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Community – University Institute for Social Research

*Alberta Mentoring Partnerships:  
Overview and Recommendations to  
Saskatoon Mentoring Agencies*

**by Maureen Seguin**



*Building Healthy Sustainable Communities*

## **Community-University Institute for Social Research**

CUISR is a partnership between a set of community-based organizations (including Saskatoon District Health, the City of Saskatoon, Quint Development Corporation, the Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee on Human Services) and a large number of faculty and graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan. CUISR's mission is "to serve as a focal point for community-based research and to integrate the various social research needs and experiential knowledge of the community-based organizations with the technical expertise available at the University. It promotes, undertakes, and critically evaluates applied social research for community-based organizations, and serves as a data clearinghouse for applied and community-based social research. The overall goal of CUISR is to build the capacity of researchers, community-based organizations and citizenry to enhance community quality of life."

This mission is reflected in the following objectives: (1) to build capacity within CBOs to conduct their own applied social research and write grant proposals; (2) to serve as a conduit for the transfer of experientially-based knowledge from the community to the University classroom, and transfer technical expertise from the University to the community and CBOs; (3) to provide CBOs with assistance in the areas of survey sample design, estimation and data analysis, or, where necessary, to undertake survey research that is timely, accurate and reliable; (4) to serve as a central clearinghouse, or data warehouse, for community-based and applied social research findings; and (5) to allow members of the University and CBOs to access a broad range of data over a long time period.

As a starting point, CUISR has established three focused research modules in the areas of Community Health Determinants and Health Policy, Community Economic Development, and Quality of Life Indicators. The three-pronged research thrust underlying the proposed Institute is, in operational terms, highly integrated. The central questions in the three modules—community quality of life, health, and economy—are so interdependent that many of the projects and partners already span and work in more than one module. All of this research is focused on creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable communities.

Research is the driving force that cements the partnership between universities, CBOs, and government in acquiring, transferring, and applying knowledge in the form of policy and programs. Researchers within each of the modules examine these dimensions from their particular perspective, and the results are integrated at the level of the Institute, thus providing a rich, multi-faceted analysis of the common social and economic issues. The integrated results are then communicated to the Community and the University in a number of ways to ensure that research makes a difference in the development of services, implementation of policy, and lives of the people of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This report provides an overview of partnerships between mentoring agencies in Alberta. This exploratory research was initiated by four Saskatoon mentoring agencies—Volunteer Saskatoon, the Canadian Paraplegic Association (Saskatoon chapter), Catholic Family Services, and Big Brothers Big Sisters Saskatoon—to better understand partnerships among mentoring agencies. Alberta partnerships included in this overview are the Alberta Mentoring Partnership, the Calgary Youth Mentoring Coalition, and two smaller partnerships in Edmonton. Interviews were held with representatives of each partnership. A brief description of each partnership is included in this report, along with an account of the initial concrete steps in its formation. Details of their collaborative activities and funding sustainability are also addressed for each level of partnership. Recommendations offered by the Edmonton interviewees to the Saskatoon agencies are included after these findings, along with a short discussion concerning the current status of Saskatoon mentoring agencies. The purpose of this synopsis is to provide Saskatoon mentoring agencies with this information, so that they can make informed decisions regarding future partnership initiatives.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, numerous mentorship agencies in Saskatoon have indicated interest in forming a partnership. In February 2004, agencies such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters, Catholic Family Services, Volunteer Saskatoon, Kids Not in School, Canadian Paraplegic Association, the Restorative Circles Initiative, and the Initiative Regional Intersectoral Committee were involved in an action research project through the Community-University Institute of Social Research (CUISR). This research, entitled “Mentoring in Saskatoon: Toward a Meaningful Partnership” (Tannis, 2006), represented an initial step. The report emphasized the interest of the individual agencies in increasing collaboration on several key issues, including the training of volunteers and general collaborative strategies and goals.

Tannis’ research clearly demonstrated that the involved agencies had a willingness to work together in the future. However, the particulars of this hypothetical collaboration were less clearly defined and, as Tannis advised, needed further work. This report aims to address this question by gleaning knowledge from several mentorship partnerships in Alberta.

This study is composed of three major sections. The first details the report's methodological background, as well as briefly outlines the research phases leading up to the findings. The second section is composed of findings obtained through interviews held with representatives of seven Alberta mentoring agencies. In the third section, a discussion of these findings is provided, as well as their applicability to the Saskatoon mentoring community.

## METHODOLOGY

This research followed a Participatory Action Research model.<sup>1</sup> Action research is a “participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 1). This research method seeks to bring together theory and practice, and is conducive to participation by the social groups being studied. In contrast to methods that are used to produce purely academic work, Action Research seeks to “produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 2).

The use of Action Research in this project allowed the agencies involved to maintain a large degree of control over the direction of the research. For example, the agencies involved were consulted in regard to both the research questions driving the project and the interview format used for the Edmonton interviews. The intention of this research is to provide a usable document for those Saskatoon agencies considering collaboration.

Prior to the Saskatoon interviews, the document *Building a sustainable infrastructure for mentoring: The Edmonton partnership and provincial implications*, prepared by Carr Leiren and Associates (2001), was distributed to the participating agencies. This was done to help familiarize the agencies with one specific mentoring partnership in Alberta, and to identify the areas to be investigated in this report.

Four semi-structured interviews were held with representatives from mentoring organizations in Saskatoon (see **Appendix A** for the interview format). These organizations were Big Brothers Big Sisters of Saskatoon,<sup>2</sup> the Canadian Paraplegic Association (Saskatoon chapter), Catholic Family Services, and Volunteer Saskatoon. Unfortunately, the Restorative Circles Initiative was unable to participate, as lack of funding had forced the termination of their mentoring program. The purpose of these interviews was to identify common areas of interest in mentoring, especially in regard to partnerships among mentorship organizations.

Interviewees from the participant agencies expressed several common concerns. The challenge of securing sustainable funding was identified by all Saskatoon agencies as a pressing, on-going issue, and agencies expressed an interest in learning how this challenge was being addressed by mentoring partnerships in Alberta. Saskatoon agencies

also indicated interest in determining on which aspects (public awareness campaigns, recruitment and/or training of volunteers) the Alberta agencies were currently collaborating. A third identified common concern was an interest in the actual, concrete steps taken by Alberta mentoring agencies in the formation of partnerships.

Based on these shared areas of interest, a draft was developed for the Edmonton interviews (see **Appendix B** for the interview format). This draft was approved by the Saskatoon agencies before it was used in the Edmonton interviews.

The Edmonton interviewing phase commenced in late July 2005. Seven semi-structured interviews were held with representatives of various mentoring agencies involved in partnerships. The interviewees were Diane Dalley, representing the Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP); Rob Lewis, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters Medicine Hat, representing AMP; Sharon Moore, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters Calgary and area, representing the Calgary Youth Mentoring Coalition (CYMC); Liz O'Neill, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton, representing AMP and two smaller partnerships; Tim Osbourne, director, Community Impact, United Way of the Alberta Capital Region, representing a small mentoring partnership in Edmonton; Pauline Smale, director of Roots and Wings program, representing a small partnership in Edmonton; and Rick Walters, community mentoring consultant for Alberta Children's Services, representing AMP.<sup>3</sup>

Following these interviews, a report on the preliminary findings was presented to the Saskatoon agencies on 7 September 2005.

## **FINDINGS**

Three levels of partnership were explored in this study. The Alberta Mentoring Partnership is an Alberta-wide partnership of mentoring agencies. The Calgary Youth Mentoring Coalition is a citywide partnership of mentoring agencies in Calgary. Finally, two small-scale partnerships within Edmonton were included. One, the Roots and Wings program, is composed of The Family Centre and Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton and area. The other small partnership is called the Partners for Kids program, and includes six Edmonton mentoring agencies.

This section is composed of three subsections, each covering the three different levels of partnerships studied (AMP, CYMC, and the small partnerships). Each subsection includes a description of the partnership, a chronology of the initial concrete steps in forming the partnership, a discussion regarding funding sustainability, and a description of the partnership's collaboration activity.

## ***THE ALBERTA MENTORING PARTNERSHIP (AMP)***

### *Description*

The Alberta Mentoring Partnership is the largest of its kind in Alberta. Ninety mentoring agencies are included, with sixteen represented on the leadership team. The leadership team meets six times per year, and includes representatives from northern, central, and southern Alberta. Many Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies are represented on the leadership team. Also included on the leadership team are representatives from Alberta Children's Services (who provide funding for various pilots) and Dianne Dalley, the AMP's government seconded coordinator with the children's ministry.

There is a wide variety of participation from the ninety member agencies. Some agencies participate only by receiving new information garnered by the more active agencies. The agencies that are more heavily involved are generally those same ones that are involved in pilot projects (see **Appendix C** for a list of pilot projects initiated by the AMP). Frequent collaboration occurs between agencies that are geographically in close proximity to each other. For example, member agencies in Edmonton collaborate with each other more often than they do with agencies in Medicine Hat.

### *Initial concrete steps<sup>4</sup>*

A national roundtable on mentoring was held in Toronto in March 2000. Alberta's representatives included Liz O'Neill and Bob Wyatt (head of the Muttart Foundation), among others. After the roundtable, Wyatt and O'Neill held a meeting with Alberta participants with the aim of increasing mentoring in Alberta. As a result of this meeting, Gary Walker, an American mentoring advocate, was approached by the group to tour Alberta and promote mentoring. Walker's tour was planned by Sharon Moore, David Pickersgill (Big Brothers Big Sisters national board member for Alberta), and O'Neill. The visits to Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Edmonton were funded by Wyatt and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC).

In January 2001, Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton brought together for a meeting various mentoring agencies, as well as those interested in developing mentoring components. This group of agencies became the Edmonton Mentoring Partnership, and initiated a study on how to build supports for sustainable mentoring in Edmonton, with funding provided by the Muttart Foundation and the Alberta Children's Ministry.<sup>5</sup> While this study was underway, it was decided that other parts of Alberta should also be included in the report, and so AADAC provided funding for a consultant to visit those communities visited by Walker in 2000. The report was released on 20 July 2001.

Meetings were held with the Alberta children's ministry to discuss the report's findings. A conference call was held with all the participant communities, and, in October 2001, agencies from across Alberta met to talk about building a provincial infrastructure for mentoring.

Alberta children's services was told of the work and business plans for the Edmonton Mentoring Partnership, and informed the partnership that the ministry was interested in helping in some way. It initially offered to provide a seconded staff person for six months, which was later extended to three years. It was decided that the secondee (Dianne Dalley) would report directly to Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton. Dalley began her position on 1 December 2001.<sup>6</sup>

On 14 and 15 January 2002, meetings were held at Tim Horton's Retreat in Kananaskis, Alberta. The purpose was to develop a business plan for a provincial partnership. Thirty-four agencies from across Alberta attended, as well as representatives from four provincial government departments. A business plan for Alberta was developed and unanimously accepted by all parties, resulting in the creation of the Alberta Mentoring Partnership.

### *Funding sustainability*

All four interviewees stated that funding sustainability was an issue currently faced by Alberta's mentoring agencies. Two stated that the creation of the AMP did not satisfactorily address the issue of sustainable funding. Two respondents reported that mentoring agencies had received increased funding from the Alberta government since the AMP's formation. One also described various initiatives, including research and pilot projects, that have been made possible due to funding granted to the AMP.

Three interviewees stressed the importance of applying jointly for grants. One respondent, who works for Alberta Children's Services and decides which organizations receive grants for pilots, remarked that large group applications are more likely to receive funding than individual agency applications.

Two interviewees emphasized that sustainability is not just about money. One felt that AMP's provincial scope was key to its sustainability. Another stated that sustainability was an "integrated block" that included "the mentors, and the kids, and the public, knowing that you're doing something good, that you're out there, you're engaged in the community, and that you also support the community back."

### *Collaboration*

The three areas explored within the collaboration theme were public awareness campaigns, recruitment of volunteers, and the training of volunteers.

Two interviewees felt that collaboration for public awareness campaigns works when the purpose is simply to inform the public of the benefits of mentoring. A third respondent remarked that collaboration would encourage government participation in public awareness campaigns.

Half the respondents emphasized that recruitment cannot be done collaboratively within a provincial scope. One explained that contact information for only a single agency must appear in any advertisement, which precludes the possibility of collaboration. According to the other respondent who shared this view, recruiting volunteers on a provincial scale was “too amorphous” to work. However, these two interviewees remarked that recruitment information, such as data pertaining to recruitment strategies for certain demographics, could be shared among agencies.

Regarding the collaborative training of volunteers, the respondents expressed a range of views. One reported that training was done collaboratively by sharing training materials among AMP member agencies, and by smaller agencies receiving training from Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies. Another interviewee stated that it “would make sense” to train collaboratively, but did not elaborate on this statement. A third respondent felt that any training pertinent to all mentoring programs could be done collaboratively, but that agency-specific requirements of volunteers could be a barrier to collaboratively training volunteers.

### ***THE CALGARY YOUTH MENTORING COALITION (CYMC)***

#### *Description*

The Calgary Youth Mentoring Coalition was formed approximately eight years ago. This Calgary-wide partnership currently includes roughly twenty agencies, up from its original six.<sup>7</sup> Current member agencies include: Alberta Mentor Foundation for Youth; Calgary Reads; Hull Child and Family Services; Aspen Family Services; Calgary Young Offender Centre; Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary; Hera Society; AADAC; McMann Youth Services; Seniors for Kids Society; Catholic Family Services; and Métis Family Services. CYMC was created because the initial members had an interest in joint training, which has remained an area of the coalition’s strength. When CYMC attempted to collaborate on funding, however, the partnership almost collapsed; since then, member agencies have not attempted such a collaboration.

#### *Initial concrete steps<sup>8</sup>*

In 1995, six agencies involved in youth mentoring came together in an informal setting. This meeting was the first of several gatherings, during which time the agencies discussed the benefits of collaboration and the possibility of forming a coalition.

Initial activities of this group of agencies involved collaboratively training volunteers. As the coalition became better established, it hosted two volunteer seminar and training conferences. The coalition also arranged for mentoring experts, such as Gary Walker, to come and speak to interested Calgarians.

### *Funding sustainability*

Moore said that CYMC does not attempt to collaborate on funding applications. An attempt at such a collaboration was made a few years ago, when the agencies considered jointly hiring a staff person to help handle the administrative component of the partnership. In particular, they wanted to hire someone to write proposals for the group and take minutes at their meetings.

Conflict between member agencies resulted from this attempt to collaborate on funding, and several agencies dropped out of the coalition. The conflict was due to several factors, such as uncertainty over which agency would manage the person hired by the partnership, and which agency would apply to fund the position. Some agencies also felt that the partnership's application for funding would negatively affect their own agency's chances for receiving program funding.

Regarding this conflict over funding, Sharon Moore commented, "[P]aranoia began to develop, relationships began to spread apart, because of the competition [when] funding was involved. There was money involved." She stated further, "When we got into funding, I tell you, it really, the group collapsed. It just about collapsed."

### *Collaboration*

Moore also discussed public awareness campaigns and the recruitment and training of volunteers. She reported that it had been problematic to collaborate on public awareness campaigns because only a single agency's name could be on the poster. For the same reason, she warned against trying to incorporate the recruitment of volunteers into public awareness campaigns. In the past, this had led to some conflict within the group. However, Moore explained that the creation of a CYMC website was helpful in addressing this issue because it gives the public multiple agencies to contact.

Collaborative training is CYMC's main area of strength. Indeed, an interest in shared training is what brought the agencies together in the first place. At every CYMC meeting, there is a training component, alternately led by the member agencies, that lasts approximately forty-five minutes. Commenting on CYMC's shared training aspect, Moore stated that it has "been extremely successful, and from that, I think the coalition actually doubled, in number, of people interested in attending meetings." Moore recognized that some agencies may have specialized training in accordance with the type of programs that they offer. However, Moore said that sharing even the more specialized training sessions has been beneficial to the agencies involved.

## ***SMALL PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN EDMONTON MENTORING AGENCIES***

Two small partnerships were included in this study. They are the Partners for Kids program and the Roots and Wings program. Both small partnerships involve Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton and area.

### *Partners for Kids*

#### **Description**

The Partners for Kids program is co-provided by six agencies in Edmonton. It is a comprehensive program that is offered in schools and aims to address a variety of issues faced by students. The program includes mentoring, counseling, in-home support and literacy training for families, and a school lunch program. Agencies involved in the partnership include: Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton; The Family Centre; Roots and Wings; the Centre for Family Literacy; Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation, and United Way. Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton provides the mentoring component, while The Family Centre offers a therapist to participating schools. Roots and Wings provides families in-home support, and the Centre for Family Literacy offers literacy skills support for parents and caregivers, while the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation manages a school lunch program. United Way limits its participation mostly to providing funding.

#### **Initial concrete steps<sup>9</sup>**

Over eight years ago, Sandra Woitas, principal of Norwood School in Edmonton, approached United Way requesting assistance with a problem reported by her teachers. According to Woitas, the teachers did not have adequate time to actually teach because they spent too much of their time disciplining students. Issues that affected many students included hunger, malnutrition, family violence, poverty, irregular attendance, and low literacy.

United Way brought together various community agencies to discuss possible solutions to the problem. The Family Centre, an agency that provides counseling services, was contacted, which led to a broader conception of supports needed to address the issues at Norwood School. Thus, the Edmonton School Lunch program was added to Partners for Kids. Additional agencies also became involved, such as Roots and Wings, Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton, and the Centre for Family Literacy.

Early results at Norwood School were positive and dramatic. In 2000, Abbott Elementary School became the second school to offer the lunch program. Additional community resources became involved in mentor recruitment, such as Concordia University. United Way facilitated these community connections. The program has since expanded to several other schools in Edmonton. According to Tom Osbourne, the committee's goal is to add one new school to Partners for Kids each year.

### **Funding sustainability**

Osbourne commented that funding for any non-profit organization is always a challenge. However, he reported that Partners for Kids' collaborative approach has made it attractive for United Way funding. Also, because of the program's demonstrated success, additional organizations have contacted United Way to offer monetary support. "What's nice," Osbourne commented, "is that it's a really successful program, and so, when we're talking to donors, and people who are in a position to make large donations, it's a very attractive program because the results are quite apparent."

As stated above, the committee's goal is to introduce the program to one new school per year. This necessitates an increase in funding of \$120,000-150,000 per year. Osbourne stated that increasing the funds by this amount each year is challenging, but they have been successful at doing so every year since the program's implementation.

### **Collaboration**

Each participant agency collaborates in the partnership by fulfilling a specific role in Partners for Kids. For example, Edmonton Big Brothers Big Sisters handles recruitment of volunteers.

Osbourne stated that the United Way does not "approach it from a funder's perspective, as we decide how things go. That's not at all how we're doing it; it's all really done collaboratively." According to Osbourne, partnership activities are directed by the agencies, not by United Way.

Osbourne reported that the program's website provides an opportunity to promote collaboration. For example, United Way promotes volunteer recruitment through their website even though it is not their specific role in the partnership.

### *Roots and Wings*

#### **Description**

Roots and Wings is a partnership between The Family Centre and Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton. The Family Centre works with high-risk families by providing social workers who offer in-home support. Once families make some initial positive changes, paid mentors provide additional on-going support. Big Brothers Big Sisters recruits and trains these mentors.

#### **Initial concrete steps**

According to Pauline Smale, Ron Rode and Liz O'Neill knew each other before the partnership was forged, having sat on many of the same committees that deal with volunteering and non-profit organizations.

The Roots and Wings partnership started from conversations between Rode and O'Neill regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their respective programs. Each recognized that the other's program could fill gaps in their own services. For example, The Family Centre had been struggling to maintain volunteers, while Big Brothers Big Sisters was strong in this area.

### **Funding sustainability**

Smale stated that sustainable funding "is always an issue with any [non-governmental organization]," and that healthy, long-lasting relationships with funders are critical for maintaining sustainability. The two agencies involved in Roots and Wings collaborate on funding by applying together and sharing the money. Also, if there is a surplus left over, they decide jointly how to use it.

Smale pointed out that sustainability is not just about funding. She stated, "The stakeholders really value the mentorship pieces, the pieces where community members come together and do some good work for families. So, to me, that creates sustainability."

### **Collaboration**

Like the Partners for Kids partnership, each agency involved in Roots and Wings has a specific role to play in their collaboration. Big Brothers Big Sisters handles public awareness and the recruitment and training of volunteers. The Family Centre oversees the professional part of the collaboration. Smale reported that the agencies collaborate by meeting, envisioning, and developing evaluations together, and by keeping communication tight.

## **DISCUSSION**

This section of the report is divided into two subsections. The first is composed of recommendations given by the Alberta interviewees to the Saskatoon mentoring agencies. The second section describes the current condition of mentoring agencies in Saskatoon, and the feasibility of forming a partnership among mentoring agencies there.

### ***LESSONS LEARNED***

Many AMP respondents spoke about competition between agencies and how this presented a barrier to collaboration. In particular, they advised "pulling back" to "look at the big picture." "Pulling back" includes prioritizing the success of mentees over that

of the agency. One respondent remarked, “It doesn’t matter who provides the service, as long as the children are being served.”

An important difference exists between AMP and the smaller partnerships with regard to intra-agency competition. Both respondents representing small partnerships within Edmonton reported that such competition was not an issue. One interviewee attributed this lack of competition to the clearly defined roles of the member agencies. The other interviewee recommended that agencies keep the “big picture” in mind to ensure that all pieces of the collaboration receive equal attention. In considering Saskatoon agencies, small partnerships may work better than large ones if competition is anticipated to be a hindrance to collaboration.

A few of the Alberta interviewees recommended that Saskatoon agencies be prepared for the time involved in operating a partnership. With the exception of AMP, where Dianne Dalley handled administrative duties during her secondment, administrative work is added to executives’ already crowded schedule. Attempting to collaborate on funding for administrative help can cause disruption in the partnership, as Sharon Moore stated. Thus, should they decide to form a partnership, Saskatoon agencies should take note of the time issue.

The CYMC interviewee strongly recommended that Saskatoon agencies should not attempt to collaborate on funding. As discussed earlier, CYMC’s attempt to collaborate on funding almost destroyed the coalition. However, representatives from AMP strongly encouraged joint funding initiatives. This strategy appears to be working for AMP (see **Appendix C**). Joint funding also seems to work for the small partnerships included in this report. This may be because these partnerships are “program-specific,” that is, the partnerships are forged around one particular program. For these small partnerships, funding must be collaborative. Based on these varied responses regarding collaborative funding, Saskatoon mentoring agencies must exercise caution when considering this issue. Small partnerships necessarily apply for joint funding, and applications for joint funding seem to be strongly encouraged (and successful) when the partnership is province-wide. However, collaborative funding is a potentially volatile issue, as the CYMC experience has demonstrated.

Alberta interviewees representing both small and large partnerships warned that geographical distance between member agencies presented a barrier to collaboration. One respondent also stressed the importance of clear meeting agendas. She stated, “Having a really loose agenda was a problem, as people quit coming to meetings because they weren’t about anything initially.” Thus, Saskatoon agencies should consider geographical distance as a possible barrier to collaboration, as well as vague meeting agendas.

## ***CURRENT CONDITIONS OF SASKATOON MENTORING AGENCIES***

The current status of the mentoring community in Saskatoon can be described as turbulent. Since Tannis (2006) began his research on Saskatoon mentoring agencies, lack of funding has forced several agencies to drop out. For example, the Restorative Circles Initiative program folded due to lack of funding. More recently, funding for the mentoring component of the Canadian Paraplegic Association was cut. This affects attempts at collaboration among mentoring agencies, as mentoring programs seem to be terminated quite frequently.

Saskatoon interviewees have expressed frustration at the current level of funding given to mentoring agencies. Several attributed the dire funding situation to the provincial government's apparent lack of support of mentoring initiatives. One respondent characterized the Saskatchewan government's treatment of mentoring agencies as "schizophrenic," while another respondent expressed frustration at the "flavour of the week" funding priorities. A general paucity of funding has produced distrust between Saskatoon mentoring agencies because they are all competing for scarce funding. This distrust between agencies presents another potential obstacle to collaboration.

An additional obstacle to the formation of a partnership among Saskatoon mentoring agencies is the amalgamation of Big Brothers and Big Sisters during the summer of 2005. This amalgamation represents a huge administrative process and is very demanding of staff time. Accordingly, forming partnerships with other mentoring organizations is not a current priority for them. Because of these obstacles present in the mentoring community, representatives from the participant agencies have concluded that a Saskatoon mentoring partnership is not possible at this time.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report provides an overview of three levels of partnerships among mentoring agencies in Alberta. Issues explored include initial concrete steps in partnership formation, funding sustainability, and the collaborative activities in which member agencies participate. The Alberta interviewees offered many practical recommendations to the Saskatoon agencies with regard to partnerships, and this information is useful even if a partnership is not presently viable. These recommendations, as well as the research findings, may be useful, however, if a partnership is considered in the future. Also, the information compiled in this report can be utilized by mentoring agencies beyond Saskatoon.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For a historical account of the development of action research, see Reason and Bradbury (2001).
- <sup>2</sup> Big Brothers and Big Sisters, formerly separate organizations, amalgamated over the summer of 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> Contact information for the Alberta interviewees is provided in **Appendix D**.
- <sup>4</sup> Information presented in this section is taken from the working document, *Chronology of events: Backgrounder of events leading to infrastructure support for provincial mentoring*, provided by Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton.
- <sup>5</sup> This is the same document distributed to the Saskatoon mentoring agencies prior to the Saskatoon interviews.
- <sup>6</sup> Dalley stated, “My boss said to me ... ‘They want to create a secondment opportunity for you. What are some of the things that you might like to do?’ And then he mentioned, ‘Would you like to go and work for, with Liz [O’Neill] at Big Brothers?’ because they were doing this provincial initiative.”
- <sup>7</sup> According to Sharon Moore, Volunteer Calgary presently has no role in the coalition. They were involved in the past, but no longer attend meetings. Moore stated that Volunteer Calgary did not think the meetings applied to them because they are not involved in direct volunteer recruitment. Nevertheless, the coalition continues to send minutes to Volunteer Calgary to keep them aware and up to date.
- <sup>8</sup> Information presented in this section is taken from the working document, *History of the Calgary Youth Mentoring Coalition*, provided by Big Brothers Big Sisters Calgary.
- <sup>9</sup> Information presented in this section is taken from the working document, *Understanding the Partners for Kids program: Past, present and future*, provided by United Way Alberta Capital Region.

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## Appendix A. Format for Saskatoon Interviews.\*

1. General information about the CUISR project was discussed with the interviewee. Also, the interviewee provided the researcher with a brief overview of the mentoring program(s) offered by their agency.
2. Is there anything in particular in the Edmonton report (*Building a sustainable infrastructure for mentoring: The Edmonton partnership and provincial implications*) that caught your attention?

Collaboration on recruiting and training of volunteers, and on public awareness campaigns?

3. The Edmonton report recommended creating a committee, composed of senior volunteers from the member agencies, to oversee the partnership. Do you think the creation of such a committee would be a good idea in Saskatoon?
4. What aspects of the Edmonton Partnership would you like to see applied in Saskatoon?
5. Can you describe how the Saskatoon mentoring agencies currently interact?

Do they work together informally?

Are their interactions cooperative, or do conflicts occur among the mentoring agencies?

How could interaction between the agencies be improved?

6. Review of responses given by the interviewee.

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\* Because these interviews were semi-structured, the format differed for each interview. However, all interviewees were asked the same core questions.

## **Appendix B. Format for the Alberta Interviews.\***

### **A. Issues identified by the Saskatoon mentoring agencies: How they have been addressed in Alberta through partnerships**

1. In talking to the Saskatoon mentoring agencies, a number of common concerns have been identified. One such issue identified by the agencies is the sustainability of funding. Is this also an issue for the mentoring agencies in Alberta? If so, how has it been addressed by the creation of a partnership?

2. In what ways do the agencies included in the partnership collaborate?

Public awareness campaigns?

Recruitment and training of volunteers?

How does collaboration help mentoring agencies in these tasks?

### **B. Inquiry into Albertan Partnerships**

1. How was the partnership created? What are some of the concrete steps for creating such a partnership among mentoring agencies in Saskatoon?

2. What would you recommend to the Saskatoon mentoring agencies that are currently coming together to create a partnership?

3. What are some of the successes of the partnership?

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\* See note in **Appendix A.**

4. What are some barriers to collaboration in mentoring partnerships?

How have the individual agencies overcome the tendency to compete with each other in favour of collaboration?

Would you make any changes to improve the partnership?

5. Would you be willing to serve as a resource for the Saskatoon mentoring agencies as they form their own partnership?

## **Appendix C. Pilot Programs Initiated by the Alberta Mentoring Partnership.\***

### **A. Youth in Transition Pilot Projects**

These pilots assist youth in transition either from child welfare or the youth justice system. Three pilots have been established.

#### **1. Youth in Care Mentoring Program of Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton and Area**

This program provides group and one-on-one mentoring for youth with child welfare status. It is operated by Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton and area.

#### **2. In-School Mentoring for Youth in Care of Big Brothers Big Sisters Medicine Hat**

In-school and traditional mentoring are offered to children with child welfare status through this pilot. It is operated by Big Brothers Big Sisters Medicine Hat.

#### **3. Youth in Transition Program offered by the Edmonton Young Offender Centre (EYOC) and the Edmonton Boys and Girls Club**

The Edmonton Young Offender Centre and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Edmonton are involved in this pilot. It provides mentoring to youth with young offender status while they are in the centre and as they transition into the community upon release.

As of summer 2005, these programs will no longer be in the pilot stage. A complete evaluation of learnings will be provided as the projects are terminated. The AMP supports these pilots and will provide appropriate assistance as agencies adapt to maintain these programs as part of their regular service delivery.

### **B. New Program: Community Outreach Program**

Many youth who reside in young offender centres are from more distant communities. This has been an obstacle to providing on-going mentoring as youth transition from the centre to their home community. To address this challenge, the Calgary Young Offender Centre agreed to partner with AMP to build on their existing mentoring program. The

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\* Information presented here is taken from *The Alberta Mentoring Partnership: Executive summary results report 2004* and *The Alberta Mentoring Partnership: A review of progress to date*.

intent of the outreach program is to provide mentoring when young offenders return to their home communities.

This program was in the initial stages of development at the end of 2004. At this point, Big Brothers Big Sisters organizations in Ponoka, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat had agreed to participate. In addition, connections with the Blood Community, Tsuu Tina Nation, and the Siksika Justice Department had been forged.

### **C. Mentoring in Cultural Communities**

At the request of community leaders, AMP has met with representatives of several cultural communities to discuss mentoring in their communities. These communities have developed informal mentoring structures to prevent youth criminal involvement and foster healthy growth and development for youth.

### **D. Aboriginal Mentoring Project**

Four sites were chosen as pilots by the Strategic Directions Committee.

#### **1. Kainai Youth Council**

Group mentoring programs are operated with twenty children participating in the program. Natural mentoring relationships are encouraged between the children and mentors.

#### **2. Paul Band**

At the end of 2004, this site was working to develop their proposal and to put structures in place to begin their program.

#### **3. Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society**

Programs have started in Brightview and Prince Charles schools. Twenty-two children are being mentored. Two staff members from Bent Arrow and an elder have provided support to the program.

#### **4. Métis Nation, Zone 3, Calgary**

This site has operated a group-mentoring program for four years for youths, aged 10-15 years. The group meets once per week and serves youth in northeast Calgary.

Each pilot site received \$30,000 to cover expenses for one year. Funding has been secured to provide on-site external evaluation of the Aboriginal Mentoring Project. The evaluation started 1 January 2005 and will be completed by 31 December 2005.

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