

## ***An analysis of the New York Mentoring Movement during 2020's COVID-19 Pandemic and Continued Racial Injustices.***

In March of 2020, an unprecedented global pandemic shook the framework of what we know to be normal. It was followed shortly by repeated public acts of police brutality on the Black community, adding to a very long history of racial injustice in our country.

As the New York mentoring and youth development community grappled with these life-altering moments in history, MENTOR New York worked alongside them as a thinking partner, mentoring expert and trainer. Throughout that time, MENTOR NY was able to identify trends in what programs and community organizations were experiencing.

To verify these trends and better assess the landscape of mentoring in New York during the pandemic and into the future, MENTOR NY designed a State Survey to collect data that can inform the creation of the following:

- Responsive training curriculum and resources
- Advocacy for critical needs and funding
- Crisis preparedness assessments

### **SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

Of the 152 survey responses from programs within MENTOR NY's network, the majority of programs represented reported to:

- Be site-based mentoring (next is community-based mentoring)
- Be after school mentoring programs (next are the school-based mentoring programs)
- Serve 13-15 year-olds with the next largest group served being 16-18 year-olds
- Serve Black or African American youth (next is Hispanic or Latino youth)

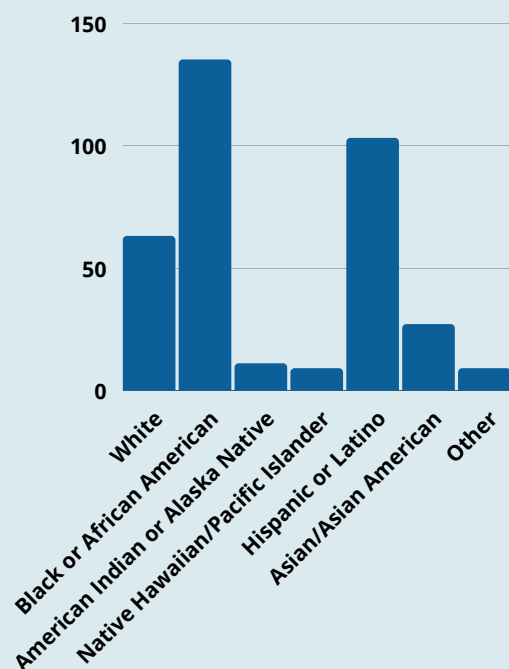
Programs that completed the survey serve youth across the full state with about 15 survey respondents from out of state. The majority of programs reported serving youth in Western New York, NYC and Long Island.

*As we review the data provided, we can assume that many programs were not able to respond to the survey due to:*

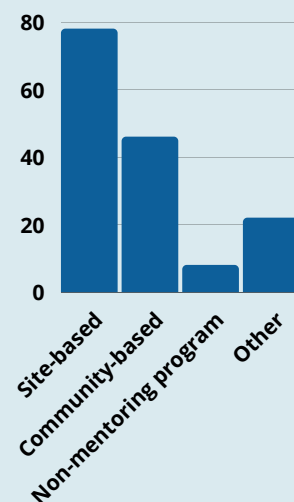
- *Staff Downsizing: A lack of staff capacity*
- *Discontinued Programs: Unable to pivot to virtual services, programs must await a full reopening of the state to resume programming*
- *Closure of Programs*



**The majority of populations your programs serves are...**



**The way your program delivers mentoring services is...**



# COVID-19 PANDEMIC: Facing an unknown virus and new realities, mentoring programs changed course in unprecedented ways....

## RESPONSIVENESS

Until March 2020, young people could participate in mentoring programs without needing technology and Wi-Fi in their homes. That all changed when the pandemic hit and many mentoring and youth programs were not prepared.

*"We learned that we must anticipate the need to pivot from in-person programming to remote programming at a moment's notice," reported one survey respondent.*

Almost half of the programs said they were not prepared for their program to go virtual when COVID-19 first hit.

- 70% of programs reported that the biggest challenge for staff was adjusting to a new working environment.

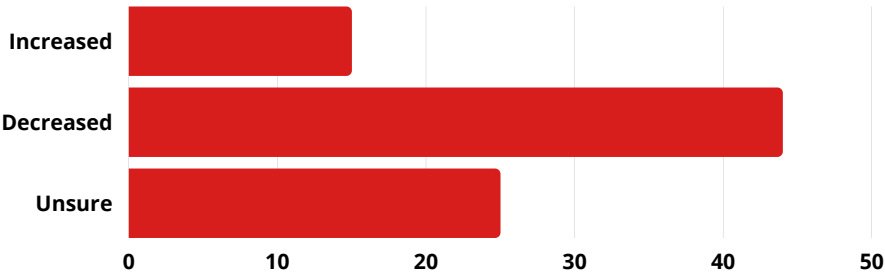
*In Western NY, Stephanie Rivera, the Mentoring Program Coordinator for Say Yes Buffalo, witnessed the same challenges that Deismond (see his story to the right) faced downstate in NYC...*

"We see the divide when it comes to having access to electronics to be able to communicate, especially the students we serve," said Stephanie.

But the group who reported to experience the most difficulties shifting to e-mentoring were the mentees.

- 61% of programs reported they lost communication with mentees due to little to no access to a computer or Wi-Fi.
- Only 30% of programs reported that mentors and mentees have access to technology to successfully connect with each other.

**More than half of the programs said virtual communication decreased the frequency with which mentors and mentees communicated.**



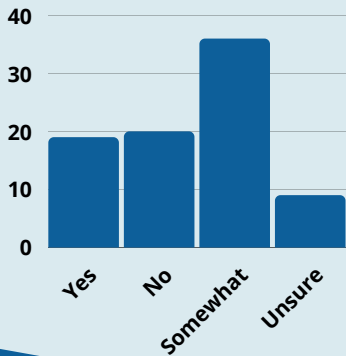
## Deismond's Story

*Limited access to technology and Wi-Fi is a challenge that Deismond Rosa understands well.*

*As the Director for the Hunts Point Beacon Site for Young Men's Initiative (YMI) Program in the Bronx, he and his team began to purchase hotspots for the mentees in their program who had little to no access to Wi-Fi in their homes.*

*There were days where Deismond would sit in his car outside the apartment building where some mentees lived so that they could access his personal hotspot and engage in virtual learning and mentoring.*

**Do you believe that there was sufficient technology for your mentors and mentees to successfully shift to virtual communication?**



## SUSTAINABILITY

*Kenneth (see his story to the right) was not the only program leader crunching numbers during the pandemic...*

The majority of survey respondents reported the biggest weak points identified during COVID-19 was available funding and maintaining the same level of support services they provide. This was further reflected in the survey data:

- Half of the programs lost funding (mostly because current funding was cut or not renewed).
- Most programs that lost funding lost about 25% of their funding.
- More than half are struggling with maintaining financial stability to some degree.

While 54% of programs reported they did secure funding through grants, nearly that amount reported they were concerned with future funding.

## QUALITY OF SERVICES

*Lynne's program (see her story to the right) is one example of how community organizations and mentoring programs shifted to meet community needs...*

Programs became important leaders for mentees and their families by centralizing information about resources and systems of support.

Despite the need for them to become multi-service leaders, half of the survey respondents reported that their program struggled to expand and go beyond their specific services.

*In addition to the difficulty with expansion was the impact on capacity...*

40% reported the loss of staff during COVID-19. Of those who reported losing staff, nearly 17% reported losing 50% or more of their team.

*Mentor retention remained high, aiding the virtual transition...*

84% of programs reporting that they lost less than 25% of their mentors during the shift to virtual mentoring.

With few choices other than to go virtual with services, programs reported trying out a variety of platforms to reach and engage youth and mentors:



*Efforts to find an effective platform for connection seem to have paid off as 57% of programs reported their mentors/mentees have access to platforms that they feel safe and secure on...*

Even with the variety of options and comfort level, 65% of survey respondents believe that mentees experience fewer benefits through e-mentoring (virtual mentoring) than they did with in-person mentoring.



### Kenneth's Story

*"I want to be here to make sure young people in my community have someone that cares for them no matter what happens," said Kenneth Simmons, Director of Recreation of Knights of Pythagoras.*

*As Kenneth endeavored to do just that during the pandemic, the city funding was cut, resulting in having to be strategic and stretch the program budget including generously contributing personal funds toward the program.*



### Lynne's Story

*Lynne Neveu's, Health Education and Outreach Supervisor for Planned Parenthood of Central and Western New York, her team completely shifted the way their program operated in order to meet the community's immediate needs. "We've been trying to make ourselves a hub of information. We've pivoted a lot of our Facebook content to be what's available in the community even if we don't necessarily offer it."*



# RACIAL JUSTICE: As the number of racial injustices grew in our country, programs grappled with what actions to take to support youth...

## THE ROLE OF MENTORS

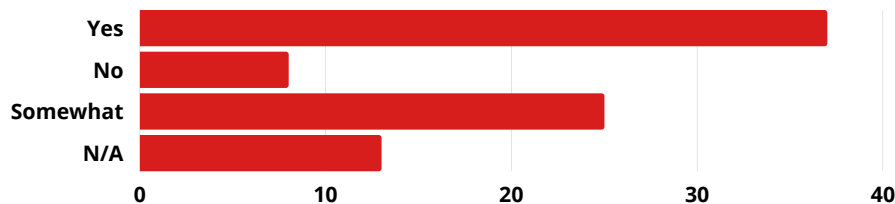
*Berenice (see her story to the right), as a mentor, was open to having these conversations with Tianna, but not every mentor may feel as prepared...*

Our data showed that only 26% of the programs who took the survey offered support and/or training for mentors to feel comfortable discussing police brutality and systemic racism.

However, the data reflected that those conversations are critical for youth:

- 44% of programs reported that many young people in their program live in over-policed communities.
- Nearly 38% reported that many young people in their program struggle with positive police relationships.
- 39% reported that young people in their program are worried about their safety/wellbeing when encountering policemen.

### Do many of the young people in your program live in over-policed communities?



## PROGRAM ACTION STEPS & NEEDS

While 55% of programs reported that they provide staff training on race, equity and inclusion, the survey also revealed that their most significant need is additional support in training staff and mentors on cultural proficiency.

Programs reported taking additional actions to support racial justice within their work:

- 52% of programs reported re-evaluating program structure.
- 42% of programs reported researching models that increase diversity and inclusion.
- 30% of programs reported creating a plan to diversify staff.
- 26% of programs reported creating a plan to increase recruitment of Black and Brown mentors to continue to diversify the mentor community.

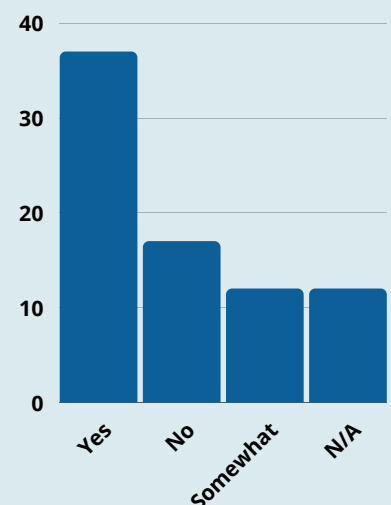


### Berenice's Story

*When uncertainty, sorrow, outrage and an unending desire for change overtake young people, the caring adults in their lives are a safe place to turn for guidance; that is precisely what 8-year-old Tianna did.*

*Her mentor Berenice engaged in conversations about race and racial justice in the U.S., encouraged learning about structural racism in our history and exploring ways for Tianna to use her voice and advocate for change.*

### Did your program train mentors on cultural proficiency?



**YOUNG PEOPLE: The impact of an unprecedented global pandemic in conjunction with persistent and unchecked racial injustice...**

**MENTAL HEALTH**

*Kailin (see her story to the right) is not the only mentoring professional in New York sounding the alarm for mental health services for youth...*

The majority of programs who took the COVID-19 State Survey said their young people would need additional emotional support once the state starts to reopen.

- 69% of programs said they're addressing young people's emotional needs through one-to-one conversations.
- 49% reported they are training mentors on how to support their mentees emotionally.
- The majority of programs reported they have young people struggling to access to high-quality healthcare/mental health services.

**PHYSICAL HEALTH**

*Youth are concerned about their safety, especially as they return to school and in-person activities...*

Only 10% of programs believe the youth they serve would be comfortable going back to school on a full-time in-person schedule, while close to 43% are likely to be somewhat comfortable with a hybrid model.

*"My mentees and their parents are afraid to have physical sessions," said one survey respondent.*

**TIME & ACTIVITIES**

*How are young people spending their time? The survey reports that youth use their time in the following ways...*

- 48% of programs responded that, on average, their young people engage in activities that they find challenging and absorbing.
- 41% of programs reported that on average, their young people do kind things for others once or twice a month with 30% reported doing kind things for others once or twice a week.
- 45% of programs report that 26%-50% of their young people feel busy in life; an additional 26% of programs reporting 51%-75% of youth feeling busy in life.

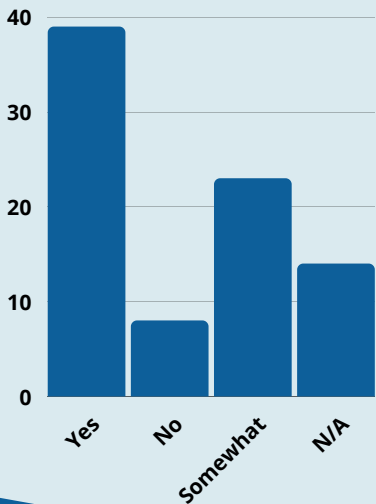


**Kailin's Story**

*"Something they [the mentees] need more of right now is support with mental health," said Kailin Kucewicz, a Peer Mentor Supervisor for the Native American Community Services, as she thought back to early June when the protests were at their peak.*

*The reality of racial injustice playing out before them was more than watching the news for some of her mentees who experienced protests in their front yards. Knowing support was needed to process and heal from this trauma, Kailin and her team became more educated to meet their mentees' needs.*

**Do young people in your program struggle with access to mental health services?**



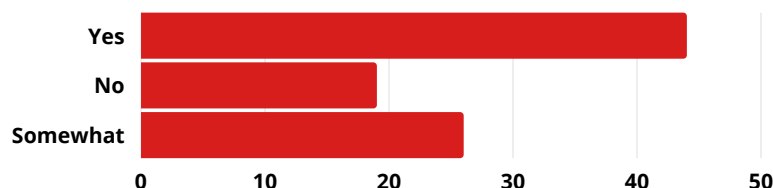
## RE-OPENING: Programs reported their plans in Fall 2020 as New York State moved toward re-opening...

### URGENCY FOR IN-PERSON SERVICES

*Simeon (see story to the right) isn't the only Program Director who believes in the importance of in-person services...*

49% of programs feel urgency to begin face-to-face mentoring sessions – family needs being one of the most significant factors.

**Does your program have a sense of urgency to begin face-to-face mentoring sessions when state regulations allow it?**



One program reported preferring to be in-person, saying:

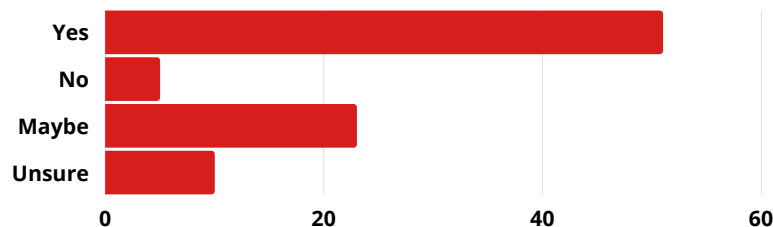
*"The general feeling of our program is lost over the virtual platform when we cannot all be together. As a group mentoring program there is a lot of importance in sharing a physical space."*

As programs planned to re-open, their plans varied:

- Only 12% of programs planning reopening plan to resume pre-pandemic practices.
- Half of the programs plan to continue to use e-mentoring in some capacity after physical distancing recommendations are lifted.

### SUPPORT NEEDED FOR RE-OPENING

**Will your program need additional support as the state starts to reopen?**



Those that identified as needing additional assistance reported the following as major needs for creating a reopening plan:

- More training for mentors on how to emotionally support their mentees.
- A crisis plan for if/when a second or third wave occurs.
- More training on addressing trauma through mentoring.
- How to create spaces of wellness and joy as young people return in-person to the program.



### Simeon's Story

*"There are children who we don't know how tough it is to be in their home," said Simeon Pollydore, Program Director of the Redfern Cornerstone Mentoring Program.*

*When his program was able to safely resume some of the afterschool, in-person services in the fall of 2020, the reality of how critical it is for some youth and their families to have in-person programming was clear.*

*Simeon shared the story of one mother who would have had to quit her job if she couldn't access the in-person care of his afterschool mentoring program for her child.*

*"I kind of knew because she did tell me before," said Simeon, "But I guess what she was making me aware of was the fact that I didn't know how more extreme [the situation was]."*



### MENTOR NY's Trainings

*"I wouldn't be able to choose one specific [MENTOR NY] training that has helped me because all the trainings have been helpful and effective."*

*- Kenneth Simmons  
Knights of Pythagoras*



## CONCLUSIONS: Implications for the NY Mentoring Movement and recommended action steps...

As we analyze these survey findings and consider their implications, it is clear that only through a collective effort will we recover from this health crisis. Together funders, donors, MENTOR New York and mentoring/youth development programs can create a more robust network of support for young people while strengthening the Mentoring Movement across the state.

### REBUILD INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPACITY

#### *Increase funding to support general operations...*

Programs will need financial support as they rebuild their staff structures, increase mentor and mentee recruitment efforts and launch revised or new program models that are more responsive to young people's current academic and social realities.

#### *Increase technology and Wi-Fi access...*

Mentoring and youth development programs are positioned to help close the technology and homework gap. During the pandemic, they became the lifeline to help young people solve their hardware and connectivity needs despite having minimal resources. By strategically funding programs and building innovative initiatives to increase access to hardware and connectivity, we can close the gap and increase youth engagement in virtual academic and social opportunities.

#### *Provide support for wellness and mental health...*

Young people have faced traumas that will impact their academic, social and emotional development. Investing in training and support services for mentoring/youth development programs is essential in the next several months. Providing resources and expertise to help programs address these realities with the young people they serve will have a residual impact that helps schools and families. (Examples of resources: wellness tents, mindfulness, grieving, meditation and reflection services)

#### *Create risk management plans and strategies...*

Programs need to invest in risk management plans that will assess youth and families' needs when a crisis strikes and will operationalize a response strategy that allows programs to pivot and be responsive with immediacy. This prepared, rapid response can help minimize the gaps and traumas that young people may experience due to social-economic disparities and other adversities.



### Ariyanna's Story

*"They're still really optimistic," says Ariyanna Simmons, Grant Technician and Mentor for GEAR UP, who can't help but feel inspired by her students who displayed resilience even in the early weeks of the pandemic.*

*"When you lay out that foundation and let them know that they are capable to do whatever they set their minds to do regardless of what happens, you see the fruit of that in times like this," said Ariyanna.*

*One of her mentees is "excited for college despite [the pandemic], and he's hopeful. And that's honestly all I can ask for as a mentor."*



### MENTOR NY's Leadership

*"There's a lot of just uncharted territory right now and there's definitely a lot of sensitive issues coming up right now... So having another organization [MENTOR NY] that is so experienced in mentoring and can help us make certain judgement calls is really helpful."*

*- Ali Hoban,  
Student Sponsor Partners*



## INCREASE SUPPORT AND RESOURCES FOR MENTORS

Mentors have proven to be a consistent, reliable support system for young people across the state during a crisis. By providing the necessary turn-key training and resources, programs can better support mentors as they continue their relationships with mentees.

### *Increase support for mentors to have difficult conversations...*

Death, grieving, police brutality, racism, and financial hardships are difficult topics to discuss for anyone, especially with a young person. Providing guidance and support on addressing these topics and best supporting young people as they navigate their thoughts, ideas, and emotions.

## PARTNER WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TO BUILD TIMELY SOLUTIONS

### *Engage in program design...*

As we build our mentoring and youth development programs, the best program designers are young people. Elevating their ideas, sharing their needs, and re-imagining program activities will strengthen youth engagement and program outcomes.

### *Engage in advocacy...*

Young people are concerned about their safety and their communities. Creating opportunities to elevate their voice, ideas, and actions to help solve community issues that concern them and allow them to help others will be an essential part of our work in 2021. Civic engagement and community engagement will be a necessary part of healing and igniting passions that can increase engagement.

### *Increasing Peer-to-Peer Support...*

As we experience social distancing, which leads to social isolation creating near-peer relationships can support social and emotional development while fostering mentoring relationships that allow young people to develop social capital and support systems as schools may need to move to a winter shutdown.

## CONTACT US: Connect with us to learn more

Interested in funding a piece of this critical work? Contact Brenda Jimenez at [bjimenez@mentorkids.org](mailto:bjimenez@mentorkids.org).

To learn more about how your program can implement this work, contact Jack Kavanaugh at [jkavanaugh@mentorkids.org](mailto:jkavanaugh@mentorkids.org).

With questions about the research, please contact Hadleigh Kindberg at [hkindberg@mentorkids.org](mailto:hkindberg@mentorkids.org).

### Roxette's Story

*Roxette (Roxy), a Youth Advocate for Mentoring from New York, has used her voice to advocate for both mentoring and policy reform for youth incarceration.*

*She has spoken at conferences and on panels to bring the leadership and perspective of a young person into conversations about the needs and realities of youth.*

*"I hope to learn many things from my participation in Youth Advocates for Mentoring," said Roxy. "Gaining mentors means opening up my mind to different perspectives."*



### MENTOR NY's Guidance

*"I'm just really grateful that MENTOR NY came through my email... It's really helped me evaluate; even when I've been with my program for so long, it's really helped me find the gaps in the program and the ways that we can improve."*

- Ariyanna Simmons,  
GEAR UP