



## **PEN PALS: PROGRAM HANDBOOK**

### **ORGANIZATION INFORMATION**

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

Companions for Children provides youth with a one-on-one mentoring relationship to increase their opportunities in life.

#### **VISION STATEMENT**

Companions for Children youth will have a better opportunity to become emotionally healthy, productive adults in our community.

#### **NON-PROFIT STATUS**

Companions for Children is a non-profit 501 (3) c that is local to the Minot area.

#### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Companions for Children is governed by a Board of Directors who volunteer their time to better the organization as a whole. Directors meet on a monthly basis for Board Meetings and are involved in one of two committees, the Screening Committee and/or the Marketing Committee. In addition, Directors assist in fundraising on behalf of the organization. More information on joining Companions for Children's Board of Directors can be found at [companionsforchildren.org](http://companionsforchildren.org).

#### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

*Heather Cymbaluk, [heather.cymbaluk@companionsforchildren.org](mailto:heather.cymbaluk@companionsforchildren.org)*

The Executive Director is responsible for the organization's consistent achievement of its mission and financial objectives. The Executive Director's responsibilities include but are not limited to: Financial strategies and budgeting, providing leadership to achieve long term goals for the organization, maintain official records and documents, ensure the longevity of the organization through grant writing, maintain knowledge of developments and trends in the field of non-profits and mentoring programs, conduct all marketing and fundraising activities, establish working relationships with community groups and organizations and oversee staff and the organization as a whole.

## **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

*Jalisa Tinnnes, [jalisa.tinnnes@companionsforchildren.org](mailto:jalisa.tinnnes@companionsforchildren.org)*

The Assistant Director is responsible for ensuring organizational success through fulfillment of its mission. The Assistant Director will help to produce positive outcomes in the following areas, but not limited to: data management, fundraising, donor development and retention, marketing, recruitment, match retention and closure rate, and stakeholder satisfaction. The organizations virtual school-based mentoring program, Pen Pals, that was developed in 2020 will be managed by the Assistant Director. Calendars, mentor satisfaction, and Pen Pals software will be managed by the Assistant Director.

## **ENROLLMENT COORDINATOR**

*Nya Harris, [admin@companionsforchildren.org](mailto:admin@companionsforchildren.org)*

The Enrollment Coordinator is responsible for the organization's enrollment of matches from application to the time they are matched. The Enrollment Coordinator is responsible for, but not limited to: Recruiting mentors and youth; scheduling and conducting interviews with mentors, parents/legal guardians, and youth; identifying qualities and interests to implement successful matches; ensuring mentors complete all screening and intake procedures and reporting to the Screening Committee for their final review; assisting in all fundraising and service activities; and assisting the Executive Director and Assistant Director as needed.

## **THE IMPACT**

Studies have shown that youth who regularly spend time with a mentor benefit in the following ways:

- ✓ 27% less likely to begin drinking alcohol
- ✓ 46% less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs
- ✓ 55% more likely to enroll in college
- ✓ 78% more likely to volunteer regularly
- ✓ 81% more likely to participate regularly in sports or extra-curricular activities
- ✓ 90% are interested in becoming a mentor
- ✓ 130% more likely to hold leadership positions

## CONTACT CHART



## THE IMPACT

Studies have shown that strong relationships can develop within the school context and these relationships can make a difference in the lives of youth.

- > 55% were better able to express their feelings
- > 56% improved relationships with peers
- > 58% achieved higher grades in social studies, languages, and math
- > 60% improved relationships with adults
- > 62% more likely to trust their teachers
- > 64% developed higher levels of self-confidence

## ROLES & EXPECTATIONS

### COMPANIONS FOR CHILDREN'S ROLE

- ✓ Companions for Children will recruit, screen and support volunteers to serve as mentors to students in the program.
- ✓ Companions for Children will match every child with a mentor as soon as possible, taking into consideration the child's grade, interests and preferences.
- ✓ Companions for Children will provide orientation to mentors virtually to provide an understanding of the technology.
- ✓ Companions for Children will utilize the automated emails sent by the Cricket software to notify mentors of Unit Start dates.
- ✓ Companions for Children will utilize focus articles within the Cricket software to aid in weekly discussion.
- ✓ Companions for Children will review all mentor and mentee letters within 3 business days for approval and may request revisions as necessary.

- ✓ Companions for Children will support the child's best interest by terminating any match which is not meeting Pen Pal's Guidelines and Ground Rules as outlined below.

## **PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN ROLE**

- ✓ The parent/legal guardian must turn in his/her child's application to the school by the due date. All items on the application must be filled out, any missing or blank items will be considered incomplete. Late applications will not be accepted.
- ✓ The parent/legal guardian is expected to notify the school ASAP when his/her child will be absent for an extended period of time.

## **SCHOOL ROLE**

- ✓ The school is responsible for identifying classrooms to participate in the Pen Pals program and provide his/her parent/legal guardian with the provided application.
- ✓ The school is to provide an appropriate classroom setting and technology for the students to access to write their letters.
- ✓ The school will notify Companions for Children if the child will be absent for an extended period of time causing the child to miss a letter due date.
- ✓ The school will abide by the Memorandum of Understanding mutually agreed upon by Companions for Children and the school.

## **MENTOR ROLE**

- ✓ Mentors must complete all aspects of Companions for Children's Screening Process as outlined below.
- ✓ Mentors are expected to stay engaged and demonstrate genuine interest in their mentee by remaining consistent and avoiding missing letter deadlines.
- ✓ Mentors must abide by all Guidelines and Ground Rules set forth by Companions for Children as outlined below. In addition, to reporting to the proper authorities as if necessary as outline by the Mandated Reporter Certification.
- ✓ Mentors are expected to follow their pre-designated letter calendar.
- ✓ Mentors are expected to return emails, texts, and calls to Companions for Children's staff in a timely manner.

## **YOUTH ELIGIBILITY & ENROLLMENT PROCESS**

### **YOUTH ENROLLMENT ELIGIBILITY**

To be accepted as a mentee in the Companions for Children's school-based mentoring program; Pen Pals, the student must:

- ✓ Be in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at a participating school in the designated class.
- ✓ Have a parent/legal guardian who submits his/her application on time and is not frequently absent from school.
- ✓ Want to have a mentor (School staff will evaluate the students desire to participate in the program and ensure understanding of the program).

Companions for Children makes reasonable efforts to meet the needs of youth with special needs, but the needs of the youth must be appropriate for volunteer intervention. For that reason, Companions for Children is not able to serve youth who are severely physically handicapped or medically fragile, are currently involved in an inpatient treatment program, suffer from significant emotional disturbances, which may pose a threat to themselves or others, or have a history of delinquent/criminal behaviors. Youth who will more appropriately be served by other agencies may be referred to those agencies.

### **YOUTH ENROLLMENT PROCESS**

- ✓ The school will identify classrooms they feel would most benefit from participating in Pen Pals, and send home an application to students who express interest after determining eligibility.
- ✓ Parents/Guardians must complete the application and return to the school by the due date. All items on the application must be filled out, any missing or blank items will be considered incomplete. Late applications will not be accepted.

## **MENTOR ELIGIBILITY AND SCREENING PROCESS**

### **MENTOR ENROLLMENT ELIGIBILITY**

To be accepted into the mentor screening process, a volunteer must:

- ✓ Have the availability to write a minimum of two (2) with their mentee through the entirety of the school year.
- ✓ Be at least 18 years of age.

- ✓ Complete all aspects of Companions for Children's screening process in a timely manner, including, but not limited to: application, mandated reporter certification, mentor training, reference checks and background checks.
- ✓ Have a working cell phone with an active voicemail and an email that is checked regularly.
- ✓ Have a schedule which allows for a commitment of approx. 1 hour every other week.

## **MENTOR SCREENING PROCESS**

- ✓ Fill out and submit an online Pen Pals application at [www.companionsforchildren.org](http://www.companionsforchildren.org). Paper copies are not available.
- ✓ Our Enrollment Coordinator will contact the applicant to provide necessary training and paperwork, set up an interview appointment and email necessary follow-up information.
- ✓ The applicant provides his/her supervisor with the reference form and ensures he/she emails a completed reference form to [admin@companionsforchildren.org](mailto:admin@companionsforchildren.org) by the due date.
- ✓ The applicant completes the Signature Packet and emails to [admin@companionsforchildren.org](mailto:admin@companionsforchildren.org) by the due date.
- ✓ The applicant participates in a thirty (30) minute interview with the Enrollment Coordinator at Companions for Children's office.
- ✓ Companions for Children's Screening Committee reviews all information gathered during the screening process and notifies the applicant of approval or denial by August 15<sup>th</sup>. No reason for denial will be provided, denied applicants may re-apply after one (1) year.
- ✓ The applicant completes an assigned online e-Mentoring Training through IRT Mentoring Central by the due date.
- ✓ The applicant completes online Mandated Reporter Training through North Dakota Department of Human Services website by the due date.
- ✓ From year to year, continuing mentors must re-submit an application and provide any portion of the Screening Process as requested by Companions for Children. The applicant's previous year's match will be taken into consideration including but not limited to: maturity in writing, reporting and attendance record. Companions for Children will inform the mentor of approval/denial by August 15<sup>th</sup>.

## **ADDITIONAL PROGRAM DETAILS**

### **MATCH SELECTION**

Upon approval, Companions for Children will select a mentee based on availability, preferences, interests, etc.

### **ORIENTATION**

A virtual orientation will be conducted with Companions for Children's Assistant Director and participating mentors. The purpose of this meeting is to introduce the mentors to the Cricket software, walk through an example Unit, answer any additional questions and trouble shoot any software issues.

### **EARLY CLOSURE GUIDELINES**

It is the expectation that all matches remain together for entirety of the school year. However, rarely, matches must be closed due to unforeseen circumstances. In all cases, it is in the best interest of the student to follow the match closure procedure, which outlines the best way to close a match. The following guidelines are in place to assist in any early closure situations.

#### **Mentee Closure:**

- > The school is expected to notify Companions for Children immediately following any notification of a student moving. Companions for Children will contact his/her mentor and assist in the match closure procedure when timing allows.
- > If the mentee is moving to another school in the Minot Public Schools district, the match will be closed. The match closure procedure will be followed.
- > If the mentee moves to a school outside of the Minot Public Schools district, the match will be closed. The mentor is eligible to be re-matched before October 31<sup>st</sup>.
- > It is the school counselor's responsibility to discuss any closures with the student.

#### **Mentor Closure:**

- > Should a mentor need to close a match due to unforeseen circumstances, Companions for Children will notify the school immediately. The mentor is expected to write two (2) more times to ensure the match closure procedure is followed accordingly. If Companions for Children has a mentor who has

completed the Screening Procedure and has been approved, they may re-match before October 31<sup>st</sup>.

- > It is the school counselor's responsibility to discuss any closures with the student.

### **PEN PALS: GUIDELINES AND GROUND RULES**

- ✓ **The start of the match is an adjustment time for the mentor and the mentee. Relationships take time and action to develop.** Try to be patient and don't expect quick changes.
- ✓ **The mentor and mentee are expected to write a minimum of one letter per unit (every other week).** The mentor is responsible to follow the pre-designated schedule as outlined in the calendar set prior to the program beginning.
- ✓ **It is prohibited for a mentor and mentee to share identifiable information with one another.** Examples of this information would be last names, social media names, gamer tags, home addresses, phone numbers, etc.
- ✓ **We expect the mentor to let Companions for Children know of any changes in his/her schedule or contact information ASAP** – address or phone number changes, marital status or job changes, serious illnesses, vacations longer than two (2) weeks, crime convictions, arrest etc.
- ✓ **Companions for Children reserves the right to request an updated background check at any time without reason.** In addition, you must contact Companions for Children immediately if you have any contact with law enforcement including, but not limited to, receiving a citation or being arrested for a DUI, disorderly conduct, domestic violence or battery, etc.
- ✓ **Mentor Confidentiality.** Do not release or discuss information about the child or his/her family with anyone outside the confines of the Companions for Children organization and/or the school. I understand that this agreement pertains to the time period prior to, during, and after the match closes. This agreement does not pertain to the reporting of suspected child abuse, neglect, or criminal activity to the appropriate authorities. Failure to comply with the above conditions may result in termination of a match without notice. Limits of confidentiality are outlined below.
- ✓ **Match contact is restricted to Cricket software.** All matches in Companions for Children's school-based mentoring program; Pen Pals are expected to limit contact specifically to virtual letter writing. Matches are not to contact or meet up with each other outside of the school. Mentors are not allowed to give their mentee contact information or accept invitations to be "friends" on any social media platform.
- ✓ **Gift giving is to be limited.** Mentors are able to give a small gift, under \$10 on special occasions, such as birthdays, Christmas, end of year, etc. This is not an



expectation and should be limited to no more than three (3) times per year. If mentors choose to give a gift they should contact Companions for Children to arrange for the gift to be dropped off at the school.

## **LIMITS OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

**Limits of Confidentiality Information will be released under the following circumstances:**

- > Pursuant to a valid and enforceable subpoena.
- > To agency counsel in the event of litigation or potential litigation involving the agency. Such information is considered privileged and its confidentiality is protected by law.
- > Written requests for information must be submitted to the Executive Director. Written requests for information need to provide adequate information being disclosed is that the client intended and authorized.
- > Members of the Board of Directors have access to client information only upon authorization by a formal motion of the board. Violation of this privilege shall constitute adequate cause for removal from the Board of Directors.

## **UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR**

A number of behaviors are regarded as incompatible with Companions for Children's goals, values and program standards and therefore are considered unacceptable and prohibited.

- > Unwelcome physical contact, such as inappropriate touching, patting, pinching, punching, and physical assault.
- > Unwelcome physical, verbal, visual, or behavioral mannerisms or conduct that belittles, shows hostility, or aversion toward any individual.
- > Demeaning or exploitive behavior of either a sexual or nonsexual nature, including threats of such behavior.
- > Display of demeaning, suggestive, or pornographic material.
- > Known sexual abuse or neglect of a child.
- > Denigration, public or private, of any Junior Friend parent/guardian or family member.
- > Demeaning or exploitive behavior of either a sexual or nonsexual nature.
- > Pursuing a personal relationship with a member of the mentee's family.
- > Pursuing a relationship other than mentoring with a child or family member. (For example, but not limited to adoption, guardianship, etc. of the child or a family member.)
- > Intentional violation of any local, state, or federal law.
- > Driving under the influence of alcohol.
- > Possession of illegal substances.