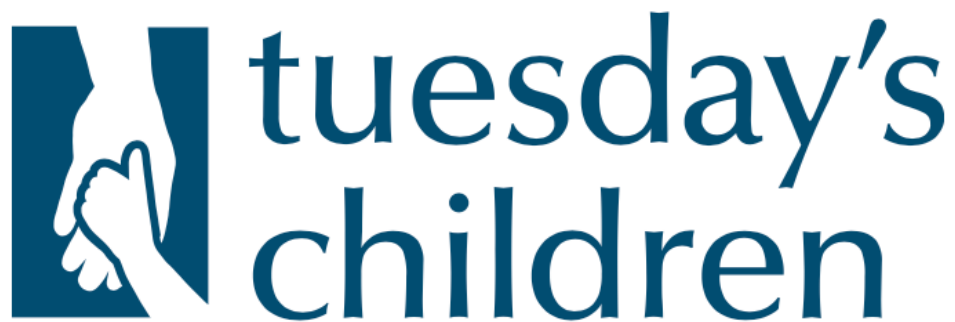


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 Liz Wright

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Lifestyle

Tuesday's Children, a national nonprofit organization that provides support and services for families impacted by terrorism, military conflict and mass violence for over 20 years, is searching for dedicated adult role models to help mentor youth who have suffered a loss due to military service or its aftermath.

“Our Military Initiative Mentoring Program was created based on the long-term healing model that Tuesday’s Children has gained international recognition for,” said Sara Wingerath-Schlanger, Senior Program Director. “We make matches based on common interests, personality traits and within a reasonable geographic distance ... this is an opportunity to join a community of understanding and support.”

Children are waiting in Augusta to be paired with an engaged supporter who can help fill a role; actively recruiting for its mentoring program, Tuesday’s Children has a custom designed program that seeks to fill the gaps in services offered to families of the fallen with children 6 to 18 years old.

“We make matches between bereaved military children and dedicated adult role models. It is a one-to-one friendship match, and we have a young person that’s a soccer fan who lost his dad post-9/11 military service,” said Wingerath-Schlanger. “He is a gregarious person and he is looking into having the support of a volunteer.”

Mentors offer advice, share life experiences, help the young to navigate life challenges and have fun. According to a news release from the organization, many mentors often share that their mentoring relationship changed their life for the better just as much as their presence has changed the life of a child; Wingerath-Schlanger deems this effect a ‘circle of care,’ because volunteers gain something invaluable and personal as they put in their time and try to uplift someone else, which is especially obvious for those who grew up in the program and returned as a mentor for the next generation of children.

With Augusta having a well-known gang problem and children across the nation lacking peer support groups for traumatic losses, Wingerath-Schlanger said mentors can be crucial in preventing a child’s feelings of isolation to increase or falling prey to negative

influences during a vulnerable stage in life. As children grow alongside their mentor, Wingerath-Schlanger said she believes having someone present for important life changing achievements or moments can lessen the emotional distress such a situation might otherwise cause.

“It just takes one, and we’re hoping that someone in the Augusta area says ‘yes’ to being a mentor,” said Wingerath-Schlanger. “We, as Americans, have a commitment to supporting these military families who have sacrificed so much for us ... and this is a direct way someone can raise their hand and say, ‘I can be there for this child.’”

Those who are over the age of 21 are eligible to volunteer with Tuesday’s Children’s Long-Term Mentoring Program, but must be able to commit to being an active volunteer by connecting with a child a few hours a month, for a year or more. Thorough screening will include a background check and other vital child safety precautions.

“Children grieve and re-grieve. The process for youth is very different ... because they have so many life milestones ahead of them,” said Wingerath-Schlanger. “Children that participate in mentoring are less likely to participate in risky behavior ... there’s a lot of really important data proving its results.”

For those who cannot be available for a 4+ hour per month commitment, Wingerath-Schlanger said Tuesday’s Children also offers

fundraising 5k runs and career mentoring programs.

“If your plate is really full, this might not be the right time for you to be a mentor; however, there are still other ways you could make an impact,” she said. “Join us for our 9/11 5k by making a team and honoring those families for the lives lost. We also do one for Memorial Day.”

For more information on Tuesday’s Children’s Long-Term Youth Mentoring Program, visit tuesdayschildren.org/our-programs/youth-mentoring/

“Grief touches us all and we would really love anyone’s involvement in this whether that’s donating, mentoring or participating in one of our 5k races,” said Wingerath-Schlanger. “Mentoring is important for any child at any age ... it’s important we close the mentoring gap.”
