

# Learn, Grow and Be Inspired – A Mentorship Story



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**C** OVID-19 has reinforced the importance of mentorship in infection prevention and control (IPAC). Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen a 50% jump in IPAC Canada Mentorship Program applications from mentees. The IPAC Canada Mentorship Program, launched in January 2017, serves to assist infection control professionals (ICPs) progressing through various stages of knowledge in their careers, and those considering moving into leadership roles within IPAC Canada.

Many IPAC Canada members who have participated in the program have testified to the head start the IPAC Canada Mentorship Program provides them professionally. In this article, we had the pleasure of a sit down with Jennifer and Christine, two mentorship participants. Paired through the IPAC Canada Mentorship Program in 2018, they are now champions of the program and share their experiences.

Christine is a certified Infection Control Professional at London Health Sciences Centre in London, Ontario. She has worked in the infection prevention and control field for over 17 years in a variety of settings, including public health, acute care, and Public Health Ontario. She is the secretary for IPAC Canada's Healthcare Design and Construction Interest Group and the IPAC Canada representative for the CSA's HVAC Technical Sub-Committee. Christine has been a mentor for the IPAC Canada Mentorship Program since 2017.

Jennifer started her nursing career at St. Joseph's Hospital in Hamilton and later transitioned to Norfolk General Hospital after her family moved to the area. She has worked with Norfolk General Hospital for over 13 years, where she progressed from a floor nurse to a Clinical Practice Leader, then into the Infection Prevention and Control Director role, which she has led for the past four years.

They both attest to how the IPAC Canada Mentorship Program has benefited them professionally.

"The mentorship program gave me access to someone I could reach out to for discussions and support, aiding in my professional and personal growth," said Jennifer.

Like most IPAC professionals in Canada, at the time, Jennifer started her position, she was by herself providing IPAC support to two acute care facilities and two congregate settings, thus the need for mentorship. However, since then, she has made the transition from a mentee to a mentor and has facilitated an additional permanent IPAC practitioner position in her department, further enhancing the department resources.

Christine has contributed immensely to the mentorship

program in many aspects. When asked what inspired her to become a mentor, Christine said that she had gained the most knowledge when she talked to other IPAC professionals, and she believes networking is a valuable skill for an infection control professional. No doubt, the mentorship program provided another opportunity for Christine to network and contribute to the IPAC community.

"The program provides me an opportunity to stretch myself professionally, enabling me to practice mentor skills, such as being an active listener, valuing others' perspectives and situations, sharing honest and direct feedback, and translating my knowledge and experiences to others," said Christine.

Jennifer was asked whether she would recommend the mentorship program to others. Her response was a resounding yes.

"This program can benefit you, and your career. It can be adjusted to meet your specific needs so that the mentorship really reflects where you are on your career path, and provides the support that you may be lacking from other areas. After having this positive experience, I would definitely recommend this program to others, and would be happy to be able to provide someone with mentorship using this program," she said.

Christine had a similar response for IPAC Canada members with a direct target for those considering becoming a mentor.

"These times are busy and stressful, but there are many new ICPs entering our field at a time of uncertainty and under an immense amount of pressure. We were all novice ICPs once, and I trust each one of us remembers the individuals we called on regularly with questions. It is quite a rewarding experience to be on the receiving end of those calls now. Let's help each other stay the course," said Christine.

As we prepare to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the IPAC Canada Mentorship Program, we would like to thank all our mentors/mentees and welcome future mentors/mentees. Above all, we thank IPAC Canada and Jennifer and Christine for sharing their mentorship experience with us.

In closing, we would like to share this comment from Christine: "Whether you are a new ICP looking for support and IPAC connections, or you are an experienced ICP with knowledge and stories to share, this program is a great way to connect the ICP community across the country. We all have so much to share!"

Feeling inspired? To join the IPAC Canada Mentorship Program as a mentor or mentee, visit [www.ipac-canada.org/mentorship-program.php](http://www.ipac-canada.org/mentorship-program.php). 🌸