The Mentoring Effect on Health
Creating Healthy Canadians & Communities

The Canadian Institute of Health Research has demonstrated through research that broader determinants of health, ranging from social and economic policies to education and training, housing and the environment, impacts communities. Health research Roadmap: Creating innovative research for better health and health care. The Canadian Index of Well-being also takes a wide view, tracking such measures as living standards, robust health, environmental sustainability, balanced time use, levels of democratic participation and education, quality family time and access to and participation in leisure and culture. And the WHO constitution states:

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
Understanding the Challenges

It’s the intertwining of social, health and economic policy that creates the environments that affect child health. Improving the overall broader health and well-being outcomes for children, youth and families is not only an important element of Health Canada’s mandate, it is contingent on the involvement of a wider range of partnerships because of the complexity of the issues and the need for preventative as well as immediate solutions.

The Lalonde Report sets the stage for key factors contributing to healthy Canadians. There is mounting evidence that the contribution of medicine and health care is quite limited, and that spending more on health care will not result in significant further improvements in population health.

- Breaking the Cycle of poverty;
- Mental Health;
- Obesity;
- Bullying/Cyberbullying.

Mentoring changes the course of young lives, and in turn, changes the future of communities to help create a better society in which more children, youth and adults can work, play, participate and thrive.

The evidence indicates that key factors which influence population health are: income and social status; social support networks; education; employment/working conditions; social environments; physical environments; personal health practices; coping skills; healthy child development; biology and genetic endowment; health services; gender; and culture.
The most fundamental determinant of health for children and adults alike is poverty; inequalities are Canada's number one health problem and yet it is a problem that health care alone is powerless to overcome. Canada has experienced a significant rise in inequality over the past several decades. Moreover, a number of trends suggest that income inequality may rise higher, and social mobility could decline, in the years ahead.

13.3% of Canadian children live in poverty, compared to 11% across the 35 “economically advanced countries”. UNICEF survey of child poverty in rich nations.

One in every five Canadian children is born or lives in a single-parent home. Canadian Institute of Child Health, 2000; Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002; Lipman et al., 2002; Ross et al., 1998. Children from single parents homes are at higher risk of:

- growing up in poverty;
- facing emotional and behavioural problems;
- having poor physical health;
- strained parental and peer relationships;
- poor academic achievement;
- disengagement from school.

Children who live in poverty are at increased risk of falling behind on many health outcomes. All children deserve the support, resources, and opportunities they need to reach their full potential.
How Mentoring Helps

The National Human Services Assembly identified mentoring as a key support to enable individuals to break out of the cycle of poverty. Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Young Families, Two-Generation Strategies for Working with Disconnected Young Parents & Their Children, Research Report 2013,

Each step up the socio-economic scale, the better the health, language skills and well-being of the population. Hertzman and Power, 2006

Every $1 invested in Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring for the most economically disadvantaged populations returns $23 to society. Boston Consulting Group Social Return On Investment of Big Brothers Big Sisters Mentoring Programs in Canada 2013

Adults who had a mentor in their youth earn $315,000 more income in their lifetime.

Reducing child poverty can have huge spillover effect on society.

$1 invested during a person’s childhood years saves between $3 and $9 in future spending on the health, criminal justice systems and social assistance. 2008 report from the Public Health Agency of Canada

Poverty is a significant burden on the economy exerting extra costs in healthcare, crime and social assistance. Health inequalities in youths shape future inequities in education, employment, adult health, and life expectancy, and should be a focus of health policy. Frank Elgar of McGill University’s Institute for Health and Social Policy.

All scenarios indicate a need for mentoring vulnerable children/youth to ensure better lifetime health indicators for Canadians as a whole.
Investing in Youth Mental Health

Community support in the form of caring interactions between adults and youth is a highly recognized protective factor, one that may be more amenable to intervention than other types of protective factors. Wolkow, Katherine; and Ferguson, Bruce (2001) “Community Factors in the Development of Resiliency: Consideration and Future Direction.” Community Mental Health Journal.

Caring adults provide young people with a sense of belonging, acceptance, empowerment and connection, factors that are known to foster mental health and emotional well-being.


70% of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Suicide accounts for 24% of all deaths among 15-24 year olds. Canada’s Mental Health Association

Less than 20% of the estimated 1.2 million Canadian children and youth affected by mental illness will receive appropriate treatment. Mental Health Commission of Canada

Almost one half (49%) of Canadians who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have never gone to see a doctor about this problem. Canada’s Mental Health Association
The WHO identifies a number of broad programs as vital ways to promote mental health such as child and youth development programs; programs targeted at vulnerable groups, including minorities, indigenous people, migrants; mental health promotional activities in schools; violence prevention programmes; poverty reduction and social protection for the poor; and promotion of rights, opportunities and care of individuals with mental disorders.

It is critical to establish the foundation for healthy emotional and social development through prevention and early intervention services to support the health and mental well-being of every Canadian as they progress from childhood to adulthood.

**How Mentoring Helps**

In the 2013 report from the longitudinal study commissioned by Canadian Institutes of Health Research titled *A Longitudinal Analysis of the Impact of big Brothers Big Sisters Community Match programs on the Health and Well-Being of Canadian Children*, numerous positive outcomes were identified for children who have had a mentor vs children who had not.

Mentoring is identified as a “structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee” MENTOR/NationalMentoringPartnership.
Obesity is no longer only a health issue but also an economic issue. A 2014 report by the McKinsey Global Institute estimates that the global cost of obesity has risen to $2 trillion annually and it puts its impact at 2.8% of global gross domestic product. Canada, like many nations, is in the midst of an obesity epidemic. In 1978, only 15% of children were overweight or obese. By 2007, Statistics Canada found that 29% of adolescents had unhealthy weights. Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009, 2010. Most adolescents do not outgrow this problem and in fact, many continue to gain excess weight. Singh AS, Mulder C, Twisk JWR. (2008) Tracking of childhood overweight into adulthood: a systematic review of the literature. Obesity Reviews 9. 474 - 488.

If current trends continue, by 2040, up to 70% of adults aged 40 years will be either overweight or obese. Le Petit C, Berthelot JM. Obesity: A Growing Issue. Statistics Canada catalogue no 82-618-MWE2005003

According to the OECD, prevention programs would cost only $200 million annually in comparison to recent estimated cost of $6 billion for obesity in Canada.
How Mentoring Helps

Big Brothers Big Sisters has two group mentoring programs which specifically address healthy habits such as nutrition, physical activity and body image. Game On! And Go Girls! educates our youth that organized sports does not provide enough physical activity to meet recommended daily levels and that you need to incorporate activity in your daily life. It also teaches pre-teens nutrition facts and discusses hot topics such as body images and social media.

- 80% of adults who had a mentor said they pursue a healthy lifestyles. Boston Consulting Group SROI study 2013

Boys who participated in the Game On! Mentoring program increased their sense of school connectedness – which is a leading indicator of a broad range of positive behavioural outcomes.

- Girls who participated in the Go Girls! Mentoring program reported a 16% increase in leisure activity and an improvement in healthy eating habits. Go Girls! Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies Program Evaluation Final Report by A. Justine Dowd, Mark R. Beauchamp & Mary E. Jung—University of British Columbia — April 2014

Physical activity and healthy eating habits are part of the solution regarding obesity, but healthy relationships and the reduction of stress, especially during developmental years are another key factor in the battle against the rising epidemic. In addition to providing education and positive roles models, mentoring (characterized by sustained support, guidance, concern, and encouragement) also promotes healthy relationships and positive social development.

1 School-Based Mentoring and School Connectedness: A Preliminary Evaluation of Game On Group Mentoring for Boys Timothy A. Cavell, Samantha J. Gregus, & James T. Craig, University of Arkansas 2014
Building Resilience against Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying is not going away, in fact Canada has the 9th highest rate of bullying in the 13-years-olds category on a scale of 35 countries, Canadian Institutes of Health Research and with technology advancements, cyberbullying is a growing issue. The implications of bullying and cyberbullying are very serious as male victims are five times more likely to be depressed and girls are over three times more likely to be depressed than their male and female classmates. Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999; Hawker & Boulton, 2000.

Research also suggests that the effects of bullying do not disappear with time. Individuals who were formerly bullied were found to have higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem at the age of 23, despite the fact that, as adults, they were no more harassed or socially isolated than comparison adults. Olweus, 1994, as cited in Fox et al., 2003: 8.

23% of Canadian students report that they have said or done something mean or cruel to someone online. Media Smarts: Young Canadian in Wired World report 2014

37% of students report that they have had something mean or cruel done to them online. Media Smarts: Young Canadian in Wired World report 2014

59% of Canadians said they suffered abuse by bullies as a child or teenager and 45% believed they suffered lasting harm as a result. 2013 Ipsos Reid Market Research Survey

Children who bully may turn into adolescents who sexually harass, become involved in delinquent or gang-related behaviours, or engage in date violence. As adults, these same individuals may display harassment in the workplace or may commit spousal, child, or senior abuse Craig & Pepler, 2007.
How Mentoring Helps

The prevention of bullying behaviour in children and youth is an important factor for reducing the likelihood of future criminal activity. Intervention programs that utilize a whole-school approach (such as OBPP) often produce significant reductions in rates of bullying and victimization. Vreeman, R. & Carroll, A. (2007). A systematic review of school-based interventions to prevent bullying. Archives of Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 161, 78-88.

Students must feel safe in their schools and communities in order to learn and develop as human beings.

87% of adults who had a mentor in their youth report have strong social networks; Boston Consulting Group SROI Study 2013

Girls with a Big Sister are four times less likely to bully than girls without a mentor.

Mentoring programs improve a young person’s ability to connect with family and peers, which builds their resilience and guards against bullying. It impacts not only the individual and their close circle, but strengthens the community as a whole. King, K.A., Vidourek, R.A., Davis, B., & McClellan, W. (2002). Increasing Self-esteem and School Connectedness through a Multidimensional Mentoring Program. Journal of School Health, 72, 294-299
What’s next?
We recommend that we establish a task force whose terms of reference would look to identify prevention as a mechanism for better overall Health of children and families for futures to come.

Breaking the cycle of poverty
Continue to invest in mentoring, with the investment of $25 million, it would equal a social return to society in the amount of $450 Million which will enable Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada the ability to recruit more mentors to help more mentees reach their full potential which means more tax payers, more donations, decreased use of the health care system, fewer youth dropping out of school and better employment readiness.

Mental Health
Big Brothers Big Sisters Mentoring programs support young people who face mental health issues the completion of an Impact Evaluation would allow us the information required to further target our mentoring programs to best fit the needs the young people are facing and will allow for good mental health over the course of a lifetime.

Obesity
Big Brothers Big Sisters promotes healthy active living which contributes to establishing good physical living into adulthood. We would recommend that the government provide Canadians who mentor a tax Credit. This will actively promote the culture of mentoring in Canadians at a time of great benefit to us all, for skill development, employability, positive culture in Canada and a decreased knowledge gap among Canadians.

Bullying/Cyberbullying
Investments in Big Brothers Big Sisters Mentoring programs as a prevention service are known as an effective service to decrease bullying and reduces the health related issues that surround the effects of bullying.
And an Invitation….
for Big Brothers Big Sisters to participate in public consultation and at committee level;

Draw upon the views and experiences of children and young people in developing policy from a child rights perspective, and;

Act on the six recommendations set out in the Senate Committee Report, Cyberbullying Hurts: Respect for Rights in the Digital Age.
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Learn more at: Big Brothers Big Sisters.ca