

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS

Program Summary:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is generally accepted as the oldest and largest youth mentoring organization in the United States. The organization has developed an effective approach to mentoring, with formalized standards and required procedures for affiliates, which has led to the model's recognition as an evidence-based program. Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) delivers proven outcomes for positive youth development. It is designed to foster supportive relationships between youth ages 6 to 18 with caring adults, which have been shown to mitigate the negative effects of risks in the social or environmental contexts of the youth's lives.

Developer: BBBS was initiated in 1904 when Ernest Coulter, a New York City court clerk, recognized that caring adults could help many of the male youth being seeing in the courtroom to avoid trouble, and he began to recruit volunteers. At around the same time, the members of a group called Ladies of Charity were befriending girls who had come through the New York Children's Court. That group would later become Catholic Big Sisters. Both groups continued to work independently until 1977, when Big Brothers of America and Big Sisters International joined forces and became Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. **What BBBS services does the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) fund?**

Only programs recognized by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) as affiliates are eligible for funding. BBBSA affiliates are 501c3 nonprofit organizations with their own staff, budget and board of directors. The national organization, sets program standards and provides fundraising, volunteer recruitment, seed capital and supporting services to its affiliates. Affiliates in Pennsylvania can apply for funding.

Although BBBS is delivered as school-based or community-based mentoring, PCCD only funds community-based mentoring, the model that has been researched and recognized by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) as a **Blueprints Model Program**. The school-based mentoring

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approach is coordinated around school structures and calendars, which limits the approaches ability to generate close, long-term relationships and it has not been proven to lead to high quality mentoring and impacts that endure.

2. What population is BBBS designed to target?

BBBS targets youth ages 6 to 18 years **and aims to develop** supportive relationships between targeted youth and caring adults. Each BBBS affiliate identifies their geographic recruitment catchment area, target population, and criteria for youth eligibility.

Adults wishing to become a volunteer mentor are carefully screened and must fulfill the following requirements before matching occurs:

- Complete an application
- Provide references
- Submit to a criminal history record check
- Participate in an in-person interview
- Undergo an assessment of their home environment

3. What are the objectives of BBBS mentoring relationships?

BBBS seeks to establish matches between youth (Littles) and volunteer adults (Bigs) that result in consistent interaction and a high level of relationship quality, marked by friendship, bonding and trust. Risks are diminished through supportive adult involvement; the caring adult volunteer focuses on the youth's interests, strengths, and resources rather than the youth's deficits or the deficits in their environment.

Initially, case managers interview each youth and their guardian and then, at the first match meeting with the volunteer, they set goals aimed at ensuring a mutually satisfying relationship and promoting growth in the youth in identified attitudes, behaviors, and skills such as school attendance and performance, parent/peer/sibling relationships, skills/hobbies, hygiene, etc. Interactions are not prescribed, but are aimed at:

- decreasing or delaying antisocial activities
- improving academic performance, attitudes and behaviors
- improving relationships with family and friends
- strengthening self-concept
- providing social and cultural enrichment

Sites are also encouraged by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) to educate volunteers of the outcomes demonstrated in the Public/Private Ventures research that has made BBBS a Blueprints program and to aid volunteers in understanding their role in pursuing frequent interaction and choosing activities that can lead to proven long-term positive outcomes. The report on the Public/Private Ventures research study, *Making A Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*, can be assessed at:

http://www.episcenter.psu.edu/sites/default/files/resources/BBBS_Impact_Study-PPV.pdf

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4. What are the risk and protective factors that BBBS is designed to target?

BBBS strives to promote positive changes in scholastic confidence and competence, social acceptance and peer relations, educational expectations, the avoidance of delinquency, and improved parental relationships. By strengthening skills related to these outcomes, the following risk and protective factors are targeted:

Protective Factors Targeted for an Increase

- Exposure to community/cultural norms that are not favorable to antisocial behaviors and substance use
- Involvement in and recognition for pro-social activities
- Promotion of healthy beliefs and clear standards
- Goal setting and positive future orientation
- Positive orientation to school and increased scholastic confidence and competency
- Positive parent-child affect and parental trust
- Improved relations with pro-social peers
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Decision-making and critical thinking skills
- Coping and self-management skills

Risk Factors Targeted for a Decrease

- Academic Failure or poor school performance
- Lack of commitment to school
- Early and persistent anti-social behavior
- Rebelliousness
- Friends who engage in problem behaviors- Negative peer influences
- Favorable attitudes towards problem behaviors and substance use
- Early initiation of problem behaviors
- Family conflict

Involvement in BBBS is also believed to buffer the negative effects of the single parent home. Children from single parent homes often live in poverty, enjoy less parental time and supervision, and have fewer opportunities for positive youth development. They are twice as likely to drop out of high school and more likely to be placed in foster care or juvenile justice facilities. Females have 3x the risk of bearing children as unwed teenagers. Males whose fathers are absent face a much higher probability of growing up unemployed, incarcerated, and uninvolved with their own children. (See [KIDS COUNT](#) for more information related to the risks associated with single parent homes.)

The EPISCenter has created a [logic model](#) outlining the risk and protective factors and proximal and distal outcomes that BBBS has been proven to impact.

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5. What training is recommended to implement BBBS?

What training is required for BBBS staff?

Orientation and training is provided on-site by each individual affiliate. Training varies by affiliate, but it is guided by the standards and required procedures of BBBSA and it generally consists of on-line modules available through BBBSA's online learning center and job shadowing. BBBSA also offers a national conference in June for management and a regional conference in the fall for direct service staff. Continued guidance and education is available online through Agency Connect with materials available on topics such as financial resources, strategic leadership, evaluation of board performance, etc... A weekly electronic newsletter, the Latest On, is also a learning tool for BBBS administrators and staff.

What training is required for BBBS volunteers (Bigs)?

Orientation and training is provided on-site by each individual affiliate. Training varies by affiliate, but it is guided by the standards and required procedures of BBBSA. Training generally addresses topics such as child safety, recognizing child abuse, youth developmental stages, communication, limit setting, and relationship building skills. PCCD recommends that formal group trainings are held to educate volunteers of the affiliate's program requirements, rules, and expectations and the proven researched outcomes that garnered BBBS recognition as a Blueprint program. In addition, affiliates provide an orientation packet to mentors and continued training and guidance through case manager contacts.

6. What costs should I budget for?

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) estimates that it costs an average of \$1,000 per year to support a mentoring a match.

Estimated costs for program implementation should be inclusive of training, staffing, supplies, program marketing and recruitment, child abuse clearances, and costs associated with hosting social events and promoting activities for the matches.

Sites funded by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) should plan in advance to fulfill the fidelity and reporting requirements of their grant and to budget for the following expenses accordingly:

- Pennsylvania funded sites are expected to host the developer for a quality assurance or fidelity certification visit in the first quarter of the second year of funding. Grantees are required to secure a letter of commitment from BBBSA for this visit prior to grant submission
- Pennsylvania funded sites are also expected to produce an outcomes report in the third quarter of the second year of funding. At the site's discretion, funding may be identified to hire an external evaluator.

7. What are some common barriers that I might encounter when implementing BBBS?

- For most sites, one of the greatest challenges is recruiting youth and volunteers to participate. It can be especially difficult to attract male and African American volunteers. It can also be challenging to attract volunteers who are interested in mentoring older youth,

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ages 13 and above. Careful consideration should be given to planning for recruitment and a site's budget should reflect ample funding for staff time and marketing expenses. Key relationships with potential referral sources should be forged, such as with school district administrators and human service organizations. Creative marketing approaches need to be developed specific to each community and it is advantageous to engage staff or community members with marketing and public relations expertise.

- Conducting background checks of volunteers and securing child abuse clearances can be a lengthy process. The Department of Public Welfare now allows BBBS affiliates to request that clearances be sent directly to them. However, this is a new process and it has posed challenges for previous grantees. It is important to understand the process and establish internal systems for requesting clearances.
- Sites have reported that, for home visitations, staff members need to possess skills that have been gained from and experience and backgrounds in human service, counseling, and education fields.
- BBBSA reports that more than 20% of matches close by the 6-month point and they are striving to increase the strength and length of match relationships. Research indicates that youth need to be engaged with their mentors for a minimum of 6 months before the relationship begins to become viable, that early termination can have cause possible harm, and that the benefits of mentoring emerge over a relative long period of time. Influences leading to match termination include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Youth eligibility or ability to participate in the program may be impacted by factors such as changes in family structure, illness, and residence.
 - Volunteers can become discouraged by a perceived lack of appreciation.
 - Volunteers may feel that the personal investment involved in dealing with a troubled youth is too demanding and detracts from social or family obligations.
 - Youth may perceive their mentor or relationship as unsupportive, disappointing, or overly demanding.
 - If not appropriately matched, the relationship may weaken due to a lack of chemistry or shared interests.
 - Social distance can exist between middle class volunteers and lower income youth and racial and cultural differences may also strain relationships.
- It is imperative that matches are interacting frequently. Agencies must be prepared to educate volunteers of the importance of consistent contact, and to invest in providing matches with frequent interaction opportunities and suggestions for independent activities.
- Female caregivers often see themselves as the dominant influence on their daughters and their relationships tend to be protective and intimate. It can be challenging assisting a mother to recognize that signing her daughter up for a mentor is not a negative reflection on her parenting. Sensitivity must be used in helping mothers to see that they will not be replaced and that their emotional relationship with their daughter will not be jeopardized.

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The enrollment decision should be positioned as a sign of strength for female caregivers and an expression of the caregiver's vested interest in the benefits for their child.

- Data collection and survey administration can pose challenges due to low literacy populations, the age of participants, and variations in available data analysis systems. It is important to understand BBBSA's recommendations for survey administration. It is also necessary to develop systems to track survey completion and analyze survey outcomes as required by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). The EPISCenter has developed tools to summarize survey data, but identifying an evaluator to aid in reporting and communicating outcomes may prove helpful.

8. How should I recruit youth and volunteers?

Recruiting youth and volunteers can be time intensive and ample staff time should be allotted to developing and enacting an effective referral and recruitment strategy. Also, sites should consider dedicating sufficient funding for program marketing. Appeals within each community are unique, but some examples of recruitment strategies include presentations to community agencies, participation in school or sporting events, banners, tent cards for restaurants, door knob hangers distributed in targeted neighborhoods, fliers, newspaper ads or articles, TV announcements, online announcements, Facebook postings, email announcements, school newsletter articles, or resources that exiting volunteers and board members can use to encourage their contacts to become volunteers, such as a speaking points card or a business card that reads "You Would Make A Great Mentor!"

9. What evaluation tools should I use?

In August of 2009, BBBSA introduced the Youth Outcome Survey (YOS). A 32 question survey to be administered to youth ages 9 and up as a pre-test and post-test at each annual match anniversary. The survey assesses academics, relationships, and attitudes towards risky behaviors. Sites trained in the YOS should administer the survey as directed by BBBSA. Sites are expected to administer the YOS to participants funded by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and to track survey completion rates.

Sites are expected to administer the Agency Connection Strength of Relationship (SoR) survey. The SoR process is based on two surveys, the Child SoR and the Volunteer SoR. The surveys provide indicators of the quality of the relationship between a youth and volunteer and are intended to be used as a tool to promote longer, stronger matches. The SoR captures data on nine relationship qualities. From the youth, coping, disappointment, safety, importance, and closeness is assessed and from the volunteer, connectedness, frustration, confidence, and closeness is assessed. BBBSA recommends administering the SoR 3 months from the match date and annually on the match's anniversary date.

Sites funded by PCCD are required to report on process and outcome measures quarterly and should work with the EPISCenter to ensure that the appropriate data collection systems are in place. Sites will report on these performance measures via a [quarterly reporting tool](#). However, if more extensive analysis is desired locally, sites may wish to consider identifying an evaluator.

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11. What are the expectations for operating with fidelity to the researched BBBS model?

Operational Standards:

Funded sites are expected to be BBBSA affiliates in good standing and to follow national's standards of practice for one-to one service and operational policies. Each year, affiliates must submit and have approved the online Affiliate Self-Assessment Indicators of Compliance. All standards for program management- service delivery, inquiry, intake, matching, match supervision, match closure, case records, and confidentiality must be adhered to.

Match Supervision:

Case managers are expected to select, match, monitor, and close match relationships. Case managers should frequently communicate with each youth, volunteer, and guardian as instructed by BBBSA:

- Applications and interviews must be conducted all of parties and an appropriate orientation to services must be provided.
- Contact must be made with-in the first two weeks of making the match.
- Monthly contact is expected for the first year of the match.
- Quarterly contact should continue for the match duration after the first annual match anniversary.
- Match goals should be assessed at match initiation and an outcome-based plan should be created. The plan should be adjusted at least annually.
- To the extent possible, closure interviews should be conducted of all parties.

Match Interaction:

BBBSA recommends a minimum of 4 hours of match interaction monthly. The frequency and duration resulting in the proven outcomes indicated through research averaged 3 to 4 hours per week 3 times a month for over 1 year. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) expects funded sites to strive towards encouraging a minimum of 9 hours of interaction per month.

12. In what ways can I involve my local collaborative prevention board?

- Local collaborative boards can play an important role in program development and sustainability. At start-up, present the research behind BBBS and share your local goals for the program.
- Provide board members with a fact sheet and the program's logic model.
- Help them to understand ways in which they can contribute to the program's local success, such as by referring youth, recruiting volunteers, contributing to marketing or fundraising activities, or donating incentives or tickets to activities that the matches can participate in.
- Identify potential program champions or community gatekeepers that can help to build relationships that may lead to program support or increased recruitment or referrals.
- Provide frequent verbal reports on the program's impact and at least annually provide a written summary of program outcomes.
- Identify board members to become engaged in generating outcome reports and securing sustainability funds.

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13. What are the outcomes I can expect from implementing BBBS?

An 18-month randomized control research trial found that Little Brothers and Little Sisters:

- Were at least 46% less likely than controls to initiate drug use (stronger effect for minority males and females)
- Were 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use (stronger effect for females)
- Were 1/3 less likely to hit someone
- Were 52% less likely to skip school
- Were 37% less likely to skip a class
- Showed small gains in grade point averages and were more confident of their performance in schoolwork
- Had improved relations and levels of trust with their parents and their families
- Had improved peer relationships

Big Brothers Big Sisters volunteers had the greatest impact on alcohol and substance abuse prevention. The study found, that for every 100 youth between the ages of 10 and 16 who start using drugs, only 54 similar youth who are matched with a Big will start using drugs. Minority boys and girls were the most strongly influenced; they were 70 percent less likely than similar minority youth to initiate drug use.

The EPISCenter has informational material and has created a logic model outlining the proximal and distal outcomes that BBBS has been proven to impact.

BBBS Research:

BBBS has been recognized as a Blueprint Program based on a culmination of a four-part research series on BBBS. The most recent of those studies, *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*, was released in 1995 and reissued in September of 2000. The first three reports were: *A Study of Program Practices* (1993); *A Study of Volunteer Recruitment and Screening* (1994); and *Building Relationships with Youth in Program Settings* (1995).

The highlights of the research study, which was conducted during 1992 and 1993 by Public/Private Ventures, a Philadelphia-based national research organization are below:

- The study involved 1,138 youth.
- Approximately 50% of the children were matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister. The others were assigned to a control group and remained on a waitlist for 18 months. The children were randomly assigned to one group or the other. There were 487 youth in the treatment group, with 378 matched.
- Of the participants, 959 completed baseline and follow-up interviews.
- Youth were selected from 8 BBBS affiliates. The participating agencies were in Phoenix, Arizona; Wichita, Kansas; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Rochester, New York; Columbus, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Houston and San Antonio, Texas. The agencies were selected based on their large size and geographic diversity.

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- Sample youth were between the ages of 10 and 16 years of age.
- Of the total sample, 60% were boys.
- More than 50% of the sample was minorities.
- Many of the youth were low-income and had a family history of violence or substance use.
- Controlled for baseline characteristics
- The matched children met with their Big Brothers or Big Sisters an average of 3 times a month for 3 to 4 hours each time for an average of one year.
- Researchers interviewed the Littles, the children who were not matched, and their parents on two occasions: when they first applied for a Big Brother or Big Sister, and again 18 months later.

The research found that youth are profoundly impacted by social interaction, but that mentoring as a generic idea is not effective. No other mentoring program has demonstrated strong outcomes. BBBS is effective because local affiliates adhere to well-developed standards guided by a national organization with over a century of experience and this expertise has resulted in mentoring relationships that are carefully supervised, intense, enduring, and thus, effective.

Information and research articles demonstrating the impact of BBBS can be accessed at:

- Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence - <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/BBBS.html>
- BBBSA – *Making A Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*
Publication Produced By Public Private Ventures
http://www.episcenter.psu.edu/sites/default/files/resources/BBBS_Impact_Study-PPV.pdf

14. Are there other sites in PA implementing BBBS Programs?

Please contact a Penn State’s EPISCenter Prevention Coordinator, to learn where there are other sites implementing the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program in Pennsylvania at (814) 863-2568.

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