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**Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland**  
**Youth Mentoring Programme**  
**Galway, Mayo & Roscommon**

***Evaluation Report***

***November 2005***



***Report by:***

***HSE / NUI, Galway Child & Family Research & Policy Unit***

## Research Team

The Child & Family Research and Policy Unit (CFRPU) is a joint initiative between the Health Service Executive Western Region and the Department of Political Science and Sociology at NUI, Galway. The CFRPU undertakes research, evaluation and policy studies in the area of Child and Family Care and Welfare. The research team for this report consisted of Bernadine Brady, Dr. Pat Dolan, Maeve O'Brien and John Canavan. The Unit's website is [www.childandfamilyresearch.ie](http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie).

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- Special thanks to Project Workers; Siobhan Bouchen, Peter Duffy and Mary Lynch for all their support and assistance.

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### Note on terms used

'Big' refers to a big brother or sister – i.e. the adult mentor

'Little' refers to a little brother or sister – i.e. the young mentee

### Abbreviations

<b>ADHD</b>	Attention Deficit Health Disorder
<b>BBBS</b>	Big Brothers Big Sisters
<b>BBBSI</b>	Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland
<b>HSE</b>	Health Services Executive
<b>NYP</b>	Neighbourhood Youth Project
<b>THI</b>	Teenage Health Initiative

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# **Chapter 1**

## **The Big Brother Big Sister Programme**

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### **1.1 Introduction**

Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) is a mentoring programme for young people, which matches an adult volunteer with a young person in need of support and friendship. The young person and volunteer meet once a week for a minimum of one year, during which time their friendship is supported and supervised by a professional Project Worker. BBBS Ireland has been piloted since 2002 in three Western counties – Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. The programme is provided under the auspices of the national youth work organisation, Foroige, and delivered through a partnership with the Health Services Executive. BBBS Ireland is an affiliated member of Big Brothers Big Sisters International and part of the recently established European Network for BBBS.

This report outlines the findings of an evaluation of BBBS Ireland undertaken by the Health Service Executive / NUI Galway, Child and Family Research and Policy Unit (CFRPU).

Before outlining the objectives and methodology of the evaluation, a brief history of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme is provided and the key features of the model are outlined.

### **1.2 Big Brothers Big Sisters America**

BBBS America is the oldest and most well known mentoring programme in the USA. The organisation has more than five hundred local affiliates and maintains over 100,000 matches between volunteers and young people (McGill, 1997). The programme's national office is based in Philadelphia, where it is managed by an Executive Director.

#### *History*

The parent organisation Big Brothers Big Sisters America (BBBSA) began as two separate gender specific organisations; the Catholic Big Sisters of New York (1902) and the Big Brothers Movement (1904). Established in the early twentieth century in New York, both agencies shared a common goal; to help children, generally from one-parent homes, whose social environments hindered their normal moral, mental and physical development (McGill, 1997). In the following years, the organisation applied sets of standards and introduced an agency component to regulate the service and manage its affairs in a professional manner. Although their operation came to a standstill during the Great Depression and the Second

World War, both organisations were operating by the 1970's<sup>1</sup>. In 1977, they merged to form the present day organisation, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.

### **1.3 Big Brothers Big Sisters International**

Big Brothers Big Sisters International was founded in 1998. Its mission is to promote and support the development of Big Brother Big Sister mentoring programmes operating independently in various countries. They are provided with consultation, technical assistance, training and materials by BBBS International, which sets standards and shares best practices for effective and sustainable implementation. Affiliate associations are currently working in thirty-seven countries. The organisation is governed by a board of directors that meets three times a year and is managed by an Executive Director. BBBS International approves programmes for the use of the BBBS logo and maintains active membership of them. The association also collaborates with international bodies on issues related to youth and children.

The essential pre-requisite for BBBS International programmes are:

- The program is voluntary for all parties involved
- The program is professionally managed
- All volunteers are screened for their appropriateness, ability and safety
- All volunteers are provided with an orientation and training about mentoring and child development
- The needs of all children and youth are assessed before being matched
- All 'matched' relationships are supervised by a professional
- Matches are professionally closed and all parties informed in writing
- A board of volunteers provides connections with the community, monitors the service delivery system and assists in fund raising
- Policies and procedures for service delivery are developed that adhere to international standards and reflect the community in which the programme is to be carried out
- Steps are taken to measure the impact of the mentoring relationship and to ensure quality and safety.

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<sup>1</sup> Following World War 2, a new federation was established for Big Brother Agencies only. Big Sisters were operating again in 1970 under the title Big Sisters International.

## 1.4 Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland

The Regional Co-Ordinator for Family Support Services of the HSE (West) and the Area Manager of the Western Region of Foroige<sup>2</sup> became interested in running a mentoring programme in the Western region when, in the late 1990's, analysis of the work of Neighbourhood Youth Projects indicated a need for a model to support individual work with young people. Due to Foroige's commitment to volunteering, it preferred that the individual work would have a voluntary element. Of the international voluntary mentoring models reviewed, BBBS was felt to be most impressive, due to its comprehensive assessment and monitoring procedures and proven effectiveness.

Dagmar McGill, the Executive Director of BBBS was invited to Ireland to meet HSE and Foroige personnel, with a view to discussing the suitability of the programme for their identified needs. Staff from both organisations subsequently visited Chicago to see the programme working on the ground and gain clarity about the programme model and practices. Given the one to one nature of the programme, the Co-Directors were naturally concerned that stringent child protection procedures would be built in. On investigating the USA model, they were satisfied that the rigorous case management and vetting procedures could minimise risk to the greatest degree possible.

BBBS International affiliates with voluntary organisations only, hence Foroige became the host organisation in Ireland, while the partnership with the HSE was maintained. The two organisations have a history of joint working, which has facilitated the development of the BBBS Ireland partnership. Funding was secured from the then Western Health Board (now HSE) for the Irish programme, which has been operating as a pilot programme since its establishment. The BBBSI programme manual completed in September 2001 adapted USA programme materials to suit the Irish context.

The BBBS programme is operationalised through local Neighbourhood Youth Projects (NYPs). All NYP staff were trained to case manage a BBBS match. A case manager with experience of the BBBS programme in Philadelphia was hired on a temporary contract as regional Programme Co-ordinator to establish the programme in Ireland.

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<sup>2</sup> Joint Directors of BBBS Ireland

### **1.4.1 Mission Statement and Underlying Assumptions**

The mission statement of BBBS Ireland is

“To make a positive difference in the lives of young people through a professionally supported one to one relationship with a caring adult volunteer. The volunteers, as Big Brothers or Big Sisters are friends, mentors and positive role models who assist these young people in achieving their unique potential”.

According to the BBBS Ireland programme manual, BBBS is based on the idea that a created relationship between an older and younger person will act to prevent future difficulties or be a support to a young person facing adversity in their lives. Having a caring adult friend can help to build positive assets for young people to enable them to have:

- A commitment to learning
- A positive sense of self and the future
- Positive values of caring, social justice, honesty and responsibility; and
- Social competencies of making friends, planning, making decisions and resisting negative behaviour (Foroige / Western Health Board, 2001, p.2).

The presence of this non-familial caring adult is expected to make a difference in the social and emotional development of the young person. Rather than focusing on ‘deficits’ or what the young person lacks, the programme adopts a positive youth development approach that addresses the young persons’ full range of needs and the competencies required to help them to become productive and healthy adults.

### **1.4.2 Essential Features of Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland**

BBBS distinguishes itself from other mentoring programmes through its use of stringent standards and procedures. These include:

- Volunteers are screened to filter out those who may inflict psychological or physical harm, lack the capacity to form a caring bond with the child or are unlikely to honour their time commitments.
- Young people are assessed to help the Project Worker learn about the child in order to make the best possible match and secure parental permission.
- Matches are carefully considered and based upon the needs of the youth, the abilities of the volunteers, the preferences of the parents and the capacity of the programme staff.

- Supervision is accomplished via initial contact with parent, youth and volunteer within two weeks of the match, monthly telephone contact with the volunteer, parent and / or youth during the first year and quarterly contact with all parties for the duration of the match.

For a young person to participate with the programme, the requirements are that:

- 1) They are between the ages of 10-18 years.
- 2) All custody issues in respect of the young person are clearly resolved.
- 3) The young person wants to participate.
- 4) The young person demonstrates a need for the service in one or more of the following areas:
  - Is culturally or economically disadvantaged
  - Exhibits poor social skills
  - Has few friends
  - Lacks adequate support and attention of a stable adult
  - Is an underachiever in school
  - Is overly dependent
  - Has other siblings who have significant problems with social or community adjustment
  - Is insecure and does not trust adults
  - Has a poor self-concept
  - Is introverted, shy or withdrawn
  - Shows early signs of anti-social behaviour
  - The young person has needs that are appropriate for volunteer intervention.

Volunteers are people from the community who commit to becoming a big brother or sister and remain with the programme for at least one year. They are not paid for the service.

### **1.4.3 The Big Brothers Big Sisters Process**

The process of matching a young person with a volunteer is highly structured and detailed step by step guidelines for Project Workers are provided in the programme manual. The key parts of the process (as illustrated in Figure 1) are:

1. ***Young person inquiry and intake:*** A referral is made to the programme, which is assessed and a decision reached. The Project Worker meets the family and the young person to find out more about them and the type of big brother or sister who is most suitable. Additional information about the young person may be sought from other agencies or schools and a recommendation is then made by the Project Worker regarding the type of match that would be suitable for the young person.

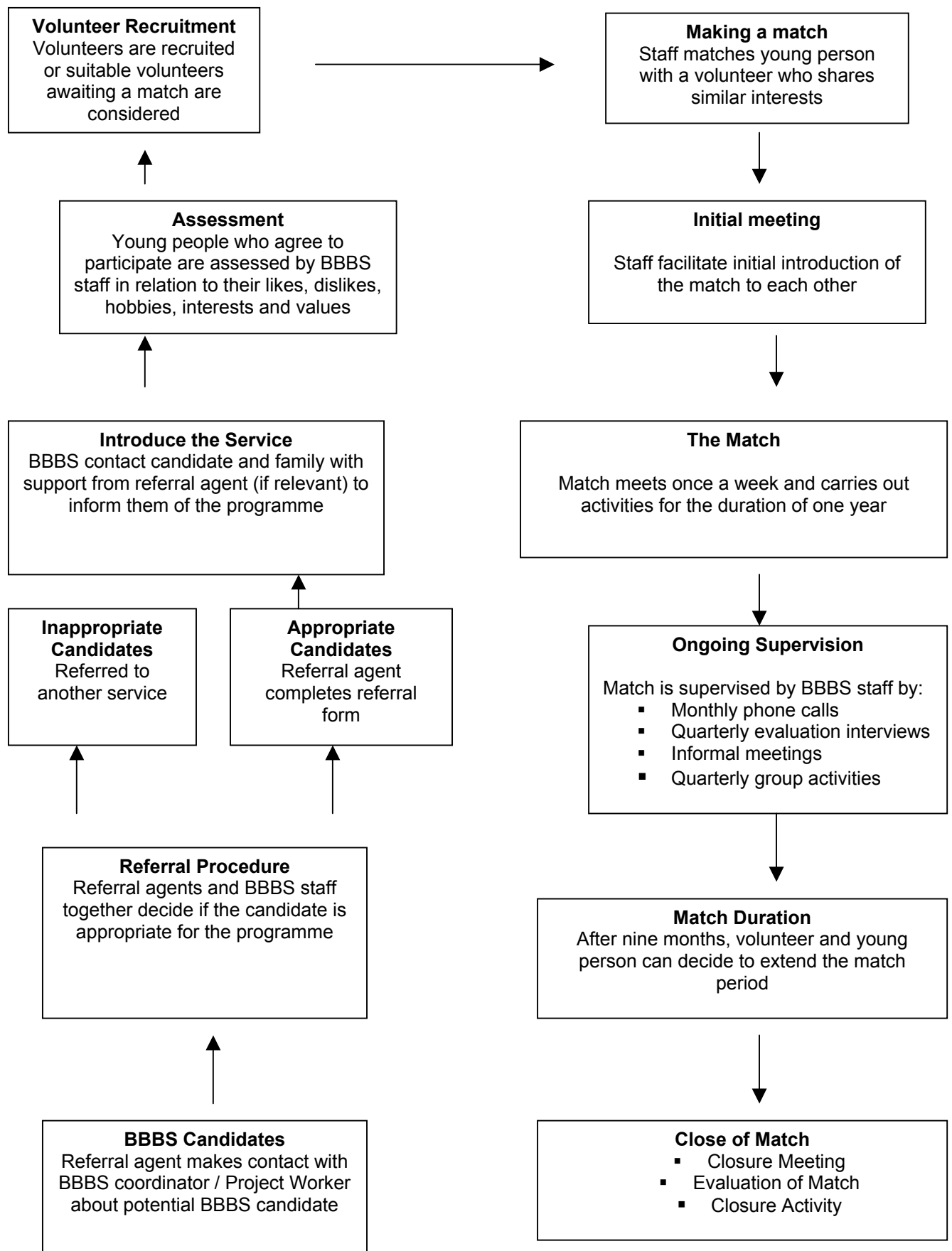
The young person is asked to sign a 'contract' prior to being matched, which sets out the ground rules and responsibilities for participation.

2. **Volunteer inquiry and intake:** Volunteers are sought through advertising, public information campaigns, posters and word of mouth and those inquiring about the process of becoming a big brother are provided with information. Applicants must undergo a rigorous assessment process, which includes an application form, references, Garda clearance, home visit and interview. Following this, the Project Worker makes a recommendation regarding whether they feel the volunteer is suitable, and if so, the type of young person they would be best suited to<sup>3</sup>. The volunteer receives training and orientation to equip him or her for the role of a big brother or sister and is asked to sign a 'volunteer contract', which sets out the ground rules and responsibilities for participation. While the programme and contract are based on the expectation that matches will last a year, the volunteer can decide to extend the match or start a different match when their first match has closed.
3. **Making the match:** Project Workers consider the views of young people and their families when matching them with a volunteer, taking into account their personalities, interests hobbies, compatibility, values and special skills.
4. **Match supervision:** The purpose of supervision is to obtain information about matches from all parties involved including young people, parents and volunteers. Staff seek to monitor the development of the relationship, address safety issues and identify the needs of the match, by adhering to the following format:
  - Monthly telephone calls or pre-arranged meetings with all stakeholders
  - Quarterly evaluation by in-depth personal interview with the young person, volunteer and parent, which is assisted by a list of questions
  - Closing interview, which involves an in-depth review of the match
  - Regular informal contact between staff and stakeholders
  - Quarterly events / activities that bring all matches together in an informal setting which provides a social dimension to the programme.
5. **Match closure:** The process of closing a match involves the Project Workers conducting a final evaluation of the match, during which they assess how the match has achieved the stated goals. At the closure meeting, the positive outcomes of the match are highlighted and matches considered successful or unsuccessful based on whether the goals and needs of the young person were met. A letter of closure is sent to all parties involved and a closure activity is arranged.

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<sup>3</sup> Reasons for non-acceptance of volunteers included having a criminal record, personal problems not been adequately resolved, inability to make a full commitment to the programme, health problems / self-esteem problems or considered 'unstable' by a referee.

**Figure 1: Overview of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Process**

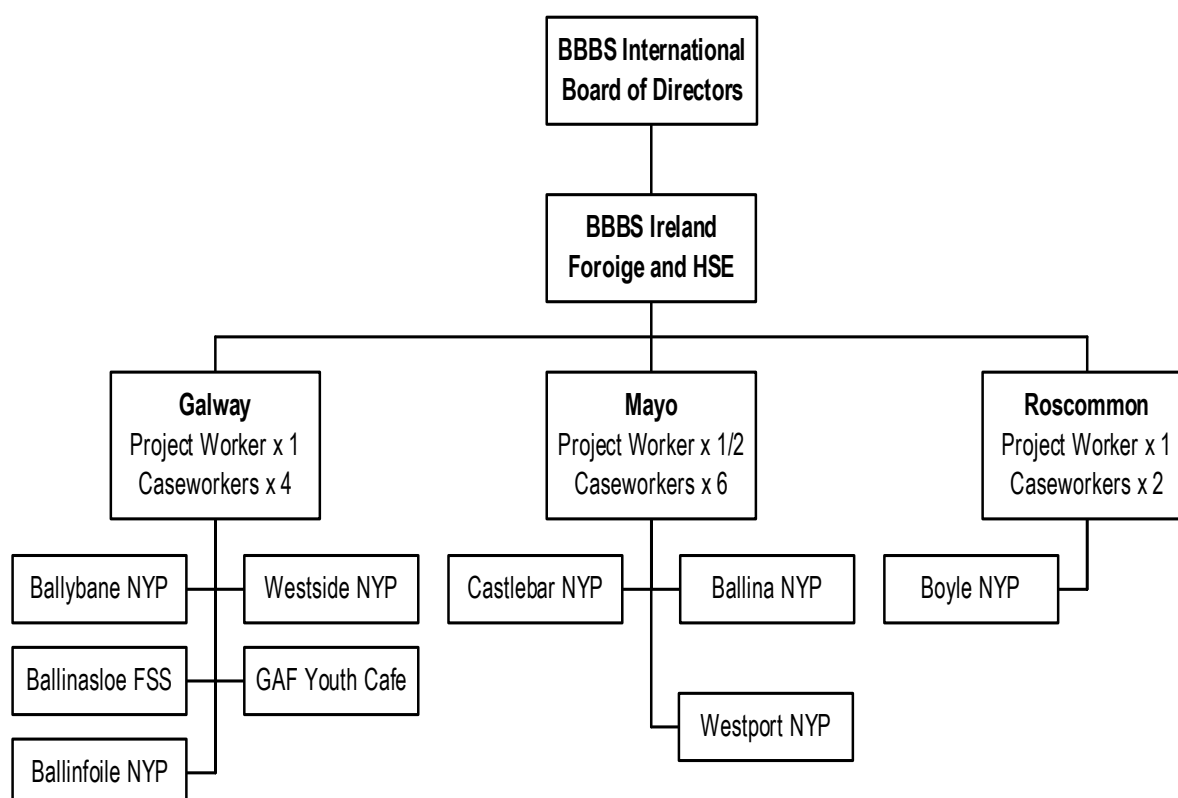


### *Record Keeping:*

Records are an important element of the BBBS programme and Project Workers are expected to keep accurate and up-to-date records of key events relating to all matches. According to the programme manual, the rationale for good record keeping is to:

- Provide the agency with a systematic record of case activity, which facilitates continuity of service delivery.
- Document each step of the case management system, which assists Project Workers in providing appropriate, orderly and timely service.
- Support the case managers in making decisions and managing the case competently.
- Show that the required or recommended steps in the process have been completed.
- Provide legal documentation that a service has been provided in a responsible manner.

#### **1.4.4 Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland Structure and Staffing**



**Figure 2: Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland Organisational Chart**

As Foroige is the host organisation for BBBS Ireland, the Board of Foroige acts as the BBBS Ireland national board of directors. The programme is co-directed by the Foroige Chief Executive Officer and the HSE Regional Co-ordinator for Family Support Services. The

nature of the partnership between the two organisations is broadly defined, with the Foroige Co-Director taking responsibility for staff employment and management and overseeing the day to day running of the programme. The HSE Co-Director is responsible for finance, evaluation, quality assurance and has a role in line management and strategic direction of BBBSI.

**BBBS Project Workers** oversee the general running and management of the BBBS programme in each county. As Figure 2 illustrates, full time Project Workers are employed by the programme in Galway and Roscommon, and a part-time Project Worker is employed in Mayo. Their role is to:

- recruit and train staff
- develop training for staff and volunteers
- liaise with youth projects and schools
- interview volunteers and young people
- make and supervise matches
- provide support to staff and volunteers
- co-ordinate advertising and information meetings
- and organise group activities for programme participants.

Initially, when the programme was established, one Project Worker was fully responsible for its implementation throughout the three counties. However, as the programme expanded, two more Project Workers were hired to look after the Mayo and Roscommon programmes<sup>4</sup>. All three have third level qualifications, ranging from sports therapy, social science and sociology and business management. The full time BBBS Project Workers are based in Galway City Partnership Offices, Galway City; and Castlerea NYP, Co. Roscommon, while the part-time Project Worker is based in Castlebar Youth Information Centre, Mayo.

BBBS Ireland employs a further twelve people as part-time Project Workers, who work for the remainder of the time as project workers in local NYPs. In general, each Project Worker devotes one fifth of his or her working week to their role as a BBBS Project Worker. Their role is to identify appropriate young people and volunteers in their area; interview potential volunteers and young people; make, supervise and support matches; and work closely with the co-ordinators to promote the programme, facilitate training and organise activities and events. They generally have third level qualifications and a long history of working with young people. They must complete a two-day BBBS training session to prepare for their responsibilities.

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<sup>4</sup> The Project Worker began work in Galway in June 2001. The Roscommon and Mayo Project Workers began in December 2003 and April 2003 respectively.

### *Referral Agents / Linked Services*

The referral process involves a referral agent making contact with a BBBS Co-ordinator or Project Worker about a specific candidate. The candidate is discussed and if they agree that he or she is suitable, the referral agent completes a referral form. The referral agent may be asked to provide more information about the young person and to attend the initial meeting with the family to aid the introduction process. BBBS Staff may also have contact with these and other youth related services throughout the course of a match.

#### **1.4.5 School-based Big Brother Big Sister**

BBBS set up mentoring programmes in a number of schools in November 2003. There are currently six schools involved across the three counties (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon). The aim is to provide additional support to younger children who have made the transition from primary to secondary education. The programme matches older fifth year students with first year students, who meet once a week on their lunch break. The same methods of intake, implementation, recruitment and training are used within the schools as with community-based BBBS and matches are supervised to the same extent. In each school, there is a designated teacher who links in with Project Workers.

### **1.5 Evaluation Objectives and Methodology**

A phased approach to the evaluation of BBBS Ireland has been adopted. This report comes at the end of the first phase of research, which has focused on the programme history, theoretical basis, implementation and attitudes. Specifically, the objectives of the report are as follows:

- (i) To provide a descriptive account of the history and operation of the BBBS programme in American, European and Irish contexts. To focus on all aspects of the model and detail its aims and objectives.
- (ii) To locate the programme in the wider service context wherein it operates. To examine existing research and theory relating to programme practices.
- (iii) To establish how and why it has been implemented within the region and assess the extent to which it is in line with the theoretical model, focusing on areas including day to day running, recruitment, screening, training, matching and supervision of young people and mentors.

- (iv) To find out the views of stakeholders involved with the programme including young people, mentors, Project Workers and programme staff in relation to all aspects of the model<sup>5</sup>.
- (v) To assess how the programme benefits the young people and adds value to established services.
- (vi) To make recommendations on the basis of the evaluation findings.

This report is designed to enhance our understanding of the history and implementation of BBBSI to date and to identify areas of strength and weakness. Some reference is made to what stakeholders believe to be outcomes for young people but the report does not claim to represent a measurement of programme outcomes or impact.

An assessment of outcomes will be made as part of phase two of the research which will involve an in-depth longitudinal study of young people participating in the programme. Funding has been received from Atlantic Philanthropies for the outcomes study and planning for the study is underway.

### *Methodology*

An evaluation steering group was formed to guide the research team in relation to the focus and implementation of the evaluation. The composition of the steering group is outlined in page 6. It was agreed by the steering group that all community matches up to the end of 2004 would be included in the evaluation and that the school-based BBBS would not be included in this particular study.

The research commenced with a review of literature in relation to the BBBS programme, including the programme materials, the programme manual and the local and national policy context. Academic literature in relation to BBBS and mentoring in general was identified and accessed through a search of academic databases.

Fieldwork for the study involved the following:

Consent: The research team wanted all bigs and littles to be aware that the evaluation was taking place and to have the opportunity to agree or disagree to their information being accessed by an external party. All young people and their parents were sent a letter by their Project Worker, explaining the study and seeking passive consent for the young persons' participation in the research. Of the 61 young people contacted, 6 indicated that they did not

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<sup>5</sup> The timescale of the current study did not permit interviews with parents. Parents perspectives will be included in the next phase of the research.

wish to take part in the study. Likewise, letters were sent to all mentors informing them of the study and seeking their participation. Six mentors indicated that they did not want to take part.

File analysis: For each match made, separate files are kept by staff to record information about the big assessment, the little assessment and the match progress. In order to make a global assessment of the progress of matches, the researcher examined 50 files relating to match progress and also accessed basic information in relation to the little, such as age, family situation and reason for referral. Files for BBBS participants who withheld consent were not included in the analysis, nor were files relating to the big assessment. Aggregate data in relation to the programme was also gathered through a questionnaire about the programme which was completed by the Project Workers in each county.

Questionnaires and focus groups: A total of 16 bigs took part in research meetings, at which they completed a questionnaire on an individual basis followed by a focus group discussion. A further 13 bigs, who could not attend the meetings completed questionnaires. Therefore, a total of 29 bigs took part in the research. Littles were also invited by the Project Workers to attend research meetings. In some cases, the turnout was poor, so NYP youth workers followed up by taking the questionnaire to the little. Through both means, 26 'littles' completed questionnaires designed by Public Private Ventures, the American agency which evaluated the BBBS America programme.

Interviews: Interviews were held with programme management and frontline staff, including Co-Directors, Childcare Managers and Project Workers, while two focus group sessions were held with Project Workers.

The fieldwork for the report was greatly supported by the co-operation and commitment of many people, particularly the BBBS Project Leaders and Project Workers.

## **1.6 Report Outline**

The reasons why a mentoring programme such as BBBS is needed are explored in Chapter Two. Youth interventions, such as BBBS are based on the theory that it is possible to promote positive youth development in the face of adversity by establishing and supporting protective relationships and structures. Chapter Two also briefly reviews the policy and legislative context of BBBS Ireland and describes relevant youth provision, including family support services, Foroige and NYPs. Finally, some of the key research evidence in relation to mentoring is presented to set the context and raise issues of relevance for this study.

In Chapter Three, the results of an analysis of BBBS Ireland programme files for a set time period is outlined, including the number and duration of matches, reasons for referrals, gender breakdown and geographical spread. The files were assessed to establish how well relationships had become established and progressed.

Chapter Four outlines the results of a survey of 26 'littles' regarding their perceptions of their own match relationship and the programme. The areas examined by the survey include the extent to which the relationship is youth centred, their level of satisfaction / dissatisfaction and their emotional engagement.

In Chapter Five, the perspectives of 'bigs' is presented, including their reasons for becoming a mentor, difficulties and challenges experienced, how they believe the young person has benefited and their assessment of the support received from their Project Worker.

The perspectives of Foroige and HSE staff and management with a stake in the BBBS Ireland programme are outlined in Chapter Six, focusing on their assessment of the programme and their analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

In Chapter Seven, the results of the primary research are discussed to reach conclusions in relation to the programme and make a series of recommendations for its future development.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Context for the Intervention**

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#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the local and national policy context of the programme is outlined, the theory underpinning the Big Brothers Big Sisters programme is examined and a synopsis of empirical research findings in relation to mentoring is provided.

#### **2.2 Social Context**

Economic growth, population growth, increased immigration and greater urbanisation are among the key social changes in Ireland in the past decade. The country has become considerably more affluent over the past decade, with per capita income rising from two thirds of the EU average, to being substantially in excess of the EU average (Reynolds, 2005). While most have benefited from employment opportunities and higher incomes, it is argued that the divide between rich and poor has become greater and that Ireland has become a more unequal society (Reynolds, 2005). Relative poverty has increased, with almost 23 per cent of the population classified as being below the relative poverty line in 2005 (Central Statistics Office, 2005). A subset of those below relative income thresholds are at above-average risk of poverty and deprivation e.g. families with children, especially lone parents and large families on low incomes, people with disabilities, the long term unemployed and the elderly, especially those living alone (Office for Social Inclusion, 2005).

In addition to the economic transformation that has taken place, Irish society has experienced a major change in the structure of the family over the past decade, with an increase in co-habitation, lone parent households and separation and divorce. There were close to 153,900 lone parent families in 2002, an increase of 24.5% from 1996 (Central Statistics Office, 2002). The overall number of persons recorded as divorced more than trebled from 9,800 to 35,100 over the same period, reflecting the legalisation of divorce in the state in 1997. The Family Support Agency believes these figures to be the 'tip of the iceberg' as many separations take place through private legal contracts and are not represented in the official statistics (O'Brien, 2005).

Naturally, these social and economic changes have had consequences for families and communities in Ireland, and have led to demands for greater provision of services, to assist families and young people experiencing difficulties (O'Brien, 2005). Concerns have been

raised regarding the needs of young people living in disadvantaged communities, lone parent families or families at risk of breakdown, whose normal development may be negatively affected by inadequate natural supports, poor living environments and poverty. The term 'at risk' is used to refer to adolescents in a range of settings, including early-school leavers, young people involved in crime and young people growing up in difficult personal and family circumstances that puts them in danger of being taken into state care.

Policy and legislative changes have shown support for the development of child and family focused practices that support children's social, psychological and educational development within their family and local community. Many of these interventions targeted at young people 'at risk' (including Big Brother Big Sister) are based on the theories and concepts described in the next section.

## **2.3 Legislative and Policy Context**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Ireland in 1990 highlights the importance of the 'four P's' of prevention, protection, provision and participation when working with vulnerable children. Since 1991, Ireland has witnessed a surge in policy and legislative activity in relation to children in need of extra care and support, with common themes of prevention, family, community, interagency co-operation and children's rights. Key developments included the following:

- The Child Care Act (1991) strengthened the Health Boards (now HSEs) capacity to provide childcare and family support services
- The Commission on the Family Report (1998) placed a strong emphasis on family support
- Intensive, community-based, preventive Springboard projects were established
- The Children Act (2001) provided a new framework for the juvenile justice system, making way for preventative and alternative methods to sentencing for young people who are at risk of entering or who have already had contact with the justice system
- The National Children's Strategy (2000) endorses a holistic model, taking every aspect of the child's life into consideration when trying to understand how children live their lives
- In the Children First National Guidelines, the welfare of children is considered paramount and a partnership approach between voluntary and statutory agencies is recommended practice.

In addition, education and health legislation has emphasised the need to develop flexible and supportive structures for young people. For example:

- The Education Act (1998) offered a framework for co-operation between schools, health services and the Gardaí to work towards common aims in supporting young people at risk.
- The Education (Welfare) Act (2000), underpinned the establishment of a national educational welfare service focusing on the area of school attendance / truancy.
- The Youth Work Act (2001) gave a statutory basis to the provision of youth work services in Ireland, emphasising the need for resources for programmes designed to enhance the personal and social development of young people in disadvantaged communities; and supported the allocation of extra resources to the implementation of preventive programmes.
- The importance of the health and well being of young people was considered by the Health Strategy (2001), which recognised that social, environmental and economic factors such as deprivation, education, housing and nutrition affect the health status of individuals.
- National Conjoint Child Health Committee (2003) highlights the issue of mental health in adolescence and promotes a multi-modal flexible approach for developing an adolescent friendly health service and it also demonstrates the potential for health services to work in partnership with other agencies.

#### *Local services context*

A range of Family Support services were established in response to legislation and are currently providing support to young people in the BBBS catchment area. The central goal of family support services is prevention, commitment to multi-disciplinary working and commitment to strength-based intervention. Family support methods seek to strengthen social capital for people without sufficient natural supports. These services encompass:

- Pre- and After-School Services
- Community-based Adolescent Services and other Family Support Services
- Services responding to the Children Act, 2001
- Services Responding to Family Violence
- Services for Travellers
- Drug Misuse Prevention Services.

The HSE - Western Area (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) has made a particular commitment to community-based intervention services for children, young people and their families. In 2002, it operated seven Neighbourhood Youth Projects, three Springboard projects and a range of similar interventions. The Youth Advocate Programme is an intensive

mentoring programme for young people at risk. Under the Children Act 2001 a Family Welfare Conference service was put in place throughout the region. Also, Children Act Service Managers are now in place in each county to manage and co-ordinate the delivery of services responding to the Act.

Neighbourhood Youth Projects, through which the BBBS programme is operated, are community-based intervention programmes that provide support for children and young people from disadvantaged areas. NYPs in the Western Area are run directly by the HSE or through Foróige. They work to help young people to address the difficulties in their lives through activity and discussion based individual and group work (Canavan, 1992), providing an integrated approach to combating individual problems in young people, working closely with families, schools and other agencies concerned with their welfare. An evaluation of the Westside NYP, Galway found the project to be highly successful in general. Discussion groups and exercises dealing with issues affecting the well being of young people increased participants ability to take responsibility and offered opportunities to consider potential solutions to their problems (Canavan *et al*, 2000).

Foróige, the national youth organisation, jointly manages the BBBS Programme with the HSE and provides a comprehensive range of youth work services through the operation of Foróige Clubs, Local Youth Services, Local Youth Development Projects and Youth Information Centres. This multi-pronged approach enables the organisation to meet the developmental needs of young people in general but in particular circumstances, to focus on vulnerable young people in relation to issues arising from poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion, under-achievement at school, early school leaving, youth crime, substance abuse and family difficulties. Foróige's aim is to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society. Foróige employs full-time professional staff to assist and enable communities and voluntary youth workers in their endeavours, and to work directly with young people as necessary and appropriate.

This is the local service context to which the Big Brothers Big Sisters programme was introduced by the HSE / Foróige in 2002.

## **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

Outlined briefly below are a number of theories that underpin strength based, people focused youth interventions that have become more prevalent over the past decade in Ireland and abroad. These theories include risk and protective factors, social capital theory and social control theory.

## *Risk and Protective Factors*

Longitudinal studies have consistently identified similar social factors that contribute to social exclusion or anti-social behaviour in young people. Evidence of such factors increases the probability that a young person will display behavioural problems that will affect his or her normal development (Utting, 2000; Quinn in O'Mahony, 2002; Warren, 2001). When a number of risk factors cluster together, a child is at greater risk of developing delinquent or anti-social behaviour (Wasserman et al, 2003). Wasserman *et al* 2003, (pp.1-3) concluded that risk factors operate in several domains:

- Individual child (early antisocial behaviour, emotional factors, poor cognitive development, low intelligence, hyperactivity);
- Child's family (parenting, maltreatment, violence, divorce, parental psychopathology, familial antisocial behaviours; teenage parenthood, family structure, family size);
- Child's peer group (association with deviant peers, peer rejection);
- Child's school (failure to bond at school, poor academic performance, low academic aspirations);
- Child's neighbourhood (living in a poor family, neighbourhood disadvantage, disorganised neighbourhoods, concentration of delinquent peer groups, access to weapons).

On the other hand, protective factors can reduce the likelihood of anti-social behaviour by protecting or buffering the effects of risk factors (McGill, 1997). Wasserman *et al* (2003) cite female gender, pro-social behaviour during pre-school years, and good cognitive and academic performance as protective factors. Beinart *et al* (2002) propose as protective factors:

- Strong bonds with family, friends and teachers;
- Healthy standards set by parents, teachers and community leaders;
- Opportunities for involvement in families, schools and the community;
- Social and learning skills to enable participation; and
- Recognition and praise for positive behaviour.

Preventive intervention programmes, such as Big Brother Big Sister, support the use of protective factors in an attempt to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes in the child's life.

### *Social Capital*

Social relationships characterised by high degrees of mutual trust and reciprocity, are believed to lead to better outcomes in society (Winter, 2000). Social capital refers to networks of association that can promote co-operative actions and can be used as social resources for mutual benefit (Das, 2004). The underlying premise is based in the promotion of goodwill and co-operation between people in communities. The theory was popularised over recent years by the work of Putnam (1995), who argued that America was losing a sense of community and that social capital was declining. Social capital theorists pay attention to the quality, content and structure of social relationships and how they affect “the transmission of resources (“capital”) across generations that shape opportunities and life trajectories” (Wright *et al*, 2001; 1). Bordieu (1986) argues that social capital is not a natural or social given, but something that must be worked for on an ongoing basis. By establishing and supporting positive relationships between young people and adults, programmes such as Big Brother Big Sister aim to increase social capital.

### *Social Control Theory*

Social control theory pre-supposes that attachments to pro-social adults and a commitment to conventional activities restrain young people from engaging in delinquent activities because they have more to lose (McGill *et al*, 1997). Research has found that having a biological father who maintains a close relationship with his son, whether or not he lived in the family home, might be crucial in preventing susceptible boys becoming criminals. The paper suggests that a father, who disapproves of crime and shows an interest in his son, can counter the effect of negative influences such as criminal peers. Boys who sense love and approval from their fathers are deterred from crime for fear of jeopardising the relationship. The children do not necessarily have to live with their biological fathers - having someone they think of as a father who shows an interest in them and what they are doing can also make a difference. Walsh (1996) examined the relationship between attachment to parents, control by parents and self-reported delinquency within the framework of Hirschi's (1969) social control theory for a population of boys in Galway in both 1982 and 1994. Boys who reported high levels of delinquency also reported having more delinquent friends, higher levels of substance abuse and more physical punishment by and weaker attachments to parents. Mentoring is based on the premise of social control theory.

## 2.5 Empirical Evidence in Relation to Mentoring

In recent years, mentoring has become a popular method of supporting young people defined as socially excluded (Phillip *et al*, 2004). In typical programmes, mentors are volunteers who provide support to the younger participants. This Chapter outlines research evidence regarding:

- the effectiveness of mentoring interventions
- the effectiveness of the BBBS programme specifically
- the characteristics of an effective mentoring programme
- the characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship.

### 2.5.1 Is Mentoring an Effective Intervention?

DuBois *et al*'s (2002) meta-analysis of over 55 studies of mentoring programmes found that there is a small, but significant, positive effect for mentees in the areas of enhanced psychological, social, academic, and job / employment functioning, as well as reductions in problem behaviours. Shinner *et al* (2004) reported that positive programmes brought about fairly substantial changes in the lives of even the most disaffected young people from different communities who were at risk of social exclusion. Clayden and Stein's study (2002) of twenty-two mentoring programmes found that vulnerable youth, who had been lacking in positive social relationships, benefited from the provision of practical and emotional support in a safe and flexible climate. DuBois *et al* (*ibid*) emphasise that to facilitate attainment of desired outcomes, programmes must adhere closely to recommended guidelines for effective practice.

However, as the concept becomes more popular, gaps in knowledge about the benefits of mentoring programmes have appeared. Roberts *et al* (2004, p.513) point out that research 'does indicate benefits from mentoring programmes for *some* young people, for *some* programmes, in *some* circumstances, in relation to *some* outcomes' (*italics added*). There is no research evidence that mentoring programmes provide positive outcomes in relation to anti-social behaviour. While the BBBS evaluation did report improvements in anti-social behaviour, it did not consider administrative records, while studies that did use such objective measures found no improved effect. Other studies have found that mentoring programmes can have a negative impact on the young people involved when mentor relationships have broken down (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). There is also a sense from some that mentoring could inhibit as well as encourage the development of 'natural' social relationships (Phillip *et al*, 2004). Roberts *et al* (2004) conclude that further investigation and evaluation is necessary for any such social intervention.

### 2.5.2 Is Big Brother Big Sister an Effective Intervention?

The results of evaluations carried out on BBBS programmes have largely been positive. Public / Private Ventures, an independent social research agency, conducted a large-scale evaluation of the Big Brother Big Sister Programmes across eight sites in the USA to assess whether the mentoring programme made a tangible difference to the young peoples' lives. The results of the evaluation were largely in favour of the programme's methods, finding that: participants were less likely to start using drugs or alcohol; were less likely to hit someone; had improved school attendance and performance; had improved attitudes towards completing schoolwork; and had improved peer and family relationships (Tierney *et al*, 1995). They were not more likely to have an improved sense of self-esteem or an increased exposure to cultural awareness (*ibid*). Furthermore, the research found that one-to-one mentoring led to improvements in students' perceptions of scholastic competence and they had fewer unexcused absences from school (Morrow and Styles, 1995). BBBS stood out amongst other mentoring programmes in both the longevity of matches and the frequency of meetings between the volunteer and the young person. The study concluded that the organised structure and support of the programme was key to the programme's effectiveness. Intensive supervision and support of the mentors by paid staff, a requisite of the BBBS approach, was especially critical to successful outcomes (Furano *et al*, 1993).

Big Brothers Big Sisters International affiliations have been evaluated in a number of countries and results have shown that ongoing mentoring relationships have had a significant impact on young people. Results from these evaluations have indicated that children's lives have been enriched by the programme's methods and have led to more positive and constructive behaviour with regard to education, peer relationships, family relationships, use of drugs and alcohol, and acts of violence. Through use of an experimental design, an evaluation of the South African programme found that groups who received mentoring attached a higher value to their schooling (Louw, 2002). An evaluation of BBBS programmes in six different regions across Russia found that the children who had an adult big brother or big sister demonstrated improvements in relation to school work, decreased levels of drug and alcohol use, decreased levels of law breaking and display of aggressive behaviour. The evaluation concluded that the programme had a positive influence on the young persons' mental state, social status and self-expression and benefited the mentor by increasing their levels of personal and professional mobility (Teterski, 2002). Preliminary research carried out in the Czech Republic found that, above all, the programme was particularly effective in addressing the young persons 'confidence' and 'relations'<sup>6</sup> (Hrudkova, 2001).

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<sup>6</sup> Especially concerning other adults and one's peers. Relations with the family were less convincing.

Turner and Scherman (1996) examined the impact of a big brother on a little brothers' self-concept and behaviour, comparing boys who were matched to boys who were not. Results indicated that boys who had a big brother reported significantly higher self-concepts than did those who were unmatched, yet scores on behaviour did not show significant differences between the two groups. Abbott *et al* (1997) compared 22 BBBS boys with 22 non-participants over a one-year period. Their results did not indicate any changes in the areas investigated, including self-competence, academic performance, behavioural problems and parent child relationships of boys raised in single parent families with their mothers. They recommended a further study with a larger sample over a longer time frame.

### **2.5.3 What are the Characteristics of Effective Mentoring Programmes?**

So, what can research tell us about the characteristics of effective mentoring programmes? DuBois *et al*'s (2002) meta-review of 55 mentoring studies found that larger effect sizes emerged when:

- Programmes were characterised by practices that increased relationship quality and longevity, including ongoing training for mentors, structured activities for mentors and youth, expectations for frequency of contact, mechanisms for support and involvement from parents and monitoring of overall programme implementation.
- Youth experienced significant conditions of environmental risk and disadvantage but had not yet succumbed to severe problems.
- Relationships were characterised by more frequent contact, emotional closeness and lasted six months or longer.

Numerous research studies have emphasised the importance of mentor induction, training and ongoing support. Grossman (in Louw, 2002) found that, to prevent matches from ending prematurely, a consistent support structure needs to be in place offering ongoing support and supervision of the match. Important programme components are screening of volunteers to ensure they keep their commitment and understand the need to earn the youth's trust and orientation and training of volunteers so they understand their role and what is to be expected. Rhodes (1999) states that, since greater numbers of these practices predicted more positive outcomes for youth in mentoring programmes, one-to-one programmes that have met these criteria can assume positive outcomes.

Parra *et al* (2002) found that mentors' self-efficacy beliefs were important in terms of how the mentoring relationship developed, and suggest that initial program training should be strong enough to instil sufficient levels of skill and confidence in mentors. Ongoing availability of staff support is necessary to sustain high levels of mentor efficacy, while opportunities for mentors and youth to participate in agency-sponsored activities were also beneficial in

helping bonds to develop. Parra *et al* make the point that mutual support groups are a low cost way of providing support and encouragement to mentors. Yet, DuBois et al (*ibid*) note that initial training or orientation to mentors was provided to mentors in 71 per cent of studies, but that efforts to provide ongoing training once relationships have begun are much less common (23% of studies). They note that factors such as increased cost and reluctance to make excessive demands on volunteer mentors hinder the development of such infrastructure.

#### **2.5.4 What is an Effective Mentoring Relationship?**

A body of research evidence draws our attention to the fact that some styles of mentoring may be more effective than others. DuBois and Neville (1997) hold that greater understanding of relationship characteristics and their implications for mentoring effectiveness could aid in the development of more successful programmes. For example, when Slicker and Palmer (1993), evaluated the impact of a school based mentoring programme on 86 at-risk students, the initial results showed no difference between the treatment and control groups. However, when the differences between those students who were effectively mentored versus those who were ineffectively mentored were evaluated, they found that effectively mentored students had a lower dropout rate than ineffectively mentored students.

In order for mentoring relationships to effect positive developmental outcomes for youth, meaningful relationships must first develop. Morrow and Styles (1995) identified two broad categories of relationship, which they labelled prescriptive and developmental. Two thirds of the 82 relationships they examined were developmental. *Developmental* mentors devoted themselves to developing a strong connection to the youth, centering their involvement on developing a reliable, trusting relationship. They placed a strong emphasis on maintaining the relationship and ensuring it was enjoyable. Only when the relationship was strongly established, did they start to address other goals, such as strengthening the youth's good habits. They included the youth in the decision making process about activities and were willing to change their plans according to the youths' preferences. Youth in developmental relationships reported feeling a considerable sense of support from their adult friend – believing their friend would be there for them in times of need. “Just listening’ and ‘being able to talk about anything’ were perceived by youth as helpful in helping to resolve or cope with difficulties. Providing opportunities for fun was one of the ‘mainstays of the relationship’. These volunteers were more likely to make the relationship last long enough to be helpful to the youth.

*Prescriptive* relationships were those in which the goals of the volunteer were primary, with the adult setting the pace and ground rules for the relationship. The researchers found that

the prescriptive relationships had unrealistic ideas regarding how the goals could be achieved. They believed that their efforts could transform youth's values, habits, and skills within a year or two. Others required the youth to take equal responsibility for the relationship and providing feedback about its meaning. In this way, according to Morrow and Styles (1995), they set the basic ground rules of the relationship beyond the capacity of most early adolescents. Both the mentor and the youth were frustrated in these relationships. These mentors did partake in some fun activities but were more likely to push for "good for you" activities and offer fun as a reward for "good behaviour" (page v).

The conclusions of Morrow and Styles are challenged somewhat by the findings of Langhout *et al* (2004), who used data from the BBBS national evaluation to distinguish a range of relationships and evaluate their differential impact on youth outcomes. They found that positive outcomes were more likely to emerge from mentoring relationships characterised by structure, activity and expectations (i.e. conditional support) than from those characterised by little structure, low activity and unconditional support. On the basis of these findings, the authors suggest that adult mentors should be trained to be less like peers and more like good parents. Langhout *et al* (ibid) also point to the need to consider what constitutes success. For example, if success is construed as mentees positive feelings towards mentors, then less conditional support and less structure are paramount. If, on the other hand, success is defined in terms of social, psychological or academic outcomes, then a more structured approach appears to be beneficial. Being clear about the goals of the mentoring relationship should help guide how mentors are trained to be effective in reaching those goals.

Mentors generally rate relationships as providing significant benefits to youth (DuBois and Neville, 1997, Furano *et al*, 1993). DuBois and Neville found that greater mentor-youth contact and feelings of emotional closeness were each linked to mentors ratings of greater perceived youth benefits. They suggest that a requirement for mentoring programs should be the availability of appropriate supports to ensure that adult volunteers spend time with youth on a regular basis and in ways that foster close emotional bonds. Supports identified include training, ongoing staff supervision, programme events and monitoring procedures. Longer-term matches tend to spend less time together (Furano *et al*, 1993), possibly not fully realising the advantages that long-term relationships have to offer (DuBois and Neville, 1997).

Rhodes *et al* (2000) highlight the role that parental relationships can play in mediating mentors' effects. If parents feel involved in, as opposed to supplanted by, the provision of additional adult support in their children's lives, they are likely to reinforce mentors' positive influences. Based on a study of 959 adolescents, they found that improved parental relationships and scholastic competence in turn led to improvements in self-worth, school value and grades.

Sipe (1998) synthesised the literature on mentoring and concluded that successful mentors tended to be a steady and involved presence in the youths' lives, respecting the youth's viewpoints, respecting the youth's desire to have fun, and seeking support from staff where needed. Some researchers suggest that close relationships are more likely to emerge as the by-product of shared involvement in activities, rather than a focus on trying to build a relationship.

## **2.6 Conclusion - Putting Big Brothers Big Sisters into Context**

BBBS is a HSE / Foróige jointly managed service that responds to the new responsibilities placed on it under the terms of legislation. It aims to intervene, in a preventive way, with young people who need extra support or whose behaviour or social conditions are a cause of concern to themselves or others. While the programme comes under the family support domain of services, it is linked into child protection and alternative care provisions. It works under a strength based supportive ethos and takes into account the personal, family and community contexts of a young person. It operates as one of a range of services in the catchment area.

The BBBS model comprises orientations that facilitate social capital and social control theory and international research on risk and protective factors accredit the ethos of the model. The model involves working with various components of the wider ecology of the young person and seeks to encourage their interests and values, while opening them up to available resources. The programme attempts to bring community back to young people whose environmental factors may have excluded them.

A range of research highlights that mentoring can have positive outcomes with young people. The best outcomes from mentoring are achieved when strong relationships develop and where young people experience environmental risk and disadvantage. Positive outcomes are more likely to accrue where 'best practice' procedures are in place – including screening of volunteers, supervision, training, ongoing support and group activities. Where such practices are neglected, there is potential for programmes to have negative effects on youth

(DuBois et al, 2002). Within programmes, there will be a variation in mentoring styles, some being more effective than others – further research is required regarding the most effective style in a mentoring relationship. Abbott et al (1997) suggest that, due to the key role of the adult-child relationship in predicting improvement in child outcomes, the relationship should be monitored and evaluated closely, possibly aiding understanding of how or why relationships succeed and how this is related to program goals. Finally, the role of parents in mediating the effects of the mentor-mentee relationship has been identified in some studies.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Analysis of Big Brother Big Sister Programme Files**

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#### **3.1 Introduction**

From the commencement of the programme early in 2002 to the end of December 2004, a total of 61 community matches had been made by BBBS Ireland. As part of the research, an analysis of the match files kept by the Project Workers in relation to the programme was undertaken. The purpose of the analysis was to:

- establish the profile of young people participating in the programme in terms of age, gender, family situation, presenting needs and reasons for referral.
- to assess the duration of matches, whether a good relationship developed and to identify the types of issues impeding or supporting strong matches.

Consent was sought from littles and bigs to allow their files to be consulted by the researcher. Consent was denied by 6 littles and 6 bigs. The part of the file relating to the assessment of the 'big' was not perused as it was believed to be unnecessary and an infringement of the privacy of the volunteer. This Chapter presents the findings of the file analysis based on 50 files made available to the research team for review. Some statistics in relation to the overall cases are presented where available.

#### **3.2 Reasons for Referral**

Referral forms in the files indicate that, in most cases, the referred child is experiencing a combination of family and individual issues. On analysis of the files, including reasons for referrals, the research team concluded that the young people participating in the programme can be considered at risk of or experiencing adversity in their lives. The profile of participants corresponds with the profile of young people the programme aimed to target.

One or more of the following family issues were present for all young people participating:

- Lone parent family
- Death of parent
- Parental divorce or separation
- Reconstituted family
- Financial poverty
- Large family
- Parental ill-health - mental or physical
- Parent experienced childhood abuse

- Parent experienced domestic abuse
- Parent(s) have alcohol problems
- Family member(s) involved in crime / in prison
- Difficult family relationships
- Siblings have problems with social or community adjustment
- Sibling(s) in care
- Whereabouts of parent unknown
- Rural isolation
- Illiteracy.

In addition to the family issues they were dealing with, the children were also described by referrers as experiencing one or more of the following personal issues:

- Shyness
- Low self-esteem
- Loneliness
- Unhappiness
- Experienced abuse
- Witnessed domestic violence
- Taking an adult role in the home
- Bullying
- Communication difficulties
- In foster care
- In residential care
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Emotionally guarded
- Asylum seeker / unaccompanied minor.

The reasons given for referral are as follows:

- She / he would benefit from a positive female / male role model
- The match will provide social outlets – time away from home
- The young person will gain cultural enrichment
- The match will support the young persons' self-development

The following vignettes give a flavour for why young people were referred to the programme. In order to protect the privacy of families, they are fictionalised descriptions, but are based on real referrals.

*Girl (14) lives in a very rural area with her mother and brother. The children suffered verbal and emotional abuse from their father. Her younger brother is displaying challenging behaviour, which takes up much of the family energy and attention of services. Referrer feels that this girl would benefit from some individual attention and a positive role model in her life.*

*Girl (12) experienced separation of her parents following an abusive relationship. Their father is in England. Mother has had a new baby with her new partner. The girls' behaviour is causing problems at home and at school. Her referrer feels she is a lovely girl who would benefit from a positive role model and extra support at present.*

*Boy (14) lives with his mother, father and 2 siblings. Their home situation is difficult due to parental mental illness. The boy has experienced bullying. The referrer felt he would benefit from a support outside of home or school who he could talk to.*

*Girl (15) lives with her father and three siblings. Her mother died a few years ago and the girl takes on a lot of adult responsibilities in the home. Her referrer felt she would benefit from having a female friend to talk to and offer her an opportunity to get out of the house.*

*Boy (12) lives with his parents and sister. Both parents attend psychiatric services. His Dad has a history of alcohol abuse and was abusive at home. The boy has difficulty making friends and wants to be at home with his Mum all the time. The referrer feels he would benefit from new relationships and experiences.*

*Girl (14) lives with her mother and 3 siblings. Her Mum has poor parenting skills. The girl is given a lot of responsibility in the family home. She does not have a lot of friends and spends most of her free time watching TV. The referrer feels she would benefit from getting out of the house and having someone to talk to.*

Detailed case notes and match evaluation reports in the files indicate that many of the young people involved in the BBBS programme continued to deal with personal and family adversity throughout the match. For example, there were references to suicide attempts on the part of the young person, arrest or imprisonment of a family member, parental illness and breakdown in parents' relationships with each other or with partners.

In situations where applications for young people were rejected by the BBBS Programme, the young person was deemed to be:

- Of inappropriate age
- Lacking parental support
- Presenting with needs too great for volunteer intervention (e.g. severe behavioural problems / sexual abuse)
- Unable to develop positive relationship with adults
- Showing poor social skills
- In emergency placement / custody issues unresolved
- Unreliable
- Not willing to participate
- Moved away
- More appropriate for another teenage service.

Two thirds of participants on the BBS programme were referred by NYP staff, as Table 1 illustrates. Social workers, teachers, residential care staff, parent and a variety of other professionals also made referrals. It should be noted that these figures do not represent total referrals to the programme, just the referrers of participants. The sources of referrals are mostly organisations that work only with young people experiencing adversity in their lives, and in most cases the young people will have been referred to these organisations for help.

	Frequency	Percent
NYP Staff	33	66.0
Social Work	4	8.0
Teacher	3	6.0
Springboard	3	6.0
Residential care	2	4.0
Parent	1	2.0
THI staff	1	2.0
Psychologist	1	2.0
School Completion Programme	1	2.0
Unknown	1	2.0
	50	100.0

**Table 1: Referral sources by frequency and percentage**

### 3.3 Gender Breakdown of Participants

One in five community matches made (n=12) involved males, while 4 out of 5 were female (n=49). While there was a greater demand for places for boys than girls, staff could not accommodate them due to a difficulty in recruiting male volunteers compared to female volunteers. As a result, less males were referred to the programme as potential referrers were advised that places were unlikely to be available for them.

### 3.4 Age of Participants

Based on the 50 cases reviewed, the majority of the young people participating fell into the 11-14 age range on intake, with 12 and 13 years the most common ages for young people on the programme. The youngest participants were aged 9 years, while the eldest was aged 17 years on intake<sup>7</sup>.

Age	Frequency	Percent
9	3	6.0
10	3	6.0
11	7	14.0
12	10	20.0
13	11	22.0
14	8	16.0
15	4	8.0
16	3	6.0
17	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

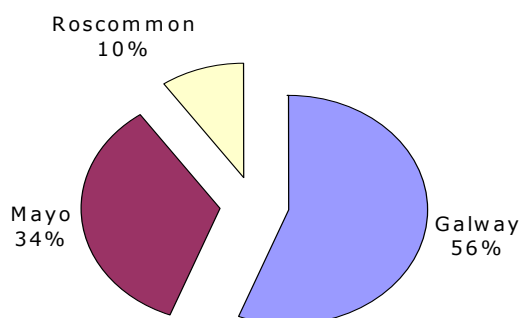
**Table 2: Ages of participants by frequency and percentage**

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<sup>7</sup> While Foroige works with 10-18 year olds, children falling outside this age range may be included subject to the special permission of the CEO.

### 3.5 Geographical Location

Of the 61 matches made up to the end of 2004, 34 (56%) were made in Galway, 21 (34%) were made in Mayo and 6 (10%) in Roscommon. At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004, a total of 38 matches were still in progress, with 21 in Galway, 14 in Mayo and 3 in Roscommon.



**Figure 3: County breakdown of matches**

The matches are distributed throughout the Western counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. Table 3 below illustrates the broad geographical regions the young people were from. These areas correspond to the location of NYPs and family support services, with the exception of Newport and Claremorris where matches were made by the Project Worker on an outreach basis. Some outreach matches were also made by NYP Project Workers for children in care.

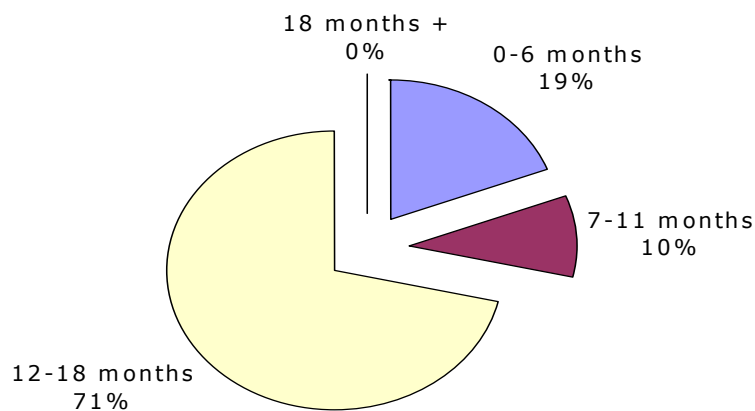
	Frequency	Percent
Newport	2	4.0
Claremorris	2	4.0
Castlebar	5	10.0
Westport	1	2.0
Ballina	4	8.0
Castlerea	2	4.0
Boyle	4	8.0
Ballinfoile	9	18.0
Westside	9	18.0
Ballybane	8	16.0
Ballinasloe	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0

**Table 3: Broad distribution of matches throughout the region**

In Galway, in many cases the young people and their mentors come from different areas of the city. In Mayo, more than half the matches come from the same town and the remainder live at a distance of between ten and twenty five miles from each other.

### 3.6 Match Duration

Of the 50 files reviewed, 45 per cent were matches that had closed, while 55 per cent were still open. The duration of each match was analysed for closed matches. Figure 4 below indicates that 71 per cent of closed matches (n=15) lasted for a year to 18 months. One in five closed matches (19%, n=4) lasted for six months or less, while ten per cent (n=2) lasted between 7 and 11 months.



**Figure 4: Duration of closed matches**

Reasons for early closure of matches included:

- Participant moved away
- Inconsistency / lack of interest on the part of the volunteer or young person
- Lack of commitment / time on the part of the volunteer
- Volunteer found it difficult

### 3.7 Match Activities

The matches engage in activities of their own choice for at least one hour per week. Activities have included having a coffee, lunch, going for a walk or drive, hanging out, playing music, swimming and swimming lessons, snooker, cinema, shows, arts and crafts, soccer, bowling, library, homework, computers, photography and celebrating special events – e.g. confirmation, birthday. In Galway, the GAF Youth Café is opened once every second month for the young people and volunteers to come together and engage in activities such as board games, cards or playing music. Other months, group activities such as cooking or pottery are organised in the NYPs. From time to time, events such as visits to adventure centres, karaoke, treasure hunts or parties are organised.

### 3.8 Analysis of Match Relationships

Reports of quarterly evaluations and case notes in the match files offer insights into how each match progressed and was valued by all stakeholders. The following four broad categories are used to provide an assessment of how relationships developed, and based on this, estimations can be made regarding whether or not the young person gained from the match.

Very Good: Quarterly evaluations and case notes in the match file indicate that a genuine bond of friendship developed between the ‘big’ and ‘little’. Few problems arose, but any that did were overcome. All parties – big, little, parent, Project Worker – are happy with the progress of the match. There is evidence that match goals are being worked on and achieved. It is likely that the young person has benefited from the match.

Good: While overall the friendship between the big and little was good, it may have been beset by problems or insecurities from one or more parties. Bigs and littles may give verbal assurances at evaluations that all is well but the case notes show that one or both parties may be less than fully committed to or enjoying the match - yet meetings are fairly regular and the friendship continues. It is likely that the young person has gained some benefit from the match.

Fair: Matches described as ‘fair’ are those where there is some evidence of friendship between the big and little, but where the relationship never fully gets into its stride, for various reasons. Some of these matches may end early due to unforeseen circumstances before a proper bond has developed. The benefits, if any, to the young person are likely to be minimal.

Poor: Poor matches are those that never take off after the match is made or end prematurely due to irrevocable problems. It is likely that the young person will not have benefited from these matches.

Table 4 below outlines the numbers of matches that the researchers believe fall into each of the four categories, based on information contained in the match file. Of the 50 files assessed, 26 (52%) were categorised as 'Very Good', 14 (28%) as 'Good', 5 (10%) as 'Fair' and 4 (8%) as 'Poor'. In one case, the match had just commenced so it was too early to make an assessment.

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	26	52.0
Good	14	28.0
Fair	5	10.0
Poor	4	8.0
Missing	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

**Table 4: Analysis of relationships based on reports on file**

From this analysis, it can be estimated that the relationships formed in 80 per cent of cases have been good or very good. Obviously this analysis cannot confirm with any certainty that benefits have accrued, but demonstrates that factors are in place which indicate that the match is likely to be beneficial for the young person. i.e. a stable enduring lasting relationship. Just under one fifth of matches (18%) appear to have encountered some difficulty as a result of poor bonding, personal difficulties for the little or big, one party moving away or other problems. Based on research findings in other areas, it is unlikely that the young person will benefit from these matches.

### **3.9 Assessment of File Keeping**

All files indicated that the proper procedures regarding intake and assessment had been followed as dictated by the BBBS programme manual. There was less consistency in relation to match supervision – for example, there were some cases of where the timing of evaluation meetings was allowed to slip for several months. These slippages, where present, often coincided with a change of staff member. In the majority of cases, however, evaluations and match supervision was undertaken thoroughly and in line with the programme manual.

Record keeping was generally of a very high standard, as expected under the BBBS programme. However, there were a small number of cases where files were incomplete and up-to-date information had not been included.

### **3.10 Summary**

61 matches were made up to the end of December 2004 by the BBBS programme. Four out of five were female. Analysis of the files undertaken as part of this research indicates that:

- The profile of young people participating in the programme indicates that they are at risk of or experiencing adversity and are thus in line with the target group that the programme aims to reach.
- Based on an assessment of case notes and quarterly evaluations, approximately four out of every five matches were assessed as 'very good' or 'good', in that a good relationship was formed which was a source of mutual enjoyment for the little and big. Approximately one out of five matches did not become well established.
- Record keeping and match supervision was generally very good, but with some minor exceptions.

## Chapter 4

### Little's Assessment of the Quality of their Mentoring Relationships

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#### 4.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter Two, evaluations of mentoring programmes have shown that the one to one relationship between a young person and a supportive adult can be beneficial to the young person. However, the benefits will accrue only from relationships that are well-developed, enduring and supportive (Public Private Ventures, 2002). Relationships that are short-lived, break down or fail to engage the young person will not have positive outcomes and may have negative effects on the young person. For this reason, it is in the interests of the programme and the young people to assess the strengths and weaknesses of matches, identify the sources of problems and, if necessary, make changes to practices.

Public / Private Ventures designed a survey to assess the strengths and shortcomings of matches. This survey was used in this study with 26 young people who are currently or have been matched on the BBBS programme<sup>8</sup>. It measures three aspects of the mentor-youth relationship from the perspective of the young person. The three aspects are:

1. *The extent to which the relationship is centred on the youth.* Research has shown that a mentor who takes the young person's preferences and interests into account are more likely to show improvement in behaviour and attitudes than are youth whose mentor is less interested in them.
2. *The youth's emotional engagement.* Research has also shown that young people who feel happy and positive around their mentor are more likely to show improved attitudes and behaviour than those who are less happy.
3. *The extent to which the youth is dissatisfied with the relationship:* Again, if a young person is dissatisfied, the benefits of mentoring are less likely to accrue than if they are satisfied. It follows that more satisfying relationships are more likely to be effective than those that are unsatisfying (Public Private Ventures, 2002).

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the survey was undertaken with a sample of littles only and gives an indication rather than a definitive assessment of all relationships.

By using the survey as part of the evaluation, it was hoped to gain an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of matches to:

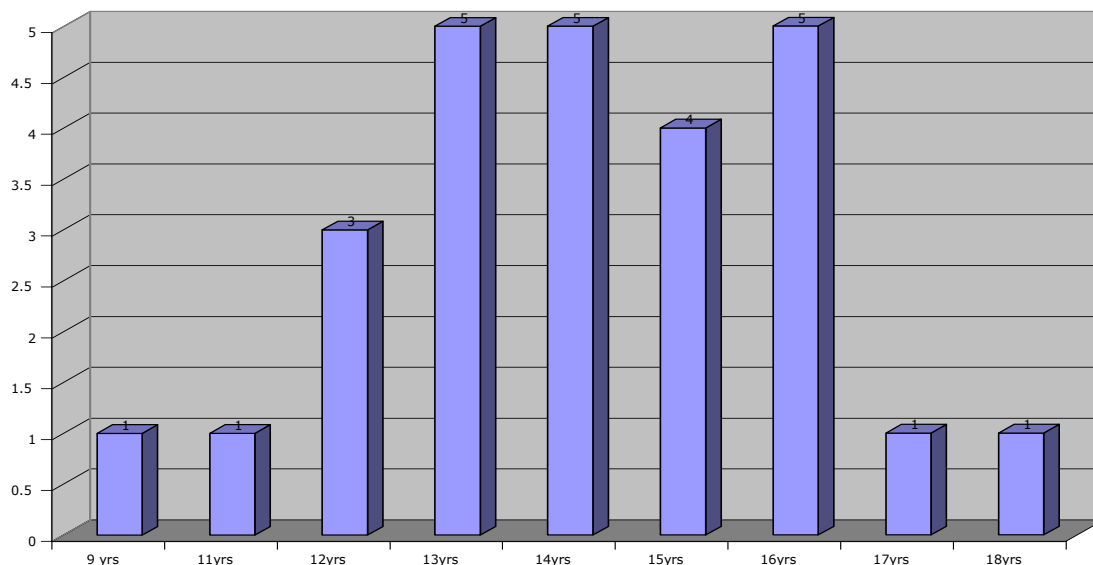
- Establish whether the relationships created are perceived by the young people as strong, as measured through their level of youth centredness, emotional engagement and satisfaction.
- Use the findings of the survey to affirm current procedures and / or to identify ways in which the programme can be strengthened or improved.

In addition to the survey, the young people were asked three open-ended questions to allow them to give their opinions on the programme. The answers to these questions are outlined in Section 4.6.

## 4.2 Sample Description

Of the 26 young people who took part in the survey, the highest percentage of respondents were from Mayo (58%), 31 per cent from Galway and 11 per cent from Roscommon.

Girls represented 73 per cent of the sample and boys 27 per cent. The ages of respondents ranged from 9 to 16, with most falling into the 13-16 age group, as illustrated in Figure 5.



**Figure 5: Age range of survey respondents**

### 4.3 Youth Centred Relationships

As mentioned above, the questionnaire examines three aspects of the mentoring relationship, the first of which is the extent to which the relationship is centred on the youth. The young people were asked 5 questions in relation to how youth centred they feel the mentoring relationship to be. The young person was asked to indicate on a scale how true they believe the following statements to be:

- My mentor almost always asks me what I want to do
- My mentor is always interested in what I want to do
- My mentor and I like to do a lot of the same things
- My mentor thinks of fun and interesting things to do
- My mentor and I do things I really want to do.

Scores for the answers, when calculated, are grouped into three ranges, as follows:

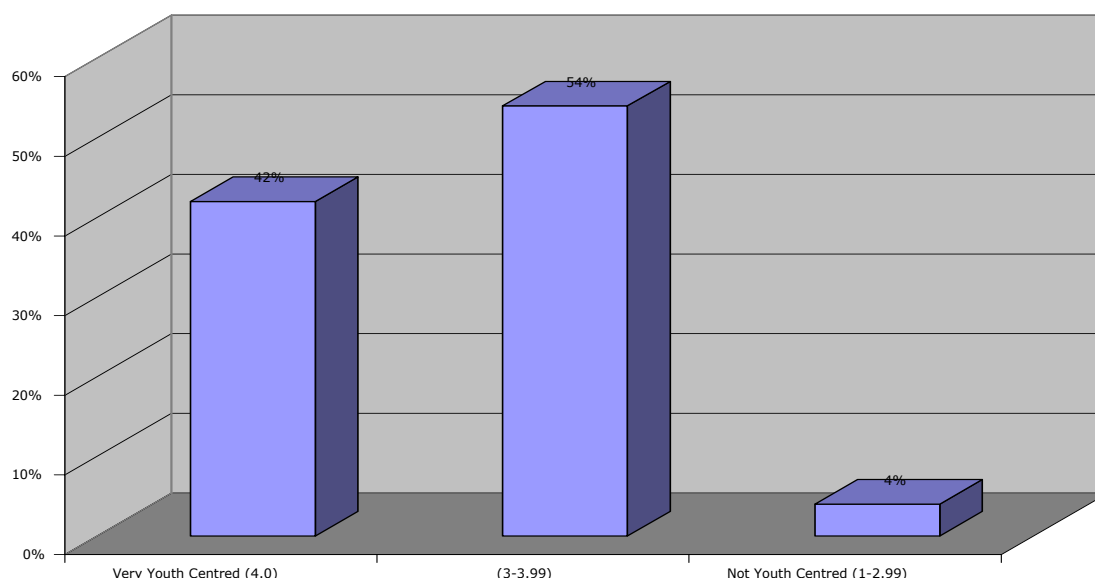
- A score of 4.0 indicates that the relationship is *very youth centred*
- A score of 3 to 3.99<sup>9</sup>
- A score of 1.0 to 2.99 indicates that the relationship is *not youth centred*.

The average for the overall sample was a **score of 3.7**, which is in the upper part of the middle range. The survey was originally used with youth in US BBBS programmes who had been meeting for an average of 12.8 months. The score for youth-centred relationships in those programmes was 3.69. While the average relationship length is unknown for the BBBS Ireland survey participants, it is unlikely to exceed this average length. This average result, therefore, compares favourably with this benchmark provided by Public / Private Ventures.

While the average across all respondents is a useful result, it is open to being skewed by a few particularly strong or particularly weak relationships. The range helps us to overcome this problem by showing how many relationships fall into each of the scoring ranges. As Figure 6 illustrates, 42 per cent of relationships were found to be *very youth centred*. Just over half (54%) were in the middle range, while just 4 per cent (n=1) were found to be *not youth centred*.

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<sup>9</sup> No title is provided for the mid-range score by P/PV



**Figure 6: Youth centred relationships (by range)**

Table 5 below outlines the percentage of responses provided to each statement. The young people agreed that the mentor almost always asks them what they want to do, is interested in what they want to do and thinks of fun and interesting things to do. Some respondents did not agree with the statements that they and their mentor like to do a lot of the same things and that they do things the young person really wants to do.

	<b>Very true</b>	<b>Sort of true</b>	<b>Not very true</b>	<b>Not true at all</b>
My mentor almost always asks me what I want to do	85%	15%		
My mentor is always interested in what I want to do	92%	8%		
My mentor and I like to do a lot of the same things	58%	35%	4%	4%
My mentor thinks of fun and interesting things to do	73%	27%		
My mentor and I do things I really want to do	69%	23%	8%	

**Table 5: Percentage responses to 'Youth Centred Relationship' questions**

## 4.4 Young Persons' Emotional Engagement

A series of questions were asked to measure the degree to which the young person enjoys the relationship and is emotionally engaged in it. The young person was asked to indicate on a scale how true they believe the following statements to be:

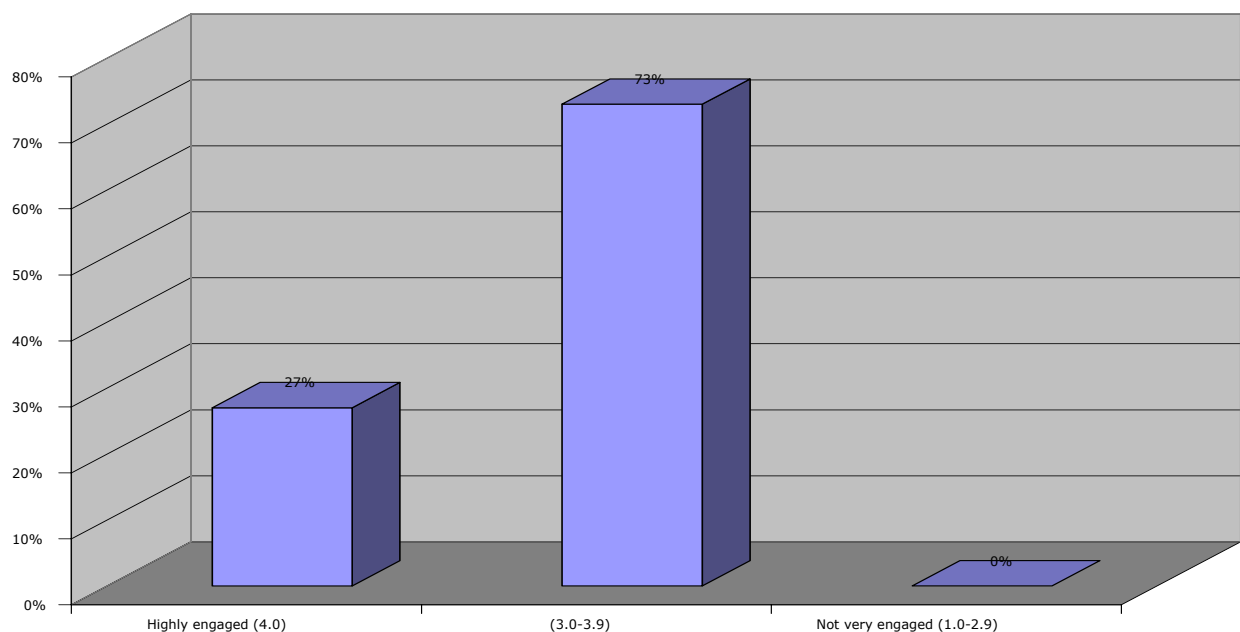
- When I'm with my mentor, I feel special
- When I'm with my mentor, I feel excited
- When I'm with my mentor, I feel sad

- When I'm with my mentor, I feel important
- When I'm with my mentor, I feel bored
- When I'm with my mentor, I feel mad
- When I'm with my mentor, I feel disappointed
- When I'm with my mentor, I feel happy

Scores for the answers, when calculated are grouped into three ranges, as follows:

- A score of 4.0 indicates that the relationship is *highly engaged*
- A score of 3 to 3.99 is in the mid range
- A score of 1.0 to 2.99 indicates that the relationship is *not very engaged*.

The average for the overall sample was a **score of 3.57**, which is in the middle part of the middle range. This compares favourably with a score of 3.55 for youth in US BBBS programme, a benchmark provided by Public / Private Ventures. As Figure 7 illustrates, over a quarter, 27 per cent of relationships were found to be *highly engaged*. Almost three quarters (73%) were in the middle range, while none were found to be *not very engaged*.



**Figure 7: Young persons 'Emotional Engagement' (by range)**

Table 6 below outlines the percentage of responses provided to each statement. On the positive side, all said that it is ‘true’ or ‘sort of true’ that they feel happy when they are with their mentor and none of the young people indicated that they feel sad, mad or disappointed when with their mentor. What is less positive is that 12 per cent did not agree that they felt special when with their mentor, 16 per cent do not feel important when with their mentor and 21 per cent feel bored when with their mentor.

	<b>Very true</b>	<b>Sort of true</b>	<b>Not very true</b>	<b>Not true at all</b>
When I’m with my mentor, I feel special	42%	46%	8%	4%
When I’m with my mentor, I feel excited	39%	46%		15%
When I’m with my mentor, I feel sad				100%
When I’m with my mentor, I feel important	27%	57%	12%	4%
When I’m with my mentor, I feel bored	17%	4%	8%	71%
When I’m with my mentor, I feel mad				100%
When I’m with my mentor, I feel disappointed				100%
When I’m with my mentor, I feel happy	69%	31%		

**Table 6: Percentage responses to ‘Emotional Engagement’ questions**

## 4.5 Youth Satisfaction / Dissatisfaction

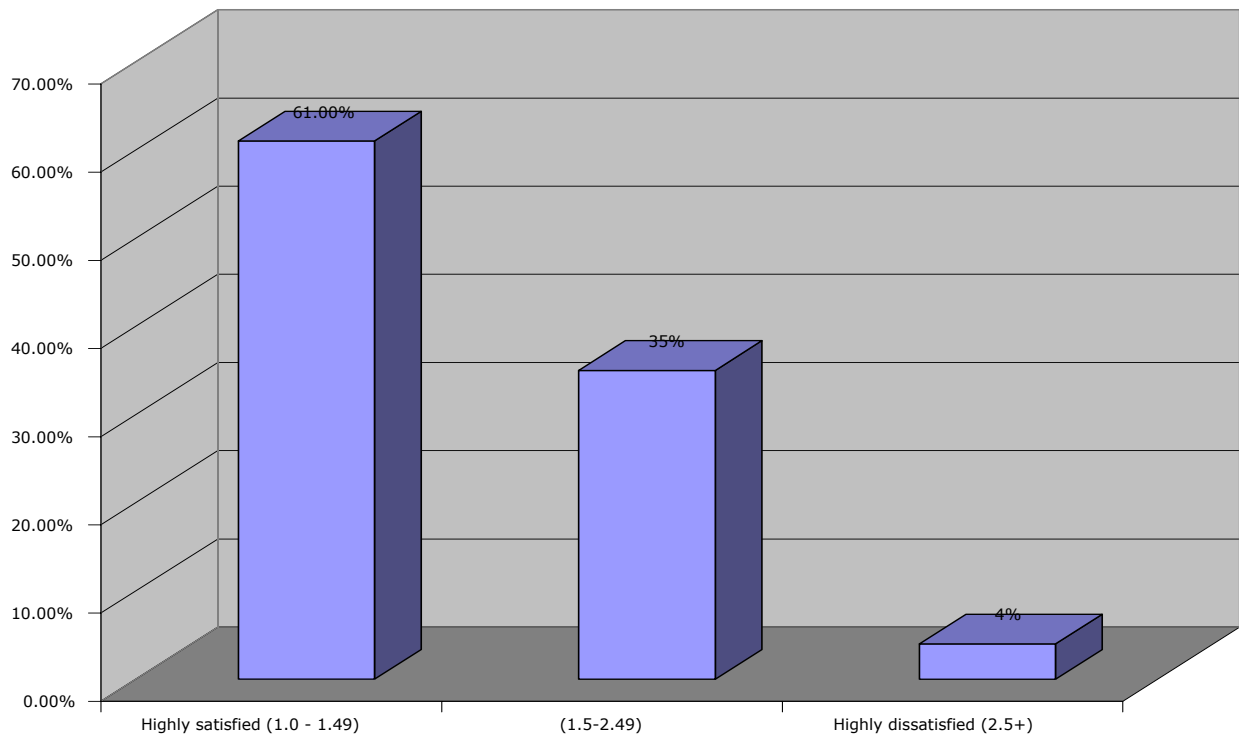
A series of questions were asked to measure the degree to which the young person is satisfied or dissatisfied with the relationship. The young person was asked to indicate on a scale how true they believe the following statements to be:

- My mentor makes fun of me in ways I don’t like
- Sometimes my mentor promises we will do something; then we don’t do it
- When my mentor gives me advice, it makes me feel stupid
- I feel I can’t trust my mentor with secrets – my mentor would tell my parent / guardian
- I wish my mentor asked me more about what I think
- I wish my mentor knew me better.

Scores for the answers, when calculated are grouped into three ranges, as follows:

- A score of 1.0 to 1.49 indicates that the young person is *highly satisfied*
- A score of 1.5 to 2.49
- A score of 2.5 to 2.99 indicates that the relationship is *highly dissatisfied*.

The average for the overall sample was a **score of 1.37**, which indicates that the average young person in the sample is highly satisfied with their mentoring relationship. The average score for US programmes provided by Public / Private Ventures was 1.61, which indicates that the average from this study compares very favourably with this benchmark. As Figure 8 illustrates, almost two thirds of relationships (61%) were found to be *highly satisfied*. Thirty five per cent were in the middle range, while four per cent (n-1) were found to be *highly dissatisfied*.



**Figure 8** Youth satisfaction / dissatisfaction with mentoring relationship (by range)

Table 7 below outlines the percentage of responses provided to each statement. None of the respondents indicated that their mentor makes fun of them in ways they don't like. With regard to keeping secrets, 23 per cent of respondents felt that they could not trust their mentor with secrets, feeling that they would tell their parent / guardian. Twelve per cent of the sample (12%) wish that their mentor know them better, while 8% wishes their mentor asked them more about what they think and 8% feel stupid when their mentor gives them advice. While these figures must be balanced against the fact that the majority of responses are positive, they do highlight areas in which mentors need to be sensitive.

	Very true	Sort of true	Not very true	Not true at all
My mentor makes fun of me in ways I don't like				100%
Sometimes my mentor promises we will do something; then we don't do it	8%	15%	15%	61%
When my mentor gives me advice, it makes me feel stupid	4%	4%	8%	85%
I feel I can't trust my mentor with secrets – my mentor would tell my parent guardian	4%	19%	4%	73%
I wish my mentor asked me more about what I think	4%	4%	11%	81%
I wish my mentor knew me better		8%	16%	72%

**Table 7: Percentage responses to 'Youth dissatisfaction' questions**

## 4.6 What Young People Like / Do not Like about having a Mentor

The young people were asked the open ended question, *what do you like about having a mentor?*

A wide range of answers were given, including the following:

- Someone to talk to / confide in
- Someone to bring you places
- Someone to share activities with
- Good if you have no big brother / sister
- Someone to have fun with
- Something to do if you are bored
- Gets you out of the house
- Someone to take an interest in you
- Broadens your circle of friends / contacts.

The following are a sample of the answers given:

*"I like that I get on well with her and that I can spend time with her. I like going to her house and doing things we're both interested in, e.g. going for walks."* (Girl, 18, Galway)

*"We got to do a variety of different things, we got to do things I wouldn't do otherwise, we had loads of fun, (mentor) is great craic, we got to meet loads of different people."* (Girl, 12, Mayo)

*"It's a brilliant idea, I could talk to him about anything that I wouldn't be able to say to others."* (Boy, 16, Galway)

*"You get out of the house, its fun. I would advise someone to get into it if someone's doing nothing for two hours. It's a class pastime"* (Boy, 13, Mayo)

*"I like having a mentor because I have no one older than me but my brother"* (Girl, 15, Galway)

*"Going out. Being able to talk to someone, having someone you didn't know now part of the family."* (Girl, 14, Galway)

*"It's something to do with a person you get to know and spending time with them, getting to know them better."* (Girl, 15, Mayo)

*"When I have nothing to do or bored I go somewhere with her"* (Girl, 13, Mayo)

*"She's very nice and I like because she's young and we like the same sort of things".* (Girl, 14, Roscommon)

*"I like having a mentor because I like meeting up and talking and even if we don't do something very exciting, we still have fun"* (Girl, 13, Mayo)

*"They bring you good places"* (Girl, 9, Galway)

*"I like having a mentor because its interesting to meet different people and my mentor is very nice. She always takes an interest in what I want to do and she takes an interest in my life. She is very cool."* (Girl, 14, Mayo)

Asked if there was anything they did not like about having a mentor, all replied no, with the exception of the following five comments.

- *“Going to museums”*
- *“We don’t meet up as much as we should”*
- *“I feel like I’m disappointing her when I can’t meet her, if I’ve something else on”*
- *“Sometimes he comes late or he changes the day at the last minute”*
- *“Mentor does not enjoy sport”*

#### **4.7 Other Comments made by young people about Big Brother Big Sister**

*“It’s a shame not many people do it cause if your well matched its great craic”* (Girl, 17, Roscommon)

*“Would encourage other young people to do it because you would get the chance to do something you normally wouldn’t get to do”. (Boy, 16, Mayo)*

*“I think if you’re a young person and you don’t have much to do, you should get one.”* (Girl, 18, Galway)

*“It’s a brilliant idea!”* (Boy, 16, Galway)

*“I think it is a good system because some people are lonely childs.”* (Girl, 12, Mayo)

*“They’re great and a great idea”. (Boy, 13, Mayo)*

*“It should continue, it’s really good, especially for children who are sad. Its really good for them.”* (Girl, 14, Galway)

*“Its good for a person who has no brothers / sister or doesn’t see his / her brothers / sister very much”. (Boy, 16, Mayo)*

*“I think that it’s a very good idea because people that aren’t very outgoing or don’t have many friends, it’s a good opportunity for them to meet new people and to have someone who they can talk to. “* (Girl, 13, Mayo)

*“It was great fun especially when we did the things in Ballina and met up with all the other bigs and littles. I also loved the last day (mentor) and I had together when we went to Galway”.*

(Girl, 12, Mayo)

## **4.8 Summary**

Twenty-six young people who are participants on the BBBS programme completed a survey designed to assess the quality of their mentoring relationship. In all three areas measured by the survey, the results compare favourably with a benchmark provided by Public Private Ventures, which was derived from research undertaken in the USA. The results are positive, indicating that the BBBS Ireland relationships are youth centred, with 42% presenting as very youth centred, 54% in the mid-range and 4% as not youth centred. The youth are emotionally engaged in the mentoring relationship, with 27% presenting as highly engaged and 73% in the mid range. The respondents are, on average, highly satisfied with their mentor, with 61% falling into the highly satisfied category, 35% in the mid range and 4% not satisfied.

Young people identified a wide range of things they like about having a mentor, including someone to confide in, someone to bring you places and someone to have fun and do things with. Their comments indicate that they feel the programme is very relevant to young people, particularly young people who are lonely, sad or do not have the support of family and friends.

Close attention to the answers provided by ‘littles’ is reassuring in most cases but highlight some areas of concern. For example, 21% of respondents agreed that they sometimes feel bored with their mentor, 23% indicated that they feel they can not trust their mentor with secrets in case they would tell their parent / guardian, 23% said their mentor sometimes promises they will do something and then they do not do it and 12% said they wished their mentor knew them better.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Big Brother / Big Sister Perspectives**

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#### **5.1 Introduction**

This Chapter outlines the perspectives of mentors regarding their experiences of the BBBS programme. This includes their reasons for becoming a mentor, their concerns about becoming a mentor, their views of their roles, how well they feel they get on with their little, what they find easy or difficult about being a mentor and whether they believe the young person has benefited from the match. An assessment of the support provided by the Project Worker and areas in which they would like additional support are also outlined. Finally, recommendations made by mentors for the future development of the programme are outlined.

The data in this Chapter is derived from a combination of questionnaires and focus groups. All 'bigs' were invited to take part in the research sessions, consisting of a focus group and individual questionnaire. Those who could not take part were subsequently sent the questionnaire and asked to return it to the researcher. A total of 29 'Big Brothers and Sisters' completed questionnaires, 16 of whom also took part in focus group sessions. Just over half of respondents are Galway based (56%), 34 per cent are Mayo based and 10 per cent are Roscommon based.

#### **5.2 Reasons for Becoming a Mentor**

Asked their reasons for becoming a mentor, the most common answer was that they wanted to 'give something back' and contribute to society through their volunteering on the programme. As one volunteer said:

*"I always felt very lucky in life so in turn I wanted to help those who were not so fortunate as I am. I saw the notice in my local town and I felt this was a good way to give a little back. I am also interested in working with young people as I feel early teens is a very important time and a lot of guidance is needed."*

*"Life was very good to me, then at the age of fifty-something when my children were out of the house and me on job sharing, I felt it would be time to pay back into society."*

The essence of the model, providing friendship and support to a young person appealed to a number of volunteers, who feel that the teenage years are difficult and that the support of an adult would be valuable.

*“I remember how confusing and frustrating it was as a child / teenager to only have either adults in authority or friends your own age – didn’t necessarily have someone outside the circle to confide in. So when I heard about the BBBS programme, I thought I could be of help to someone who needed it. Also wanted to do it because it sounded fun!”*

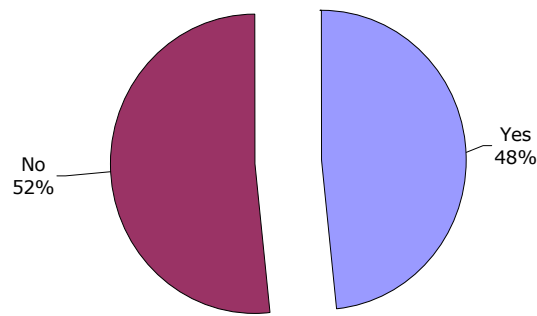
*“Wanted to help children / teenagers because I believe if they are positively influenced at this stage, it will effect the rest of their lives. Wanted to make a big difference (positive) to one person rather than a little difference to many people”.*

The fact that the work was individual rather than group based was also cited as a reason by some people. A number of people were attracted to BBBS because it was a model that had been evaluated and proven effective elsewhere, and had clear guidelines and structure. One respondent said that because she has no sister of her own, she wanted to ‘see what it would be like to have a little sister to care for and build up a friendship with’. Two mentors who had recently moved to Ireland from other EU countries saw it as an opportunity to get to know young Irish people. A number of mentors said that they work in the health or social care profession and welcomed the opportunity to befriend a young person outside of their work environment. Finally, the fact that the programme would be fun, enjoyable and interesting was a motivating factor for people to become involved.

### **5.3 Concerns Regarding Becoming a Mentor**

Roughly half of all respondents reported that they had concerns about becoming a mentor, while half did not have any concerns. The key concerns identified were:

- Worries that the relationship would not work.
- Their own ability to be a mentor, including fear that he/ she would say something that would negatively affect the mentee, that he/ she would have enough to offer a young person.
- That the little’s family background would be ‘alien’ and / or that the mentor would not be accepted by the little’s family.
- The time commitment involved (i.e. would it be too much commitment, would the time given represent a good use of voluntary time).
- That the young person would be uninterested or apathetic.
- How they would manage to fill the time every week.



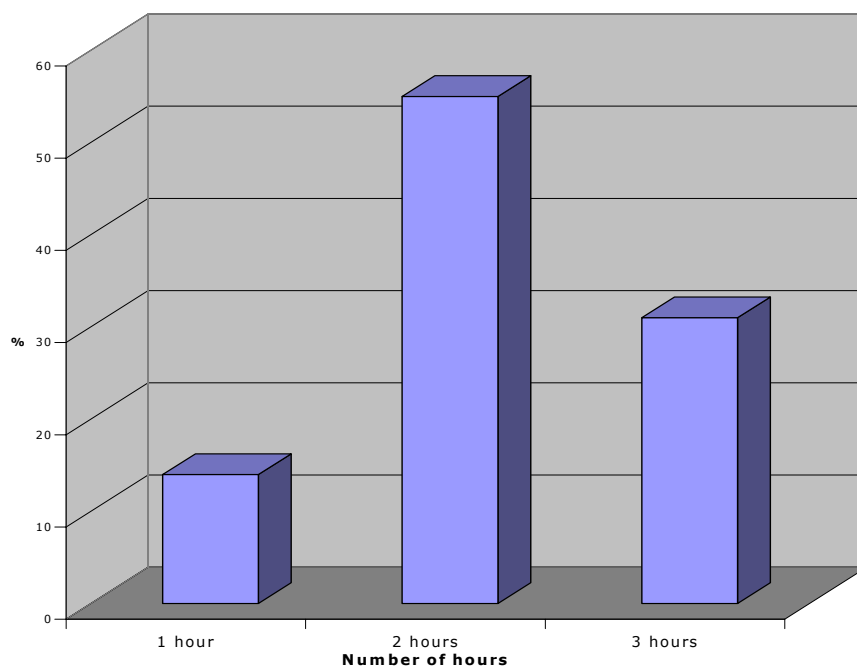
**Figure 9: Percentage of *Bigs* who had concerns about becoming a mentor.**

Interestingly, given the one-to-one nature of the programme, just two mentors identified child protection issues as concerns. One mentor said that he or she was 'conscious of false allegations in light of the current climate and media coverage of such matters as child abuse', while another said that they 'made sure I followed guidelines so as not to put myself or the little at risk'.

## 5.4 Time Spent on Mentoring Role

Just over half of all mentors (55%) reported that they spend an average of two hours per week with their little brother or sister, just under one third spend 3 hours (31%), while 14% spend one hour a week with their Little, as illustrated in Figure 10.

In addition to this, almost all mentors (93%) spend up to one hour travelling to meet with the Little Brother or Sister, while 7 per cent spend up to two hours.



**Figure 10: Time spent by bigs meeting with littles every week**

## 5.5 Mentors' Views of their Roles

Asked what they see as their role as a big brother / sister, a range of answers were given. Most respondents mentioned offering friendship and support to the young person as central to their role.

*"To be a supportive big sister who would encourage the little to be the best they can be. To give them hope and inspiration to show them that there is a big world out there which is theirs for the taking and also what they put into life they will get out of it."*

*"Mainly to be a friend, a good listener and to be understanding so that if they have any problems, they can share them with you and you can try to resolve them together."*

The ability of a big brother or sister to introduce the little to new activities, ideas and perspectives that they would not otherwise have access to was highlighted by a number of respondents.

*"I see myself as a good friend, support and advice giver to my little sister. I am a person who she can discover or experience a different perspective with. I see myself as someone who can be there when she needs me and learn new ways of doing things."*

*"Someone to offer new and interesting things to do / think about – something outside the norm, be a friend – have fun"*

Allied to this is the importance of 'time out' from their routine, peer group, family and the pressures of their daily lives.

*"To be a friend to my little whom they can trust and confide in and to offer them some time out from those who are around them constantly. To be there for a chat about everyday life or something they would like to seek advice about but don't feel at ease asking others."*

A number of 'bigs' mentioned that they could offer advice and guidance and act as a role model for the young person.

*"I try to encourage my little to do the best they can and also try to impart some values to him. I sometimes act as an advice giver."*

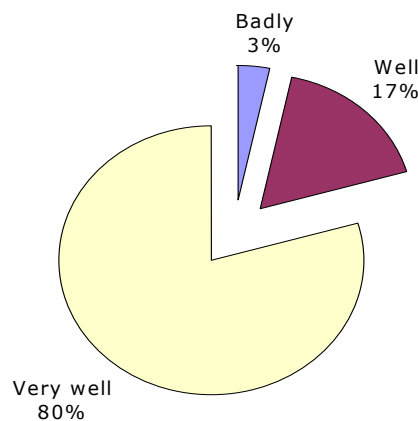
*To act as a good example to her, so she might think “What would M do in a situation like this?”*

The importance of a non-judgemental listening ear was emphasised in a number of responses.

*“To be there every week regardless of whatever problems or otherwise are going on in my little’s life. She can be certain I will meet her and will listen and not judge and we will enjoy our time together.”*

*“To respect the ‘little’ brother and his ways, not to judge him, to give him some space, to listen to him, to play with him, to be reliable, to show him different ways (model).”*

## 5.6 How ‘well’ Mentors ‘get on with’ their Littles



**Figure 11: How bigs feel they ‘get on with’ their little brother or sister.**

Four out of five mentors (80%) feel that they get on ‘very well’ with their little brother or sister. One mentor replied that they get on ‘badly’ with their little, while 17 per cent (n=5) get on ‘well’.

Of those that get on ‘very well’, a number of mentors outlined how they had developed strong, open friendships with their littles, as a result of having similar interests. These relationships are characterised by reciprocal support, wherein both parties contribute to the relationship and gain from it.

*“My little is very enthusiastic, the actual pairing up or matching of interests worked very well. She never fails to meet me and is willing to try out new things. I enjoy her company.”*

*"My little will talk to me about everything from school to socialising to family. She feels comfortable with me and I with her. I feel very much at ease with her and we can both suggest or say anything to each other."*

*"I think we both share many interests. We have developed a very open and honest relationship. She teaches me a lot about life and vice versa."*

*"I consider myself lucky that I was matched well with my 'little sister'. We share the same sense of humour, interests and get on very well indeed. I'm pretty sure she feels the same!"*

For other mentors, the relationship took some time to establish, and while they feel they get on well, some are unsure whether it can be considered a real friendship.

*"The beginning was tough with us not getting on badly or well but a little non-descript! Our relationship has improved."*

*"We get on well together but I don't think I ever got to know the real little. She was different with me, pretending life was perfect so I don't feel I made any major difference to her as I don't think she felt she could talk to me about her problems"*

*"Difficult and awkward at first but after a few meetings both of us felt more relaxed and I wasn't the one doing all the talking! My little is now starting conversations all by herself!"*

*"My little had many problems and various people working with her. It took a while to get to know her and for her to see that I am not there to 'counsel' her or otherwise but rather just to be an adult she could trust to meet on a weekly basis. I felt we were getting on very well towards the end of the year."*

A number of mentors said that the young persons' shyness made it difficult to form a relationship. Others found it easier to overcome the shyness to form a friendship.

*"My little sister was very shy and while with me she was fine and would chat a bit – if I met her outside our session, she wouldn't talk to me and was really awkward around me. She was really shy."*

*"She's great – a bit shy at times but once I ignore that, she relaxes."*

The mentor who reported that she got on 'badly' with her little sister gave the following explanation:

*"Initially we got on well. However, as I worked with the Health Board at the time, this was something that appeared to affect the relationship as my little saw me as being another health care professional"*

## **5.7 What Mentors find Easy and Difficult about being a Mentor?**

Among the things that mentors reported as being easy about being a mentor are:

- Finding common ground and interests that they can share
- Having fun and doing activities
- The fact that the little is enthusiastic and willing
- Just being yourself and taking it easy.

Asked what they found difficult about being a mentor, some mentors expressed frustration that they always had to initiate contact with their little and make suggestions for activities. For some, it felt like they were giving up their time to spend with somebody who did not want to meet them. For some, the fact that the 'little' did not offer to pay for things or say 'thank you' was difficult to deal with.

*"Thinking up activities in which to participate. Coping with the teenage 'I don't mind', 'I don't know' attitude, not sure how the match is being evaluated or if its going well"*

*"Both of us being comfortable with each other was hard initially, finding things to do which don't involve travelling. Long days at work and then spending time with a person who isn't interested in meeting."*

*"Small things like sorting out the money situation, saying 'thank you'."*

Some matches found it difficult to find activities to do, especially in a rural setting and activities that do not cost much money. This put pressure on the relationship in the early days, as they could not go to each others' houses.

*"The lack of facilities that didn't cost money in the Castlebar area. After the initial 3 months this difficulty became less as you could bring your 'little' to your home so you could watch videos, listen to music, etc."*

Some mentors mentioned that they found it difficult to witness the challenges and experiences the little faced in his or her life and not be able to do anything about it. Gaining clarity about their own role in relation to the little took some time.

*“Understanding when I just have to listen and not solve his challenges”*

*“Seeing some aspects of my little sisters life – aspects different to my own – a more difficult family life; and not being able to change them apart from ‘being there for her’”.*

*“Not difficult but sometimes I have found it upsetting to witness the effects that my little brothers upbringing has had on his being and the associated feeling of powerlessness that brings”.*

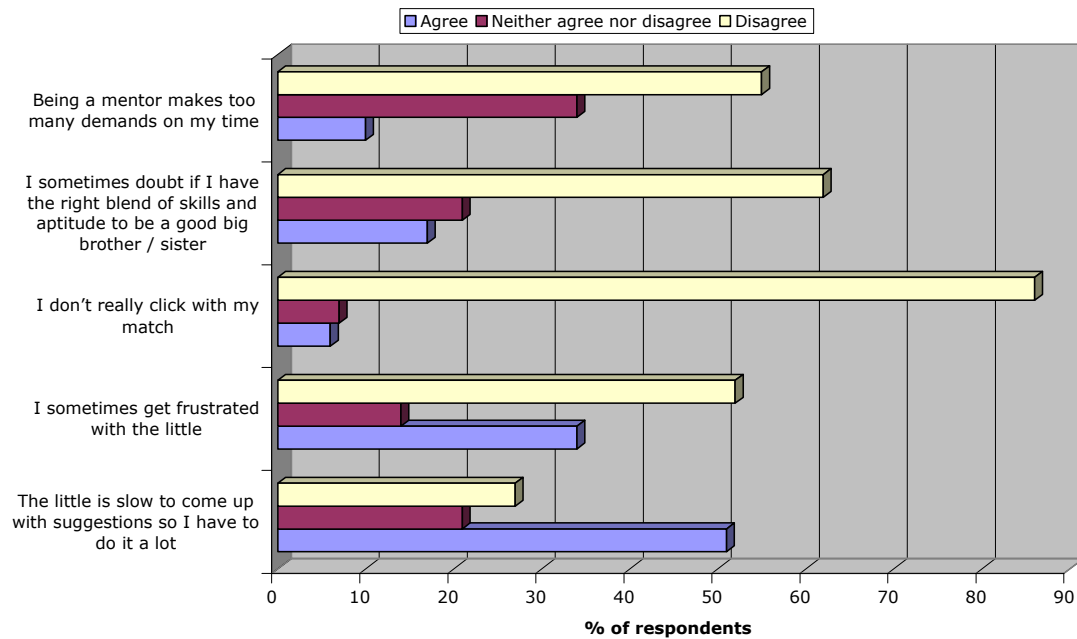
*“There were times we could not meet because of her problems and it was difficult not knowing exactly what was wrong and what I should / shouldn’t do when problems arose”.*

Some of the structures and procedures of the BBBS programme caused some difficulty for mentors. One mentor found it difficult to discuss the relationship with a Project Worker, fearing that this may be interpreted negatively by the ‘little’. Another mentor felt that getting an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues with the little was difficult when their time spent together is limited.

*“I did feel a little awkward reviewing my match after 3 months / 6 months as it felt weird / dishonest reporting back on what I see as a friendship. My match didn’t open up for quite some time so I felt my saying stuff might offend her.”*

Finally, a number of mentors found the weekly time commitment challenging due to other demands in their lives.

*“I find it difficult time-wise as with work full time and living in a different town but we get over that hurdle.”*

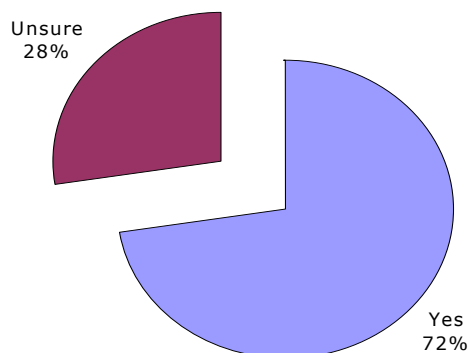


**Figure 12: Mentors responses to statements regarding potential difficulties**

Further insight into mentors' perceptions of potential difficulties is provided by Figure 12. Respondents were asked to express agreement or disagreement with a series of statements relating to potential difficulties associated with being a mentor. As the figure illustrates:

- Less than 10 per cent of mentors agreed with the statement that '*being a mentor makes too many demands on my time*'.
- 15 per cent of mentors agreed that they '*sometimes doubt if they have the right blend of skills and aptitude to be a good big brother / sister*'.
- Just 6 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement '*I don't really click with my match*', while 7 per cent expressed neither agreement nor disagreement, and 85% disagree with this statement.
- Just over a third of the sample (34%) agreed that they '*sometimes get frustrated*' with their little, while approximately half (52%) disagreed.
- Half of all mentors (51%) surveyed agreed that the little is '*sometimes slow to come up with suggestions, so they have to do it*.' However, over one in four expressed disagreement, indicating that ideas and activities are forthcoming from their littles.

## 5.8 How Mentors feel the Young Person has Benefited.



**Figure 13: Mentors views on whether the young person has benefited from the match.**

Just under three quarters (72%) of all ‘big brothers and sisters’ feel that their ‘little’ has benefited from the match. While none of the respondents answered ‘no’ to the question, more than a quarter (28%) are unsure whether or not the little has benefited from the match.

Those who were unsure of whether the young person had benefited reported a lack of feedback from the young person which made them doubt if they were getting anything out of the match.

*“As he is very quiet, you don’t get much of a feedback. At least he learned how to swim and we went to the pool most of the time”.*

*“I really don’t know – she always pretended that everything was nice and that life was great when I know it is far from perfect. But we did have fun and she always met me and seemed interested in the match.”*

*“My ‘little’ is very shy and had low self-esteem – not sure that she benefited from match. I met her recently by accident but I had to speak to her and she just about spoke back and kept looking at her feet when chatting back.”*

*“Unsure, initially I felt she did but I think she always saw my role as a professional and not as her ‘big’. I also felt she was allowed ‘cop out’ when she wanted, with no explanation to me.”*

The difficulty in establishing if a young person has benefited from the match as well as enjoying it is summed up in the following remarks.

*"My Little Brother has certainly experienced activities that he would most likely not otherwise experience but how beneficial that may be is unclear in its manifestation."*

*"My little is a very nice girl but I often wonder if the program is of benefit or just having a good time for a year but I suppose then again, what's wrong with that!!!"*

For those who felt the young person had benefited, gains in confidence, communication skills and positivity were mentioned frequently.

*"I think my little has blossomed to say the least. She has gained more and more confidence in herself. She was prone to panic attacks and with the help of health services and family and myself, she is able to manage this in her life."*

*"I have seen vast improvement in my little's attitude and dealings with the public and I can see that now they are quite happy in expressing their own opinion."*

*"I think my little has more confidence and a more positive outlook on life than previously. I also think the other members of her family have benefited by seeing her having a positive relationship."*

*"He has now very little attention-seeking behaviour (used to be different). He 'behaves' in groups different now than 1 year ago."*

Having a one to one relationship with an adult, which brought with it the opportunity to do many activities and confide in an adult friend was seen as a beneficial thing by some.

*"I feel that my little has benefited from the match in that it has offered / provided her with a form of escapism from home and when we spend time together she is the main focus."*

*"Yes, my little likes the break away from her home and seems to like the 1-1 attention from me - always asking questions and looking for advice – also seems to have fun and enjoy the experience."*

*"My little looked forward to being taken out each week and would pour out her problems as soon as we met. My little never wanted the outing to end. It gave my little a break from her routine."*

*“I know that my little sister appreciates my effort in meeting her. She enjoys our time together. She always thanks me when we part company. I feel that our ‘match’ is making a difference in her life!”*

In cases where the little sister had a lot of problems, the ‘big’ could feel that their input was small relative to the magnitude of the problems faced by the young person. However, mentors were able to put this into perspective, as the following quotes illustrate:

*“My little has many problems and often times I felt that I was of no ‘use’ to her. But then I realised that she did commit to the programme which was an achievement for her and despite her problems, we got on well.”*

*“I believe I am one more adult in her corner – when she is mad at the world, I am one more number she can call. One more person she can rely on.”*

Mentors are aware that their input, while potentially beneficial, does not occur in isolation and is just one of a range of positive and negative influences in the young person’s life at any given time,

*“I believe he has swung in the right way in a case where when I met him he was at a crossroads, i.e. could have gone down positive or negative road. However, I believe BBBS is only one element of many that have made this happen.”*

Asked what they feel has been most valuable for the young person from the match, the following answers were given:

- Someone from outside the family to trust and confide in and who praises and encourages the young person
- Somebody to bring him / her places and do new and different things with
- Being exposed to a different outlook and perspectives
- The fact that volunteer is not paid
- Getting a break from home life and family duties / obligations.

In terms of what they feel has been least valuable for the young person in the match, mentors gave the following answers:

- Inadequate transition for the young person for when the match ends
- Not being matched with somebody who has interests more aligned to the young person's own
- Seeing the mentor as another person who was there to 'fix' them
- Being matched with somebody who the young person perceived as from a very different social class
- The fact that the young person has not been able to confide as of yet, or that activities have taken priority over talking and confiding
- Some young people do not like group activities and are reluctant to attend them.

## **5.9 Benefits and Costs of Being a Mentor**

Asked what they regard as the main benefits to themselves as a result of their mentoring role, the following answers were given:

- They have made a new friendship
- They feel they have contributed to their community and to society
- They are seen as a trusted member of the community
- Being a mentor has promoted their own personal development, including learning to be less judgemental, having more understanding of other peoples' lives, examining their own ability to commit to something like BBBS and that they have been personally challenged in finding responses and solutions to difficulties arising in the relationship with the little
- A number of mentors found it beneficial to learn about the lives of modern teenagers
- For some, being a BBBS mentor provided an opportunity to engage in activities she or he would not otherwise have done
- Some mentors mentioned that they benefited from knowing the young person is gaining something from the match, that it is making their lives even a little better
- Knowing that their time is being spent wisely for the benefit of others:

*"I like to spend my time wisely and know this is a very good project for me. I feel I am making a difference in my 'little sisters' life and there's satisfaction in that I guess."*

- One mentor said that the programme has given good experience that will be useful for his / her career.

Finally, a number of mentors mentioned that their 'little' has been an inspiration to them:

*"My match is inspirational in terms of her inner resolve, strength of character and positivity' and "being with a young person of considerable character and having fun in her company".*

*"It has been a wonderful and invaluable experience for me. I have connected as an individual with a very courageous family and witnessed their strength and my little's strength through adversity."*

Many mentors replied that there has been no real financial cost to them as the 'little' and 'big' both pay for their own activities. Two thirds of mentors mentioned the time commitment involved in meeting someone once a week for a couple of hours as the main cost to themselves.

For some the time commitment was difficult but worth it, while for others the benefits of their time investment were not apparent to them.

*"Presently, not a lot of costs but maybe the time commitment as now I am back studying and I work long hours into the evening and some weekends but it is manageable, I am an adult"*

*"The time I put into it and then she just decided she didn't want to do it anymore without ever having to give me an explanation".*

*"Time spent waiting for the little".*

A number of mentors mentioned worry about his / her effectiveness in their role as mentor, as a cost to themselves. For example:

*"I don't think I'll ever know if I did make an impact on my little and while that's not a cost, its more the chance you take when you become a mentor"*

*'A level of uncertainty about my effectiveness"*

*"Some concern still about my effectiveness in the role of mentor"*

Two mentors highlighted that for them the role can have emotional costs. Another highlighted that while the time commitment is difficult, she feels guilt if she does not get to meet her little.

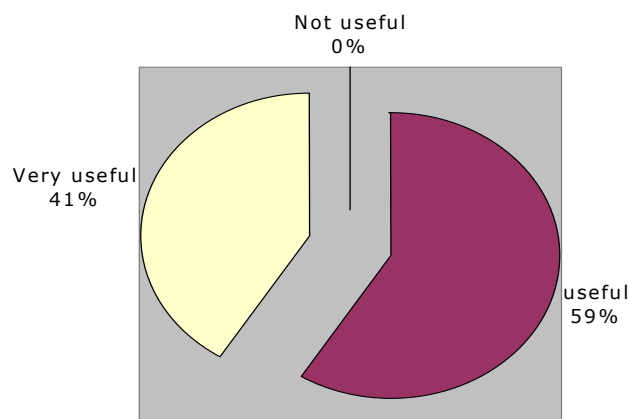
*“Emotionally it can be draining at times. And I feel guilt if I have to change a visit or postpone one, but this is self imposed.”*

*“Time has been the main cost. Even if I don’t get to meet her, I feel a bit guilty.”*

*“My match may be deported, which would be emotionally very traumatic. Sometimes feel as though I’m dealing with superficial aspects of her life while she faces major obstacles alone.”*

## 5.10 Mentors’ Rating of Training and Support Provided to Them

All respondents found the training provided to them prior to their commencing the mentoring to be valuable, with 59% rating it as useful and 41% as very useful.

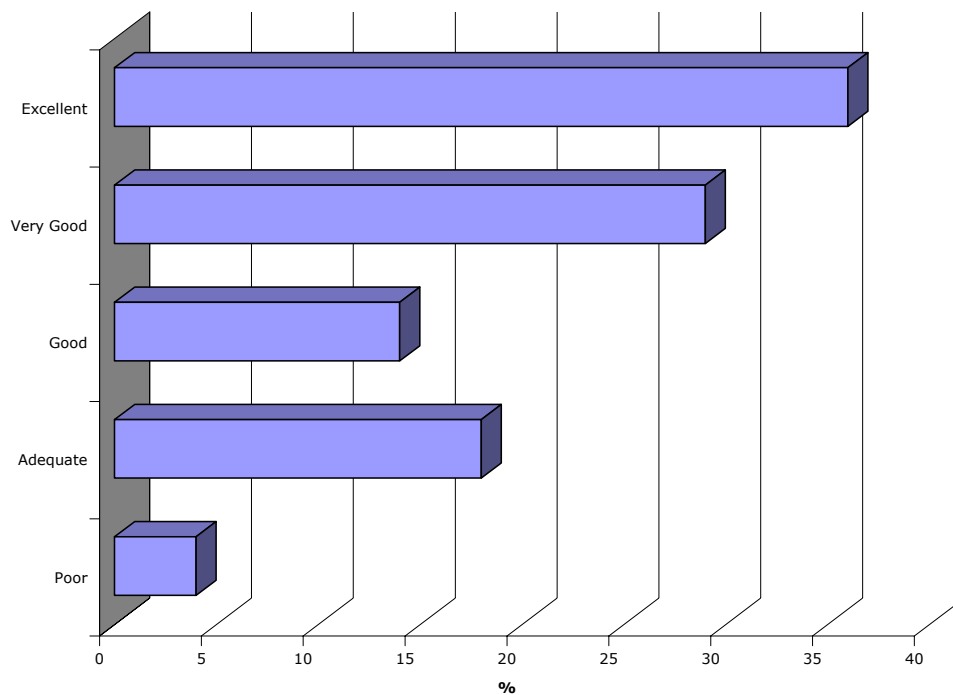


**Figure 14: Mentors’ rating of value of training in terms of preparing them for their roles.**

Comments made in relation to the training included the following:

- The training provided a good practical guide and an opportunity to meet others. Role plays and games helped mentors to deal with possible situations. The talk from the volunteer and lists of do’s and don’ts were useful.
- While the training was useful, there was a big time gap between when they were trained and they were matched.

- Found the initial training valuable and would have liked to receive ongoing training, but this did not happen.
- A number of mentors said that, while the training was valuable and told them it would be tough, the experience of being a mentor was tougher than they expected and that because each child is different, it is impossible to prepare for every possibility.
- A number of people said that they were already familiar with a lot of the training content due to their professional roles as teachers or otherwise.



**Figure 15: Mentors rating of support provided by their Project Worker**

Asked how they rate the ongoing support provided by their Project Worker, 36 per cent of mentors said excellent, 29 per cent very good, 14 per cent good, 17 per cent adequate and 4 per cent poor. In addition to the above rating, a total of 23 mentors made comments in relation to the support received from their Project Worker. The majority of these (n=17 or 59% of overall sample) were overwhelmingly positive. The following are an illustration of comments made by mentors regarding the valuable support and commitment of their Project Worker, support which is valued in times of difficulty.

*“At any stage we know we can call in or phone our Project Worker with the smallest of questions. She is very approachable and enthusiastic and there is always total support and help with dealing with any difficulties.”*

*“My Project Worker is fantastic. She is down to earth, you can buzz whenever you need her. She was so helpful and supportive.”*

*"My Project Worker is always at the end of the phone if I need to chat and makes time regularly to meet me. I know she is committed to the match working and she is always full of encouragement and enthusiasm. There's been times when I really didn't feel I was making a difference in my little's life and she could see all the differences I had made."*

*"Was useful and supportive when discussing little's ADHD and difficulties around this."*

*"Always strong support structure in place. All staff involved in BBBS are friendly, approachable and good company."*

*"I found my Project Worker to be very supportive with the match. She was thorough in explaining things and was very easy to talk to."*

Six mentors (21% of sample) made comments which suggest that they have found the BBBS programme to be less supportive, particularly when staff changes occur and Project Workers move on. Another suggested that he or she did not automatically receive support but it was available when sought.

*"This has changed over the past few months. I guess we have been in contact over phones, etc. Originally, met with my Project Worker every 3 months. That helped to focus on the issues from my little."*

*"Would like to have had more contact in the initial stages – understand that Project Workers are very busy with numerous projects but would have liked even a few telephone calls for feedback."*

*"Excellent while Patty was there – but non existent since she left. New Project Worker did meet with me but knew neither myself nor my little so it was difficult."*

*"I could have done with a lot more support in the initial few months when things were very rocky and difficult. Telephone contact once in a few months / weeks is not enough."*

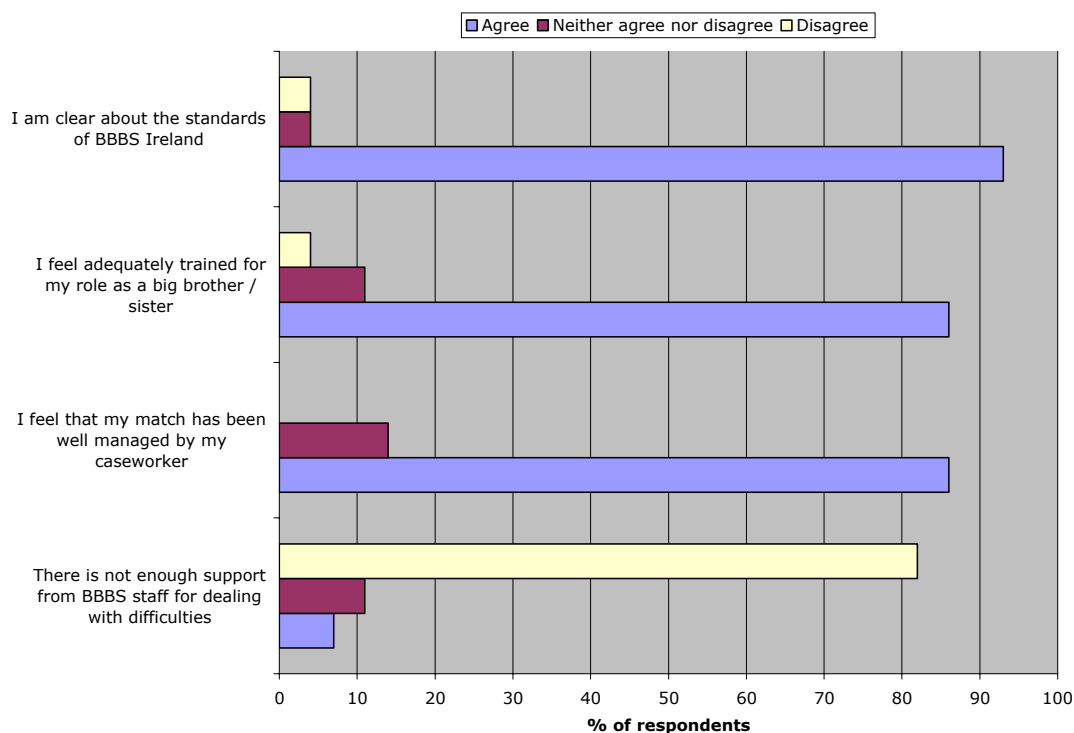
*"I felt I was leading the way"*

*"Adequate – I have not had much support but I have not sought much support either. When I have, it was given."*

Asked if there are areas in which they would like more support from their Project Worker, 31 per cent said yes, 55 per cent said no and 14 per cent were unsure. The supports highlighted by those requiring additional support were:

- More contact with the Project Worker, including feedback as to how the Project Worker feels the match is going, more telephone supports at the early stages of the match.
- Continue to have three monthly reviews throughout the match to offer a frame of reference for the match.
- More opportunity to meet other matches and go out with them on team building exercises. Have monthly group activities as was originally planned.
- More commitment to address problems arising from unsuitable matches.
- More information and feedback from parents' evaluations.
- To be kept informed of changes in their little's domestic situation.
- Support with technical issues (i.e. the asylum process) for mentors matched with refugee and asylum seeker children.

Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with a number of statements, as illustrated in Figure 16. A very high proportion, 93% agreed that they were clear about the standards of BBBS Ireland, while 86% agreed that they feel adequately trained for their role as a big brother / big sister and that their match has been well managed by their Project Worker. Finally, 82 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement 'there is not enough support from BBBS staff for dealing with difficulties', 7 per cent agreed with this statement and 11 per cent were unsure.



**Figure 16: Mentors responses to statements regarding training and support.**

## 5.11 Group Activities with Other Mentors

Asked if they had participated in group activities with other mentors, 41 per cent of respondents said that they had and 59 per cent had not. Of those that had participated, 95 per cent described the activities as 'useful' or 'very useful'.

The comments made in relation to group activities were as follows:

- They help to make the little's part of something bigger than just themselves.
- Good to exchange information, experiences and ideas with other mentors.
- They brought the little and big closer as they were 'thrown in' with other people and have more of a common ground now.
- Hearing that other people also struggle with their relationships is a motivation to continue.
- Group activities add further excitement and experiences to the match.
- One mentor said that her 'little' did not particularly enjoy group activities as she was older than most of the other little's.

At the focus group sessions with mentors there was strong support for more networking between mentors as a means of mutual support and information. One mentor made the following comment:

*"I really feel that was one of the biggest things missing from the BBBS programme. I would have liked more contact with other members – every 3 months or so."*

## 5.12 Mentors' Recommendations for the Future Development of the Programme

Mentors made the following recommendations for the future development of the programme (in order of frequency):

1. Provide more training, networking and support for mentors:

*"I would suggest more mentor meetings and a more frequent review system...I suggest a longer training period and a more effective mentor / mentor service to help new mentors."*

*"More mentoring for mentors!"*

*“More follow-up training for the mentors – giving them more of a chance to meet up. More group activities – with big and littles. We were told when we did our training that there would be a group activity every month – this happened twice – not enough!”*

*“I suppose its up to each Big Brother / Sister to decide on activities but it would be a good idea to receive suggestions from time to time. I have only seen 2 newsletters in my time as a big sister (17 months) so it would be good to see more effort in that area! To see other matches and have input from them into something communal!”*

2. Provide more opportunities for group activities:

*“My little sister and I were pleased to take part in activities arranged for all the matches together and gave us an opportunity to be together and yet not one to one for some of the time.”*

*“The programme should have more structured activities for matches – i.e. facilities that they could come in and use – games, etc.”*

3. Wider availability and marketing of BBBS for young people:

*“It should be made available to more young people. I don’t think the service is advertised in the correct way. There are so many people my age that would love to do BBBS but they feel they would not be the right people to do it which I disagree with. It should be advertised in colleges, aim it at student teachers, nurses, social workers, etc. Also group mentors and little’s should be set up – it may be more effective.”*

*“Do exactly what you are doing now. Develop very professional promotional package for roll-out of programme nation-wide, enlist high profile patrons to promote. Develop Galway as role model.”*

*“I think it should be a national programme and hope it will expand.”*

*“Broaden the programme, reach kids that come from a more challenging background.”*

4. Take into account the reality of matches in rural small towns:

*“The initial stages are awful, especially in a small town where there are so many restrictions, e.g. ‘going in the car, etc. It is hard to build up any sort of friendship when both people are slightly uncomfortable and added total lack of anonymity. Better structure for development of program in initial stages geared towards smaller town.”*

*“It was difficult at times to have suitable places to go initially for meetings and while there are many places in the city, the little was not always interested in them. Therefore, I see this as being a very real problem for developing BBBS in rural areas and I think it would be useful to take this into consideration when making ‘rural’ matches.”*

5. Improved transition process for match ending:

*“2 months before the BBBS programme ends, the transition for the time after BBBS should be planned with the ‘little’.”*

*“It is an excellent programme and a marvellous way of helping young people. However, I feel there should be the continuation of a ‘big’ for a little if a big is leaving the programme – not to leave the little ‘high and dry’.”*

Other recommendations made were that good co-operation from parents and guardians is necessary to make a match work well and that individuals who work with children daily should carefully consider becoming a mentor as ‘you can begrudge your time as the match feels like work’.

## **5.13 Summary**

The main reasons why adults decided to volunteer for the BBBS programme are that they wanted to ‘give something back’ and contribute to society. Many agreed with the logic of the model, feeling that the support of an adult would be of value to a young person. Others were attracted by the fact that work is individual rather than group based and the fact that BBBS was a proven model was an enticement for some. Roughly half of mentors reported that they had concerns about becoming a mentor, including concerns about their ability to be a mentor, whether the relationship would work, the time commitment involved and fear of non-acceptance by the little and / or their family. Most mentors spend 2-3 hours per week with their little brother or sister, and additional time travelling to meet with them. They see their role as offering friendship and support to the young person, introducing them to new ideas, activities and perspectives, giving them time out from their routine and family, and providing a non-judgemental listening ear.

Four out of five mentors (80%) said that they feel they get on ‘very well’ with their little, 17% said they get on ‘well’ and 3% said they get on ‘badly’. The experiences ranged from those who developed a strong, open friendship with their little to others who found it difficult to break through shyness to form a real friendship. The fact that the little was slow to come up with suggestions or appeared unenthusiastic was cited as a difficulty by some mentors, while for

others finding low cost activities, particularly in rural areas was difficult. Seeing the effects of the little's family context was difficult for some mentors.

Three out of four mentors feel that their little has benefited from the match, with just over a quarter unsure. Those who were unsure cited the lack of feedback from the little or the difficulty in establishing benefit as opposed to enjoyment as a reason. Gains in confidence, communication skills and a more positive outlook were witnessed by some mentors in relation to their little's. Having someone to confide in and help him or her to deal with problems was also felt to be beneficial for the young person. Benefit for mentors themselves were numerous, including feeling they are spending their time wisely, getting to know an inspirational young person and broadening their own horizons. The time commitment associated with meeting their little for 2-3 hours per week was cited as the main cost by two thirds of mentors in the study.

All respondents found the training received prior to their commencement as a mentor to be valuable. The majority of mentors rated the ongoing support provided by Project Workers as 'excellent', 'very' good or 'good', while 17 per cent rated it as adequate and 3 per cent as poor. The enthusiasm and encouragement of their Project Worker was mentioned by many mentors as a crucial support in dealing with difficulties and maintaining momentum of the match. However, just under one third of mentors said that they would like more support from their Project Worker in the form of greater contact and feedback, three monthly reviews throughout the match, more opportunities to meet with other matches and partake in group activities and more information about their little's domestic situation. Those who had taken part in group activities with other mentors found them useful.

The recommendations made by mentors include that more training, support and networking would be available on an ongoing basis for mentors, that the programme provides more opportunities for group activities for matches, that there be wider availability and marketing of BBBS for young people and that the programme take into account the difficulties experienced by matches in small towns and rural areas. The need for a better transition period when a match ends was also recommended.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Management and Staff Perspectives**

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#### **6.1 Introduction**

As part of the research, the opinions of key staff members were sought in relation to performance of the programme to date and any issues arising. Interviews were held with the BBBS Co-Directors, Foroige Regional Manager, NYP Project Leader, Mayo and three BBBS Project Workers in Mayo, Galway and Roscommon. Two focus groups were held with Project Workers from all three counties. In addition, interviews were undertaken with HSE Childcare Managers in Mayo and Roscommon, with the Family Support Manager in Galway and with the Children Act Services Manager in Roscommon.

This Chapter collates all staff and management perspectives under a number of headings. As there was a lot of overlap and convergence in terms of opinions, it was felt to be unnecessary to profile the feedback from each grouping separately. Where points were made particularly strongly by some person or groupings, this is noted in the narrative.

#### **6.2 Big Brother Big Sister Concept and Early Development**

When the idea of BBBS was first mooted, Project Workers said that they welcomed the opportunity to offer one to one support to young people. It made good sense to have a programme of individual support because most of the NYP focus was on group work. For Foroige, BBBS was their first one-to-one mentoring programme. According to the Foroige Regional Director, the need for the programme was clear. It is especially useful for one-parent families, or for children who find it difficult to make friends or join groups. The Foroige CEO saw the programme was fully in keeping with the Foroige ethos of volunteering and its belief in the civic responsibility of communities to support children. In spite of the need for an individual programme, some staff were unsure of the potential of a volunteer-led programme, and, due to the high profile of child abuse issues at the time, there was a fear among some of taking on and supervising one-to-one matches between an adult and a young person. Resources were scarce and workers already felt stretched which led to some resistance to what was seen as more work.

## 6.3 Assessment of the Programme's Value

Support for the programme was strong among all Project Leaders and Project Workers, who generally feel that the BBBS Programme is excellent. The NYP Project Leader in Mayo believes that every one of the NYP staff is positive about the programme. It's an area of their work that they derive particular satisfaction from, having seen the positive benefits that young people derive from secure, stable relationships in their lives. She says that the Foroige staff have definitely seen a change in littles. They show a pride and achievement in the match and value having their own private time to spend with their big. According to Project Workers, young people appreciate that the volunteer is not being paid – it is very different to paid mentoring.

Project Workers gave numerous examples of the commitment of the adult volunteers to their 'little', going beyond what is expected of them. For example, one volunteer painted over negative graffiti about her 'little sister', while another was the 'little's' sponsor at his confirmation. Children experiencing a very diverse range of issues have all benefited. The match may start off a bit clinical but by the time they end, many have developed into powerful caring relationships. In a very small number of cases, the friendship can go too far and a dependency is created. It is up to the Project Worker to make sure that this is avoided.

According to the Foroige CEO, the programme has so far "exceeded their expectations". He has a 'huge passion' for the programme, believing it has huge potential. He believes that staff are highly committed and derive great satisfaction from seeing the benefits of successful matches and that the Foroige Chairman and management are 100 per cent committed to BBBS. They believe it has proven to be culturally appropriate, in that there has been no adverse reaction to any aspect of it in Ireland. He also believes that it is a cost-effective proven preventative model.

For the HSE Childcare Managers in Mayo and Roscommon, the BBBS programme is an important element of a range of family support services available in the county. It is valuable for families who do not have resources and networks from which they can draw positive support. Its strength lies in its simplicity, in the fact that it is about the young person doing 'normal' things, having someone to connect with.

## 6.4 Structures, Procedures and Resourcing

**Neighbourhood Youth Project Base:** While it took some time to become embedded, there is consensus among staff and management that it has been very advantageous to have Project Workers based in the NYPs rather than as a stand-alone service. According to the Foroige Regional Director, one of the most crucial aspects of the development of BBBS was to put local

structures in place, embedding the programme in the local NYPs. Giving NYP Project Leaders responsibility for supervising the programme increased local ownership of it. He feels that the synergies have been excellent, in spite of meagre resources. Furthermore, all Foroige staff did BBBS training, which was instrumental in securing widespread support for BBBS.

**Referrals:** Most of the referrals come from the NYP, while others come from social work, THI and other sources. Some external referrals are very appropriate and have been matched to great benefit. Other referrals have been inappropriate for the programme, because the young person concerned may be too troubled or difficult to match with a volunteer or because they are too young or old. Internal NYP referrals tend to be very appropriate as the Project Workers know the young people well and are better tuned into what will work for them. Project Workers said they got some very good feedback from referrers, who have found the programme to be of benefit to the young people.

**Recruitment of volunteers:** Although there are more male than female referrals, the number of matches made is predominantly female as a result of the greater supply of female volunteers. In Roscommon, where there are currently no male volunteers, recruitment of male volunteers is proving challenging. Project workers attribute the lack of male volunteers to a fear of false allegations against them, one potential volunteer reputedly said 'an allegation would stick with you for life, even if its not true'. This particular person had been willing to volunteer but would not do so when he realised that it involved one to one contact with a young person. Project Workers also feel that there is more of a female culture of volunteering, making it more likely that women will be drawn to something like BBBS.

In each county, the Project Worker undertakes publicity for the programme, involving local radio, newspapers, posters and public meetings. The number of volunteers sourced through these means can vary. As the programme becomes more embedded, a growing number of volunteers are sourced through word of mouth.

**Assessment procedures:** Project Leaders and Project Workers feel that the assessment process is generally very good. The fact that there is a methodical, standard procedure, followed by all Project Workers, makes it easier to stand over their assessment and explain it where necessary. There is scope to gather information from other agencies if necessary prior to making the match. The only problem identified is that the Project Worker can feel under pressure to make a match for the young person, even though a totally suitable volunteer may not be available. Sometimes they have to make a match based on convenience rather than shared interests due to the small pool of assessed and available volunteers. In a larger programme this would not be a problem.

According to Project Workers, there is very little resistance from volunteers to the assessment procedures – only one person objected to the home visit. The procedure has been good in terms of weeding out unsuitable people. They feel this is crucial as one bad match could destroy the credibility of the whole programme. Yet, the time taken from recruitment to matching is quite considerable. The Project Worker in Mayo undertook to measure the time taken for all stages – which averages approximately 18 hours for a child and 20 hours for a volunteer. It therefore takes a full week's work just to assess one case. Given that Project Workers give one fifth of their working week to BBBS, this means that they would need at least five weeks of their BBBS time to work on one assessment alone. At the end of this process the volunteer and / or young person may be deemed unsuitable. Examining the process in detail, however, the Foroige staff in Mayo concluded that the full assessment is necessary. The Garda Clearance is the only problematic part of it –it is poorly structured and takes a long time to complete. In Mayo, the Project Leader reads all assessments because she may pick up on something the Project Workers do not see.

**Case management:** According to the Project Workers, most matches have some type of teething problems. For example, the 'Big' may feel that the little is not interested, there may be a mix up over who is supposed to contact who and so on. The Project Worker must help to sort out these problems and reassure each party that the other is interested. Regarding how much information is shared about the young person's life and background, the Project Workers tell the volunteer the minimum amount necessary to make the volunteer feel their time is worthwhile, but yet protect the privacy of the young person. Project Workers said that if a match is going well, it is easy to forget about it, but if it is going badly, it can take up a lot of time. Project Workers reported a difficulty in balancing the demands of their BBBS work with their NYP work, especially if the project is short-staffed. They also said that they can find it difficult to take over an established match from another Project Worker due to the fact that a close friendship has developed between a big and a little and they are coming in 'cold' as match supervisors. On a practical basis, it can be hard to schedule a suitable time to meet 'Bigs' because they work during the day and the Project Workers run youth groups in the evenings.

According to the Foroige CEO, the key challenge of the programme is to get the balance between the natural relationship between a young person and their older friend, but maintain the case management. Some volunteers are very skilled and have great experience – there is a need to trust them while maintaining the standards. They have to make sure it does not become too structured or unstructured, which is a delicate balance.

**Volunteers support needs:** In Mayo, the volunteer training was revamped on the basis of feedback from volunteers. Some volunteers said they would not become a mentor again, due to the fact that they felt isolated and experienced self-doubt. Some volunteers do not access

support enough so the role of the Project Worker has been emphasised in training. According to the NYP Project Leader, people volunteer because they want community cohesion but can be left feeling isolated. Also, people hope to see a change in the young person and if they do not they are disappointed. Some volunteers may pull out for various reasons – it takes a lot of Project Worker skill to keep things on track. Staff feel that additional group activities and support for volunteers could help to reduce feelings of isolation and facilitate more peer support. However, these have not been provided to the degree desired as a result of resource difficulties.

**Rural / urban:** Project Workers feel it is harder for matches in rural areas to find things to do. In some cases, the parents of the 'little' may not drive, which means they cannot even drive them to meet their 'big'. In one case in Mayo, the 'big' does not drive and the programme has to seek funding for taxis to support the match meetings. If more funding was available, the programme could pay for games, tickets to local clubs and other entertainment, but that is not possible with their current budget. In the cases of rural matches, the volunteer time investment is often greater, due to the time spent travelling to and from the littles' house as well as the time spent meeting. There was support among HSE management for having BBBS available on an outreach basis to benefit children in rural areas and also to have an additional collective component in these areas to counteract the isolation of matches.

**Joint management model:** Due to the good working relationship between the two Directors, the partnership is described as 'seamless'. In terms of its future development, the Directors are considering an appropriate structure for the programme to support its national development. Foroige does not have a presence in all communities, which means that a different type of organisational structure may be necessary to support its development nation-wide. In the mean time, the consolidation and mainstreaming of the programme in the Western Area (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) is its main priority.

**Resourcing and capacity:** While resourcing and capacity emerged as an issue across the three counties, it was particularly emphasised in Mayo. All staff in Mayo said that up to 2004, the programme was in expansion mode, there was a lot of commitment to it among staff and they had plans for the development of the programme. However, staff said they have become disheartened because the Project Worker is still part-time, and resource constraints prevent them from delivering it in an effective manner. Maintaining caseloads is difficult, promotional work is now kept to a minimum and there is a sizeable waiting list of potential 'littles' and 'bigs' that they do not have the time to assess. Some volunteers have become fed up because the intake process is slow (could take 2-3 months) and opt to do something else, meaning that potentially valuable resources are lost. Project Workers in all areas said that they have lost volunteers due to the long waiting list for processing, while one volunteer who was processed

but awaiting a match reportedly just stayed involved because she 'felt sorry for the Project Worker'. According to staff, the time lags are a source of frustration to everybody, including parents, young people, volunteers and referrers. Furthermore, Project Workers in all areas said that regular contact between the Project Worker and volunteer sometimes does not happen as a result of time constraints on the Project Worker. The Project Workers also stressed the importance of ensuring that the parents are supported and that all the emphasis is not on the young person, making their parents feel excluded. According to staff, for the programme to really fulfil its potential, there is a need for additional full-time Project Workers.

Apart from capacity issues in assessing and supervising matches, there is no funding available for programme activities – any BBBS activities run are funded by NYPs. Staff estimate that funding for at least 3 group activities in a year is required in order to support volunteers and offer variety to matches. According to the Mayo Project Worker, volunteers are very resourceful and do not mind paying for things themselves. While the programme has no wish to pay for everything, it would be good if BBBS could acknowledge their contribution more through group activities, rewards and recognition events.

Options in terms of expanding through other programmes have been explored. However, this also involves a time investment in terms of training, casework supervision and quality assurance.

***School based BBBS programme:*** Staff feel that the school-based BBBS is a good model, and works well as an anti-bullying transition programme. Schools, bigs and littles have been extremely positive about the programme. It is not as intensive as the community based programme, so can reach larger numbers with less inputs. Such is the demand for the school-based programme that they could easily devote all their resources to it. The Foróige Regional Director believes they have to get the balance right – making sure that the integrity of the community programme is not compromised, but also testing out the potential of the model in other areas, such as schools. The programme must focus on sustaining the community based matches, rather than being attracted by the ease of working with larger numbers in schools.

Foróige management consider that the 200-300 young people taking part in the in-schools programme are potential community BBBS mentors, as they know about BBBS and are more likely to become involved. For many it is their first experiencing of volunteering and feedback suggests that it is positive.

## **6.5 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats of Big Brother Big Sister Ireland - Identified by Staff and Management**

The following is a summary of the overall assessment of the programme by staff and management.

### **Strengths**

- The model has won support of young people, parents, mentors, staff and referrers due to the benefits it brings to young people.
- The organic development of BBBS Ireland from the grassroots means that it has been firmly established locally from which it is now growing outwards.
- The volunteers are great people, the 'backbone' of the programme.
- It is new, different and seen as 'cool' in the eyes of the young people.
- Young people really value an adult giving up their time for them, especially in rural areas where there is not a lot to do. They are aware of and appreciate the fact that volunteers are not paid.
- Given the restrictions on the programme, it has exceeded expectations.
- The programme is very adaptable – proposals have been developed to use it as a support for unaccompanied asylum seeker and refugee children, for prevention of early school leaving and as part of a scheme to prevent juvenile re-offending.

### **Weaknesses / Difficulties**

- The programme is time-intensive, particularly at the initial stages of recruitment, assessment and matching. It takes some time before the benefits of this investment are reaped for the young people and volunteers. Yet, the integrity of the programme is dependent upon all stages of the process receiving adequate attention.
- Young boys are the subject of most referrals but the programme cannot match many of them due to the difficulty of accessing male volunteers.
- Lack of funding is hampering its potential, particularly in Mayo, where it is co-ordinated by a part-time Project Worker despite huge pressure for expansion.
- There is insufficient financial and moral support for volunteers, due to resource constraints.
- In rural areas, transport is a big problem for bigs and littles, especially if a Big does not have a car or just has a provisional driving licence.
- Roscommon has less young working people than Galway or Mayo and so finds it more difficult to recruit volunteers.
- Some external professionals refer inappropriately despite clear guidelines regarding criteria and appear insensitive to the resource constraints under which the programme operates.

## **Opportunities**

- BBBS has huge growth potential – people want to volunteer, young people want to do it – with resources it could really expand. The vision of senior management is that that it will go nationwide.
- The school-based BBBS has been very successful and is also in great demand.
- The school-based BBBS is creating a pool of young people who know and understand BBBS and are potential community volunteers.

## **Threats**

- The programme is ready to implode as the demand is so great – it could be a victim of its own success if it is unable to meet expectations.
- Despite their firm commitment to and belief in the programme, energy and morale is low in Mayo due to the fact that they do not have a full-time Project Worker or adequate capacity. Staff feel that goodwill towards the programme will be damaged and it will lose credibility as a result of its long waiting list and inability to make matches.

## ***Chapter 7***

### **Evaluation Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

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#### **7.1 Introduction**

This Chapter collates the findings of the report to reach a number of conclusions and recommendations about the BBBS programme in Ireland. The purpose of this research was to examine how the model has been implemented in Ireland to date, to profile the young people using the service, to assess the opinions of all stakeholders regarding it and to make recommendations for its future development. This Chapter assesses the rationale for the programme, how it has been implemented to date and whether it has been beneficial to young people. Finally, recommendations are made regarding the future development of the programme.

#### **7.2 Rationale for the Programme**

BBBS Ireland was introduced by Foroige and the HSE as a means of offering support to young people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing adversity. The programme is founded on the belief that a positive relationship between an older and younger person will act to prevent future difficulties or be a support to a young person facing adversity in their lives. Having a caring adult friend can help to build positive assets and make a difference in the social and emotional development of the young person. The programme adopts a positive youth development approach that addresses the young persons' full range of needs and competencies required to help them to become productive and healthy adults.

The programme was introduced in response to an identified need for a means of supporting young people on a one-to-one basis. Most youth work takes place in group settings but some young people are not suited to a group setting for various reasons, the group setting may not be capable of addressing their needs or there may be young people who would benefit from individual work in addition to group work. The BBBS model was chosen by Foroige and the HSE on the basis that it is a model that has proven effective and popular on an international basis, its procedures ensure that risk to the child is well managed and it involves adult volunteers, which is in keeping with the Foroige commitment to volunteering and civic contribution.

The BBBS programme is a preventative intervention – it is not tackling any one particular issue, its aims are broad and the form the intervention takes is likely to be different due to the

uniqueness of each young person and mentor. It is not expected to be a panacea, but one of a range of supports (family, community, statutory) that a young person will draw on. It aims to identify and connect with the young person's interests and talents. The aims and methodology of the BBBS programme are in keeping with the thrust of successive Irish policy and legislative developments, which emphasise the need for preventive, supportive interventions for young people to maximise their potential and to prevent the development of social, health and behavioural problems in later adolescence. For example, the National Children's Strategy (2000), the National Conjoint Child Health Committee (2003) and the Children Act 2001 all emphasise the need for a positive approach to youth needs that emphasises accessibility, flexibility and partnership.

The BBBS model is rooted in social control theory, which emphasises the preventative role that a pre-social adult can play in a child's life and youth development theory, which emphasises how risk and protective factors interplay in a child's life – balancing the scales in favour of preventative factors is believed to support the young person to achieve a healthy development. Research into mentoring has shown it can be beneficial to young people. However, there appears to be consensus that, in order for mentoring to be effective, stringent programme procedures must be in place, the young person must be properly mentored and the relationship should last for at least a year. These factors are addressed by the BBBS model, which if implemented fully are considered likely to achieve benefits for young people.

Taking these factors into account, it can be concluded that the rationale for introducing the BBBS Programme was sound. There was a clearly identified need on the ground for targeted individual work with young people. The model is a proven one with a sound theoretical basis, programme procedures are rigorous and incorporate the features identified by numerous research reports associated with good practice in mentoring. The programme addresses the objectives and priorities of recent Irish policy and legislation in relation to vulnerable young people.

### **7.3 Implementation of the Programme**

**Targeting:** For reasons identified by their referrers, it was felt that the young people referred to the programme would benefit from a one to one relationship at a critical point in their adolescence or pre-adolescence. Analysis of programme files indicates that participants are in line with the model, in that they are experiencing adversity or at risk of adversity in their lives. Most participants were referred due to a combination of family issues (such as lone parenthood, poverty, parental illness) and personal issues (such as shyness, poor self-esteem, loneliness)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The only area in which the profile of participants deviated from the theoretical model was in relation to age, with a very small number aged 9 years on intake.

**Structures:** The BBBS programme was delivered mainly through Neighbourhood Youth Projects in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. The strategy of basing the programme in local NYPs was a good one as it ensured that appropriate young people could be selected to participate, the service was non-stigmatising and offered as part of a menu of options, Project Workers were trained and experienced youth workers, ideally placed to manage such an intervention. Furthermore, the regional spread of NYPs meant that BBBS achieved a wide geographical range and became embedded in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Essential inter-agency relationships and networks were in place through which the programme could operate. The joint management model appears to work well.

**Standards and Procedures:** The BBBS model was adapted for Ireland and a programme manual developed, which clearly set out the standards and procedures. All staff were trained. It is acknowledged that the standards and procedures are very detailed and time consuming, yet they have the support of staff as they are essential to uphold the quality and safety of the programme. Evidence suggests that the intensive intake and application process is followed in all cases and has proven successful in identifying suitable and unsuitable littles and bigs for the programme.

Project Workers provide excellent supervision in most cases, with some matches requiring an intensive level of support. The files made it clear that Project Workers go to great lengths to smooth out difficulties between the big and little and their parents. Many of the files are exemplary in terms of how the model has been implemented. However, in a small number of files, evaluations were not done up on time or files were not fully maintained. Slippages appeared to occur where there were changes in staff members. Any fall off of in supervision is a concern as the integrity and success of the programme demands that procedures are followed completely. Furthermore, research suggests that regular supervision is correlated with frequency of meetings between bigs and littles. There were examples in the files of where a Project Worker made contact with a match, having not been in contact for some time. The match may have been languishing but they made a commitment to start meeting again. Further case notes would indicate that this nudge from the Project Worker was vital in keeping the match from losing focus. It is imperative, therefore, that supervision is up-to-date at all times.

**Supply and Demand:** Maintaining a flow of volunteers and young people is crucial to the health of the programme. The larger the programme, the bigger the pool of young people and adults from which appropriate matches can be made. For smaller programmes, options regarding matches are narrowed and there is a risk that matches will be made on the basis of necessity rather than choice. In Galway and Mayo, recruitment of volunteers has not been a difficulty, although intense efforts in terms of publicity and advertising are required. In

Roscommon, due to the smaller pool of working young adults, recruitment of volunteers has been more difficult. In all areas, there were difficulties in achieving a gender balance among matches due to the shortage of male volunteers. Maintaining the supply of volunteers is a time intensive task – due to the need for widespread publicity campaigns, posterings, answering queries, assessing applications, training and other matters. In a context of limited resources, staff found it difficult to keep up to date with the assessment of volunteer applications. Yet, on the demand side, pressure for places on the programme is strong and staff believe that many more young people could benefit if the capacity was there. Lack of capacity in terms of time and dedicated full-time workers has slowed up the process and resulted in waiting lists for both bigs and littles.

**Support for Volunteers:** Volunteers are people of strong character, commitment and energy and have given very generously of their time and talents. Mentors benefited from their contribution to the programme, including feeling they are spending their time wisely, getting to know an inspirational young person and broadening their own horizons. Initial training is provided for all volunteers but ongoing training has not been available due to resource difficulties. While the majority of mentors were satisfied with the support received, almost a third of 'Bigs' indicated that they would like more support from their Project Worker. Among the supports identified are continuing to have three monthly reviews throughout the match, a commitment to address problems arising from unsuitable matches and more contact with their Project Worker. Mentors have said that they would value additional group activities for matches and a greater degree of training and networking for mentors. Research into mentoring indicates that the potential for success is likely to be greater if such structure and supports are in place. Project Workers reported that it can be difficult for them to find enough time for BBBS matches, which indicates that some type of guidance is required regarding the number of matches a Project Worker should supervise.

## **7.4 Has the Programme been Beneficial for Young People?**

The youth survey indicated that the vast majority of young people feel emotionally engaged, satisfied and that the relationship is youth centred. The open-ended questions answered by the young people highlighted their broad support for the programme. An assessment of the match files found evidence that a strong relationship developed in 52 per cent of cases, while a reasonably strong relationship developed in 28 per cent of cases. The conclusion reached was that approximately 4 out of 5 matches made develop into good relationships. Parental feedback to the Project Worker about the match, where recorded, was very positive in many cases. Furthermore, almost three quarters of Bigs feel that the young person has benefited, while just over a quarter are unsure. Gains in confidence, communication skills and a more positive outlook were witnessed by some mentors in relation to their little's. Having someone to confide

in and help him or her to deal with problems was also felt to be beneficial for the young person. Those who were unsure if the little had benefited cited the lack of feedback from the little or the difficulty in establishing if he or she had benefited as a reason. Project Workers believe that the programme is very beneficial to the young people. They have witnessed positive changes in little brothers and sisters and believe that the majority of matches result in positive outcomes. Furthermore, BBBS is perceived as 'cool' by young people, an important factor in youth services.

All in all, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of matches develop a good relationship and that a minority – possibly one in five develop some problems. These problems are often beyond the control of the programme – for example, if a big becomes ill or has to move away or if a young person's family move away. In a small number of cases they are because the young person does not engage or the relationship does not 'click', which underlines the need for careful matching. Close scrutiny of the littles' survey offers insights into how they perceive their relationship with their mentor – for example none of the respondents agreed that their mentor makes fun of them in ways they do not like, but 23% said that it was true or sort of true that they can not trust their mentor with secrets for fear that they will tell their parent or guardian.

## **7.5 Conclusions**

There is a high level of demand and support for the Foroige and HSE Big Brother Big Sister programme in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon from young people, parents, volunteers and professionals, who have welcomed what they believe to be a positive, preventative intervention programme. Through providing one to one support to a young person, it clearly fills a gap in service provision and yet is complementary to existing youth provision. The model has proven to be cost-effective, through building on volunteer inputs and working through NYP structures. However, while what has been achieved represents good value for money, it is likely that outcomes from the programme could be improved if additional resources were available.

DuBois et al (2002) analysis of 55 mentoring programmes concluded that mentoring does not automatically guarantee benefits for the young person – rather, positive benefits accrue where: relationships were characterised by frequent contact, emotional closeness and lasted six months or longer; young people experience environmental risk and disadvantage but had not yet succumbed to severe problems and; where practices were in place to increase relationship quality and longevity – such as ongoing training for mentors, structured activities for mentors and youth and other practices. Taking these three indicators into account, it can be assumed that the programme has been beneficial for the majority of young people participating. The young people experience environmental risk and disadvantage, good practice procedures are in

place and strong relationships have developed in approximately four out of five matches. It is in the area of practices to increase relationship quality and longevity that the programme has most room for improvement. While BBBS Ireland is working very well, there is a need to focus clearly on making sure that every match is as good as it possibly can be in order to maximise outcomes for young people. The following set of recommendations are made to this end.

## **7.6 Recommendations**

### *Overall programme development:*

- The programme has been extremely successful in terms of the spread and support it has achieved over the past 3 years. It is culturally appropriate, well-integrated into local structures and is highly valued among young people, mentors, parents and staff. The programme should be continued and expanded.
- The potential of the programme is being limited by lack of resources, particularly in Mayo, where a full-time Project Worker is required to maintain and develop the programme. Outcomes from the programme are likely to be greater if there is a larger pool of trained and assessed volunteers from which to make matches. At the moment, the options for matching are limited due to the lack of time available to recruit and assess volunteers. These time lags are damaging to the programme and must be addressed if the programme is to realise its potential.
- Representation of past and present littles and bigs in an advisory or management group would be in line with good practice in service provision, in that they could offer valuable guidance for service development. Understandably, the programme does not want to make too many demands on volunteers, but feedback from the research suggests that volunteers are very committed to the concept and development of BBBS Ireland and it is likely that some would wish to become involved in a management or advisory capacity.
- The difficulty in attracting male volunteers has resulted in a gender imbalance of approximately four to one. It may be worth considering a campaign to recruit males, addressing concerns they may have about coming forward. The support of existing male volunteers could be used in the campaign.

### *Maintaining quality and duration of matches:*

- Given the correlation between ongoing supervision and match meetings, it is vital that supervision is kept up to date. Furthermore, the integrity of the programme demands that all procedures are fully adhered to. It is important to ensure that a complacency does not develop if a match appears to be problem free. A system should be put in place to audit files regularly to ensure that no slippage occurs.
- The contribution of volunteers as the backbone of the programme was acknowledged by all parties. Yet, mentors reported that they would like additional support to counter the self-doubt and isolation they experience. Parra et al (2002) highlight that ongoing support and training is necessary to sustain high levels of mentor efficacy. According to Rhodes (1999), greater numbers of supportive practices predicted more positive outcomes for youth in mentoring programmes. While it is acknowledged that resources are limited, options such as peer support are low cost options that are likely to yield positive outcomes for participants. Mentors participating in this research said they would very much value an opportunity to have greater interaction between mentors in the form of a peer support group, training, activities and outings. The idea of more experienced mentors acting as 'mentors' to new mentors was also raised. Further consultation with mentors is recommended to identify the most appropriate forms of support.
- A number of issues in relation to match closure were raised in the research and it is recommended that the process of match closure be discussed by staff, possibly with input from former participants and mentors. For example, some staff feel that matches should formally end after one year, as they move into a different phase of development after one year, while others felt that more preparation of the young person for the end of the match was required.
- Additional supports and structures are required in small towns and rural areas. Feedback suggests that matches found it very difficult to find things to do, particularly in the first few months when the little could not go to the bigs house.
- Feedback from the youth survey could be incorporated into the training of mentors to raise awareness of how they can focus on developing the quality of their relationship.

## **7.7 Areas for Future Research**

The critical question in terms of assessing the value of a programme like this is whether having a mentor for a year or more makes a difference to the young people. Do they make better choices, improve their self-esteem, broaden their horizons, become healthier? Or do they have a nice time for a year and carry on as if it never happened. This should be the central research question in any future study.

It was apparent from this research that mentors have different views of their roles and differing expectations regarding how the young person should behave. Further research regarding how different styles of mentoring result in differential outcomes for young people would also be valuable.

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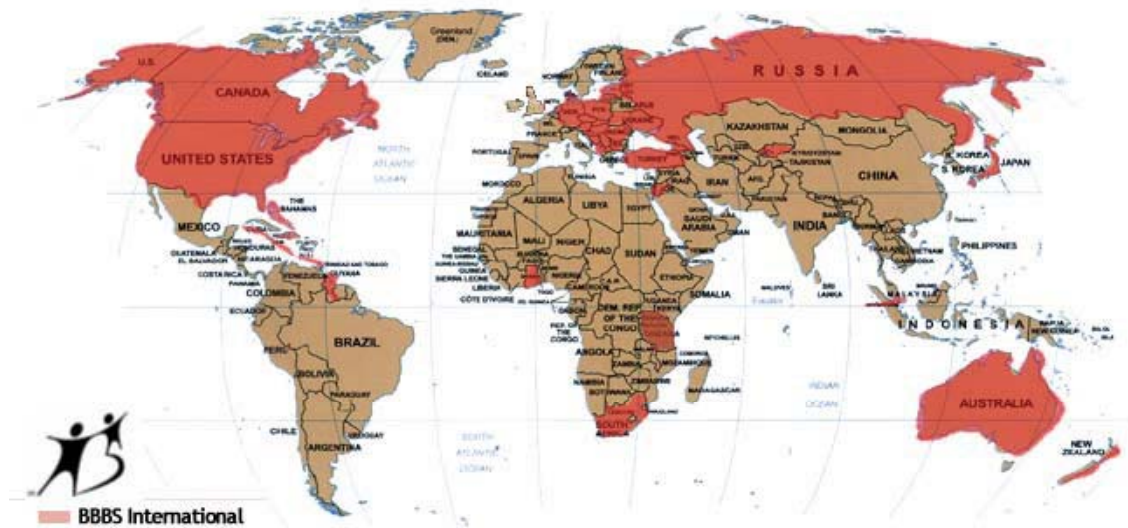
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## Appendix 1

# Big Brothers Big Sisters International



Antigua & Barbuda | Australia | Barbados | Bermuda | Bulgaria | Canada | Cayman Islands | Croatia | Czech Republic | Dominica | Estonia | Georgia | Germany | Ghana | Grenada | Guyana | Haiti | Ireland | Israel | Japan | Kyrgyzstan | Latvia | Lithuania | Macedonia | Moldova | Netherlands | New Zealand | Poland | Romania | Russia | Serbia & Montenegro | Singapore | Slovakia | South Africa | Tanzania | Trinidad & Tobago | Turkey | Ukraine | United States of America

## **Appendix 2**

### **Young People's Survey**

#### **Big Brothers Big Sisters Research**

#### **Young People's Survey**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Are you a girl or a boy?**

Boy

Girl

**2. How old are you?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. What class / year are you in at school?**

\_\_\_\_\_

On the next page are some things that young people say about their mentors. Please circle one number for each statement to say how true it is for you and how you feel. For each sentence, circle if the statement is not true at all, if its not very true, if it's sort of true or if it's very true for you.

For example, if your mentor always remembers your name, you would circle '4' (very True) to question 0.

	<b>Not true at all</b>	<b>Not very true</b>	<b>Sort of True</b>	<b>Very True</b>
1. My mentor knows my name	1	2	3	4
2. My mentor makes fun of me in ways I don't like	1	2	3	4
3. My mentor always asks me what I want to do.	1	2	3	4
4. When I'm with my mentor, I feel special.	1	2	3	4
5. Sometimes my mentor promises we will do something; then we don't do it.	1	2	3	4
6. My mentor is always interested in what I want to do.	1	2	3	4
7. When I'm with my mentor, I feel excited.	1	2	3	4
8. When my mentor gives me advice, it makes me feel stupid.	1	2	3	4
9. My mentor and I like to do a lot of the same things.	1	2	3	4
10. When I'm with my mentor, I feel sad.	4	3	2	1
11. I feel I can't trust my mentor with secrets - my mentor would tell my parent / guardian.	1	2	3	4
12. My mentor thinks of fun and interesting things to do.	1	2	3	4
13. When I'm with my mentor, I feel important.	1	2	3	4
14. When I'm with my mentor, I feel bored.	4	3	2	1
15. I wish my mentor asked me more about what I think.	1	2	3	4
16. My mentor and I do things I really want to do.	1	2	3	4
17. When I'm with my mentor, I feel mad.	4	3	2	1
18. I wish my mentor knew me better.	1	2	3	4
19. When I'm with my mentor, I feel disappointed.	4	3	2	1
20. When I'm with my mentor, I feel happy.	1	2	3	4

(Public Private Ventures, 2002)

Finally, we would like you to tell us what you like and don't like about having a mentor. Also, if there is anything else you would like to say about having a mentor, please write it down.

**What do you like about having a mentor?**

**Is there anything you don't like about having a mentor?**

**Is there anything else you would like to say about Big Brothers Big Sisters?**

Thank you very much for filling out this questionnaire.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Mentors' Questionnaire**



#### **Big Brother / Big Sister Evaluation 2005**

##### *Questionnaire for Mentors*

**Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. All information provided will be treated anonymously.**

Q.1 What were the key factors in your decision to become a mentor?

---

---

Q.2 Did you have any concerns about becoming a mentor?

Yes                      No

Q.2 A If yes, what were they?

---

---

Q.3 What do you see as your role as a big brother / sister?

---

---

Q.4 On average, how much time do you spend each week:

A. Meeting with your little brother / sister?

- 1 hour
- 2 hours
- 3 hours
- 4 hours
- 5 hours or more

B. Travelling to meet your little brother / sister?

- 1 hour
- 2 hours
- 3 hours
- 4 hours
- 5 hours or more

Q.5 How do you get on with your little brother / sister?

Badly

Well

Very well

Comment:

---

---

Q.6 What, if anything, have you found to be easy about being a mentor?

---

---

Q.7 What, if anything, have you found to be difficult about being a mentor?

---

---

Q.8 In terms of preparing you for your role as a mentor, was the training provided:

Not useful

Useful

Very useful

Comment:

---

---

Q.9 How do you rate the ongoing support you receive from your caseworker? Would you describe it as:

Very poor

Poor

Adequate

Good

Very Good

Excellent

Comment:

---

---

Q.10 Are there areas in which you would like more support from your caseworker?

Yes

No

Unsure

If yes, what are these areas?

---

---

Q.11 In your opinion, has the young person benefited from the match?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please explain your answer:

---

---

Q.12 In your opinion, what has been most valuable for the young person about the match?

---

---

Q.13 In your opinion, what has been least valuable for the young person about the match?

---

---

Q.14 What do you regard as the main benefits to yourself of being a mentor?

---

---

Q. 15 What do you regard as the main costs to yourself from being a mentor?

---

---

Q.16 Have you participated in group activities with other mentors?

Yes

No

Q.16A If yes, would you describe these activities as:

Not useful

Useful

Very useful

Comment:

---

---

Q. 17 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate response.

**I enjoy being a mentor**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I believe that the 'little' and I have a good relationship**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**The 'little' and I have a lot of fun**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**The little is slow to come up with suggestions for what we do so I have to do it a lot**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I sometimes get frustrated with the little**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**There is not enough support from BBBS staff for dealing with difficulties**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**Being involved with the programme is a positive thing in my life**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**Big Brothers Big Sisters is an excellent idea**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I generally get on well with young people**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I don't really 'click' with my match**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I feel that my match has been well managed by the caseworker**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I sometimes doubt if I have the right blend of skills and aptitude to be a good 'big brother / sister'**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**Our match goals are achievable**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I am clear about the standards of BBBS Ireland**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I can't notice much positive change in behaviour in my little brother / sister since our match started**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**The little's life experiences are very different to my own**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**I feel adequately trained for my role as a big brother / sister**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**Being a mentor makes too many demands on my time**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

**The BBBS programme should be available to a greater number of young people**

Strongly agree      Agree      Neither agree nor disagree      Disagree      Strongly disagree

Q.18    Would you like to make any suggestions for the future development of the programme?

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Please use the space below to make any additional comments:

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**Thank you for completing this questionnaire**