

Check Against Delivery

National Mentoring Symposium November 5, 2013, Banff, Alberta Honourable Dave Hancock

Before I begin, I would like to thank the sponsors of this event.

Enbridge is to be heartily congratulated on its clear commitment to community.

I would like to also thank, Cenovus.

The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research.

The Alberta Mentoring Partnership.

The Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta. As well as the Canadian Women's Foundation and Conoco Philips. I am also pleased that the Government of Alberta is a sponsor.

Without this collective support, the symposium would not have been possible.

Now might be a good time to show our appreciation for what they have helped do.

The Premier sends her regrets at not being able to attend.

Given her demonstrated commitment to families, children and youth, it is indeed unfortunate that she could not be here today to feel the positive energy in this room.

But her loss is my gain.

I was excited by being able to speak at this, the first National Mentoring Symposium.

Congratulations to Big Brothers and Big Sisters on your 100th anniversary.

I am appreciative and supportive of the good work you do in improving the lives of children and youth.

And my compliments to you and the Alberta Mentoring Partnership for organizing this symposium.

I hope it is one of many to come.

For those of you who have come from outside the province, I hope you have the opportunity to take advantage of the extraordinary things our province has to offer.

The beautiful setting you are in today is just one of them. (Pause)

As you have heard from my biography, I have been Minister of just about everything.

But as diverse as my portfolios have been, there has been one thing that has connected them all for me – my concern for children and youth.

I have seen first-hand, what often happens when children and youth do not receive the guidance and support they need.

All too often, they have mental health and addiction problems - they drop out of school - they go into care - or they end up in the penal system.

It shouldn't be – and doesn't have to be that way.

And that is why I wear this Children First pin every day.

It reminds me of why I do what I do and why it is so important that I do it well.

I suspect that many of you here today had a mentor who had a positive impact on your life.

Even the most intrepid of explorers would not set out without a compass and a map.

The mentor plays those roles in helping the mentee determine their life goals and what route they should take to get them there.

They also help the mentee understand that the first journey is one of the internal discovery of self.

Once we know who we are and the extent of our capabilities, it is much easier for us to choose the path we will walk in life.

That's why being a mentor is about gift giving.

Mentors give the gifts of possibility and hope.

They also give the thing that most of us feel we have all too little of.

They give the gift of time.

Today that's a very precious commodity.

Mentors also give the gift of constancy and stability to children and youth who often have neither.

And they give the gift of caring to those who can sometimes feel abandoned and unvalued by the world in which they live.

Those of you, who are and have been mentors, know that mentees return the favour.

They show mentors they have value.

And they show mentors that they are making a real difference in another's life.

I believe that at some level, every individual has potential and ability.

The sad reality is that potential and ability have a short half-life.

The longer they go without guidance and support, the more the doors of opportunity for success are closed to them.

That is why we need to connect mentors to mentees as early as possible.

Once a child or youth becomes lost in the world, the harder it becomes to help them find their way back.

So thank you to Big Brothers and Big Sisters and to the Alberta Mentoring Partnership and its members for the good work you do.

One of the challenges of my portfolio is to show that what we do is an investment in people that actually shows a return.

If someone asked me to prove that, I would point to those who have benefitted from mentorship.

Some of whom you will hear from at this symposium.

And speaking of investment, I am pleased to announce that Human Services and Alberta Education are committing to providing additional funding to the Alberta Mentoring Partnership.

Together, the two ministries will be providing \$750,000 to the partnership over three years beginning in 2014.

(Pause for applause)

That clearly indicates that we think mentoring makes a difference and produces the positive outcomes we all want for children and youth.

In particular, I want to recognize the leadership of Liz O'Neill who has played a critical role with the Alberta Mentoring Partnership.

Earlier, I talked about the gift of mentoring.

In recognition of that, each of you will receive the same Children First pin that I wear.

When someone asks you what it is, I hope you will be proud to say that it says,

“I am an agent of hope.”

You can say that quite proudly and clearly because it's true – and you can prove it.

Thank you very much for your time.

Have an interesting, productive and enjoyable symposium.