

Check Against Delivery

#8000Mentors

July 16, 2014, Calgary

Honourable Manmeet S. Bhullar, Minister, Human Services

Good morning everyone.

What a terrific gathering of community, corporate, education and government partners from across the province.

Thanks for your ongoing dedication to Alberta's children and youth.

About a month ago, I had the honour of speaking at a graduation ceremony for youth in care.

It was a special moment for our young people; the crowning achievement of their lives so far.

They worked extremely hard and overcame much adversity to accomplish that milestone.

Their strength, passion and hope for the future is incredible.

What stood out for me, that day, was the heartfelt gratitude the students expressed to their foster parents, teachers, caseworkers, neighbours and friends who were at the ceremony.

These students knew how important these adults were to their success.

You could see the pride these supporters felt, as each student received their diploma...knowing they made a difference in the lives of these youth.

The truth is that none of us – no matter how talented, hardworking or lucky – succeeds without the help and guidance of others along the way.

Every child needs someone to look up to for guidance and inspiration – someone to laugh and share their dreams with.

Someone who encourages them and shows them what's possible.

Alberta has 7,400 children in temporary and permanent care.

Sadly – before coming in to care – many of our children grew up in abusive homes and were exposed to family violence, drugs or neglect.

Many did not have positive and responsible adults to help guide them.

Instead of hope, confidence, trust and happiness ... many experienced fear, doubt and negativity.

When children come into our care from traumatic situations, they often have emotional wounds,

Their healing process does not happen overnight,

However, with kindness, compassion and stability from people around them, kids in care can thrive.

We surround them with caring caseworkers, foster parents and other professionals who provide them with healthy, trusting, respectful relationships.

They do an incredible job.

But, for our kids to reach their potential, they need the support of everyone in our communities to make them feel truly accepted, supported, and valued.

They are kids in government care, but they are Alberta's children.

We all have an important role and responsibility to support their well-being, happiness and success.

Despite the curveballs that life has thrown them, they are extremely resilient.

There is no limit to what children and youth in care achieve.

With friendship and support of caring adults, they graduate high school, get satisfying jobs, volunteer in their communities, start families, and take loving care of their own children.

That is why, today, I am so pleased to announce our #8000mentors Campaign with the goal to ensure all children in care have a caring, adult role model in their lives.

Through #8000mentors, Human Services is providing \$365,000 to three community agencies - Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters Society of Edmonton and Area; Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary and Area, and The Youth and Volunteer Centre of Red Deer - to help match more children and youth in care with mentors.

These organizations will work with our caseworkers to:

- assess the needs of children and youth;
- work with the biological parents, foster families and youth;
- screen, train, and match mentors; and
- provide ongoing support to children, mentors and guardians.

Our #8000mentors recruitment campaign includes print, radio, outdoor, online advertising, and social media.

It is aimed at attracting more mentors – particularly from Aboriginal and multicultural communities.

Nearly 70 per cent of children in care are Aboriginal.

And we know that children benefit from having a mentor that shares similar interests, cultural experiences and connections to their community.

Our #8000mentors campaign challenges Albertans, businesses, non-profit organizations and employers, to provide mentorship opportunities for young people.

It is continued action under my Five-Point Plan to improve child intervention and keep children healthy and safe, which I announced in January.

I realize that #8000mentors is an ambitious goal.

It will not be easy.

However, I know we are up to the challenge.

This is vitally important work.

It deserves concerted time, effort and attention of all Albertans – communities, businesses, government and individuals.

Our collective efforts to help Alberta's children and youth can and do make a difference in their lives.

That is why I am very pleased to be sharing the stage today with Tony Palmer, Senior Vice-President for Stakeholder Relations for TransCanada.

In February this year, I met with a number of business leaders to discuss how we could advance the importance of mentoring in Alberta (pause)

And to find ways to sustain its viability within our communities.

TransCanada has come forward today to help raise the profile of mentoring in the province.

Tony will elaborate about this later on.

So what are the overall benefits of mentoring? And especially for children and youth in care?

Every single study that's been done on mentoring shows that one positive role model can be the factor that puts a child on a pathway of hope.

Children with mentors do better in school.

They have higher self-esteem and are less likely to be involved with crime or drugs.

A recent Canadian study by James Tucker found that a child with a Big Brother or Big Sister will earn \$315,000 more, over their working lives, than a child without a mentor, from a similar socioeconomic background.

For every \$1 spent on mentoring... society gets back \$18 in additional tax revenue, higher consumption, charitable volunteering and increased charitable giving of children who have been mentored.

Mentoring is key to addressing many of the root causes that bring children into care in the first place.

By creating hope and opportunity for young people, mentoring can help break the cycle of abuse.

I have seen, first-hand, the difference that mentoring makes in people's lives.

As the son of immigrants, I was surrounded by family and community – and I attribute my success to them.

I grew up with the sense of belonging, giving back to community and the importance of service.

We need to make sure children and youth in care have the same types of supports and equal opportunities to succeed.

Right now, youth in care between the ages of 13 and 20 are in most need of a mentor.

This is my personal appeal to Albertans on behalf of all children in care: Please support our #8000mentors campaign and consider sharing their time with a child.

Go to our campaign homepage albertamentors.ca/8000mentors, sign up, and count yourself as one of Alberta's 8000!

You will discover, very quickly, just how enjoyable and rewarding mentoring is.

There are so many different ways to spend time and share your interests with a young person, whether you're into sports, music, academics, gaming ... you name it!

You don't need special skills or superpowers.

Just kindness, compassion and the precious gift of time.

Share the #8000mentors message with your family, friends and colleagues.

I want to use this opportunity to appeal to Alberta's business community as well.

Business leaders, please promote #8000mentors with your employees and encourage them to sign up.

Tap into your business relationships, cultural networks and church connections, retirees, and young adults looking to give back to the community.

We have training, resources and networks through the Alberta Mentoring Partnership that can help you.

Our mentoring partners are doing exceptional work - bringing together youth, community agencies and government to increase mentoring opportunities.

But we need to do more – especially for kids in care.

That's what #8000mentors is all about.

As I said earlier, many of us owe our success and happiness to the people who've supported us throughout our lives.

The ultimate way show our appreciation to our mentors is to give back our younger generation in exactly the same way.

I see a room, a community, and a province full of inspiring people who can be tremendous role models for youth in care.

With your help, we will ensure every one of our children has a caring, and responsible adult role model to look up to.

Let's give every child in Alberta the chance to dream big, go far and give back.

Thank you.