

# Uncles & Aunts at Large (Edmonton Area) Society



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Uncles & Aunts at Large (Edmonton Area) Society is a nonprofit, Edmonton-based children's charity that has operated in Edmonton communities for over 35 years. Children are supported in Edmonton and surrounding areas including Leduc, St. Albert, Sherwood Park/Strathcona County, Stony Plain, and Spruce Grove. Our program seeks to complement the parent or guardian's role and, through one-on-one mentoring and group support, has become an extended family to children and their parents/guardians. The following individual mentoring programs are available for children from single-parent families in Edmonton and area:

## **Mentoring Programs:**

### **1) Core One-on-One Mentoring Program**

#### *i Program Purpose and Outcomes:*

**Purpose:** Agency services are based on the belief that positive adult role models nourish a child's healthy growth into adulthood. Adult volunteers from the community are screened, oriented, and matched with children ages 6 to 16 from single-parent families. Children can stay in the program until the age of 18. Support for the one-on-one matches is supplemented and enhanced by mentoring experiences with adults in other program situations and special Agency events.

**Mentor role:** After professional screening and orientation, one-on-one mentors meet regularly (once/week for a year) with a child from a single-parent family. The mentor and child plan enjoyable activities of mutual interest ranging from recreational and community event outings to relaxed at home times watching videos, playing games, or reading together. Children and their volunteer mentors can also take part in ongoing group activities or special events organized by professional Social Work staff.

**Outcomes for Youth/Children:** Children benefit from reduced isolation, enhanced self-esteem and support from the 'community' of other children and their single-parent families who take part in Agency activities and programs. Benefits extend to academic progress as children's academic, emotional, and interpersonal skills increase. Through skill development and support, the children increase their willingness to explore new activities and build new friendships. At the same time, programming for parents/guardians to enhance family interaction further reinforces the positive experience of children in their one-on-one mentor relationship.

**Mentor Outcomes:** Volunteer mentors report enrichment through opportunities to contribute to the community and to the well-being of children and their families by sharing their experiences and skills with young people. In addition, the volunteers increase their ability to interact effectively with children while taking part in enjoyable activities with children and other adults who value contributing to the community.

**ii Relevant Recruitment/Promotional Messages - Core One-on-One Mentoring Program**

**Children/Youth Best Suited to this Program:** Children best suited to this program are those who are generally able to interact positively with and develop a relationship with an adult outside the immediate family. Children are from single-parent families.

**Mentors Best Suited to this Program:** Volunteer mentors best suited for this program come from various walks of life, are over the age of 18, and enjoy sharing their skills and time with children on a regular basis. Mentors are able to commit to a mentoring relationship that involves a weekly activity for a minimum of one year. They appreciate children at their various stages of development and provide positive reinforcement at each stage. In addition to carefully screening and orienting volunteers, the Agency provides volunteer support through additional training and coaching. Registered Social Work staff support mentors in their roles and design programs that reinforce mentor effectiveness.

**Motivations and Potential Fears of Prospective Mentors:** Volunteers are motivated to contribute to the child, their family, and the community at large by serving as constructive role models for children from single-parent families. Mentors understand that they can make a significant impact on the life of a child through their ability to focus on and support that child.

Volunteers reflect the trends reported by Volunteer Canada – increasing demands on their time reducing availability for volunteer support. In addition, the broader factors at play in society, e.g., increased geographic mobility, decreasing job security, result in volunteers not being confident in their ability to fulfill the commitment of one activity a week for one year.

Volunteers are also concerned about their effectiveness in supporting a child who may experience a personal or family crisis at some point or a child who may develop disruptive or challenging behaviour. The ongoing support of professional Registered Social Work staff has proven to be an important resource for volunteer mentors.

**iii Current and Projected Recruitment Demand for Mentors:**

**Current Matches:**

- Number of matches: 45
- Number of mentors: 45
- Number of mentees: 45

**Wait List:**

- Number of children 85

**Target Number of Matches September 2003**

- Number of mentors (new): 10
- Number of returning mentors: 40

**2) Tutor Mentor Program**

*i Program Purpose and Outcomes- Tutor Mentor Program*

**Purpose:** In this program, the positive effect of adult role models is focuses on the learning/academic mentoring of children from single-parent families. Adult volunteers from the community are screened, oriented, and matched with children from single-parent families who are in need of learning support.

**Mentor role:** Mentors meet with children, weekly, to collaborate on a learning project of the child's choice. The project may be school-based or it may be of a personal interest nature, e.g., sports, art, technology.

**Outcomes for Youth/Children:** Mentee outcomes include increased success in learning results and in learning how to learn. Increased knowledge and/or skills lead to enhanced self-image as a learner. This self-image introduces broader options and alternatives for education and career direction. In addition, children benefit from developing a relationship with an adult who is concerned about their well-being and can, in some cases, act as a long-term coach and supporter.

**Outcomes for Mentors:** Mentor outcomes include the opportunity to share love of learning with children. Mentors experience the satisfaction of knowing they are contributing to a child's ability to learn and, thereby, the quality of their life. In addition, mentors contribute to the community by enhancing the life of a child and reinforcing the efforts of local schools. In some cases, the mentor role contributes to a volunteer's career experience and job-related skills.

*ii Relevant Recruitment/Promotional Messages – Tutor Mentor Program*

**Children Best Suited to this Program:** This program is best suited to children who have the ability to learn in a normal school or activity-based setting. The children have the motivation to either increase their knowledge/skills in an area or to develop new knowledge or skills. Children who will particularly benefit from this program are those who enjoy learning in a one-on-one process and may require focused attention on specific components of a topic or subject.

**Mentors Best Suited to this Program:** This program is best suited to mentors who prefer to interact with children in a more structured environment to support a specific learning activity or goal. Adults who enjoy and are committed to learning and have a collaborative, supportive coaching approach are ideal Tutor Mentors.

**Motivations and Potential Fears of Prospective Mentors:** Mentors offer their services in this program because they love learning and have benefited from their learning experiences. In addition, mentors enjoy contributing to children's growth and love of learning. Despite their success in learning, mentors may be concerned that they may not be able to communicate their knowledge in a way that meets the needs of the child. Mentors may carry demanding work and family responsibilities so have concerns about their ability to provide regular support to the child.

**iii Current and Projected Recruitment Demand for Mentors:**

**New Program - Target Number of Matches *September 2003:***

- Number of mentors (new):
- Number of mentees:

**Current and Planned Program Practices:**

**1) Recruitment / Screening:**

**i Interviews and Reference Checks:**

Candidates complete an application form and are interviewed by a Registered Social Worker (RSW). The application and interview data are considered with the results of 5 references, a Criminal Record Search, Child Welfare Investigative Service Search, and a psychological profile that is interpreted by a psychologist. The candidate then attends a program orientation.

**ii Training**

Training and orientation are required for all participants in the match: child, volunteer, and parent/guardian. The child/youth attends an age-appropriate Child Safety Workshop. In the application process, the parent/guardian and child/youth would have viewed a Child Safety video as well. Parents attend orientation session to learn about the Agency, program, related policies and procedures, their responsibilities in the match. The volunteer mentor attends an orientation program in their application process then can attend further training once they have been accepted in the program. Tutor Mentor volunteers receive.....???

**iii Matching**

Matches are reviewed and discussed by the Agency Registered Social Work team. The matching process is conducted after separate discussion by a Registered Social Worker with the child, parent/guardian, and volunteer about the proposed match. The mentor and parent/guardian meet at the Agency office or in the home. If that meeting is successful, the volunteer meets the child at the Agency office or the parent's home. Based on that meeting, a final match decision is made.

**iv Follow-up / Evaluation**

The Agency has both formal and informal processes to follow up on the match. The parent and volunteer are required to contact the Registered Social Worker regularly throughout the match. At quarterly intervals, the Registered Social Worker conducts a formal follow-up interview with the parent, child, and volunteer. An annual interview is conducted with each family, child, and volunteer mentor. The volunteer also reports any changes or developments related to the match. Support contact with families takes place by phone, e-mail, or in person according to the need.

**v Recognition**

The Agency plans formal and informal volunteer recognition processes. Volunteers are hosted at an Annual Volunteer appreciation evening. Throughout the year, Agency staff organize other expressions of appreciation for volunteers, i.e., letters, acknowledgement in newsletter and public presentations. Recognition of services milestones includes plaques and certificates.