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## **KidStart Mentoring Program**

### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The KidStart Mentoring Program recruits, selects and supports volunteers who work with young people who are at risk of experiencing serious difficulties in their lives. These youth may be struggling with problems at school, with their family, with their peers and in the community. The Volunteer Mentors serve as consistent and positive role models who plan one-to-one activities that will provide the young person they are assigned to work with, with opportunities to experience success and achievement. The primary objective of the program is to strengthen youths' resilience to the risk factors that are known to lead to victimization, violence and criminal activities. It is a positive youth development program with a proven track record of improving participants' capacity to overcome adversity and become more active in their communities.

The Volunteer Mentors develop a supportive relationship with the young person they are assigned to by engaging them in different activities on a weekly basis in their community. All Volunteer Mentors are carefully screened, oriented and supervised by the Volunteer Coordinators.

The Council of Accreditation accredited the KidStart Mentoring Program in 2005.

#### **SERVICE POPULATION**

Many young people are experiencing the risk factors associated with violence, victimization and criminal activity such as: poverty, gender, family or lack of success at school. They may be getting into trouble in the community, at school or at home. There are few supports or services available to these youth, particularly for those who are younger than 12 years old. The KidStart Mentoring Program is offered on an outreach basis in a variety of communities throughout the Lower Mainland.

We promote access to the program by distributing brochures and posters, making presentations and participating in community events and resource fairs. Social service organizations, schools, community policing centres, community centres, and libraries have all been effective locations to not only promote the program but to develop key relationships with other service providers. It is important to note that due to the fact that the program often has a waiting list – it is challenging to balance the time spent promoting the program with the need to recruit and select new Volunteer Mentors to serve the young people who are referred to the program.

#### **ELIGIBILITY**

Referrals generally come from the young person's parent or guardian, family member, school counselor, community worker, social worker, probation officer or the police. The referral form includes basic information about the young person, their current circumstances and the reason(s) for referral.



The KidStart Mentoring Program (Under 12) is designed for young people 6 – 12 years of age who are generally not doing all that well in the community, at school or at home. The only reason for screening out a referral is if the waiting list for a Volunteer Mentor is significant, and an alternate program would better serve the young person's needs – sooner.

The KidStart Mentoring Program (Teens) is designed for young people 12 – 18 years of age, who are identified by a social worker, probation officer or others as being at-risk. Some youth are on probation or diversion, while others are experiencing difficulties at home, at school or in the community. The only reason for screening out a referral is if the hours of contact per week to meet the conditions of the court order are beyond the scope of the program.

All referrals are processed within one week. Pending the parent's or guardian's and the young person's agreement to participate, all referrals are placed on the registration list and notified as such. At times, registered young people may remain unassigned for a period of time, unfortunately sometimes exceeding six months. In these circumstances we contact them on a regular basis and reconfirm their desire to participate in the program.

## **ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES**

There are a number of risk factors that have been identified by the National Crime Prevention Council. Exposure to more than one risk factor increases the likelihood that a young person will become involved in, or be victimized by criminal activities.

Risk factors include:

- Poverty
- Gender (there is a much higher rate of behavioral problems in boys)
- Family (experience with violence, neglect or abuse may prevent young people from learning healthy social skills)
- School (young people who are strongly attached to their school and are doing reasonably well are less likely to become involved in crime)
- Other social factors.

The KidStart Mentoring Program continues to assess the need for the program based on the prevalence of these socio-economic factors in the community, and how they are impacting young people and their families' ability to cope. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for the number of young people referred to the program to exceed the number of Volunteer Mentors who are available to be assigned.

The KidStart Mentoring Program does not conduct formal assessments at any point on the young people who are participating in the program. The goal for every young person is to provide him or her with the opportunity to develop a supportive and caring relationship with an adult who will be a positive role model. Assessment of the KidStart Mentoring Program is ongoing. The team meets at least monthly to review the recruitment of new Volunteer Mentors, the supervision and support of the Volunteer Mentors assigned to participants, the quality of services being provided, and the number and status of referrals.

## **SERVICE PHILOSOPHY**

The KidStart Mentoring Program has been in operation for approximately twenty years. Its success is due to the outstanding commitment that the Volunteer Mentors have been willing to make to the program and the power of positive, and meaningful relationships.

The fundamental premise of the program is that providing young people with the opportunity to develop a supportive relationship with a caring adult will increase their resilience to the risk factors they may face in their lives. All Volunteer Mentors are selected based on their demonstrated ability to accept young people unconditionally, develop caring relationships with them based on mutual trust, and model pro-social attitudes and behaviours. They are expected to meet with the participant they are assigned to on a weekly basis and engage them in a variety of activities in their community for at least six months. Volunteer Mentors are encouraged to plan activities that are fun, and to focus on doing rather than talking. The objective for every participant is to provide experiences that will bring a sense of personal achievement and success, reinforce their strengths and create new interests.

The program brings to bear what the criminological literature understands to be three particularly effective measures in reducing violence, victimization and criminal activity. They are the provision of unconditional and consistent attention by a caring adult, the engagement of the young person in normal and constructive activities in a pro-social environment, and the development of a positive relationship based on mutual respect and trust.

Young people who have succeeded in the face of adversity will often make reference to a special person who cared for them, advocated for them, and was a friend through "thick and thin". A Volunteer Mentor can be that one person who believes, listens, respects, encourages, and supports them; and most importantly enjoys their company. The intent of the KidStart Mentoring Program has always been to provide young people with that reference person.

## **DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES**

The service plan for all young people who are referred to the KidStart Mentoring Program is to introduce them to a Volunteer Mentor who will successfully engage them in a variety of activities on a weekly basis. The objective is that they will, over time, develop a meaningful relationship based on shared experiences and mutual trust. Volunteers are assigned to a program participant based on their availability, gender and geographic proximity. The only criterion for matching is the same gender. Every effort is made to assign Volunteer Mentors to a young person who lives in their community, or as close as possible to facilitate their weekly meetings. The KidStart Mentoring Program is offered on an outreach basis in a variety of communities throughout the Lower Mainland.

Volunteer Coordinators are responsible for the recruitment, screening and selection of all Volunteer Mentors. They also prepare every volunteer for their new role through a comprehensive orientation process before they are assigned to a participant. All volunteers are required to sign the Volunteer Mentor Agreement form that outlines in detail their obligations to both the young person they are assigned to, and to the program.

The Volunteer Coordinators hold all volunteers accountable for their assigned duties and responsibilities through a range of supervisory activities. Volunteer Mentors are contacted at least once a month and more often if required. They are expected to attend monthly support meetings as frequently as possible and required to submit Monthly Reports that record their activities with the participant they are assigned to. All volunteers are encouraged to contact the Volunteer Coordinators whenever they need support, assistance or direction.

Volunteer Mentors are selected based on their demonstrated ability to accept young people unconditionally, develop caring relationships with them based on mutual trust, and model pro-social attitudes and behaviours. Setting formal or therapeutic goals is discouraged. In fact, volunteers are specifically instructed during their orientation to the program to refrain from establishing goals or predetermining outcomes.

Although Volunteer Mentors are encouraged to develop friendly and courteous relationships with the young person's family members, they do not provide any formal support or assistance. The focus of the program is exclusively on the young people - spending one-to-one time with them, participating in enjoyable activities out in the community.

In our ongoing practice of volunteer recruitment, training, supervision, and community education we are strong advocates for the understanding and well being of children and youth. The KidStart Mentoring Program reinforces the best practice literature on positive youth development. These articles underscore the need for all youth to have access to programs that recognize their importance and contributions, share the responsibility for their successful development, and facilitate their participation in activities that will contribute to their sense of achievement and well-being.

Survey results support our quality of service and a growing body of evidence substantiates mentoring programs' claims of effectiveness. They have documented that well run programs that provide young people with the opportunity to spend time with a caring adult on a consistent basis can significantly improve the young person's life – educationally, behaviourally and emotionally.

We provide opportunities for all participants in the program to:

- Connect with a caring, positive, adult role model
- Learn and participate in recreational activities
- Experience success and achievement
- Attend summer camps/programs
- Learn how to utilize community resources
- Explore new experiences
- Participate in a broad range of activities limited only by the imagination of our skilled Volunteer Mentors!