



April 2015

Dear Friends of Big Sisters,

Welcome to the Spring 2015 issue of *The Big Picture*. In this issue, we feature an interview between Study Buddy Cara and Little Sister Haleluya, highlight the dedicated volunteerism of two of our Big Sister mentors, update you on our three mentoring programs, and much more!

The first quarter of 2015 has been busy here at the Big Sisters house. We continue to work on our three-year Strategic Plan, the four goals of which are to: raise our profile, broaden our reach, grow our sustainable revenues, and enhance our program effectiveness.

Stay tuned as we embark on new and exciting initiatives focused on helping us reach our goals!

Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds group mentoring program continues to grow, having served almost 250 girls last year. Even more exciting, one in ten of our volunteer mentors self-report having once been a Little Sister themselves! This is the true vision of Big Sisters, that each of our Little Sisters will grow up to support and empower others, and in turn, enrich and strengthen their own communities.

We also continue to see growth in our one-to-one mentoring programs. Last year, we served over 350 girls in our Big Sisters Mentoring Program, while the average length of our Study Buddy matches grew for a third straight year. For a program with a six month commitment, it is heartening to see that our average match length is now over two years!

Big Sisters believes in the importance of investing in girls to help them realize, and share, their true potential. It is my pleasure to come to work every day with a staff truly dedicated to the continued success of our programs, our Little Sisters, our volunteers, and our community.

Thank you for your continued support of Big Sisters, and please enjoy this issue of *The Big Picture*.

Justine Greene
Executive Director



Cara and Haleluya

When asked to describe their relationship in three words or less, Little Sister Haleluya doesn't even wait for the question to be finished.

"AWESOME," she declares. "Just. Awesome."

Big Sister Cara laughs, and emphatically agrees. "It's been fun since day one," she adds. "Our relationship has always been very easy, and very fun. It's like we really are sisters."

The two Study Buddies have been matched since October of 2013, and last fall Haleluya took part in Big Sisters' Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds group mentoring program at her elementary school.

"That program was super fun," she says. "On the last day we had pizza, and it doesn't get much better than that."

"Haleluya is incredibly outgoing," says Cara. "She's very smart, and has fantastic confidence."

While Cara acknowledges that her Little Sister is known for her big personality and personable nature, Haleluya shies away from bold titles.

"Everyone in our school is obsessed with the word 'rockstar'. That word is really overblown of late – it's almost worshipped! There's an acronym built around it that I can't quite remember what it stands for. Another acronym I know is PANDAS, but that's a disease, so it's not at all the same."

Now eleven years old, Haleluya met Cara when she was ten, having joined the Study Buddy program to receive help with her school work.

"I did need help with my homework when we first started and I'm slowly getting better at it," says Haleluya. "The best thing about Cara is she makes learning and math fun."

She describes one of her favourite memories as the time that Cara taught her algebra as a head start for grade eight.

"It was during the school strike last year, and I thought I could help her with one of my favourite subjects from when I was in school," explains Cara.

"It was really great, and when I told my teacher about it she was so excited because she also loves algebra," continues Haleluya.

Outside of their time spent studying, the two love to take part in outdoor activities and regularly take advantage of the opportunities provided by Big Sisters.

"We've gone to a music festival, and love visiting the lights at Capilano every Christmas," says Cara. "Last year it was pouring, so we practically had the whole place to ourselves."

The pair also loves sporting events, Haleluya herself being a big hockey fan. "I watch a lot of CBC and I just don't know why they sold their hockey rights to Rogers," she puzzles. "That was such a bad move! George Stroumbouloupoulos? It's very strange. I don't

think he knows that much about hockey."

Cara laughs and agrees, before reiterating how much she loves working with her Little Sister. "Haleluya is so engaging and bright. We talk all of the time about the books we're reading and current political events."

"Working with Cara is a big help to me," says Haleluya. "She is my book buddy. She is an awesome, outgoing mentor. Homework isn't always fun, but Cara always makes it more fun. She has got me into a lot of things and I really look up to her."

"I think it's so important to have a positive supportive role model, and to have other women that you can look up to as a young girl – that you can just talk to and trust," explains Cara. "Growing up with just older brothers, I really didn't have anyone that I could talk to about all of the things happening in my life. It's so important to have that positive, female influence."

"For sure one day I will be a Big Sister," finishes Haleluya. "Even already, I'm getting more and more to be a better mentor and little kids are looking up to me more." She shows off one of her bracelets before continuing, "I made this bracelet with a girl in grade three. I lunch monitor her and I know she really looks up to me. It makes me feel great."

Photo by Brandon C. Elliot
belliot@brandtmedia.com

Start Something Every time you volunteer or donate to Big Sisters, you start something BIG.

News Briets

- Announcing our 2015 Big Heart Award recipients! We are so pleased to be able to recognize the outstanding contributions made by: Jen Birnie (Big Sister), Margaret Voth (Board Member), and Marquis Wine Cellars (Corporate Supporter). Awards are being presented this spring.
- Fantastic Fundraisers! The Grape Juice Wine Auction (hosted by McNeill Nakamoto Recruitment Group and MAC Marketing Solutions) raised \$80,000 for Big Sisters in March, and Canadian Western Bank donated \$22,500 from "The Greater Interest GIC".

"Love myself. I loved myself even before Go Girls!, but only because I had to, and now after I joined Go Girls! I love myself because I deserve to and you should too!

-Go Girls! participant answering: "What will you do differently now that you have been in Go Girls?"

Upcoming Fundraising Events

Big Sisters Spring Lunch
Presented by Scotiabank

With Keynote Victor Montagliani

April 28 - Fairmont Waterfront Hotel

Golf for Good

June 16 - University Golf Club

Scotiabank Half-Marathon & 5K

June 28 - Stanley Park/UBC

Visit bigsisters.bc.ca for info on these events or call 604.873.4525 x 312.

Big Sisters Making BIG Impacts!

In November 2014, Big Sisters Jen Birnie (JB) and Annamaja Irvine (AI) travelled to the Dominican Republic with Live Different and Big Brothers & Sisters of Canada to help build houses in the community of Nuevo Renacer ("New Life").

What was the purpose of your trip?

AI: The trip brought together two organizations that believe in human rights and the progression of social change. Our first goal was to build a home for a deserving family that would take them away from the flooding river. Our second was to build a kids club where village children would have a place to gather for events, educational programs, and recreational activities.

Why did you choose to apply for this opportunity?

JB: The mission from Live Different came across strongly to me - it allowed me to extend my humanitarian experiences to other communities in a safe and sustainable manner. I also figured it was time to step out of my "comfort zone."

What did the program entail?

AI: The program entailed a lot of hard work! We were split up into two groups, half working on the house and the other half on the club. Jen and I were on the house build team. With five contractors, translators, and a project manager, we got started right away. Everyone was hands on from day one: brick laying, rebar, mixing cement, smooth coating - you name it!

JB: This may sound like a lot of manual labor but there was also time to talk to the locals and play with the children. The community loved to get to know the volunteers!

We also got to spend half a day in the community with a family who has yet to receive a new home. This really opened my eyes to the overwhelming need for our work! We assisted the family with their daily tasks - cooking, cleaning, laundry, caring for their children, and anything else they needed done.

AI: Each day after dinner, we would debrief our experience and talk about anything that was on our minds as an excellent way to decompress. There were also daily activities in the evening such as karaoke. On a day where more advanced skills were required on the worksite, we took the afternoon off for a waterfall hike.

Who did you meet?

AI: There were 22 of us who came from Big Brothers Big Sisters, ranging from Bigs, Littles, Study Buddies, Caseworkers, Go Girls! mentors, office staff, and even the past Vice President. One of the most inspirational people we met on the trip was Sandra, who is the Mother Theresa and unofficial mayor of Nuevo Renacer. She is both an outstanding and compassionate human being. Having Sandra talk to us about the community and her hopes for change easily brought everyone to tears.

What was the best part of the program?

AI: The overall experience of building and being part of real change. I learned a lot

about myself, how I live, and how I will move forward with decisions in my life.

JB: I've walked away from this trip with different values and a completely new perspective on life.

What have you taken away from your experience?

AI: I also have a new perspective on life. I reevaluated my decisions and behavior and worked out a way that I can focus my energy on helping people and my activist efforts. I want to feel good about how I'm spending the hours of my day. This trip made me a more open and loving person and I know that I will be back.

JB: I want to continue to make change in my community, and I am more aware of my views and values! The basic needs of humans, no matter where you live, should never be ignored or taken away.



Big Sister Annamaja (L) and Big Sister Jen (R)

Program Updates



Big Sisters Mentoring Program

2015 is off to a great start for Big Sisters! We are building off of the energy of 2014 which saw 353 girls served in the Big Sisters Program alone. Further, 22% of our Little Sisters have been a part of the Big Sisters program for 5+ years! This shows that girls in the Big Sisters program will stay involved into their teenage years. In fact, 39% of our current matched Little Sisters are 14-19 years of age. This is why our program is unique compared to other programs that serve young people for short periods of time and find it difficult to engage older teens.

We celebrated this great news by hosting a Teen Night in early 2015, where matches made their own aromatherapy oil and enjoyed networking with matches similar in age. We can't wait to see how all these inspiring young women shine this year!

Big Sisters provides girls, ages 7-17, with a volunteer mentor who spends quality, one-to-one time with them each week.

Milestone Match Anniversaries

CELEBRATING 5 YEARS!

Audrey Mak & Kaelan
Big Sister & Alysson
Cindy Noble & Little Sister
Cori Kay & Tianna
Heather Holden & Little Sister
Heidi Arias & Emely
Katie Litzenberger & Jaimison
Kimberley Chatwin & Michelle
Jennifer Morrison & Kate
Margaret Mlodzik & Tina
Michele Reid & Ceili



Study Buddy Mentoring Program

Last year was a busy year for Study Buddy as we served 166 girls in the Lower Mainland. Since the end of the job action of last September, we have seen a slow and steady increase of Little Sister Study Buddy referrals and we are so excited to be working with these new girls.

Our Parent Information Packages are now translated into seven different languages: Chinese, Punjabi, Hindi, Spanish, Vietnamese, Farsi, and Russian. This package will allow us to effectively explain to many more families what our program is all about! Our volunteer interpreter project is also up and running, which sees volunteers helping during screening interviews and match introductions.

We also offered professional development workshops on topics such as social media, and stress and anxiety that were geared towards helping our Little Sisters reach their individual potential.

Study Buddy is an academic-focused mentoring program that matches girls, ages 7-17, with a female volunteer who offers educational guidance and support.



Big Sister Zahra and Little Sister Shabnam

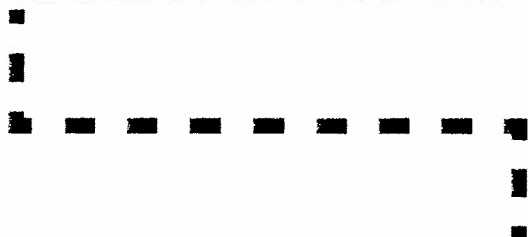


Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Program

Go Girls! continues to grow! This spring, the program will be offered in 14 Vancouver, Coquitlam and Burnaby elementary and middle schools. Last year, Go Girls! provided 249 girls in these three cities with important information on how to be active, eat healthy, and build a positive self-image, and we are very excited to see this number continue to grow.

Go Girls! consists of eight weekly sessions that are facilitated by volunteer mentors (ages 19-25) and held after school at our partner schools. Each two hour session is structured around themes of: physical activity, healthy eating, self-esteem, and communication skills. As summarized by one participant: "The best thing about Go Girls! is learning how to keep myself healthy, making new friends, sharing stuff and knowing it wouldn't be talked about through the school and behind my back."

Go Girls! is an eight week group mentoring program that encourages physical activity, healthy eating and the development of a positive self image among girls ages 11-14.



Meet Sonia Bozzi

Why do you support Big Sisters?

"Supporting Big Sisters as a monthly donor is a way of doing something meaningful and participating in my community in a constructive way. As a restaurant founder and owner I see people making connections every day and I understand how important these connections are. Big Sisters is able to create important and lifelong connections by carefully matching girls with caring mentors. It is the power of these connections that changes lives, and I am so proud to be a loyal supporter of these programs."

– Sonia Bozzi, Co-Founder, Chill Winston and Guilt & Co.

A BIG Thank You...

A special thank you to these generous supporters who made recent donations of \$5,000 or more:

The 1988 Foundation - Lotte & John Hecht Foundation

Amir & Yasmin Virani Family Foundation

Beedie Development Group

Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP

Canadian Western Bank

Chevron Canada Limited

Diamond Foundation

Grosvenor Canada Limited

Ironwood Dental Centre

The Lutsky Family Foundation

Marlow Hesson Wealth Partnership Group

ONNI Group

Peter & Joanne Brown Foundation

The Province of British Columbia

The R & J Stern Family Foundation

The River Foundation

Seaspan

Sutherland Foundation

United Way of the Lower Mainland

Windsor Plywood Foundation



Big Sisters
of BC Lower Mainland

www.bigsisters.bc.ca

Big Sisters

Gala

25th Anniversary

PRESENTED BY

SILVER WHEATON

Thank You!

With the support of our sponsors, guests and donors,

\$150,000 was raised for our mentoring programs

at the September 23rd Big Sisters Gala.

SILVER WHEATON

THE PETER & JOANNE BROWN FOUNDATION

3H

Grant Thornton

JOHANNSON FAMILY FOUNDATION

BC BUSINESS

BUSINESS VANCOUVER

CITV

THE JOURNAL WATERFRONT

R.R. DONNELLEY

VANCOUVER

ROBERTS GROUP

newgold

OSQ MEM

A Day to Remember

Avanade

California Closets

Easy Park

Figaro's Garden

The Lazy Gourmet

Landscape Event Rentals

Mila & Sorel Lutsky

Nurse Next Door Home Care Services

Park Shore BMW

PwC Canada

SW Audio Visual

West Coast Seeds

34 East 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5T 2G5
P: 604.873.4525 F: 604.873.2122
info@bigsisters.bc.ca | bigsisters.bc.ca



If you do not wish to receive this newsletter, please call 604.873.4525 x 321