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WEB EXTRA: Mentoring program drawing on star power

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A mentoring program for young aboriginal girls is looking for a few good women.

The Winnipeg non-profit service, run through the city's organization, Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Winnipeg, is drawing on the star power of Inuit singer Susan Aglukark to recruit 100 aboriginal women as big sisters for underprivileged girls who need role models in their lives.

"The campaign is intended to spread a message of community responsibility, hope and empowerment for female aboriginal youth in the city, while recruiting 100 new mentors," the group that runs the mentoring program said in a prepared statement.

Aglukark will be featured in newspaper ads and TV and radio spots throughout the campaign, said the non-profit group Empowering Our Little Sisters Inc.

"No stranger to the harsh realities and the inherent potential of aboriginal children and youth, Susan has brought hope and inspiration to thousands of young people both on and off reserve with her powerful mixture of workshops, presentations and songs," the group's statement said.

Winnipeg, with 70,000 people of aboriginal heritage in the last national census, is often called the aboriginal capital of Canada.

But organizing a force of volunteers to cope with the community's poverty and social problems has always been a challenge. The mentoring program was started after the suicide of an aboriginal girl, 11, in the city's North End in 2005.

Getting adult aboriginal women linked up with vulnerable young girls could save lives and help the city realize the potential in the youth.

"We are so thrilled to have Susan join our efforts," said Michelle Boivin, chair of the group.

"Given her tremendous commitment to improving the life circumstances of our children and youth, we hope to inspire aboriginal women from all walks of life to mentor and become part of the solution."

For more info: click on www.empoweringsisters.com

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