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MEDIA ALERT

UNITED WAY LAUNCHES NEW FAMILY MENTOR PROGRAM

First Mentor Training Class Starts February 17

FORT MYERS, Fla. (Feb. 5, 2015) --- [The United Way of Lee, Hendry, Glades, and Okeechobee](#) is proud to announce that the United Way Volunteer Center has officially launched a new **Family Mentor Program** and are partnering with the Children's Network of Southwest Florida to recruit volunteer mentors who will be trained and matched with parents who have been involved in the Child Welfare system and are ready to be re-unified with their children.

"At this point the parents have worked very hard to resolve their personal challenges in order for their children to be returned to their custody. This reunification can be as stressful as it is exciting. Parental support is paramount to the success of the newly reunited family unit", said Nadereh Salim, Chief Executive Officer, Children's Network of Southwest Florida.

Now more than ever, today's parents need a support system. Each Mentor will work to build a committed and trusting relationship with the parents to support them through this transition. The mentor will empower them to define and meet goals for themselves, to achieve self-reliance, and offer advice that parents may be uncomfortable seeking from elsewhere. Building these kinds of relationships is particularly important for struggling

families in low-income neighborhoods which frequently offer few role models or positive outlets for children and adults.

“We are extremely excited about adding the Family Mentor program and our partnership with Children’s Network of Southwest Florida to assist these parents,” said Cliff Smith, President of United Way of Lee, Hendry, Glades, and Okeechobee. “The goal is to help parents achieve and maintain greater self-reliance so that they may stay together as a family, offering both the parents and their children a chance for a brighter future,” added Smith.

An ideal family mentor will be one who can be non-judgmental, offer a minimum of an hour a week to work together with the parent(s), guiding and supporting them in the following areas:

- **Social Connection** – Helping parents develop social supports.
- **Hands on Assistance** – Accessing available benefits and services (food stamps, medical resources, free tax filing, etc.) and assisting parents in obtaining appropriate assistance.
- **Friendly visitation** – Offering a caring and supportive relationship to reduce the feelings of isolation in the spirit of “families helping families”.
- **Basic parenting assistance**- Assisting parents in the basic parenting education, knowledge and skills by teaching, coaching and modeling.

The **first training class begins Tuesday, February 17**, and will consist of a background screening and four evening classes covering the areas of Safety, Confidentiality, Planning for Success, Signs and Reporting of child abuse and neglect, Family Engagement, plus an overview of the Child Welfare System.

To register to become a mentor or request additional information contact Patrice Cunningham, Special Projects Manager at Patrice@UnitedWayLee.org or 239.433.2000 x272. Future training classes will be announced and posted on the website at www.unitedWayLee.org/.

About Children's Network

Children's Network of SWFL is the private, nonprofit lead agency that administers the child welfare system in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Hendry and Glades Counties. Our mission is to work with the community to protect children and preserve families. Children's Network is responsible for over 1,800 abused and neglected children, and delivers a comprehensive local system of care through subcontracts with more than 50 social service agencies. For more information about Children's Network and its programs, visit www.childnetswfl.org or call us at 239-226-1524.

About The United Way

In addition to raising funds for 82 human service organizations and over 200 programs in our community, the United Way promotes partnerships and collaborations among agencies, helping them to work together focusing on issues that continue to improve lives. The United Way of Lee, Hendry, Glade, and Okeechobee was established in 1957. For more information please call United Way of Lee, Hendry, Glades and Okeechobee at (239) 433-2000 or visit www.UnitedWayLee.org.

The United Way Volunteer Center connects individuals and companies to volunteer opportunities throughout our community. You can reach the United Way Volunteer Center by calling 433-2000 ext. 260 or by visiting the United Way website at www.UnitedWayLee.org/volunteer.

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