

Big Sisters and Big Brothers Society of Edmonton and Area (BSBB)



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BSBB has offices located in Edmonton, Parkland and Sherwood Park. The following programs are offered in Edmonton and the surrounding area:

Mentoring Programs:

1) Traditional Big Sisters & Big Brothers Program

i Program Purpose and Outcomes:

Purpose: This *community-based, one-to-one* mentoring program matches a child aged 6 to 18 with a caring adult of the same gender. The matched child and mentor spend approximately 3 hours per week together doing fun activities in the community (e.g. playing sports, making crafts, walking in the park, going to a ball game, or just talking).

Mentor role: This “Big Sister” or “Big Brother” provides support and friendship to the child on a weekly basis, and acts as a positive role model (e.g. healthy fun activities).

Outcomes for Youth/Children: Children gain self-esteem and self-confidence through spending time with their mentor. They also increase their social and relational skills, and increase their links to, and experiences with community resources (e.g. parks, recreational facilities).

Canadian studies have documented that “little” brothers and sisters that participate in the Traditional Program also demonstrate the following: decreased levels of frustration, anger and worry; improved academic performance; decreased likelihood of involvement and violence; decreased willingness to initiate drug or alcohol abuse; and success in achieving employment and/or further education.

Mentor Outcomes: Mentors are able to see the difference they are making for a child, through building a relationship with the child. They increase their attachment through the community, through participation in community-based activities, and as a participant in activities as part of the Big Sisters and Big Brothers volunteer “community”.

ii Relevant Recruitment / Promotional Messages - Traditional Program

Children / Youth Best Suited to this Program: Children best suited to this program are those who would benefit from improved self-confidence and self-esteem, and *regular one-on-one activities with an adult role model of the same gender*. Children

matched in this program are often from single parent homes, and / or suffer from emotional or cultural hardship. They may live with relatives or within group homes.

Mentors Best Suited to this Program: Mentors best suited to this program are those that like to participate in *a range of activities* with a child or youth, *on a weekly basis*. Mentors are encouraged to pursue economical activities focused on shared interests (e.g. sports), exploring new activities (e.g. crafts), or exploring community facilities (e.g. parks, the Odysium). These can also include activities organized by BSBB (e.g. annual picnic, Christmas party).

Volunteers should be willing to make *a minimum commitment of one year*.

Motivations and Potential Fears of Prospective Mentors: Volunteers in this program are motivated to make a difference for child by building *a stable, long-term relationship* with one child. Prospective mentors often what to “give back to the community” through building a personal relationship with a *disadvantaged child*. Many younger mentors may have career or job-related interests.

Volunteers may be uncomfortable with the *extensive screening* that is undertaken for recruitment of BSBB volunteers, as they are unclear as to the intent of the process. Volunteers may also feel they *lack the financial or other resources* for regular match activities (e.g. transportation, income).

Volunteers may also be *nervous about whether a match will “work out”*, and what to do if the child or their family *encounter difficulties*. They may be unsure of what they have to offer higher needs children. They also may be unaware of the ongoing supports proved by BSBB caseworkers, to support them in any concerns that arise, and to provide ideas for economical activities.

iii ***Current and Projected Recruitment Demand for Mentors:***

Current Matches:

- ◆ Number of matches: 384
- ◆ Number of mentors: 384
- ◆ Number of mentees: 384

Target Number of Matches September 2003

- ◆ Number of mentors (new): 200
- ◆ Number of returning mentors: 180

2) TEAM Program (Together Exploring Activities with Mentors)

i ***Program Purpose and Outcomes:***

Purpose: This *community-based, group program* is designed to provide group mentoring for unmatched children in a similar age group that share a common interest (e.g. computers, swimming, weight lifting). Depending on the activity, the program may also be *site-based* (e.g. specific recreation centre).

Each group consists of 5 volunteers and 10 children of the same gender, or a minimum of 1 volunteer per 4 children. Upon completion of the time-limited program, the children will have acquired a skill and/or linked to community resources.

Mentor role: The mentor acts as a positive role model, and provides support and friendship to a group of children as they explore or builds skills in a shared interest.

Outcomes for Youth/Children: Children build specific skills, knowledge, and self-confidence, while building relationships with caring adult mentors. They also develop social and relational skills through participation in structured activities with other children.

Outcomes for Mentors: Mentors are able to build relationships with a number of children over a set time period. They get to participate regularly in an activity they enjoy. Mentors are able to build relationships with other adults with similar interests (e.g. biking), and can also build greater linkages within the community.

ii ***Relevant Recruitment / Promotional Messages -
BSBB TEAM Program:***

Children Best Suited to this Program: This program supports children on the *BSBB wait-list* for the Traditional Program; as boys wait the longest for one-to-one matches, the *majority of the programs are for young boys*. Children selected for this program are those that could benefit from the building of confidence, self-esteem, and social skills, through participation group mentoring activities around a shared interest.

Mentors Best Suited to this Program: This program is best suited to mentors who like building relationships with *groups of children* in active settings. They enjoy sharing skills and knowledge related to *a personal interest*, and are comfortable being a role model to children in the context of *group learning / problem-solving*. Younger mentors often have job or career-related interests.

Mentors best suited to this program are those that often cannot commit to long term programming, but wish to offer their skill-specific talents over a defined time period (e.g. 10 weeks). As most of the children requiring this programs live on the north side of Edmonton, mentors must be willing to attend mentoring activities in communities north of the North Saskatchewan River.

Motivations and Potential Fears of Prospective Mentors: Mentors are attracted to this program because they like working with young children, but are *unable to make a long term commitment, or prefer to have short term involvement*. They prefer *pre-set structured activities* related to a specific personal interest.

Prospective volunteers may be nervous about leading a variety of activities, being unable to attend all sessions, dealing with group conflicts, or leading tasks without adequate guidance or modeling.

iii ***Current and Projected Recruitment Demand for Mentors:***

Current Matches:

- ◆ Number of mentors: 23
- ◆ Number of mentees: 60

Target Number of Matches September 2003:

- ◆ Number of mentors (new): 50
- ◆ Number of returning mentors: 28

3) BSBB In-School Mentoring Program

i ***Program Purpose and Outcomes:***

Purpose: This *site-based, one-on-one* mentoring program builds a caring relationship between an adult mentor and an elementary student, through a focus on literacy related activities. The matches participate in a range of activities, including reading, writing, story composition, analysis of stories, word puzzles, or games / activities that utilize reading, writing, math, logic and / or problem-solving skills. The matches meet for about one hour per week, in the school setting, throughout the school year.

Mentor role: The role of the mentor is to engage the child in a *range of literacy-based activities* that help enhance the reading, comprehension, communication and problem-solving skills of the child, while building self-confidence and self-esteem. The mentor may or may not be matched with a child of the same gender.

Outcomes for Youth/Children: Children improve their *conversational and literacy-related skills* (e.g. reading, writing, analyzing, numerical), while gaining a relationship with a reliable, caring adult. As a result, they often become more willing to try new or more complex tasks and are more willing to participate in class.

Outcomes for Mentors: Mentors are able to see the *tangible impact* of the time they spend with their child, as the child becomes more confident in reading and communicative in the stories or tasks they share. Mentors lead a *structured, time-limited, and site-based activity* that is usually located in a neighborhood of their choice. As the match meets only *during the school year*, the mentoring commitment often also accommodates personal or family commitments (e.g. Christmas, summer holidays).

ii ***Relevant Recruitment / Promotional Messages - BSBB In-School Mentoring:***

Children Best Suited to this Program: Children best suited to this program are those that could benefit from one-to-one attention in literacy-related tasks. They are also children who could benefit from a reliable adult role model, who encourages them to talk, problem-solve and try new or more difficult literacy tasks.

Mentors Best Suited to this Program: Mentors attracted to this program desire to be empathetic and encouraging supports to young children as they build on their *existing literacy skills*. They also desire to build a friendship, so that the child increases their confidence in questioning and problem solving.

In-school mentors are often *not able to commit more than one hour per week*, but are *able to do this during the school day*. Because the task involves literacy-related tasks, mentors do not require the physical fitness required in other programs. Mentors can be *adults of all ages* from post-secondary students, middle-aged business people to senior citizens.

Motivations and Potential Fears of Prospective Mentors: Mentors in this program often value the importance of literacy related skills, and education. They enjoy literacy-related tasks, and they like to encourage children to feel good about their existing literacy skills in order to build confidence and new skills. Mentors may have career related interests or aspirations.

Volunteers may feel they do not have enough education or literacy skills to be a mentor. They may also confuse mentoring with tutoring, and feel that they do not have the personal skills for the task. Mentors may feel insecure about knowing what kind of tasks to do with the child. They may be unaware of the program supports of mentor training and assigned caseworkers.

iii Current and Projected Recruitment Demand for Mentors :

Current Matches:

- ◆ Number of mentors: 383
- ◆ Number of mentees: 411

Target Number of Matches September 2003:

- ◆ Number of mentors (new): 152
- ◆ Number of returning mentors: 228

4) Big Sisters & Big Brothers E-Mentoring Program: Scientist 2010

i Program Purpose and Outcomes:

Purpose: This *school-based electronic mentoring program is a component of* Scientists 2010 Program. Scientist 2010 is a science and technology related learning program brings together partners from business, education, government and voluntary sectors *to better prepare children for success in the global economy.* Founding partners of the program were the Edmonton Space & Science Centre, the Edmonton Public School Board, Edmonton Catholic Schools, and Economic Development Edmonton.

Grade 4 students (2002) in 5 elementary schools have been matched with employees from a variety of interested corporations, to correspond via e-mail about science-related questions and problems. Mentors will follow the students until they graduate Grade 12. The participating elementary schools include McArther, Calder, St. Jerome, Belvedere, and St. Bernadette.

Mentor role: Mentors are required to correspond by e-mail with their match on a weekly basis, and to engage the children in science related discussions and research. This can be as simple as a answering a question on what the student is learning in class that day, to how to research more complex issues on the web. Corporations that currently sponsor e-mentors include WCB, Epcor, Nait, Alberta Energy, ADC, Intuit, Edmonton Public School Board, and the Edmonton Catholic School Board.

Outcomes for Youth/Children:

The Scientist 2010 Program seeks to create this positive outcome for Edmonton's children by:

- Offering students special opportunities and resources that will stimulate enthusiasm for learning;
- Involving parents and the whole community in the education process; and
- Increasing the number of students who potentially choose rewarding careers in science and technology.

A key component of Scientist 2010 is the e-mentoring program. This component seeks to

- Develop Student skills in technology use
- Improve the understanding of science and technology
- Provide guidance regarding the workplace, careers and the importance of education
- Create a relationship between student and mentor organizations that will improve academic achievement
- Provide partner organizations with a convenient way to support Scientists 2010 program, as well as the education system.

ii ***Relevant Recruitment / Promotional Messages -
BSBB E-mentoring Program:***

Children Best Suited to this Program: Schools were selected by the Edmonton school boards, based upon a need for improved performance in science and math, as well as limited access to such community-based programs.

Mentors Best Suited to this Program: Mentors best suited to this program include employees that are encouraged by their employers to in this effort, and have access to e-mail. They are often individuals skilled in, and enthusiastic about electronic communication, and web-based search. They also include adults interested in promoting a curiosity / interest in science within children. Corporations best suited to sponsor such a program include those committed to larger community outcomes such as: community investment through volunteering; building a skilled workforce for tomorrow; encouraging the education system to promote an interest in science and technology.

Motivations and Potential Fears of Prospective Mentors: Mentors may be unfamiliar with the elementary science curriculum. As a result, they may be concerned that they will not be prepared for the kinds of questions their match will ask. They may also be unclear on their role, thinking that they are the ones that are to do the research.

iii ***Current and Projected Recruitment Demand for Mentors :***

Current Matches:

- ◆ Number of mentors: 87
- ◆ Number of mentees: 51

Target Number of Matches September 2003:

- ◆ Number of mentors (new): 63
- ◆ Number of returning mentors: 87

5) **Roots and Wings Program:**

i ***Program Purpose and Outcomes:***

Purpose: This *community-based, family mentoring program* is a collaborative project of The Family Centre and the Big Sister & Big Brother Society of Edmonton. The program matches parents with adult mentors to provide support to a family that is motivated to make changes, through weekly interaction and / or activities with the parent.

Mentor role: Mentors provide support, guidance and friendship to the family, assisting them in their efforts to grow towards a healthy, future. They build a relationship with the parents, and bring their own life experience to help the family build upon its own strengths. Match activities could be simply having coffee, exploring community resources (e.g. transportation systems), or recreational outings.

Outcomes for Parents: With the ongoing support of a mentor, parents build parenting skills, relational skills, life skills and confidence, as they deal with challenges related to making healthy choices for their families.

Outcomes for Mentors: Mentors gain the satisfaction of helping a whole family, including parents and children, build a healthy future. They gain heightened self-esteem by valuing the relational, parenting and life skills they developed through their own experiences. They also gain greater linkages to the community, including the two supporting agencies.

ii ***Relevant Recruitment / Promotional Messages -
Roots and Wings Program***

Families Best Suited to this Program: Parent(s) in the family have made a commitment to change, in order to provide a better future for their family. These families linked to additional supports provided through the Family Centre.

Mentors Best Suited to this Program: Adults who are experienced, positive parents, with good relational and problem-solving skills, are good volunteers for this program. A strong resilient attitude enables them to provide ongoing and encouragement to families, based on the family's strengths today. These mentors need to be willing to make a commitment of a specific agreed upon length of time, and be willing to work with casework staff to link families to relevant resources in the community.

Motivations and Potential Fears of Prospective Mentors:

Prospective volunteers are those interested in actively supporting parents and families. Volunteers are interested in, or willing to assist families that could have higher or more complex needs. They are respectful and interested in learning about other cultures and communities and take an asset rather than deficit approach.

Prospective mentors may feel unaware or unable to respond to the range of needs in a family. They may feel they lack education and training to support high needs families, and may not value their own experience in parenting, or their relational / problem-solving skills.

They may have concerns regarding "boundary" issues related to the role of the mentor. They are likely unaware of the range of supports offered by the two supporting agencies.

iii ***Current and Projected Recruitment Demand for Mentors:***

Current Matches:

- ◆ Number of mentors: 24
- ◆ Number of mentees: 24

Target Number of Matches *September 2003*:

- ◆ Number of mentors (new): 15
- ◆ Number of returning mentors: 20

Current and Planned Program Practices:

1) Recruitment / Screening:

i Interviews and Reference Checks:

Interested volunteers attend an orientation session, which introduces them to the different volunteer roles at BSBB. They complete an application form, and are asked to provide four references (preferably personal references, but employment related references are acceptable). They are asked to request a criminal record check, and a child welfare record check. All volunteers would be declined if record checks were deemed to be unsuitable for this type of volunteering, if interviews suggested inappropriate behaviors (e.g. anger management, inappropriate interest in children, etc.), or if changes in their personal life would impair their ability to make the required commitment.

ii Training

Mentors in the Traditional Program and Roots and Wings program receive one day of training regarding communications, relationship building, and child safety training (e.g. what do if a child “discloses” abuse). BSBB caseworkers also support mentors with additional match-specific training or information.

In-school mentors attend a 3 hour training session in building relationships and literacy skills. This also addresses child safety training.

iii Matching

Traditional Program mentors are matched with children or youth with similar interests, and with needs that could be met by a specific mentor.

Roots and Wings volunteers are matched with families referred by the Family Centre that share similar interests, and /or families that could benefit from that mentor’s particular skills, strengths and experience.

Case workers match *Literacy-based mentors* with children that the teachers have identified could benefit from this program, that share interests, and / or other needs (e.g. a child that could benefit through a match with mentor of a specific age, gender).

In e-mentoring, matching takes place when there are enough mentors to match an entire class.

iv Follow-up / Evaluation

Traditional Program and *Roots and Wings* mentors receive monthly telephone contact for the first four months, and an in-person interview at 3 months. Subsequent telephone follow-up is every two months for the remainder of the year. An additional interview is held after one year. For the remainder of the match, telephone contact is made each quarter, as well as an annual interview.

In-school mentors receive telephone or in-person follow-up at the beginning, middle and year end of the school year.

TEAM mentors are contacted by telephone at the mid-point of the session. An in-person interview is held at the end of the session, and once / year.
BSBB is also participating in evaluation processes for outcomes in specific programs (e.g. In-school mentoring, Roots & Wings).

v ***Recognition:***

All BSBB mentors receive recognition gifts (e.g. mugs, tote-bags) and are included in the organization's annual recognition events. As well, mentoring programs host *program-specific recognition events* (e.g. Christmas luncheon for In-School mentors).

