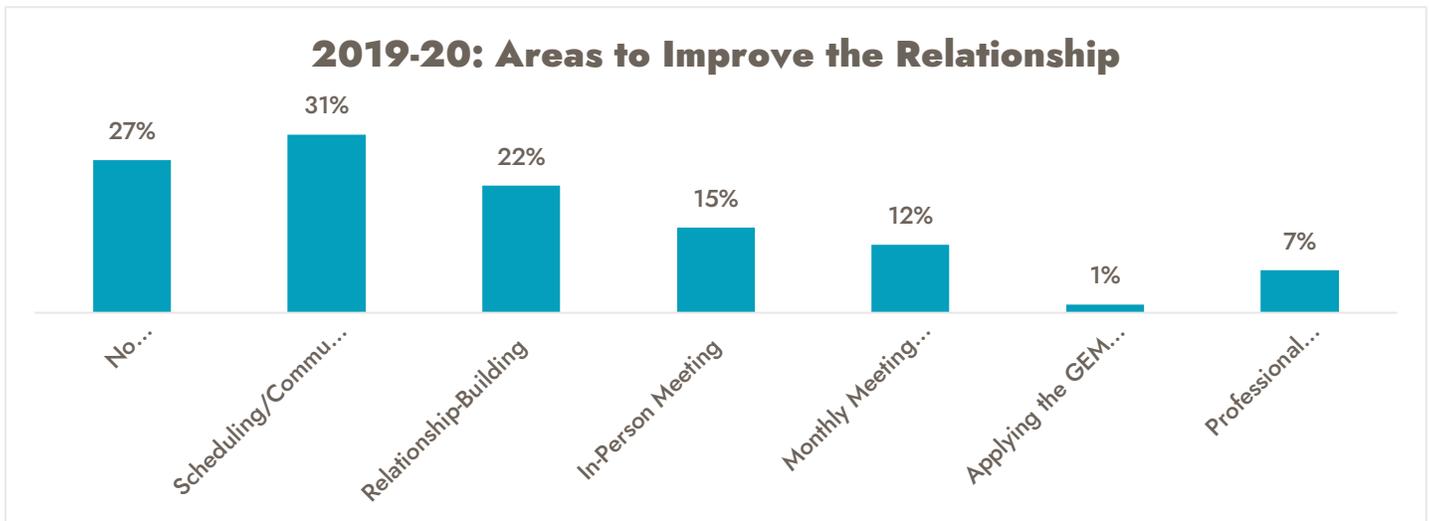


- **Personal Development:** The mentor and mentee worked together to set goals, develop resiliency, and overcome adversity.
- **Personal Support/Friendship:** The mentor and mentee developed a close personal friendship throughout the program year.
- **Professional Skill Development/University Preparation:** The mentor and mentee frequently reviewed the GEM curriculum together and worked on improving the mentees' professional development skills. The mentor also assisted the mentee with university and scholarship applications.
- **Mentors' Personal Experience/Perspective:** The mentor supplemented the GEM curriculum with examples from her own experiences. The mentee benefitted from her life experience.
- **Professional Networking/Connections:** The mentor introduced the mentee to her professional network and provided the mentee with opportunities to expand her own network.
- **Curriculum:** (2019-20 cohort only) The mentee valued the topics of conversation in the curriculum that she was able to discuss with her mentor.

For mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort, the most valuable aspect of their mentorship relationship was the personal development they achieved with their mentor. For 42%, working with their mentor on setting and achieving goals, developing resiliency, and overcoming adversity was the most valuable. Similarly, 40% reported that they valued the personal support and friendship they received from their mentor and 39% reported valuing the professional skill development/university preparation that they did with their mentor.

For mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort, the most valuable aspect of their mentorship relationship was the personal support and friendship they received from their mentor. In a close second was the mentors' personal experience and perspective that was shared during monthly meetings regarding various aspects of the curriculum. The third most valuable aspect of the mentorship relationship was professional skill development/university preparation. Mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort valued when their mentor shared personal anecdotes and lessons learned throughout their careers because it felt authentic and allowed mentors and mentees to bond over shared lived experiences. By learning how their mentors overcame barriers throughout their career, mentees felt understood and were inspired to overcome their own barriers.

Question 2: What aspect of your relationship with your Mentor could have been improved?



- **No Feedback/Improvements:** The mentee had no feedback – she enjoyed every aspect of her mentorship relationship.
- **Scheduling/Communication:** The mentee felt that she could have connected more with her mentor throughout the program year, or the mentee felt that her mentor was too busy to respond to her messages.
- **Relationship-Building:** The mentee wished that she could have developed a more personal connection with her mentor.
- **In-Person Meeting:** The mentee felt that the relationship would have been stronger if the mentor and mentee met more in person as opposed to online or by phone. Both mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort and mentees in the 2020-21 cohort noted this.

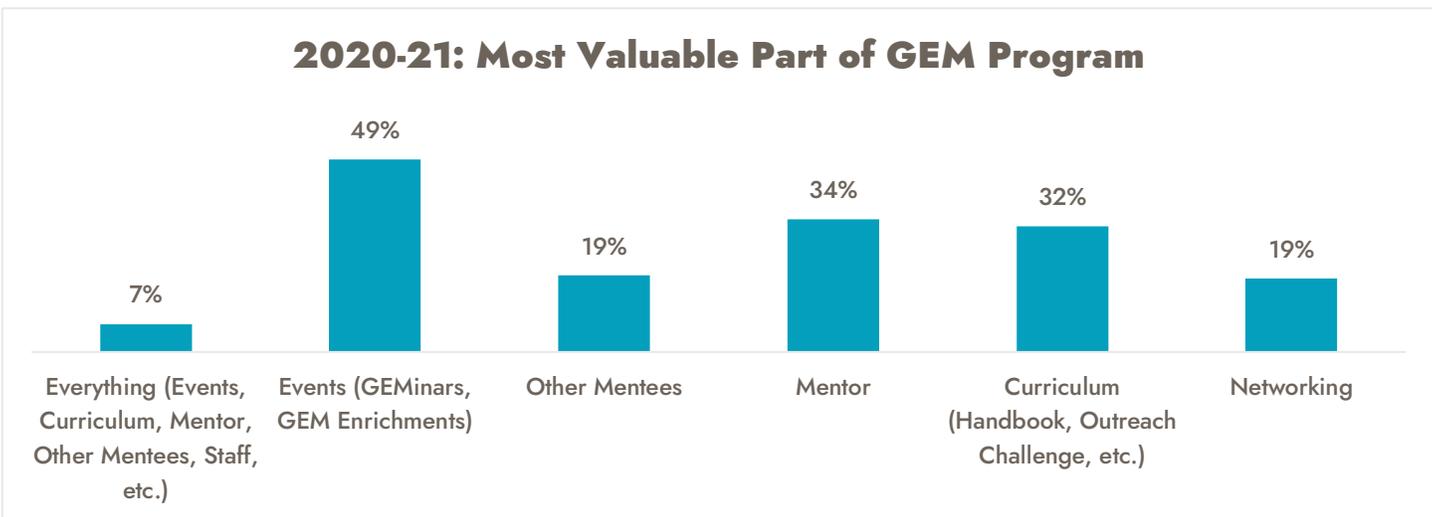
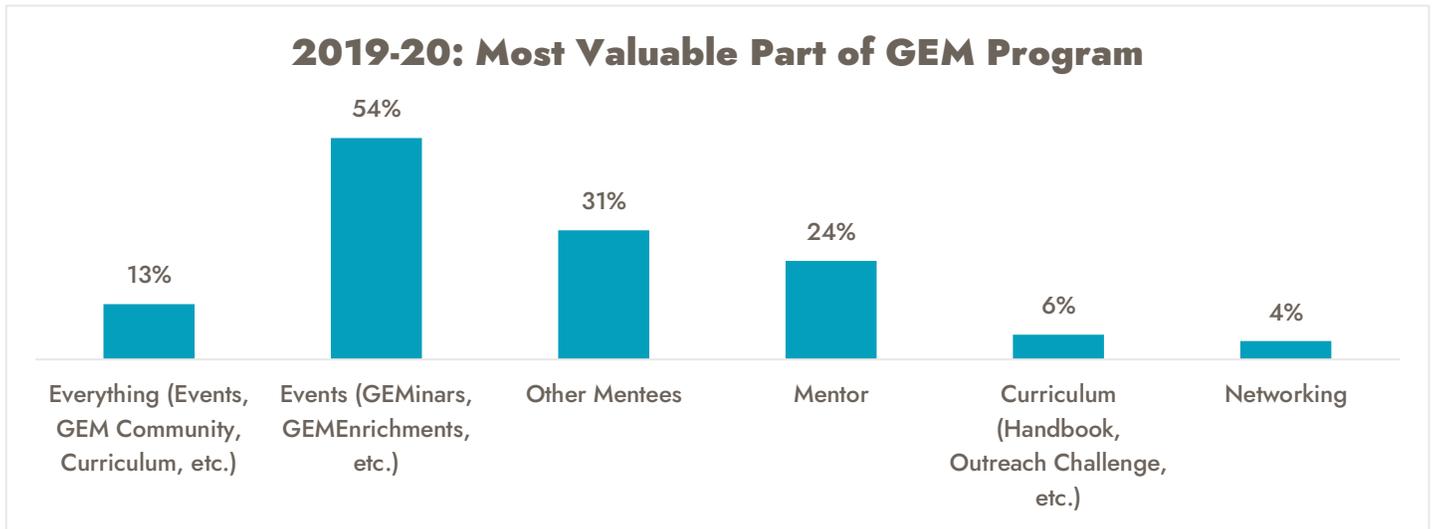
- **Monthly Meeting Preparation/Discussion Planning:** The mentee wished her monthly meetings were more organized. Some mentees requested that a sample agenda be added to the Mentee Handbook.
- **Applying the GEM Curriculum:** The mentee and mentor struggled to apply the GEM curriculum during their monthly meetings.
- **Professional Connections:** (2019-20 cohort only) The mentee requested that more opportunities be given to network with mentors in her chosen field, especially since her mentor was not a career match.

27% of mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort and 32% of mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort expressed that they had no feedback for how to improve their mentorship relationship. For 31% of mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort, scheduling/communications was an area of their mentorship relationship that could be improved. Many of the mentees took responsibility for the challenges communicating, but some attributed these challenges to their mentor's busy schedule. Mentees also noted that they wished they could have built a closer personal connection with their mentor.

In the 2020-21 virtual cohort, 44% of mentees reported that scheduling/communication was an area they think could have been improved in their mentorship relationship. This increase can largely be attributed to the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic – both mentors and mentees had irregular and busy schedules and were unable to set in-person meetings. Based on these factors, it is reasonable to see a slight increase in scheduling/communication issues for the virtual cohort. The other substantial area of improvement for mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort is reasonably the lack of in-person meetings and events. All mentees who made this comment acknowledged that while it was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they missed the opportunity to connect with mentors, mentees, and the GEM Team at in-person events and hoped to attend in-person Alumnae Network events in the future when it is deemed safe.

Experience in the GEM Mentorship Program

Question 1: What was the most valuable part of your experience in the GEM Mentorship Program?



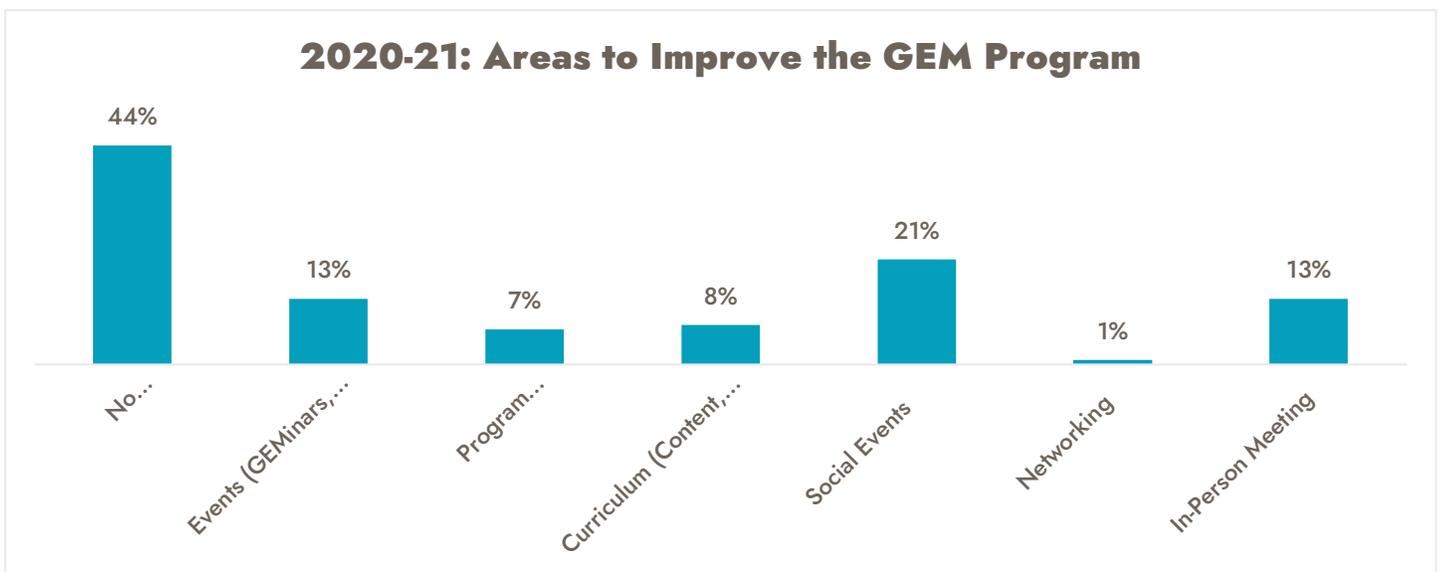
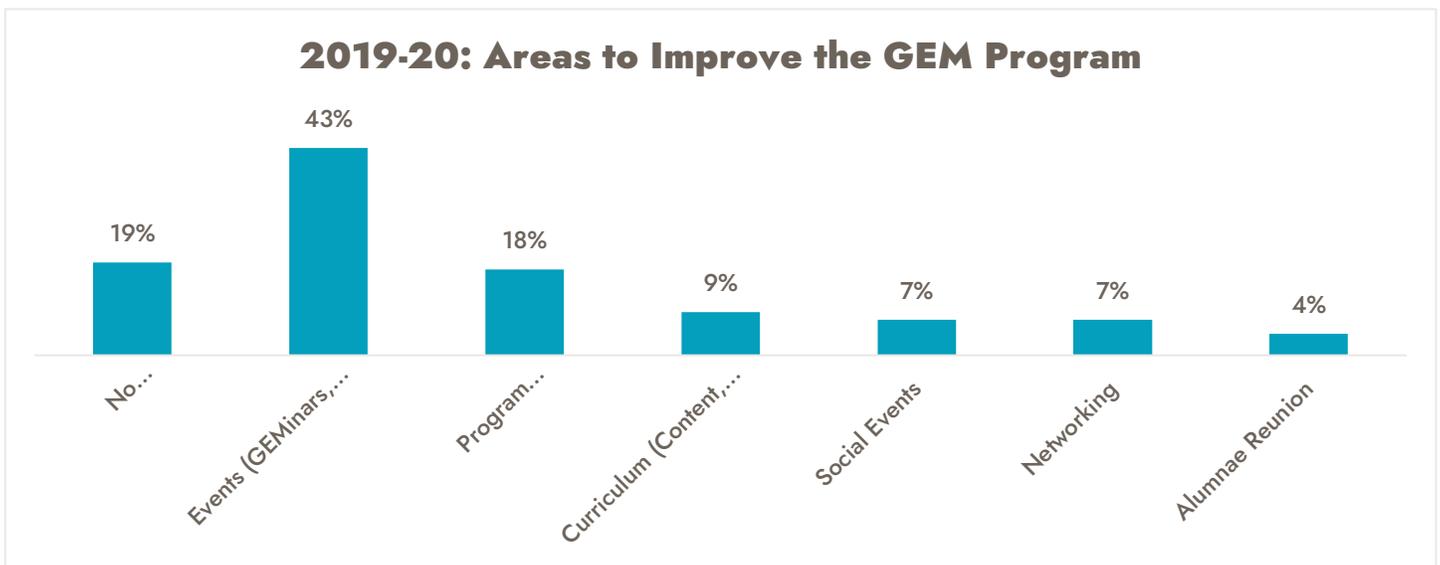
- **Everything (Events, GEM Community, Curriculum, etc.):** The mentee enjoyed every aspect of the GEM program and could not name one component that was better than the rest.
- **Events (GEMinars, GEMenrichments, etc.):** The mentee enjoyed being able to connect with other mentees, mentors, and corporate volunteers at events. Most mentees highlighted the diverse career panels at each GEMinar as being a highlight of the program.
- **Other Mentees:** The mentee valued being able to meet and connect with other high-achieving students in the GTA.
- **Mentor:** The mentee valued their mentor's personal experience, advice, and support throughout the program year.

- **Curriculum (Handbook, Outreach Challenge, etc.):** The mentee enjoyed developing skills and gaining confidence as a result of GEM curriculum.
- **Networking:** The mentee valued learning the importance of cultivating a professional networking and learning about strategies for reaching out to potential connections.

For 13% of mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort and 7% of mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort, everything in the GEM program was valuable for them – the events, the curriculum, their mentor, other mentees, the GEM Team, etc. For 54% of mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort, events were the most valuable part of the GEM Mentorship Program – they enjoyed the atmosphere, meeting other mentors and mentees, and listening to the diverse career panels hosted by GEM’s corporate sponsors. 31% of this cohort also valued the other mentees in the program appreciated being able to meet and connect with other high achieving students in the GTA. Finally, 24% of the 2019-20 cohort valued their relationship with their mentor, specifically their personal experience, advice, and support throughout the program.

49% of mentees the 2020-21 virtual cohort noted that events such as GEMinars and GEMenrichments were the most valuable part of their experience in the GEM program. 34% valued their relationship with their mentor, and 32% valued the curriculum and the lessons learned throughout the GEM program. Due to the greater emphasis on learning outcomes and curriculum throughout this cohort, it reasonable to see such an increase in that response. As well, due to the nature of the online cohort and the limited ability to host social events among mentees, it is reasonable to see a decline in how much mentees value their relationships with other mentees.

Question 2: Based on your experience, are there any aspects of the GEM Mentorship Program which could be improved?



- **No Feedback/Improvements:** The mentee had no feedback – she enjoyed every aspect of the GEM mentorship program.
- **Events (GEMinars, GEMenrichments, etc.):** The mentee expressed that events could have been more engaging. The mentee requested that more diverse careers be represented in events – more science and STEM-based sponsors.
- **Program Administration/Relationship Management:** The mentee recommended being more clear with mentors about time commitment and other expectations to avoid burnout and inconsistencies. The mentee suggested changing language throughout the GEM program to clarify that GEM is a program for all female-identifying individuals. The mentee requested that GEM improve

community-building among mentees and create a 'group-chat' for mentees to connect with each other throughout the year.

- **Curriculum (Content, Outreach Challenge, Scholarships, etc.):** The mentee requested more internship opportunities and more activities like the Outreach Challenge. The mentee provided recommendations for new curriculum.
- **Social Events:** The mentee requested more opportunities to connect with mentors and mentees in an informal setting – not at curriculum-based events.
- **Networking:** The mentee requested more opportunities to learn about other mentors' careers and connect with them. The mentee requested more access to internships and co-ops for mentees.
- **In-Person Meeting:** (2020-21 cohort only) The mentee noted that more in-person events would make the program better, but acknowledged that this was not possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Alumnae Reunion:** (2019-20 cohort only) The mentee requested the GEM facilitate a cohort reunion social event.

When asked if there were any recommendations on how to improve the GEM program, 19% of mentees from the 2019-20 in-person cohort and 44% of mentees from the 2020-21 virtual cohort had no suggestions – they enjoyed every aspect of the GEM program. 43% of mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort responded with suggestions on how to improve events in the GEM program, including that they could have been more engaging and that more diverse industries could have been represented in corporate sponsors. As well, 19% of mentees from the 2019-20 in-person cohort recommended improvements to the administration of the program and the management of relationships. According to these mentees, the GEM Team should be clearer with mentors about the necessary time commitment and other expectations prior to the start of the program to ensure that mentors are able to fully commit to their relationship for the entire duration of the program.

21% of mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort recommended the addition of social events to the schedule. These events would give participants the opportunity to meet other mentors and mentees in their cohort, facilitating virtual networking and community-building. 13% of mentees in this cohort also recommended improvements to events and in-person meeting, with most comments expressing disappointment that the COVID-19 pandemic prevented them from connecting in-person with other program participants. Finally, 7% of mentees from the 2020-21 virtual cohort recommended improvements to the administration of the program and the management of relationships. These mentees recommended that GEM improve community-building and networking among mentees through the creation of a 'Whatsapp group-chat', which will provide mentees in a virtual cohort with an opportunity to communicate and stay connected with each other throughout the program.

Ask a GEM Mentee

The GEM Team facilitated conversations with five focus groups after the conclusion of the 2020-21 Cohort: two groups were composed of graduating mentees from the 2020-21 virtual cohort, two groups were composed of mentors that participated in both the 2020-21 virtual cohort and the 2019-20 in-person cohort, and one group was composed of alumnae from the 2019-20 in-person cohort. Participants were asked about their experience in GEM's mentorship program. Specifically, participants were asked to provide feedback on: the mentorship relationship, learning/curriculum, program events, the outreach project, and community-building throughout the program.

Mentorship

In the mentorship section of the focus groups, mentees were asked about their experiences with a variety of topics, including lessons learned from their mentor, goal setting, monthly meeting discussions, communication frequency and methods, and their comfort level speaking about challenging topics. Mentors were asked similar questions about goal setting, monthly meeting discussions, communication frequency and methods, and how they broke the ice and earned their mentee's trust when dealing with challenging topics of conversation.

1. **Lessons Learned from Mentor:** Mentees from the 2019-20 in-person and 2020-21 virtual cohort learned about how to improve their self-confidence, resilience, and networking skills from their mentors. Other important lessons mentioned by the 2020-21 virtual cohort included communication skills, interview skills, and resume-building skills. The 2019-20 in-person cohort mentioned the importance of being open to new opportunities as a lesson learned from their mentors.
2. **Goal Setting:** Similarly, mentees from both cohorts used the same methods to set goals with their mentors. In the beginning of the program, goal setting between mentors and mentees was formal, according to the post-secondary and career aspirations of the mentee. Mentors and mentees would begin with a long-term goal, and then develop short-term goals to support it. Throughout the course of the year, goal setting for both in-person and virtual cohorts became more organic. Mentors emphasized the importance of returning to one's goals and evaluating them throughout the relationship.
 - The mentor focus group confirmed these reflections and commented that goal-setting was more dependent on the mentee as opposed to whether the relationship was virtual or in-person. Mentors found that some mentees were more driven and independent, while other mentees needed more hands-on guidance.
3. **Monthly Meetings:** In terms of monthly meetings and check-ins, mentees from the 2020-21 virtual cohort reported that they would begin the meeting discussing curriculum, and then transition into more personal and friendly topics. Mentees appreciated when their mentors could be flexible in what

they talked about – if the mentee was struggling with scholarship applications, they appreciated when their mentor was willing to put curriculum on the back burner to assist them. Mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort reported similar experiences during monthly meetings, but mentioned more of a reliance on ice-breakers than those in the virtual cohort. Because these meetings were conducted in-person, mentors and mentees were able to dedicate more time to getting to know each other organically.

- Some mentors found that online discussions were more talkative and friendly – they would discuss curriculum after getting comfortable with their mentee. Other mentors found that their mentees were timid and reserved. All mentors agreed that their relationship was entirely dependent on the mentee and their personality, as opposed to the method in which the mentor and mentee connected. One mentor commented that while she relied heavily on curriculum to direct the conversation with her in-person mentee, she developed a strong personal connection to her online mentee because she was outgoing, talkative, and engaged.
4. **Communication Frequency and Methods:** Mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort noted that their mentors were generally approachable and easy to contact. Most pairs would have organic, friendly conversations via text or direct message each week. For monthly meetings, most pairs confirmed that video calls were the best method of conversation. Mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort reported a similar style of communication, with the primary difference being that they met their mentor in-person each month. The most important aspect of communication for both cohorts was agreeing on the most convenient platform to direct message – options included iMessage, Instagram, Whatsapp or text message.
- Some mentors reflected that it was more challenging to stay in touch with their virtual mentee than their in-person mentee. During the pandemic, they both had busy schedules and had trouble keeping themselves accountable. The mentor noted that being understanding and accommodating was the best solution for this challenge. Another mentor noted that her virtual mentee never initiated conversations during their relationship – this mentee was much more introverted than previous in-person mentees. Generally speaking, communication challenges were largely due to mentees being introverted or busy with school and other commitments.
5. **Comfort Level With Challenging Topics:** Mentees in both the 2020-21 virtual cohort and the 2019-20 in-person cohort noted that their mentor’s body language was important when building their comfort level with their mentor. Seeing their mentor engaged and having a positive, upbeat energy made mentees in both cohorts feel comfortable opening up to their mentor. As well, both cohorts highlighted the importance of their mentors being open about their own personal experiences – learning about their mentor’s past made mentees feel comfortable opening up about their own challenges. Shared lived experience was a common way for mentors and mentees to bond.
- Some mentors found that they had to be more intentional with breaking the ice because they were online. They asked more probing questions and shared more with their mentees. Most mentors agreed that vulnerability breeds vulnerability – when mentors were honest with mentees about their experiences and personal lives, mentees were more willing/able to open

up to mentors. Some mentors spoke about their families, their careers, and challenges they faced to break the ice and be more relatable to mentees. This worked to combat the tendency of mentees to put their mentor on a pedestal. Mentors also found that starting the relationship by asking mentees what they wanted from the program and the relationship was a good way of breaking the ice and setting priorities. All mentors agreed that the relationship was dependent on the mentees' personality, as opposed to online vs in-person. If the mentee was more extroverted and eager, the easier it was to cultivate a relationship.

6. **Additional Comments:** Mentees from the 2020-21 virtual cohort noted that mentors should ask their mentee what they are looking for in the relationship in their first meeting. This will help set boundaries and expectations for the relationship. As well, it is important for the mentor and mentee to get to know each other outside the program curriculum. Knowledge about the mentee will help the mentor give better advice later in the relationship. Mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort noted that communication has to be a two-way street – it cannot fall on either the mentor or the mentee to carry the conversations and communication throughout the relationship.
 - Most mentors noted that a big challenge for their virtual relationships in the 2020-21 cohort was the 'Zoom burnout' faced by mentees as a result of online school and other commitments – they found it challenging to remain engaged during meetings and online events. Mentors also reflected that being online forced them to focus on the task at hand during each meeting – there was less opportunities for small talk over coffee to distract from goal setting.

Learning/Curriculum

In the learning and curriculum section of the focus groups, mentees were asked about their experiences with three topics: the Mentee Handbook, GEMinar activities, and important lessons from the GEMinar curriculum.

1. **Mentee Handbook:** Mentees from the 2020-21 virtual cohort reported enjoying the activities associated with each curriculum topic in the Mentee Handbook. Pairs would skip curriculum if they found it more beneficial to focus on other things, or if they already had a strong grasp of the topic. Mentees from the 2019-20 in-person cohort noted that they would determine their own topics of conversation during their monthly meetings and refer back to the curriculum if they struggled to find other topics. Both cohorts emphasized that the monthly checklists in the Handbook were helpful.
2. **GEMinar Activities:** Mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort expressed that Breakout Rooms during each GEMinar were a highlight for them. They felt comfortable turning their cameras on and enjoyed interacting with other mentees, mentors and panelists. As well, mentees from this cohort enjoyed the career panels and keynote speakers at each GEMinar – mentees felt they could see themselves in the panelists and were inspired by their career journeys. Mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort enjoyed the informal time they had during GEMinars to network with other mentees and mentors.

They also found the discussions and panels to be informative, but enjoyed them less compared to the virtual cohort.

3. **Lessons from GEMinar Curriculum:** With the transition to a virtual cohort, GEM placed a greater emphasis on curriculum and the educational outcomes of program participants. With this in mind, the 2020-21 virtual cohort did report more positive lessons learned throughout the GEM program than the 2019-20 in-person cohort. Specifically, mentees from the 2020-21 cohort enjoyed learning about networking, personal branding, communication, the growth mindset, and planning for the future. Mentees from both cohorts emphasized that they learned a lot from the diverse panelists that shared their career and life experiences.

Events

In the learning and curriculum section of the focus groups, mentees were asked to describe the atmosphere of the GEMinars they attended and to comment on how engaging they were.

1. **Atmosphere and Engagement Level of GEMinars:** The majority of mentees in the virtual 2020-21 cohort reported that GEMinars were engaging and informative. Mentees enjoyed interacting with other participants in the chat and Breakout Rooms and found that the PowerPoint presentations kept them on track with the content. Finally, the mentees commented that the atmosphere of virtual GEMinars was positive and upbeat – the mentees appreciated the exciting energy. Mentees from the 2019-20 in-person cohort also found that the atmosphere was energizing, upbeat, and fun. They enjoyed having the seating arrangements mixed up throughout the year because it allowed them to meet new friends and reconnect with existing friends. The mentees from the in-person cohort found that being in a professional workplace for GEMinars was an empowering and inspiring environment.

Outreach

In the outreach section of the focus groups, mentees were asked to describe how they conducted outreach in their community and what the highlight of the challenge was for them.

1. **Outreach Strategy:** Mentees in both the 2020-21 virtual cohort and 2019-20 in-person cohort emphasized quality over quantity while recruiting new mentees for the next years' cohort. They made sure to reach out to girls they knew would benefit from a program like GEM. Mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort found that being virtual allowed them to reach more people without having to worry about booking event space, travelling throughout the city, etc. They were also able to invite their mentors to speak at information sessions via Zoom, which would have been more challenging if the event was in-person.

2. **Highlight of the Challenge:** Mentees in both cohorts noted that they enjoyed getting to network with other girls and speak about their experience in the GEM program. Mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort reflected that the challenge was a wake-up call about how great the program was and how they should take advantage of the time they had left. Mentees in this cohort also found that they were motivated by the competition and enjoyed getting to develop new skills like organizing information sessions and making graphics.

Community-Building

In the community-building section of the focus groups, mentees were asked about their experiences with a variety of topics, including how they established relationships with other mentees, the platforms they used to connect with participants in their cohort, and how the GEM Team could better facilitate community-building among program participants.

1. **Establishing Relationships:** As expected, mentees from the 2020-21 virtual cohort and 2019-20 in-person cohort did not have the same experience establishing relationships with other mentees in their cohort. Mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort reported that they were able to network with other mentors and mentees at in-person events like GEMinars. They would then connect on LinkedIn and other platforms. Mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort had a more challenging time establishing relationships – some mentees connected on Instagram after the first GEMinar. Other mentees joined a Discord channel and shared opportunities to join clubs, webinars, and more. Mentees enjoyed when GEM facilitated informal conversations to break the ice during online events. Most mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort noted that while they were able to make acquaintances, developing friendships was a significant challenge for them.
2. **Online Platforms:** Mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort and the 2020-21 virtual cohort noted that they tried to create a group-chat for mentees to connect on via Instagram, but were frustrated with the maximum capacity of about 30 accounts. While some mentees in both cohorts used LinkedIn to connect with other mentors and mentees, they found that participant profiles contained outdated information.
3. **Facilitating Better Community-Building:** Mentees in the 2020-21 virtual cohort recommended that the GEM Team create a Whatsapp group-chat for interested mentees. This will allow the GEM Team to start informal conversations and facilitate better community-building. As well, this could be a useful tool for quickly sharing important information with mentees who do not frequently check their email. Mentees in the 2019-20 in-person cohort recommended hosting an online speed-networking event for mentees to meet each other at the beginning of the cohort. Mentees from both cohorts recommended creating a 'directory' with a list of mentors, along with their industry, current employer, education credentials, and their preferred method of communication to better facilitate networking for mentees.

Conclusion

GEM's internal findings presented throughout this report are consistent with the external research discussed at the beginning: mentorship programs, both in-person and virtual, can lead to positive personal and professional outcomes for youth. Conducting mentorship programs virtually can allow for greater accessibility among participants, but can lead to challenges with communication and the mental health of participants. While online events were engaging and informative, they did not provide participants with the same opportunity to network and develop relationships as with in-person events.

GEM has admitted 150 mentees and 150 mentors to the 2021-22 cohort, which will primarily be held virtually again as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to provide mentees and mentors with the best possible experience, the next section will outline several recommendations for best practices to be implemented throughout this program year.

Recommendations and Best Practices

Based on the quantitative outcomes, the qualitative feedback, and the conversations had during participant focus groups, the following recommendations are presented for virtual mentorship.

Building a Virtual Mentor/Mentee Relationship

- 1. Communication:**
 - a. Encourage mentors and mentees to maintain consistent communication with each other.
 - b. Encourage both parties to contact the GEM Team if they are struggling to communicate.
- 2. Relationship-Building:**
 - a. Encourage mentors to break the ice, share personal experiences, and try to develop a friendship with their mentee.
 - b. Encourage mentors to contact the GEM Team if they are having a challenging time breaking the ice.
- 3. In-Person Meeting:**
 - a. Encourage mentors and mentees to meet face-to-face via video conference at the beginning of the relationship, even if they prefer to communicate via phone calls later on. This will help to promote accountability and a closer personal bond.
 - b. When safe, it is encouraged that mentors and mentees meet at least once in-person at the beginning of their relationship. Even if the mentorship program continues to run online, encouraging mentors and mentees to meet in-person will promote accountability and help build a stronger personal connection.
- 4. Monthly Meetings:**
 - a. Develop a sample agenda for monthly meetings to help mentors and mentees stay on task throughout the relationship.
 - b. Encourage mentees to reflect on what they want to take away from the mentorship experience prior to the start of the relationship. Remind mentees to return to this reflection throughout the year and ensure that they are taking full advantage of the experience.
- 5. Professional Connections:**
 - a. Encourage mentors to introduce their mentees to other mentors based on career interests.
 - b. Encourage mentors to take advantage of Mentor City peer support groups and the Mentor Network to connect with other mentors.

Recommendations for GEM's Mentorship Program

- 1. Events:**
 - a. Add polls and other interactive features to PowerPoint presentations to promote engagement.

2. **Program Administration/Relationship Management:**

- a. Set clear expectations for mentors and mentees about time commitment and communication to avoid inconsistencies and burnout. Encourage participants to contact the GEM Team if their mentor or mentee is non-responsive.
- b. Implement Mentor City as a centralized location for all program communication, announcements, and resources.
- c. Provide mentors with a “list of ideas for safe and appropriate ways of connecting with mentees, both in person and digitally,” according to local public health guidelines.⁴⁹

3. **Networking:**

- a. Create more opportunities for building community among mentors and mentees.
 - i. Host informal social events and speed-networking events in addition to existing curriculum-based events.
 - ii. Create peer support groups for mentors on Mentor City.
 - iii. Create professional networking groups for mentor and mentee pairs on Mentor City.
 - iv. Create a Whatsapp group for all mentees to connect on.

Notes

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⁴ Renée Spencer, "Understanding the mentoring process between adolescents and adults," *Youth and Society* 37, no. 3 (2006): 290.

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⁶ Ibid., 298.

⁷ Ibid., 302.

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¹⁰ Ibid., 306.

¹¹ Johanna K.P. Greeson and Natasha Bowen, "'She holds my hand': the experiences of foster youth with their natural mentors," *Children and Youth Services Review* 30 (2008): 1182.

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¹⁴ Kym R. Ahrens, David Lane DuBois, Michelle Garrison, Renee Spencer, Laura P. Richardson, Paula Lozano, "Qualitative exploration of relationships with important non-parental adults in the lives of youth in foster care," *Children and Youth Services Review* 33 (2011): 1019.

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¹⁸ Kaufman et al, "Mentoring in the time of COVID-19: An analysis of online focus groups with mentors to youth," 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

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²² Julie E. Speer, Max Lyon, and Julia Johnson, "Gains and losses in virtual mentorship: A descriptive case study of undergraduate mentees and graduate mentors in STEM research during the COVID-19 pandemic," *CBE: Life Sciences Education* 20, no. 14 (2021): 1.

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²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁹ Ibid., 5.

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ Ibid., 5.

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ Ibid., 7.

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³⁵ Ibid., 5.

³⁶ Ibid., 5.

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

³⁸ Ibid., 6.

³⁹ Kaufman et al, "Mentoring in the time of COVID-19: An analysis of online focus groups with mentors to youth," 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

⁴² Ibid., 7.

⁴³ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.

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