



# Investing in Youth for Canada's Social & Economic Future During and Beyond COVID 19

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations  
in Advance of the 2021 Budget

By Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada  
August 2020

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** That the Government provide immediate financial support to front-line charities and not-for-profits which have suffered critical revenue shortages due to the pandemic.

**Recommendation 2:** That the government provide annual funding in the amount of \$25 million for Big Brothers Big Sisters youth mentoring programs.

**Recommendation 3:** That the government implement the recommendations of the June 2019 Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector, as noted in its first report *Catalyst for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable Sector*.

## Who We Are

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) enables life-changing mentoring relationships to ignite the power and potential of young people. Founded in 1913, we are a federation of 102 local charities operating in 1,100 communities across Canada.

In 2019, we mobilized 21,300+ volunteers to provide the mentorship needed by 41,400+ children and youth. These young people face adversities in their lives, resulting in toxic stress that can negatively impact their development. Our mentors are adults who create a positive developmental relationship with a young person, providing guidance, support, and constructive role modelling. We meet community needs that are not always addressed through government social support structures.

As a national mentoring organization, we have a vested interest in improving the lives and outcomes for children and youth across the country, including those from Indigenous, newcomer, racialized, and LGBTQ2S+ communities. This is only possible through their involvement in mentoring programs that acknowledge, honour and celebrate their communities and their stories.

## Investing in Youth for Canada's Social & Economic Future

Today, young people represent nearly one-third of the Canadian population. The Government of Canada has taken measures to underscore its commitment to Canada's future, via the creation of the Prime Minister's Youth Council, new programs and investments introduced in Budget 2019, and the first-ever Canada's Youth Policy.

We thank the Government for launching the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy and for recognizing the importance of mentors in this work through investment in the Canadian Mentoring Partnership. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is proud to have stewarded the creation of the Partnership, alongside the Alberta Mentoring Partnership and the Ontario Mentoring Coalition, and will actively participate in its development over the next few years.

While the government is taking steps to listen and respond to young Canadians, the need remains high and, as detailed in the next section, is increasing dramatically. Young people are asking for an even-more responsive political system, with two-thirds giving governments a score of 5 or less out of 10 for their responsiveness to the needs and views of young people.<sup>1</sup> Economic inclusion continues to be a critical issue, with 85% of surveyed youth indicating that there is still a lot of discrimination in Canada and 80% saying it is harder to get ahead today than in the past.

And all this was before the pandemic. Youth are now likely to feel its social and economic effects more than any other segment of society.

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<sup>1</sup> "ANOTHER YOUTHQUAKE? Exploring the concerns, priorities, and political engagement of Canadian youth aged 15 to 30." was written by David Coletto, PhD & Oksana Kishchuk, and conducted for a coalition of Canadian national youth-serving agencies. The survey was conducted and analyzed by Abacus Data.

## **Pandemic Realities**

For the Committee's 2020 pre-budget consultation, we made a submission recommending an annual investment of \$25 million in Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs. As there was no 2020 federal budget, that recommendation still applies – but is more urgent than ever due to the more immediate needs created by the realities of the pandemic.

### **Recommendation 1: That the Government provide immediate financial support to front-line charities and non-profits which have suffered critical revenue shortages due to the pandemic.**

The pandemic has had a devastating economic impact on the charitable and not-for-profit sector, driving up costs while revenue slowed to a trickle. We had to completely reorient our programming to a virtual world – at considerable cost. This allowed us to sustain the intentional mentoring relationships we facilitate with 41,400 youth across Canada. However, we have had virtually no revenue coming in since March, and this cannot continue much longer. To sustain our operations through 2020 and into 2021, an immediate investment of \$21 million is urgently needed.

We must stress that this appeal is to continue to provide programming to the youth already in our system, not for administration or bricks and mortar, and never has there been a greater demand for intentional mentoring of youth in need. Consider just the impact of the pandemic, which has driven youth unemployment to 29% according to Statistics Canada. Mentoring is incredibly valuable to youth trying to navigate such a challenging workforce.

There are also the youth mental health aspects of the pandemic. Calls to Kids Help Phone are up 61% through their texting service and 55% through professional counselling, with 76% of callers saying they had no one else to talk to or turn to for support. We are grateful for the investments made by the Government in these services, and BBBS is a recommended program by Kids Help Phone for young people to reach out to for ongoing mental health supports, as we are ideally suited to support these youth. However, we are now in a position wherein we can barely sustain our existing matches, let alone take on an influx of new cases. Funding a crisis line but not the organizations that provide longer term support is akin to funding 911 phone service but not the health system to care for those in need.

We support the recommendation of Imagine Canada and others who have called for the creation of a recovery stabilization fund for charities and not-for-profits. Without it, many of the organizations your communities rely on will be forced to close their doors.

### **Recommendation 2: That the government provide annual funding in the amount of \$25 million for Big Brothers Big Sisters youth mentoring programs.**

Our first recommendation is about survival; our second is looking ahead to the post-pandemic world. It is the same recommendation made for the 2020 budget, but now it has taken on even greater importance.

BBBS works with youth experiencing toxic stress. COVID-19 is a source of toxic stress for everyone – adults and youth – but imagine what this is doing for a youth already living in isolation, but who now has no school, limited contact with friends – if any – and parents who may have lost their job. Those youth that are facing the greatest challenges already are those likely to be most impacted by the pandemic.

Therefore, we anticipate a major surge in demand for our services in the coming months and years as a result of the pandemic, which we are not in a financial position to support while struggling to sustain our existing matches. Prior to the pandemic, we had 15,000 youth on our waiting list, and requests are already beginning to grow exponentially in many regions. This will put further strain on our resources, both financial and volunteer.

Layered on top of the new COVID-related challenges of increased youth unemployment and toxic stress is the ongoing need to focus on Indigenous youth achievement and the heightened attention of late around systemic racism. Fortunately, BBBS has successful programs in place, and those could easily be scaled with appropriate resources.

Thus, our 2020 budget recommendation is even more relevant a year later: to invest \$25 million annually in Big Brothers Big Sisters youth mentoring programs. We can help with youth unemployment, youth mental health, Indigenous youth achievement and addressing systemic racism – all without reinventing the wheel. We already work on all these issues through our existing mentoring programs. The only thing preventing those from being expanded is resources.

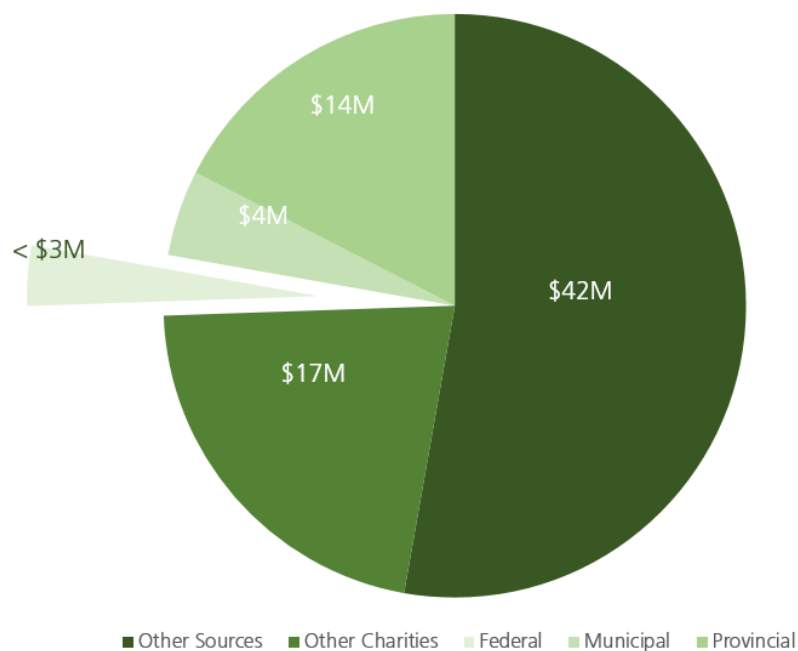
## Detailed Investment Framework

Our cost to make a successful match between a mentor and a youth is \$1,764 per year. A \$25 million annual investment would enable an additional 14,000+ youth to participate in life-changing mentoring relationships through Big Brothers Big Sisters – thereby significantly impacting our ability to provide mentoring services to more young people and minimizing our ballooning waiting list.

To enable life-changing mentoring relationships	At a cost of...	Impacting
Intentionally <b>recruit</b> volunteer mentors based on the needs of each community's young people	\$1,764 per year per match	14,000 youth across Canada, with a \$23-to-1 social return on investment
<b>Match</b> each young person with a professionally screened volunteer mentor		
<b>Monitor and support</b> the match through a professional caseworker		
<b>Train and support</b> the mentor, mentee, and family		
<b>Graduate</b> the match relationship towards a natural support system		

The government's investment would match and help scale the contributions of thousands of individual Canadians and the private sector. (Note: the below is pre-COVID revenue.)

### Federal government funding has represented 3% of Big Brothers Big Sisters revenue



Source: BBBS data, 2018.

## Mentoring Works

The obvious question that arises is what the Government receives in return for its investment. The short answer is simple: mentoring works. We label our request an *investment* because research from the Boston Consulting Group found a return of 23 to 1 for every dollar invested in BBBS mentoring, with those who have benefited from it being more likely to be employed, earning more over the course of their career, being healthier mentally and physically, and more likely to give back to their communities later in life – in both dollars and time. Therefore, based on this research, a \$21 million investment delivers a return to the Canadian economy of \$483 million – a 2300% return on investment.

Consider some of the findings from the Boston Consulting Group and others:

- **Employment.** Young people with mentors are 17% more likely to *find* employment, earning an average of \$315,000 more over the course of a lifetime.<sup>2</sup>
- **Leadership and impact.** Young people with mentors are 30% more likely to volunteer and, when they do, they give 50% more of their time.<sup>3</sup>
- **Health and wellness.** A growing body of research points to having at least one positive relationship with an adult as the single most common factor for building resilience and overcoming adversities.<sup>4</sup>
- **Innovation, Skills & Learning.** Mentoring can lower barriers to education, with research showing that young people with mentors are 2 times more likely to stay in school.<sup>5</sup>

**Recommendation 3: That the government implement the recommendations of the June 2019 Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector, as noted in its first report *Catalyst for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable Sector*.**

As one of Canada's largest charities, Big Brothers Big Sisters was pleased to provide testimony for the Senate of Canada's study of the charitable sector. Young people are inextricably linked to the charitable and volunteer sectors; they are at the forefront of disruption within these sectors and they are beneficiaries of its services.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada recommends that the government carefully review the recommendations of the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector, which can be found in the report *Catalysts for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable Sector*.

In particular, we encourage adoption of the following recommendations:

- **Develop and implement a national volunteer strategy.**
- **Include costs associated with volunteer recruitment and retention in contribution agreements.**

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<sup>2</sup> The Boston Consulting Group (2013). Big Brothers Big Sisters Social Return on Investment Study.

<sup>3</sup> Boston Consulting Group (2013). Big Brothers Big Sisters Social Return on Investment Study.

<sup>4</sup> Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child (2017). Brief: The Science of Resilience.

<sup>5</sup> DeWit, David & Lipman, Ellen (2013). Mentoring Relationships and the Well-Being of Canadian Youth: An Examination of Big Brothers Big Sisters Community Match Programs.

- **Explore ways to alleviate a financial burden for needed police checks for volunteers.**
- **Review existing tax measures available to individual donors.**
- **Ensure that grants and contribution agreements cover a minimum of two years, renewable as appropriate; and minimize complexity for smaller amounts.**

We thank the Finance Committee for this opportunity and would look forward to an opportunity to appear before Committee.