

# kids these days...

By Dr. David Rideout, CEO  
North Central Alberta Child & Family Services Authority

## SOCIAL WORKERS – MAKING A DIFFERENCE ONE FAMILY AT A TIME

Many of us in the “boomer generation” grew up with a lot of constants in our lives - supper at 6:00, fish on Friday, NHL hockey on Saturday night, church on Sunday, and daily routines that provided us with a sense of comfort and security during the week. Today’s kids have their constants too, with organized sports, videogames, 4-H meetings, cell phones, and iPods. But what about the kids that don’t have the most important constant in their lives—family?

Sometimes a child has no family member to turn to in times of turmoil, no one to trust with confidential concerns; sometimes a family has no one to turn to in their times of difficulty, when it seems their world is coming apart and no solutions are evident. Thankfully, they can choose to seek help from a social worker.

Whether they are friends, sounding boards or problem solvers, social workers are a valued part of the helping professions - like teachers, nurses and clergy. They try hard to work with people, rather than against them, so they can create their own solutions in their situation.

Some social workers go above and beyond ordinary demands of the job. This could mean giving up holiday time, or sharing it with the families they serve, in order to help children and youth feel safe or have extra contact with their families.

I won’t go so far as calling these workers unsung heroes, but it takes a very selfless person to put others needs before your own day in and day out - and sometimes for little or no thanks.

Some social workers think of the people they work with as their own extended family and make sure they go the extra mile in order to ensure happiness for them. My grandmother would refer to such people as “the salt of the earth.” I’ve never understood the meaning of the metaphor, but I knew by the way

she said it that it was a compliment of the highest order!

Why do social workers choose to do it? Ask them sometime. You will be sure to get very diverse answers but all of them will have the same theme...if they don’t who will?

Not every child or youth will need a social worker, but I’m willing to bet every child or youth knows someone who has or has had contact with one.

While sometimes portrayed as “bad guys” because of their intrusion into such personal areas, I think it is important to stress they are often coming into an already difficult situation and trying to find a way to help improve the situation.

The same thing won’t work for every family - because each family, like a fingerprint, is unique. It is the challenge of the social worker to use training, experience and wisdom to help find the best course of action in each situation.

There are many programs and alternatives available to kids and their families today, which can be almost as unique as the family dynamic. From Mediation to Kinship Care, Foster Care to Adoption there are so many ways that social workers can help families.

Children and youth can fall through the cracks unless someone pays attention to their needs and helps them when they are most vulnerable. In many instances, that person will be a social worker.

March 1-7 is National Social Work Week. We hope that one day we won’t need the assistance of Social Workers, but for now we are sure glad to have them.

---

Any feedback or comments are welcome and can be sent via email to [david.rideout@gov.ab.ca](mailto:david.rideout@gov.ab.ca)