



Big Brothers Big Sisters
of Winnipeg

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Parent
Information

Mission Statement:

To provide children with mentors for friendship, support and guidance.

About Us:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Winnipeg was founded in September of 1997 by amalgamating the former Big Brothers and Big Sisters Associations of Winnipeg, both of whom had been operating since 1969/1970. We are a charter member agency of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada.

Operating funds for Big Brothers Big Sisters programs are provided by the United Way, the Province of Manitoba, City of Winnipeg, various Foundations and the Association's own fundraising initiatives. The agency is reviewed regularly by the National organization, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, to ensure we are meeting the many standards that have been set for us. These standards reflect the commitment of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada and its member agencies, to provide quality volunteer and professional services to children and youth. They are also some of the highest and most comprehensive standards in existence within the youth-serving non-profit community.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a growth-enhancing relationship that occurs between a more experienced person, and a less experienced person. It takes many different forms and paths. We have learned a lot over the last forty years of mentoring, and from the 100 years of mentoring since the very first Big Brothers organization was formed here in Canada. We believe that mentoring is not about 'fixing' broken kids, or simply trying to replace an absent parent's gender role. Mentoring, as we have now learned, works best when it looks for the strengths in children and youth who are facing adversity, and provides a champion and cheerleader for a child who needs encouraging. The presence of a caring, supportive person outside the family unit can improve youth's resilience to buffer the challenges they face as part of growing up, or after a difficult life event has occurred such a divorce, death, family illness or change in homes.

Mentoring relationships enhance a young person's world by introducing someone who is focused on what the young person wants and needs from them. When youth connect to mentors, at times they want that person to answer questions about things they are unsure about, or they may just want to go out and have fun with a mentor to take their mind off whatever is bothering them. These are playful relationships that serve an important purpose. They are unlike a parent, or teacher relationship. They aren't disciplinarians, or babysitters. We work hard to pair young people with positive, healthy, and wonderful adults who will be good role-models, who will inspire youth to grow. **A mentor is a person who believes in them.**

Mentoring relationships depend on a good relationship between the parent and the mentor. We actively need you, as a parent, to help work with the mentor and with us. We collaborate with parents regularly, and require a lot of interaction with you and your child. Mentoring will not work if your child doesn't want to have a mentor. We hear regularly that parents feel their child needs a mentor, and while we may agree, please talk with your child about how willing they are to

participate in this program. It is not a program like other recreation programs available in our community; this one is about **relationship building**.

Little Brothers/Little Sisters:

Little Brother applicants are generally between the ages of 7-12 at the time of application; Little Sisters are generally between the ages of 6-13. Children can remain in the program until they are 21 years of age, once they have been matched with a volunteer. "Littles" can come from any area of the city. Little Brothers/Little Sisters have a variety of needs, but they are all in need of a relationship with an additional consistent, positive adult. The parent/guardian must give consent for their child to be involved in any of our programs. We also require that the **child wants** to be involved. All children, parent(s)/guardians must attend the agency's Pre-Match Training Program (Strong from the Start) before being accepted onto the waiting list.

Big Brothers Big Sisters Volunteers:

Big Brothers/Big Sisters are grown-ups, from all cultural backgrounds, with big hearts and some spare time to share with a child. Big Brothers/Big Sisters are reliable, caring volunteers. They must be 18 years of age or older and be able to commit for a minimum of one year. Big Brothers/Big Sisters come from all walks of life – tradespeople, university/college students, members of the business community, retirees. All volunteers are required to attend an information session, complete an application, undergo a personal interview, and provide personal reference and police background checks. Volunteers also attend a training session and are educated in the area of child safety. Ongoing guidance and support is provided to volunteers and matches by an agency Caseworker. The safety of the children involved with our agency is of utmost importance.

Programs and Services:

Community-Based 1:1 programs

Big Brother, Big Sister and Cross Gender Matching

The Big Brother/Big Sister program matches an adult volunteer to a child for friendship, support and guidance. Big Brothers/Big Sisters are matched to a young person who has similar interests. It's simply about having fun, laughing, playing, dreaming and just being there to lend a helping hand. Big Brothers/Big Sisters meet with their Little for a few hours, two to four times a month, for a minimum of one year. Matches often last well beyond the first year as the benefits are realized by all. Matches spend time doing activities that are of interest to them both. Common activities include playing games, going to the park, bike riding, movies, cooking or simply hanging out.

The Ototema Program:

The Ototema Program is designed for youth who are currently involved with the justice system, either incarcerated at the Manitoba Youth Center or who are serving a sentence in the community (i.e. probation.) Youth 7-11 may also be considered if they are engaging in identified illegal behaviors. Volunteers are matched in a one-on-one relationship with a youth (7-17 years old) and participate together in recreational/educational community activities. This program helps to provide youth with beneficial opportunities to expand their interests and learn new skills through involvement with a positive, reliable adult.

Mentoring Adolescent Parents (MAP): The MAP Program is designed specifically for pregnant and parenting teen girls. Volunteers are women, 21 or older, who have experience with babies, and childcare. New moms, especially teens, need all the support they can get; this program provides a link to information resources about child-care and positive parenting, while also giving moms a fun break to just relax, play and have some time to focus on themselves too. The commitment is the same as the Big Sister program.

P.R.I.S.M. (Pride.Respect.Identity.Safety.Mentoring) This program is for youth and mentors who identify as part of the LGBTQ2IA* community and want to be matched in this program option. The program matches youth in a variety of community based and site-based options.

Group Mentoring and Short-Term Mentoring Programs

These programs are options after you've enrolled your child to be on the waiting list. Participation in these programs allows us to get to know your child better, while offering them immediate programming. This can alleviate the feeling of a 'long wait' for the right Big Brother or Big Sister. We encourage your participation in these programs. At times, we will allow parents to register for these programs directly if the child is not interested in a longer term match.

Big Buddy Program

The Big Buddy Program is available to children on the waiting list for a Big Brother or Big Sister. "Big Buddies" are volunteers who have been screened the same as a Big Brother or Big Sisters, but do not have the time to commit to a one-on-one match. Big Buddy events run twice a month and are arranged by the agency. Big Buddies attend the events with 1-2 children from the waiting list. 10-12 matches go out to each activity. Outings can range from horseback riding, to wall climbing, to parties at the office. Once children are enrolled in this program they will have the opportunity to express interest in as many activities as we can accommodate. Regular communication is required after each outing your child goes on as match feedback.

Storybook Program

We believe your child has an important story to tell. When kids are going through hard times, sometimes they need a bit of help to tell the story in the right way. Sometimes, kids have had a very 'problem-saturated story' told about them through diagnosis of mental health issues, or behavior difficulties and self-esteem issues. Big Brothers Big Sisters believes that the person isn't the problem - the problem is the problem. And trying to have young people relate to their problems as heroes-in the making of their own story, helps give them the strength and encouragement to overcome many of life's struggles. In this program, kids and mentors meet for 6-8 weeks to work on a story that means something to your child. It can be about them or a fictional character they relate with. It is positive and strength-based. Once the story is done they will illustrate it, and we will publish it for them to keep. The young people in this program have all loved this experience.

L.E.A.P

Learning is Essential for All People! This is a tutor mentor program that runs here at the Agency every week. These mentors have an academic interest and focus, and they do one hour of homework tutoring followed by a snack and an hour of fun time. This is a great program to participate in, if your child needs a bit of homework support by very cool mentor/tutors.

Girlvana

Each November, Girlvana opens for registration. Our Girlvana instructor and a small group of girls 13+ meet on Thursday evenings to do yoga, discuss mindfulness, self-esteem, image, and healthy-bodies and minds.

School-Based Programming

In-School Mentoring Program (youth are referred by partner schools)

The In-School Mentoring Program is a fun and rewarding program that matches children to a mentor at their school. Matches meet for one hour a week, for the duration of the school year. Matches must meet on school property, during school hours. Mentors and Mentees spend time building a friendship and having fun. Common activities include playing games, playing in the gym, arts and crafts, reading or talking. The In-School Mentoring Program is offered in select Winnipeg schools. Referrals come from the schools, with parent consent.

Other Opportunities for Children on the Waiting List

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Winnipeg provides a number of opportunities to children while they are waiting for a match. Some of these opportunities may not be available for all children, however this is the list of some of the possibilities:

- Access to group programs at the activity center (LEAP, Storybook, Girlvana, Summer Day Camp)
- Camperships
- Tickets to various events for the families involved with the agency.
- Funding for music lessons or sports registrations (subject to specific criteria, application and approval)
- Invitations to take part in very special events such as Air Canada Dreams Take Flight.
- Waiting List events such as craft nights, drawing lessons, games, and parties.

Role of the Caseworker:

Each match in the traditional Big Brother/Big Sister program is assigned to a Caseworker. These are awesome people who want to get to know you and your family. The Caseworker follows-up with all parties in the match frequently, especially during the first 6-12 months. Contact with all parties (Volunteer, Parent and Child) will continue until the official relationship comes to an end. All parties in the match must ensure they are committed to keeping in contact with their Caseworker and return calls promptly. The Caseworker should be contacted at anytime should problems arise in the match. If a match is not proceeding satisfactorily, or there is a lack of cooperation with the Caseworker, the match will be fully reviewed and may be ended if necessary. We hate to have to do this. We never want to interrupt service, but communication is absolutely necessary between us. Our services are free of charge, in exchange for a mentor who will support and care for your child as a volunteer, all we ask for in return from you is your participation with communication.

F.AQ'S:

Is there a cost to sign up my child?

No. Providing your child with a mentor is done free of charge to you.

How long does getting a volunteer take?

It is difficult for us to tell you exactly how long that it will take to find the right match for your child. In fact, as best as we try, we cannot guarantee a match. Generally however, girls wait an average of a year, and boys wait an average of two years for a match. However, if the right volunteer comes along that will be suited to your child, children have also been matched at times within a year of waiting. It all depends on the volunteers who we have at any given time. We always have more women volunteering than men, and more boys waiting for service than girls. We do our very best to match children as quickly as possible, and to provide them with as many opportunities for service while they are waiting as we can.

It is important for parents to know that we match children with a strength-based approach. While we recognize that your child may be facing some challenges in their lives, at school, or behavior at times, it is very difficult to make a good match based on 'need.' All children need a mentor for different reasons, and all children benefit from the right kind of mentor at the right time. If you are able to help us to identify positives about your child(ren) and indicate likes, and interest, special talents, and unique traits, it helps us to find the right match more quickly.

How are volunteers screened?

The volunteer screening process is very rigorous, as our focus is always on child safety. We do everything within our abilities to determine that our volunteers are safe and positive people. All volunteers must go through their own application process which includes (3) positive references, a clear police record check, and child abuse registry check, a personal interview and child safety training.

What is the volunteer's role?

- To act as a positive role model. Mentors exhibit a standard of behaviour for modeling honesty, truth, and respect for others. A child may look to the mentor for an example in lifestyle, dress, or occupation. Mentors share their skills and talents with the child.
- To be an adult companion. The mentor is willing to be understanding, kind, sincere, and patient. The mentor commits without condition to a child, accepting the responsibility that the child may be unresponsive and/or get into trouble because of emotions, natural growing pains, different value systems and latent hostility against adults.
- To provide the mentee with individual attention.
- To be a friend and a listener. The mentor maintains open communication with the mentee by suspending judgments and accepting the child. The mentor creates a climate that allows for the expression of positive and negative attitudes, feelings, and thoughts.
- To reinforce the mentee's successes.



- To be a resource and a guide. The mentor opens the door to activities and experiences.
- To be a limit setter. The mentor sets clear limits for acceptable behaviour and focuses on the behaviour rather than the child. To enhance the child's self-esteem, the mentor stresses positive behaviours rather than simply pointing out negative ones.

The Mentor's Role is NOT...

- To replace the role of parent/guardian.
- To tutor the mentee in academic subjects as a means of improving grades.
- To expect dramatic changes in attitude and self-esteem.
- To provide solutions to all the issues facing children today.
- To break the trust they have established unless the child's safety is at risk.
- To be an authority figure/disciplinarian
- To be Santa Claus without the suit.
- To be a therapist.
- To be a judge or moralist.
- A bank

Do I get a choice of mentor?

Because we make relationships, we believe it is important for us to take your preferences into consideration when matching your child. Keeping that in mind, we do not discriminate when accepting mentors into the program based on any protected grounds. Our mentors, ideally, promote open-minded tolerance and acceptance of all people. We have zero tolerance for attitudes that promote oppression or prejudices, violence or attitudes that demean any individual based on their sexual orientation, race, culture or ethnicity.

We will call you when a mentor has selected your child as their match of choice. We will ask that you do not tell your child about this until you've had a chance to meet the mentor. This meeting is facilitated by a caseworker and you will have the chance to talk about your child, and hear about the mentor's life and interest in mentoring your child. Both you, and the mentor, must agree it is a good match before we introduce them to your child. Either party has a say. Therefore, it is important that you help let us know your restrictions and preferences ahead of time, so we can make good pairings, and not waste valuable time from excited volunteers.

We ask that you respond promptly to arrange this meeting, or you may risk the volunteer going back to choose another child to proceed with instead.

We ask that you also keep in mind that the best matches are based on common interests. The ability to have fun together doing things of mutual interest helps to connect the mentor and your child and create the bond through which the relationship will be able to act positively for your child.

What is your policy on confidentiality?

With the exception of information which must be disclosed by law, all of the information that is kept about the volunteers, parents and children in our agency is strictly confidential. Volunteers, Staff members and parents must all sign confidentiality agreements.

What are the expectations of me as a parent?

- To participate, and have your child participate in, an age appropriate pre-match training (which includes information on self-esteem, all forms of abuse, how to disclose abuse, who to tell, and discussions on appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior, internet safety, and street smarts).
- To be an active parent in the match, **communicate with the agency regularly**, and be available for meetings, telephone calls, and regular follow up with the caseworker about the quality and safety of a match
- To be home for pick up and drop off when a volunteer is taking your child out of the home
- To be patient with the volunteer relationship and not expect immediate or drastic changes to your child too early in the match relationship
- To respect the volunteer's role and not request them to act outside of their role
- To promptly report changes in life situation, upcoming family changes (including moves, and address change information)
- To understand that friendships take time to build and grow, and to encourage the mentoring relationship positively and gently on your child's terms rather than your own expectations.

We understand that some parents may not have access to a consistent telephone at home. In order to provide you service we must be able to reach you reliably and consistently. **Parents should know that in order for their child to be considered for a match their availability must be demonstrated.** We understand that sometime life circumstances may make this complicated, however mentoring is only able to work when it is consistent. If there are factors that prevent you from making appointments, and returning phone calls, mentoring may not be the right program for your child at this time.

Throughout the various stages in the enrollment process, you will be provided with further orientation information such as this. At the interview, at the pre-match training, and regularly as your child waits for a mentor. If you have any questions, at any time, you are encouraged to bring them up with the caseworker who is working with you in the enrollment or matching stage.

We look forward to getting to know you and your child better, and hope that we can provide you with a quality, safe and effective relationship.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Winnipeg is continually looking to grow and to create new and exciting ways to mentor children. Ideas and Feedback are always welcomed!

Criteria of Acceptance in the Big Brother Big Sister Program

1. Age:
 - We will accept Little Brothers onto the Wait List between the ages of 7-12 We will accept Little Sisters onto the Wait List between the ages of 6-13. (for PRISM age 9-17, MAP, up to 21, for Ototema 7-17)
2. The child will usually be from a single-parent home where there is only one adult in the home.
3. Boys who live with their father or male guardian will be eligible for a Big Sister only.
4. We will not match a boy who sees his father more than once a month with a Big Brother.
5. The child must live within the City of Winnipeg
6. The child must have approximately 3-5 hours (2-4 times monthly) available for a minimum of a year, to spend with a Big Brother or Big Sister
7. We will not match a child whose absent parent lives in the City without contacting the absent parent (if possible and/or appropriate). We will **not** match a child if the absent parent is opposed or could interfere with the match.
8. Regular support from an adult other than the guardian (i.e. grandparent, respite worker, parent/guardian's partner) will be a significant factor in determining acceptance and/or match.
9. All legal papers pertaining to custody, visiting rights, and restraining orders must be made available to the Caseworker at the time of the interview.
10. If joint custody exists, both parents must agree to the match
11. The child must be in a situation where stable guardianship of the child exists.
12. The child's living situation must be assessed as reasonably safe for a volunteer.
13. Additional information may be required from other agencies and professionals involved with the child. It is the parent/guardians responsibility to ensure this information is made accessible to the Big Sisters and Big Brothers Association when requested.
14. **We will accept for matching:**
 - ◆ A child and parent/guardian who have received program information, and reviewed criteria with a Caseworker.
 - ◆ A child and parent/guardian who have participated in, and can demonstrate understanding of, the Child Safety Program

- ◆ A child and parent/guardian who want a Big Brother/Big Sister and agree to be cooperative with the Agency
 - ◆ A parent/guardian who has signed a consent and release form
15. All acceptance and matching of Little Brother Little Sister applicants is dependent upon the availability of an appropriate volunteer and appropriate resources within the Agency.
16. Girls will only be matched to a Big Sister only. A boy will be matched with a Big Brother, but may be eligible for a Big Sister as well.
17. TIME ON WAIT LIST:
- ◆ Children may remain on the Wait list until they are 15. (unless enrolled in a program where youth over 15 are matched.)
 - ◆ At any point in time, reassessment may occur to determine if the child should continue waiting or be referred to another agency for service.
18. REFERRALS: Reasonable attempts will be made to refer individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria to other more appropriate services where possible.

* criteria subject to change without notice. Criteria is also different in the Ototema II and ISM programs

Please continue to the next page for information on the next steps.

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF WINNIPEG

NEXT STEPS FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

IF YOU ARE WANTING TO PROCEED WITH THE APPLICATION PROCESS:

PRIOR TO FILLING OUT THE APPLICATION:

*Review criteria to ensure your child(ren) are eligible

*Ensure your child wants a Big Brother or Big Sister

If you are applying for your son, consider if you are willing to consider a Big Sister volunteer for him, and if he is accepting of this as well.

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FILL OUT THE ONLINE APPLICATION AT:

<https://goo.gl/forms/YF9wT5ofNxUmnD4h1>

*(Or the hard copy enrolment package available upon request)

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER APPLICATION:

*Depending on how many applications are being processed, the wait for an interview can sometimes be months. We apologize in advance. Our services are only possible depending on how many volunteers we have at any given time.

THE APPOINTMENT FOR AN INTERVIEW:

*A caseworker will contact you to schedule an appointment for the interview.

*Appointments are held at the office, but exceptions can be made with extenuating circumstances

*Please allow 1 1/2 to 2 hours for the interview (for one child). An additional 3/4 hour for each additional child.

*Parking is available in the lot at 532 Ellice

WHAT TO BRING TO THE INTERVIEW:

*Any custody orders, restraining orders, protection orders or other legal documents. The Caseworker will make a copy and return the original to you.

*If there is a protection order/restraining order, if possible bring a picture of the person named in the restraining order.

*Have your child(ren) bring a favorite toy/game, in the event they do not want to watch any movies at the office, or may have difficulty amusing themselves while you are in the one-to-one interview with the Caseworker.

*A picture of your child(ren) (this is for our files only).

