

Good Morning. For those of you that I have yet to meet, my name is David Sheach and I am the Executive Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Abbotsford Mission Ridge Meadows. I've been in this position for just over a year now and previously was 5 ½ years as Executive Director of Boys and Girls Club in Williams Lake.

## **Story**

I have benefited from mentors – nor formalized in the Big Brothers Big Sisters model but meaningful relationships with “elders” – people older than me, who took me under their wing and introduced me to new things – new foods, new social and political thought, new places. As meaningful and significant as my parents and extended family are, these mentors opened new doors that previously had not been imagined. Mentorship occurs in many forms and is a natural tendency that was historically the responsibility of aunts and uncles, god parents and close family friends. My mentoring relationships have sometimes been short and sometimes long. Frequently – due to natural circumstances – they have been time limited, but always they are notable. They are notable in that these relationships have had enduring impact that shaped my perspective on life, the future and my skills, abilities and capacity to learn and to work.

Many of us here have our own children and our children aren't that different from the children served by Big Brothers Big Sisters. Parents, like any of us, want the very best for our children; for them to have opportunities that we didn't have. Often we know that they need more than we can give them on our own, that they need people in their community, outside of family who care about them, who know their name and their interests.

Big Brothers Big Sisters was founded by men who looked out their window and saw boys playing alone, apparently without dads. Based on their intuitive knowledge that children want to be connected to their elders, these men assumed their calling, became mentors and made a commitment to spend time and be accountable to the children in their neighbourhood.

We know that children crave connection to adults and need to believe that adults outside of their immediate family care about them. We also know that children who have healthy connections to adults become more grounded and successful as adults themselves.

We know that rewards come in ways and at times that we least expect and that friendships are enduring mutually beneficial relationships.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a community based, charitable society that was founded with a belief in civic engagement, to facilitate mentoring friendships between adult volunteers and children.

We use volunteers to mentor and paid staff to screen, supervise and guide. Our focus is on making friendships; our belief and experience suggest that when children are successfully matched with an adult mentor, they are exposed to more possibilities, tend to achieve higher education levels and typically acknowledge their Big as the person who influenced them to be successful, reporting the benefits as:

- Feeling supported
- Having someone to look up to
- Having someone to talk to about personal problems
- Having someone who cares about what happens to them
- Having someone who influences their choices

In Abbotsford Big Brothers Big Sisters was founded in 1969 by two local men who, like the original founders in Toronto and New York, chose to respond to the need they saw in their local community. We have transformed from a small, rural chapter to a mature, professional organization serving over three hundred children. We have grown from the early days of working the program from the trunk of the Executive Director's car to owning our office building, now over twenty years resident of Historic Downtown Abbotsford. There is a whole other exciting story about our goal of a new building that we will be happy to share if you ask.

Our task is two fold – to create powerful mentoring relationships between screened adult volunteers and children and to reach more families with the positive intervention of a Big Brother or Big Sister. We currently have 50 children on our waitlist and 2/3 of these are boys. This number is higher than we would like and it highlights that the needs of children and families is greater than our communities' capacity to respond – it shows the need we have for volunteers to share the magic of friendship and connectedness. Our saddest legacy is the reality that for some, we will never match them with a Big; to me, this is the worst of never being picked for the ball team.

There are 62,000 children, under 17 living in the Abbotsford, Mission, Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. If one third is within our age criteria of 7-14, there are 20,000 children. Imagine if we could reach 5% with a Big Brother or Big Sister. What a difference we could make.

Our organization, across Canada is challenged to increase our relevance. Our national goal is to quadruple the number of children served across the country, to reach 100,000 children by our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013. For our part, we are preparing to triple, serving 1000. We know this is a lofty goal.

We also know it isn't unrealistic

- given our population,
- the quality of our service, and
- the level of need among Canadian families.

While our mission is not impossible our challenges include finding 500 new volunteers and \$500,000 of annual program funding. Our Board of Directors has a strategic plan to achieve this growth goal and is actively planning for our needs in terms of human resources, facility, policies and funding.

On average it costs us \$1300 per child we serve and \$2500 for one community based match, per year. We have a diverse budget with approximately 50% of revenue coming from an affiliation with the local Gaming Centre, 25% coming from grants, 25% from events, including individual donations, and the balance from some regularized corporate donations including the Renew Crew. Not only do we intend to grow our budget we also intend for increased diversity and security in our revenue sources.

We believe we are part of the solution. We believe our interventions make lasting differences.

By becoming involved you can contribute to the social health of future generations and make a lasting impact. At a minimum, we know that by joining us you will accomplish the following:

- Children have an expanded sense of their future potential
- Children have increased capacity to attach to others
- Children have increased sense of their personal value and ultimately have increased capacity for personal success.
- Children learn to be better parents and partners – through role modeling and friendship.

## Essential Story

Our work and research are rooted in the relationships we build between children and their mentors. We know we make a difference by seeing relationships unfold and develop and by hearing mentors and children tell us how the Big Brothers Big Sisters program made a difference for them. Sometimes it's obvious and the friendships are nearly instant, other times it is less obvious and sometimes, on the surface they fail.

We have many stories of success and struggle, just like the stories told today. There is another story, one you might know, about a traveler walking down the beach on vacation, a long beach, and except for the unusual movement of a figure in the distance, the traveler was alone. He watched the movement as he walked toward it and eventually he could make out that it was a man, bending forward and making a tossing motion toward the ocean. When he got near the man he asked what he was doing and the man explained that the tide was out and that as the sun came up it would dry out the ponds and the starfish would die. The traveler asked if the man thought he could really make a difference with so many miles of beach, let alone a world of ocean. The wise man bent forward, picked up a starfish and tossed it toward the water. He said, "I made a difference for that one didn't I." It's like this at Big Brothers Big Sisters – we make a difference one child at a time.

We do this work everyday. Each time we never really know how significant our impact will be or how much time we have to make a difference but regardless if our time is a few months or a few years, regardless if we feel like we're making a difference or not, we can be assured that *the magic of our work is the spark we kindle*. Mentors create opportunity, they convey a sense of personal value and they create meaningful attachments with children – giving them skills, through experience, to connect and attach with others – children, adults, and community.

Thank you.

*For us to realize our vision of reaching 1000 children across our communities we need:*

- *Leadership support from the communities – people like you who are informed about our work, who speak convincingly about the positive impact we make on the social health of our community*
- *We need you to talk to your family, friends, colleagues about being involved*
- *We need people like you to show your commitment to the social health of children*
  - *Become a donor,*
  - *Become a volunteer*
- *Join with us to make a difference for families and in the lives of children in your neighbourhood*
- *The easy thing you can do is give your money; can you give your time?*

*We are hosting this breakfast and have invited you to attend because you are part of our future.*

*We need you to be ambassadors for our cause, to become volunteers and to advocate volunteerism among your friends and families. We need you to become contributors to our work and to personally make a difference for children and families across the Fraser Valley.*

At the close of 2006 we reached 325 children. Currently we are approaching 350 children served and of that 50 are waiting to be matched with a Big.

You might wonder what's holding us back – in our business we rely on three tightly related components to accomplish our work – donated funds, volunteers and our social work staff. To meet the existing demand, to increase the number of children served and to be more relevant in our community, we need both more money and more volunteers. For us to expeditiously make and support quality and safe friendships we need professionally trained social work staff and our caseloads are currently near capacity.