



# A Longitudinal Study of the Impact of Big Brothers Big Sisters Community Match Relationships on the Health and Well-Being of Canadian Children

Studies of Big Brothers Big Sisters community match programs have found that children matched to an adult mentor experience significant improvements in mental health, academic performance, and psychosocial functioning compared to un-matched children.

For a century Big Brothers Big Sisters has matched thousands of Canadian children to an adult mentor; however, a national evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters community match programs has not been conducted in Canada.

...until now.

STRATEGIC PLAN

June 2011

SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

## Study Background and Early Findings

CROSS CUTTING THEME

This study seeks to address four broad questions:

- Do matched children experience greater health and well-being than unmatched children?
- What match relationship features (e.g., length, quality, time invested, type and diversity of activities) are crucial for successful child outcomes?
- Do match relationships work better for certain groups (e.g., girls vs. boys) or under certain conditions (e.g., low vs. high risk neighborhoods)?
- How important are certain agency practices (e.g., mentor training, caseworker support) for building healthy matches?

### STUDY DESCRIPTION AND PROGRESS

- Our study has recruited 997 children (ages 6-17) and parents enrolled in 20 Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies across Canada
- Children and parents complete baseline questionnaires on their health and social functioning and five identical follow-up questionnaires spaced apart by 6 months (until 30 months)
- Adult mentors enter the study after a match to a study child; thus far, 450 mentors have been recruited
- At each follow-up, matched children and mentors complete additional questions on their match relationship and agency practices

To date, 997 children and parents have completed a baseline questionnaire, 791 at 6 month follow-up, 704 at 12 month follow-up, and 640 at 18 month follow-up (near completion); 24 and 30 month follow-ups are currently in progress (476 and 374 completed respectively)

374 children have completed the study.



## PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

### Background Facts About Study Children (Baseline Results):

- 51% girls; 49% boys
- 32% aged 6-8; 44% aged 9-11; 24% aged 12-17
- 65% live with biological mother only
- 33% do not have a sibling at home
- 42% Caucasian/White European ethnicity; 13.3% Aboriginal; 10.3% African-Canadian; 7.7% Asian; 2.4% Hispanic
- 30% report a chronic health condition
- 28% sought mental health/social services in the past 12 months

### Match Status of Study Children at 18 Month Follow-up:

- 50% continuous matches; 15% dissolved matches only; 9% re-matches and 26% never matched;
- More boys are never matched (33% vs. 17% for girls)
- More girls in dissolved matches (20% vs. 11% for boys)

### Background Facts About Parents (Baseline) and Adult Mentors:

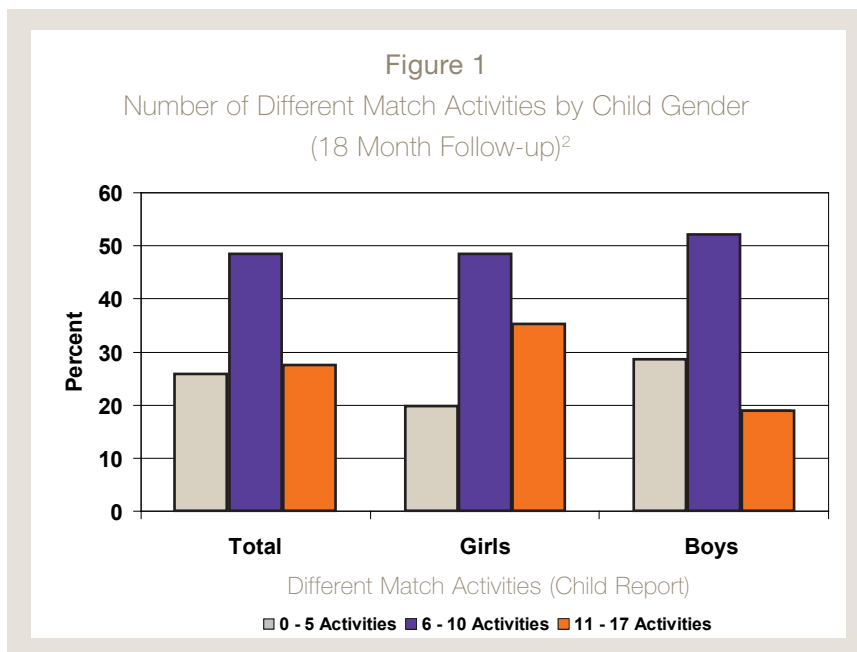
		Parents (%) (n=997)	Mentors (%) (n=450)
Gender (Female)		93	65
Age	<35	29	77
	35-39	23	10
	40+	48	13
Never Married		35	59
One or More Children at Home		100	12
3+ Family Moves		25	NA
Education	High School Diploma or Less	36	9
	Some College/University	26	23
	Completed College/University	39	69
Annual Gross Income (<\$20,000)		41	11
Full Time Employment		43	74
Ethnicity	Caucasian or White European	NA	78
	Aboriginal	NA	1.8
	African-Canadian	NA	1.6
	Asian	NA	6.9
	Hispanic	NA	1.6



## MATCH RELATIONSHIP FINDINGS

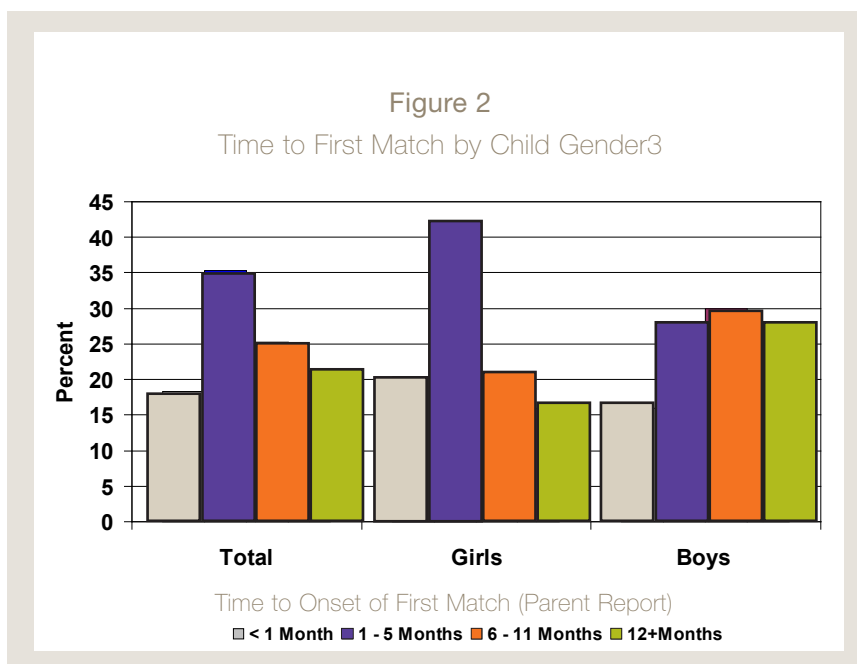
### At the 18 Month Mark, Children in Current Matches Reported:

- Frequent involvement with their mentor (61% met one day or more weekly)
- High intensity of time with their mentor (67% met 3-4 hours or more weekly)
- High quality match relationships with mentor (74%)<sup>1</sup>
- Participating in a wide range of match activities (72% involved in 6 or more different activities in the past month) with a greater percentage of girls reporting 11 or more different activities see Figure 1: (35% vs 19% for boys)<sup>2</sup>



### Parents Reported:

- High quality child/mentor match relationships<sup>1</sup> (67%) (current matches)
- Moderate to high parent support of match relationships<sup>3</sup> (65%) (current matches)
- Just over half of the children (54%) were matched within the first five months with a greater percentage of girls matched during that time.
- Enrolling their child in Big Brothers Big Sisters programs because of perceived need for another adult in child's life (75%)



<sup>1</sup> High quality defined as a score of 80% or higher on a 10 point scale (e.g., child and mentor have a trusting relationship, a close relationship); <sup>2</sup> Example activities include: going for a walk, talk face-to-face about something important, playing sports/games, teaching a skill; <sup>3</sup> Moderate to high support defined as a score of 70% or higher on a 24 point scale (e.g., parent suggests activities for Big Brothers or BS, parent offers advice on how to help Big Brothers or BS)

<sup>2</sup> Number of different match activities scored as "sometimes" or "often" in past month. Results based on current matches at 18 month follow-up. Difference between boys and girls statistically significant at  $p < .05$

<sup>3</sup> Results based on current and dissolved matches at 18 month follow-up. Difference between boys and girls statistically significant at  $p < .05$

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our research will inform Big Brothers Big Sisters program practitioners and policy makers:

- For whom and under what conditions community match programs achieve the greatest benefits
- How long match relationships must last to achieve positive change
- The optimal amount of weekly contact between mentors and their mentees
- Types of shared activities and styles of mentoring most conducive to positive change
- Agency practices/procedures that contribute to successful matches

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### Big Brothers Big Sisters Agencies

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area
- Big Brothers of Greater Vancouver
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Guelph
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Moncton
- Niagara Falls Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Big Brothers Big Sisters Windsor Essex
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary
- Big Sisters of Regina
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- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Victoria
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Saskatoon
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Winnipeg
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of York
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of London
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Halifax
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Montreal
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Toronto
- Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peel
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ottawa



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Future Directions