Big Brothers Big Sisters In-School Mentoring Program Revisited: Can Match Longevity and Quality be Improved to Enhance Program Efficacy?

Jenn de Lught\textsuperscript{1}, Vajmeh Tabibi\textsuperscript{2}, Tracy Holland\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Queen’s University, \textsuperscript{2}Big Brothers Big Sisters

**ABSTRACT**

This study describes a local Big Brothers Big Sisters In-School Mentoring (ISM) program through the perspectives of mentors, students, and a school principal. A focus group of four mentors provided insights into their role and their perceived impact on their “Littles.” Students were interviewed for their view on their mentoring experience and a school principal was also interviewed for her insights into the effectiveness of the ISM program at that school. Recommendations are made on how match quality and longevity can be enhanced in order to improve the efficacy of the program.

**BACKGROUND**

The local Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) ISM program has entered its tenth year and services 23 schools in the area. Volunteers are screened and matched with a student from Grades one to nine, and commit to meeting once a week for one hour for at least one school year. In the current year, 2011-2012, this agency has established 50 matches, serving 50 students. The ISM program is not designed to be a tutoring program, but instead provides mentorship to children and youth, giving them a friend and confidential--contributing towards building their resiliency through relationships.

**PURPOSE**

This study evaluates a local BBBS In-School Mentoring program to determine how match longevity and quality can be enhanced in order to improve the efficacy of the program.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

BBBS of America piloted an Enhanced School-Based Mentoring (ESBM) program and found that match longevity improved with an increased carryover rate of 56% compared to 40% (Hansen et al., 2011). The most important factors for enhancing match quality and longevity were found to be:

- A minimum 12 month commitment
- Frequent support for mentors and mentees
- Continued communication during the summer months where possible
- Matches interacting one-to-one
- Expanding the interview process and matching on interest

Also important was:

- Pre-match training for mentors
- Parental support and engagement
- Involving the mentees in activity selection
- Deep school partnerships

**METHOD**

The data for this multi-perspective study was collected from a focus group interview, individual interviews and a questionnaire.

**Participants**

Thirty-three students participated in individual interviews and completed a self-efficacy questionnaire, four mentors participated in a focus group interview, and a principal participated in an individual interview.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Both the focus group and individual interview discussions were facilitated through semi-structured open-ended questions. Both sessions were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed for emergent themes.

**FINDINGS**

The mentees were clearly positive about the relationship they had with their mentors:

- 91 per cent described the match with their mentor as “awesome”
- All mentees were comfortable with their mentors and found them easy to talk to
- Activities were usually decided between the mentor and mentee
- The mentees also said that their mentors made them feel special because: the mentor seemed “happy to be around me,” because “I know he won’t go away and does not leave me,” and because “when I have a problem, she comforts me.”

The three participant groups were invited to make recommendations on how the match or the program could be improved. Most students said that nothing needed to be changed, as “it is great the way it is” and the principal recommended “less paperwork” and suggested that earlier referrals, perhaps in the second week of August, would allow for matches to be ready by September. Mentors had three recommendations for enhancing the ISM program:

- Having the option of meeting with their mentees outside the designated one hour in the school
- That the connection with the school should be strengthened to enhance cooperation and support
- That matches should be carefully and diligently made to ensure a good fit.

**DISCUSSION**

The perspectives of the students, their mentors and a staff liaison (principal) contribute to recommendations for improving match quality and longevity and therefore the efficacy of the program:

1. The program should be run for as long as possible with referrals being made in August so that matched pairs can meet in September.
2. Where possible, communication should continue over the summer months.
3. A hybrid ISM program that combines the current ISM program with a shorter and more flexible version of the traditional one-to-one program, could allow for some time spent together outside the school setting.
4. Connections with the school should be strengthened to enhance cooperation and support, particularly with classroom teachers.
5. Matches should be carefully and diligently made to ensure a good fit.
6. Mentors and mentees should share in deciding in what activities to engage in.
7. Initial and ongoing training/support should be provided to mentors.

**REFERENCES**


**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**