

# netWORKING: YOUNG BLACK WOMEN'S MENTORSHIP PROGRAM



## **Mid-term Program Evaluation**

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Date: July 2nd, 2019



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## **INTRODUCTION**

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Women's Health in Women's Hands (WHIWH) Community Health Centre provides primary healthcare services to racialized women from African, Caribbean, Black, Latin American and South Asian communities in Toronto and surrounding municipalities. As an organization WHIWH is committed to working from an inclusive feminist, pro-choice, anti-racist, anti-oppression, multilingual, participatory framework in addressing the issue of access to healthcare for mandated priority populations encompassing gender, race, class, experiences of violence, sexual orientation, religion, culture, language, disability, immigration status and socio-economic circumstances.

In 2017, Women's Health in Women's Hands applied for a Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services grant under the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan (OBYAP). Formed by the development of Ontario's Anti-Racism Strategy, the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan (BYAP) is a four-year initiative created to help reduce disparities for Black children, youth, and families in Canada. Some of the indicators of the above-mentioned disparities impacting the lives of Black youth can be seen below:

- Black youth make up 41% of the youth in the care of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (Toronto Star, 2014) – five times their representation in the overall population (Children's Aid Society of Toronto, 2015).
- Black youth only account for 12% of students in Toronto public schools, they represent more than 31% of all suspensions (Toronto Star, 2013).
- Black youth across the province are unemployed at nearly two times the provincial rate (Government of Ontario, 2016).
- Black women and girls are one of the fastest growing incarcerated groups.

To address the above mentioned social issues, WHIWH required a targeted service approach to supporting young women, while also cultivating service delivery that aid youth in navigating intersectional barriers of Anti-Black racism, sexism, classism, and other interconnected forces of oppression.

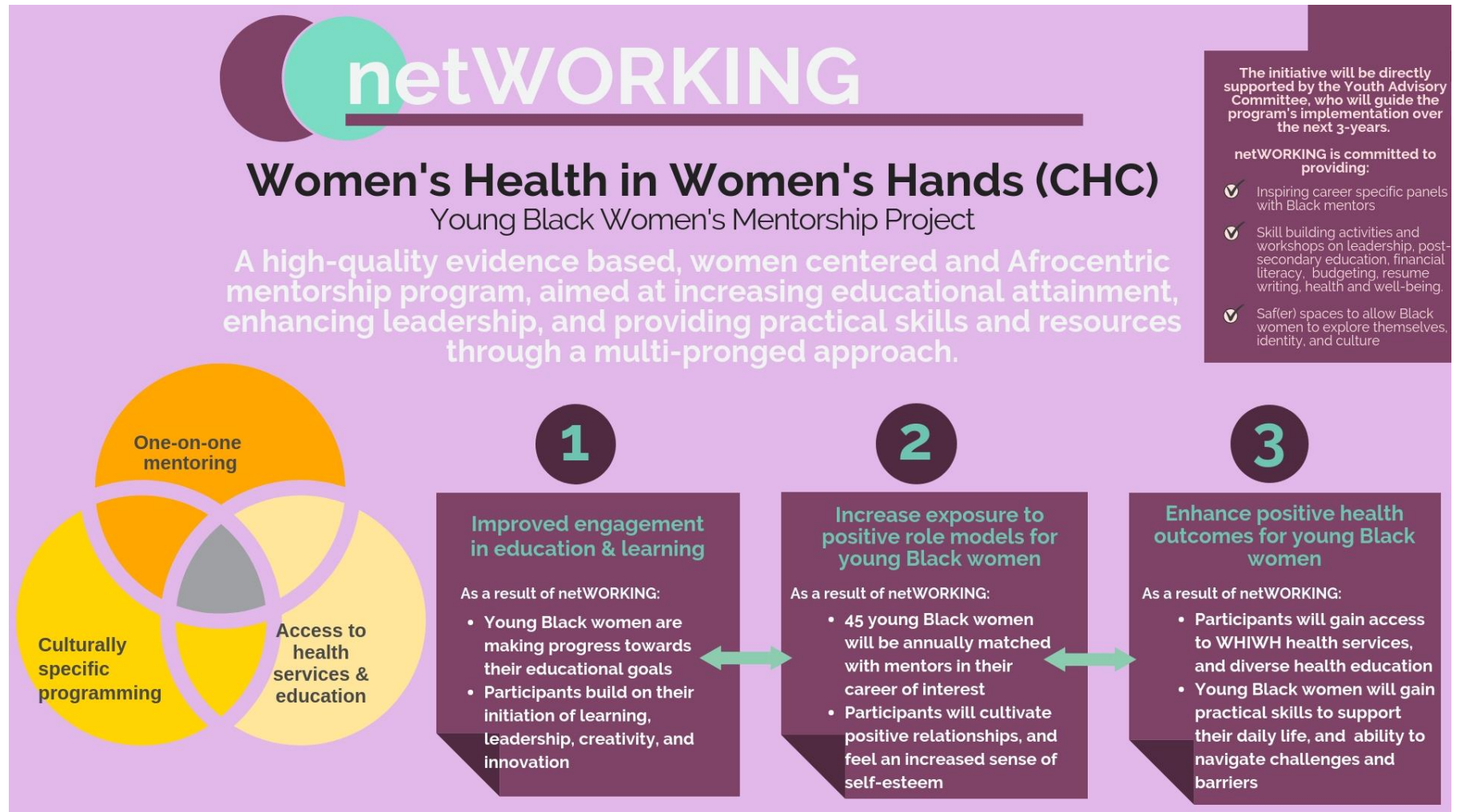
## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

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The netWORKING Mentorship Project is a three year initiative that aims to provide multi-pronged support to African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) identified women between the ages of 16-25. Facilitating a culturally centered mentorship, the program utilizes a strengths-based and community lens to support young Black women. Co-led by a Youth Advisory Committee, netWORKING works to increase protective factors of communal support, decrease isolation, link youth to health services, while also supporting participants in navigating the Canadian workforce and post-secondary education. The project fosters connections to 45 youth participants annually, pairing each with a one-on-one career-centred mentoring relationship. The project will cultivate a minimum of 12 interactive workshops and panels strengthening knowledge, resources, and skills on topics including, but not limited to healthy relationships, financial literacy, post-secondary education, as well as physical, and sexual health, and overall well-being. As illustrated, the service delivery and logic model for the netWORKING Mentorship Project are as follows:



## SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL



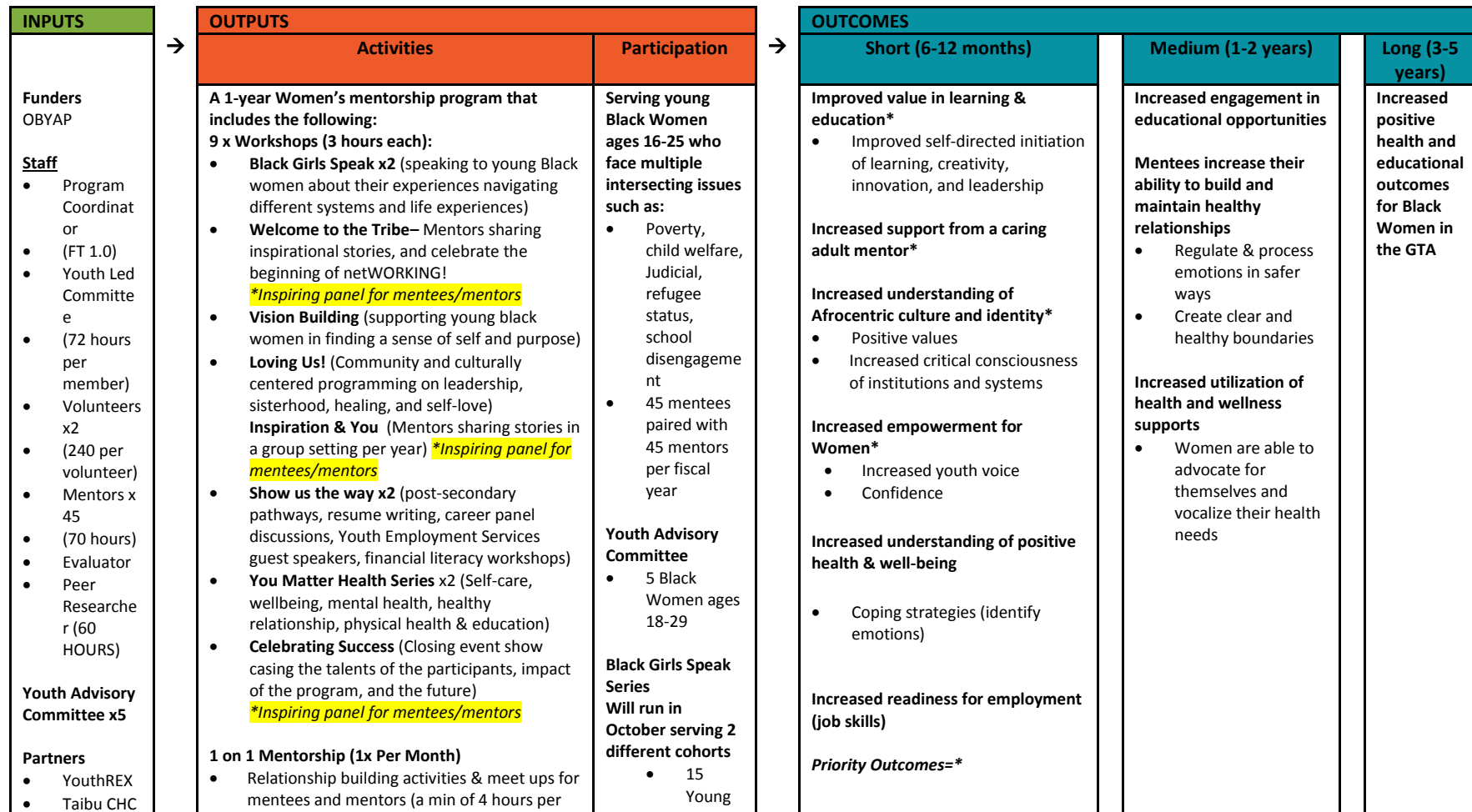


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## PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

**PROGRAM:** netWORKING Young Black Women's Mentorship Project

**PRIORITIES:** To facilitate an empowering, multipronged, Afrocentric mentorship program that connects young Black women to a career specific mentor, resources, and knowledge, as well as deepen connections/understandings to cultural identity and Black womanhood.





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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Black Coalition for Aids Prevention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>month)</li> <li>Mentees and mentors help develop program plan and goals</li> <li>Career panel discussions for mentees</li> </ul> <p><b>Youth Committee/Volunteers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment/Outreach</li> <li>Planning workshops and events reflective of program participants needs</li> <li>Reviewing evaluation processes</li> <li>Supporting data analysis and providing recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Black women ages 16-19 ages 15 Young Black women , ages 20-25</li> </ul>			
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## **BUILDING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

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Reflective of the previously mentioned research on Black youth, staff completing a needs assessment noted a limited number of resources that specifically support young Black women in the Greater Toronto Area. As a result, netWORKING has intentionally aimed to collect information and data on the experiences of clients in order to adequately evaluate and measure program effectiveness. Herein, prior to the start of netWORKING, Women's Health in Women's Hands held two community consultations entitled, Black Girls Speak. Led by the netWORKING Program Coordinator and Youth Advisory Members, a total of 17 young Black women attended the centers sessions in October 2018. Facilitating the series enabled WHIWH to receive a clearer strategic direction to the initial foundational aspects of the program, ultimately enhancing the organizational capacity to deliver comprehensive programming, as well as meaningfully engage community participation in the process. Lastly, Black Girls Speak served as an outreach tool to support young Black women in connecting to the full range of services offered at the centre.

**Participants noted the most imperatives items needed in a young Black women's mentorship program were the following:**

- Mental health guidance
- Accessible and reliable mentors
- Ability to have candid conversations
- One-on-one group and networking events
- Increasing confidence
- Receiving guidance for both personal and professional matters
- Mindfulness and self-care techniques

**Participants also shared after the completion of the netWORKING program they hoped to see the following changes within themselves:**

- Stable and balanced life
- Increased achievements at school
- Embrace and prioritize self, as well as build confidence
- Better equipped to build and support their community





## netWORKING MID-TERM FOCUS GROUP

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In January 2019, through a one-on-one mentorship model, every mentee was paired with one (1) mentor who works directly in their career field of interest. For mentees registered prior to January 2019, they were able to pick from three (3) mentors who they believed would be the best match for them. Mentees registered after January 2019, were matched based on these same interests and provided the information of one (1) mentor to measure if the suggested match would be an appropriate mentor. Matching criteria in the program is based on mentor careers, work experience, biography, and location. This specific practice enabled youth to actively exercise agency in our program. In total, forty two (42) youth were matched in the fiscal year of 2018-2019. The challenge in matching the remaining three (3) mentees was due to the extremely niche field, more specifically difficulty in securing Black-women identified mentors who were neurosurgeons, urban planners, and engineers.

January 2019 also commenced the monthly community programming held at the centre for netWORKING participants. To evaluate the structure, content, and impact of these programs, as well as one-on-one mentorships, mentees were asked to participate in a mid-term focus group on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. June marked the mid-term of the 1<sup>st</sup> participating cohort. Herein, completing a focus group evaluation would enable WHIWH stakeholders to review current experiences in the program, as well as create and implement recommendations based on relevant experiences. A total of fourteen (14) participants attended in the formal focus group, with additional 2 mentees completing an over the phone interview with a trained WHIWH peer youth researcher. The above mentioned numbers comprise a total of 35 % (n=16) registered mentees.

The focus group was divided into three (3) sections to receive feedback on each aspect of the program; (1) one-on-one mentor relationships, (2) experiences in facilitated programming, and (3) recommendations for the future of netWORKING.

**To begin the focus group, participants were asked on their reasoning for entering into the program. Each mentee indicated they were seeking a better sense of support within their lives:**



## What did you expect of NetWORKING before signing up?

"I was not sure what to expect before signing up, but the sheer fact that this was a program focused on the female Black youth population was what initially sparked my interest."

- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

"I was interested in talking to an industry professional, especially someone who is a Black woman."

- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

"I signed up for support. I wanted to be confident as a Black young woman and learn not to speak down to myself."

- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

"I joined because I knew I would be set up with a mentor, and expected them to be there whenever I had any questions. I knew they would have a bit more expertise in my concerns. I expected my mentor to help me accomplish goals by bouncing off ideas with them and get advice. I expected her to be someone that looked like me and have similar life experiences."

- PARTICIPANT PHONE INTERVIEW

"I thought it was just JOB RELATED, an asset to help me develop my career but now it's way beyond just a job and building relationship. Having that support of a 'big sister'. To feel more confident in myself and my career. I wanted help in ways on how to live beyond survival, a more fulfilling life and having a mentor to guide and help live life to the fullest. Guidance & help with steps to figure out pathway to career."

- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

## ONE-ON-ONE MENTORSHIP REFLECTIONS

The foundation of the netWORKING program is to link young women with career focused mentorship. When specifically asked to describe their overall experiences with their mentors, clients noted the following:



***"I was very fortunate to be paired with someone in my field. It has been very incredible meeting up with them. She's very motivating and she's like my mom, she does not hold back"***

*-Participant 1*

***She's open me to a lot of opportunities and doors, she shows me that there is a life and space for people who look like me. She reminds you that you are on the right path and to take your time.***

***It has been supportive, especially emotionally as well employment questions.***

*-Participant 2*

***One thing that I have gained from having a mentor has been an improvement in my decision-making skills. It has significantly improved since beginning this program in January, I would say that I am more decisive now in my decision making, which has been made it easier to make progress in my journey. For as long as I can remember I have been an indecisive person, but having someone to hold me accountable has given me the extra push to follow through, and make quick decisions when necessary.***

*-Phone interview participant 2*

***"My mentor is very supportive, she guides me and lets me know the real. She helps me look at my resume and gives me interview tips and just motivates me to be better. It feels like she is always in my corner when I can't trust no one else."***

*-Participant 4*

***The beginning wasn't okay, but now with time in our relationship we have developed a good relationship. She is very supportive.***

*-Participant 5*

The above mentioned pillars of support were found throughout participants responses to this question. The sample size of the focus group was a third of the total number of participants registered in the program. However, due to the fact that there was no particular order in securing participants, the noted outcomes may be generalizable to the population reached through the program as a whole. These specific mentoring experiences will be re-evaluated at the end of the cohort in December 2019. In the final program evaluation we will include a larger sample of participants to gain greater insight on participant experiences.



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Despite expressing an overall satisfaction within their one-on-one mentorships, there were some commonly noted challenges by mentees in relation to the program:

## What has been the biggest challenge in the program?

"I realized my personality was not the best in asking people questions or asking for help. Due to this, my mentor didn't really know how to help. I am hoping to have more opportunities prepared by WHIWH to get in touch and have a better conversation with mentor."

- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

"Having the events twice a month or more events to better accommodate availability, handouts from events that they were not able to attend."

- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

"I want more mentee-mentor events. I feel like we don't have enough time together."

- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

"Timing can be difficult, more events in the weekends would be helpful"

- FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT



## netWORKING GROUP PROGRAMMING

In order to holistically support mentees, both staff and youth advisory members indicated an essential component of the project was to create ongoing programming for mentees (although this component was not initially indicated within our program proposal). Staff and advisory members believed creating consistent programming would provide a platform for WHIWH to create a sense of safety, exchange knowledge, life, and practical skills, with participants outside of mentoring activities. Herein, programming was held at the centre on a monthly basis and addressed a wide variety of subjects, resources and practical tools. In inquiring at the focus group, mentees who attended ongoing programming said the following:

***"The discussions and transparency especially the financial literacy which started out serious but at the end we all bonded and it was very nice."***

- Focus Group Participant

***"The vision board was very empowering and really changed my life. Everything we do here impacts my life positively and being here has given me more of a voice, everything has been AMAZING."***

- Focus Group Participant

***"I learnt that there's no WRONG way to live your life and netWORKING has really helped me to navigate through my fear of failure. "***

- Focus Group Participant

***"I am on the older side of the spectrum in the program. So sometimes I think it would be helpful to have segmented programs for our ages. Financial literacy and other events were great but the needs of people in high school is at times different then the things that are relevant for some of us who are older. "***

- Focus Group Participant

***"Loving us was the best one to me. It talked about us empowering ourselves, recognizing what you do for self-care and challenging myths we were taught it our life. It really challenged me. I really like the discussion and connecting with others. And I like that it goes around a circle so we all get a chance to hear each other. "***

- Focus Group Participant

The focus group discussion illustrated that attending mentees felt supported overall in netWORKING monthly programs. However, one of the major challenges noted by mentees was the location of the centre. Due to the fact that the program is dedicated to clients in the Greater Toronto Area, mentees are coming as far as Peel and Durham region. Although, clients are provided the costs of transportation to the centre, it takes some youth up to 2 hours to arrive. In



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addition, clients living outside of the downtown Toronto core also indicated our location as a barrier. Mentees noted it may take up to 1.5 hours of travel time for them to arrive to the centre, despite living in Toronto. As a result of this barrier, several mentees recommended additional programming on an ongoing basis to ensure they are able to attend at least one session per month.

## **R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S**

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In its first year of existence, the netWORKING Mentorship Project has managed to successfully harness the strengths of community resources, community members, and young women to implement a culturally centered and multipronged intervention for African, Caribbean, and Black-identified women in the Greater Toronto Area.

The key objectives of the program to (1) provide one-on-one career centered mentorship (2) strengthen educational attainment (3) translate knowledge and skills to mentees have collectively embedded support to enhance positive health outcomes in young Black women.

The following recommendations are derived directly from the focus group themes, and herein can aid the projects future ability to meet the needs of participants and address barriers:

- 1) Find sources of sustainable funding either provincially, federally or internationally to continue this program which has shown positive impact in terms of both reach and uptake.
- 2) Create more consistent ongoing programming that is inclusive of all mentors and mentees to better support and foster diverse relationships in the program.
- 3) Cultivate a strategy that aims to support alumni of the program, after the subsequent year is completed.
- 4) Create and utilize community partnerships and relationships in order to have more ongoing programming in multiple geographical locations.
- 5) Provide more directly tailored programs to specific age groups, to better support the diverse needs of participants.