

Canada Bridges: Mentorship Process

Background:

Since 2009, Canada Bridges has built relationships and developed initiatives aimed at youth and young adult leadership development with many diverse communities across Southern Alberta. As a local organization, we have more recently – since 2011 – focused on invitations to work alongside indigenous North American groups around Calgary, particularly the Siksika, Stoney Nakoda, and Tsuu T’ina Nations. Our work is centered on our Unveiling Youth Potential (UYP) model, a relationship-based approach aimed at realizing the potential of youth and young adults by supporting their leadership roles in building strong, resilient communities.

Given the many program offerings available, what youth today need is not another program; they need relationships that will support and empower skill building, exploration, and discovery – relationships that encourage the energy, passion (and sometimes, associated rebellion) that young people are so wonderfully equipped with and sometimes need the support to direct it positively. Canada Bridges’ mentorship process exists to fill this need: to match the experience and generosity of caring adult mentors with the emerging potential of youth and young adults, with the goal of supporting these young people throughout a piece of their developmental journeys and helping them achieve their goals, and therefore improving their (and all of our!) communities.

The Role of Mentorship:

Mentorship plays a critical role in Canada Bridges’ Unveiling Youth Potential approach; all staff actively mentor youth and young adults, and we have a team of caring adults who generously give of their time and energy as volunteer mentors. This mentorship process is aimed at building and strengthening *developmental relationships*, in which the development of strong, resilient, youth-supportive relationships is the goal. Congruent with our own experience, youth-serving organizations around the world are finding that these kinds of relationships are the mechanism for true empowerment; for example, Big Brothers Big Sisters’ Youth Engaging Supports program and [Roca’s approach](#)¹ to at-risk youth intervention. Furthermore, the starting point for each mentorship relationship is Canada Bridges’ Unveiling Youth Potential approach, which is entirely youth-centered – focused on each youth’s personal potential, not an externally prescribed outcome or path.

In order to foster healthy developmental relationships, Canada Bridges selects mentors who are:

- willing and able to share their time, their care, their story, and their expertise;
- open to different perspectives;
- interested and secure about fostering the growth of another person;

¹ Link: <http://rocainc.org/what-we-do/roca-works/rocas-intervention-model-for-high-risk-young-people/>

- able to commit to a long-term engagement with a mentee (Canada Bridges asks for a minimum of one year, but with the hope and intention that each mentorship relationship will last much longer – for many years, or a lifetime);
- able to give and receive constructive and honest feedback;
- respectful of confidences;
- excellent listeners;
- honest and full of integrity;
- able to detect strengths and weaknesses in others;
- willing to confront negative intentions or behaviours;
- sensible, sensitive and patient; and
- flexible in terms of expectations.

(list of characteristics adapted from Australia's Council for the Arts 'Making Your Mentorship Work' manual by Mary Ann Hunter)

To bolster these preexisting qualities, our mentors are also trained in areas that contribute to healthy relationship development: communication skills, relationship building skills, basic human development, self-care, and cultural sensitivity.

Goals of Canada Bridges' Mentorship Process:

The goals of Canada Bridges' mentorship process focus primarily on growth and development of a healthy, resilient, youth-supportive relationship between mentor and mentee. Our goals for these mentoring relationships include:²

1. Care expressed by the mentor, and felt by the mentee (mentors spend time with mentees and are genuinely present during this time; mentors demonstrate enjoyment, interest, and dependability with mentees);
2. Growth in mentees is expected, encouraged, and challenged by mentors (mentors inspire mentees to see and seize opportunities and future possibilities);
3. Support is provided by mentors, and accepted by mentees (mentors offer empowering assistance and advocacy when appropriate; mentors model healthy lives and lifestyles for mentees);
4. Power is shared between mentor and mentee (mentors respect mentees by inviting their thoughts, opinions and contributions, and giving careful consideration to these inputs); and
5. Possibilities are expanded, particularly for the mentee, as the pair engages in new experiences together (connections are made to resources that are helpful to the mentee, and systems are navigated together in a way that is empowering to the mentee).

Becoming a Mentor - What to Expect:

If becoming a mentor is something that interests you, and you possess the characteristics outlined above, we'd like to talk with you! Step-by-step, here is what you can expect from the process:

² Goals adapted from The Search Institute Developmental Relationships Framework: <http://www.search-institute.org/downloadable/Dev-Relationships-Framework-Sept2014.pdf>

Step 1: Get in touch with us by completing a [Volunteer Application Form](#)³ and emailing it to info@canadabridges.com.

Step 2: Meet with a Canada Bridges staff to learn more about one another, and discern interests and priorities.

Step 3: If approved as a mentor candidate, you will be invited to attend a Mentor Training Workshop (approx. 14-16 hours over one weekend or several weeknights).

Step 4: Complete and submit a Police Information Check, and sign a release waiver.

Step 5: Once approved as a mentor, you will be matched with a mentee. Matches are based on overall compatibility, as discerned by Canada Bridges' staff. (please note: the matching process can take some time, as we do our best to identify a great fit for both mentor and mentee.)

Step 6: Meet your mentee! Canada Bridges asks that, in most cases, at least the first two meetings take place in the mentee's 'space and place'. For First Nations mentees living on reserve, this means that at least the first two meetings take place on the reserve, or in another environment of their choosing. For mentees living in the city, this means that at least the first two meetings take place in an environment of their choosing.

Step 7: Stay in touch with your mentee, and continue hanging out with one another!

Step 8: Participate in mentor/mentee group gatherings, which may include fun activities, 'field trips', and/or learning opportunities, organized by Canada Bridges. These gatherings will take place approximately every two months.

³ Link: <http://canadabridges.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2014-Volunteer-Application-Form-PDF.pdf>