

The Promise Partnership at UNB Saint John

Autumn 2020 Update



Prepared by the Office of Development and Donor Relations

The Promise Partnership provides tutoring and mentoring programs for students living in two of Saint John, New Brunswick's Priority Neighbourhoods – Crescent Valley and the North End.

The dominant issue in 2019-2020 was adapting these programs to meet the needs of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020-21 school year launched successfully in September with new protocols for digital and socially distanced mentoring and tutoring.

Student Mentoring Program

In 2019-20, a targeted approach to scholastic improvement was adopted with close focus on each individual K-5 student's literacy level. Staff worked closely with teachers and administration throughout the year, gathering data on student progress to adjust each child's learning outcomes in the Mentoring Room. UNB students who had previously volunteered gave positive feedback on the change. Likewise, mentors felt that their mentee was learning more under the new structure.

In the Fall 2019 semester, 112 students were matched with mentors; in the Winter 2020 semester, the number of mentored students grew to 150.

The Promise Partnership tracked the attainment of literacy gains among program participants.



More than 1,000 books were read by and with mentees within the 170 hours of mentoring time provided by our program.



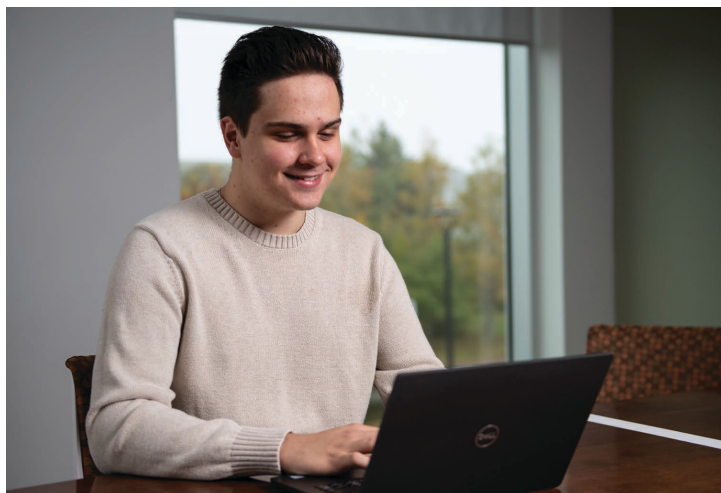
High School Tutoring Program

In the 2019-20 school year, The Promise Partnership hired and trained 13 UNB Saint John students as high school tutors as well as deploying 30 volunteers from our pool of university students. Six tutors were fluent in Arabic to assist with newcomer learning.

The Promise Partnership worked with 103 different high school students in some capacity during 2019-20; 49 of these students were newcomers to Canada. This year 16 of our 18 Grade 12 students graduated. Five of our high school graduates received acceptance or conditional acceptance (depending on final grades) to post-secondary institutions. The number of former Promise Partnership high school tutoring students currently attending UNB Saint John has risen to 14.

"Having the opportunity to connect with such a diverse and welcoming group of people has given me an appreciation for the people I share a community with."

As of August 2020, 100 per cent of The Promise Partnership's students have graduated high school on a five- or six-year plan.





Response to COVID-19

Due to COVID-19, all K-12 educational programming in New Brunswick was suspended in March 2020.

The Promise Partnership's 2019-20 mentoring program subsequently ended one month before schedule. Support shifted to an online presence, with mentors asked to send "mentor messages" to their mentees through coordinators and teachers. These messages encouraged students to stay safe and continue learning from home. Online program delivery using Microsoft Teams was attempted for High School Tutoring in May 2020.

Co-ordinators worked hard over the summer months to develop new online programs for both mentoring and tutoring that would closely mimic what had been offered previously in person, while enabling staff and undergraduate volunteers to deliver the programming in virtual or socially distanced environments. Pilots of these programs took place

over the summer. The new programs are designed for flexibility and can continue to be offered if schools are shut down again due to a resurgence in COVID-19 transmission.

We will be using the Microsoft TEAMS software used by the university and the local board of education for our mentoring and tutoring programs during the 2020-21 academic year. This software allows UNBSJ students to connect with their mentees or their tutoring students in a safe and virtual manner.

D2L (Desire To Learn) courses have been created to provide the mentoring/tutoring training that we would usually provide in a face-to-face manner, so that university students can work through service learning training programs at their own pace. We have established D2L platforms for both the mentoring and tutoring programs, so that student volunteers will continue to have the necessary resources to work with their students.

The goal for our mentoring program is to continue offering mentoring to students from the Crescent Valley Community. Program sessions will be offered using Microsoft TEAMS from Monday to Friday, with students who share the same classroom “bubbles” during school hours participating in each session. Promise Partnership staff piloted this process with students at the Crescent Valley Resource Centre to make sure everything runs smoothly, and we are very pleased with the result. As per usual, the children will be working on their reading comprehension, sight words and social/communication skills using our online Raz Kids account and various educational online games that they can play with their mentors.

Students will continue to meet in The Promise Partnership Mentoring Room, which occupies a separate and self-contained classroom unit at Hazen White-St. Francis. We have set up the Mentoring Room for social distancing, per Public Health guidelines, with 20 laptops and headsets. Two Promise Partnership staff are at each mentoring session to supervise the students as they meet virtually with their undergraduate mentors. Common spaces and shared equipment are sanitized per university procedure, which also requires that all participating students and staff wear masks in all common areas of the school.

For the High School Tutoring Program we have designed an online program rather than one which brings the students to campus on a regular basis. We are still discussing having occasional face-to-face small group meetings with students using appropriate social distancing measures, but most of the interaction between our undergraduate tutors and students will be virtual and delivered in one-on-one meetings.



“The program is absolutely incredible and positively impacts both the mentees and mentors. I always look forward to mentoring. My mentee and I are a perfect match.”



Leading Community-Wide Collaboration

A collaborative community meeting was arranged in May with similar organizations in and around Saint John to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on programming and changes that needed to be made. Some goals of the meeting were to develop our community network, identify what other organizations are doing, identify what resources are needed as a community to move forward, and to support one another, share ideas and collaborate. From this meeting, The Promise Partnership was able to strengthen ties with Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, the Boys and Girls Club, Inner City Youth Ministry and Crescent Valley Resource Centre Inc. Meetings were held with Pathways and Elementary Literacy Friends, two programs that offer similar support in high school tutoring and mentoring, to offer further support and collaboration.

Plans are in place for a follow-up meeting with the hopes of extending the invitation to more organizations within Saint John to join in on the collaboration.



*"Mentoring is
a great way to
make friends
and to learn new
things."*



2020-2021 Look Ahead

The 2020-21 school year is already off to a respectable start, with new programming that is flexible and aligned with New Brunswick's public health strategy of minimizing social contact and reducing or eliminating the possibility of COVID-19 transmission.

Throughout this academic year, The Promise Partnership will:

- Continue to explore alternative mentoring options at the middle school level.
- Deliver the E-Mentoring, High School Tutoring and Undergraduate Service Learning programs and make changes, as circumstances dictate, to ensure that student needs are being met.

Thank You for Your Support

As students return to school and try to make up for time lost to the pandemic last year, our mission to offer educational support has never been more important than it is today.

Our donors' support for The Promise Partnership has been invaluable. Thank you for believing that providing access to effective education, positive reinforcement, and role-modelling can help level the playing field for even the most vulnerable youth in our community to become tomorrow's leaders!



**UNIVERSITY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK
DEVELOPMENT AND
DONOR RELATIONS**

PO Box 4400, 13 Bailey Drive
Alumni Memorial Building, Lower Level
Fredericton NB, E3B 5A3
(506) 453-5053

PO Box 5050, 100 Tucker Park Road
G. Forbes Elliot Athletic Centre, Room 107A
Saint John NB, E2L 4L5
(506) 648-5989

devdr@unb.ca
unb.ca/giving
