

# EVERY CONNECTION COUNTS



Dear Big Sisters Community,

As you know, 2020 marks Big Sisters' 60th anniversary. Over those decades we have been witness to so much change, but nothing quite like the situation that we are experiencing in the world today.

Like you, the last weeks for us have been marked by concern and adjustment. Every day has been about doing all we can to safeguard the physical and mental health of our staff, volunteers and most importantly, Littles, while trying to navigate a new daily reality during this global pandemic.

We know that trauma and uncertainty will most acutely impact the vulnerable among us. The at-risk girls we serve are already facing socio-economic adversities that will be amplified by this crisis.

Some of the girls we support are living in difficult family situations from which attending school and regular meetings with their Big Sister provide a respite, helping them cope with stress and anxiety.

As you'll read, our caseworkers have been working hard to find new and innovative ways to support these matches and ensure while our Littles are self-isolating, they never feel abandoned.

Maintaining this stable relationship with a caring adult is vital for building resiliency in young people and is why Big Sisters mentoring will be essential to help guide our youth through this crisis and support them in the future.

**This newsletter is called "Every Connection Counts" and that is more relevant now than ever. In the coming weeks, we will be finding new ways to connect with all of you.**

We may be physically apart, but we are acting with a unity of purpose to protect each member of our BIG community today and for years to come

With Gratitude,

Hanne Madsen



# STAYING CONNECTED AT HOME

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS STEPING UP TO SUPPORT ISOLATED YOUTH

**Rogers Canada generously donated 500 smartphones and six-month prepaid plans in addition to \$150,000 dedicated to their distribution, to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada.**

Cellphones and funds were distributed to metropolitan Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies; Toronto, London, Montreal, Calgary, Halifax, Ottawa and Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland.

58 devices were donated to be allocated to Little Sisters of the Lower Mainland, alongside \$17,400 of funds to support the distribution of those cellphones to families most in need.

Big Sisters will reserve the devices to Little Sisters aged 13+ who would benefit most. Caseworkers will assist in finding the families whose youth are facing the most struggle connecting to the outside world.

**It is because of in-kind donation like these that Big Sisters can allow its Littles to be connected in a time where so many are alone.**

What can seem like simple acts of kindness, can be an opportunity to speak to a family member, be able to study from home, or find essential distractions to the current stress and anxiety that may be omnipresent in homes. Big Sisters feels very grateful to organizations that help offer relief to hundreds of youth whose well-being have been affected in these times.

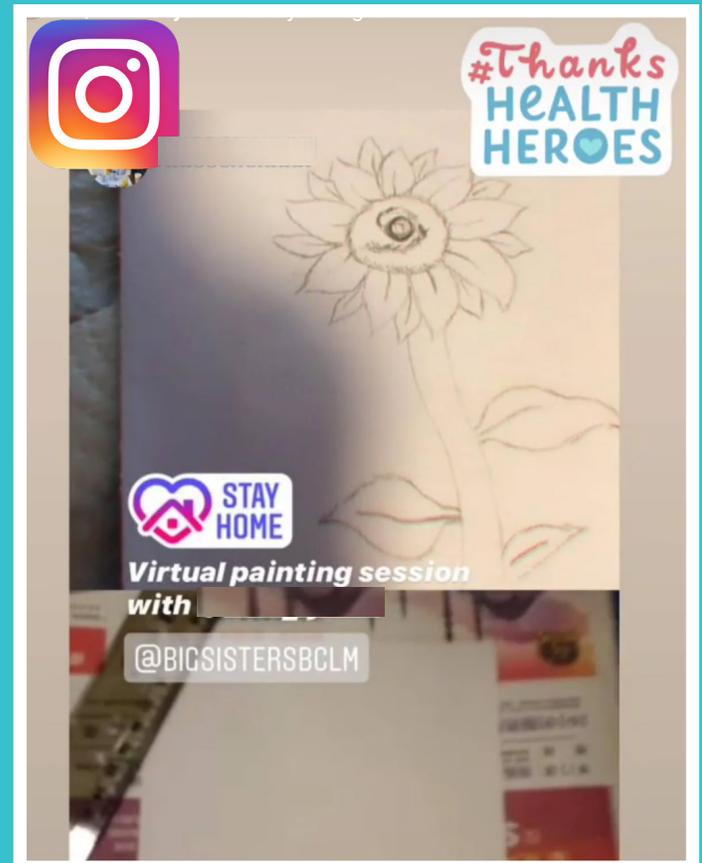
**Isolation does not mean loss of connection.**

**#Stayconnected to each other.**

As our matches navigate their new day-to-day and what time together looks like in this new digital reality, we have been very impressed by the clever ways they find to challenge isolation!

From virtual muffin baking, digital board game or simple video calls, we are extremely proud of how every single one of our matches is making efforts to stay connected to one another. We look forward to sharing their stories over the coming weeks!

*A match shared their virtual painting session on instagram with us!*



# MESSAGES

## FROM OUR TEAM

**Like the rest of the world, our team of amazing caseworkers have been adjusting to life working from home and the daily reality of digital work and social-izing.**

They are experts in their field, supporting mentoring relationships that build resiliency and confidence in vulnerable youth. Yet, so much of what our casework team does is dependant on building a trusting relationship with a Littles, volunteer or family through regular in-person check-ins.

With their new day-to-day, our program staff has been adapting quickly to continue to carry the mission and vision of the agency. As they call more often and check-in with the families and volunteers frequently, they are learning a new way to help maintain the same level of connection to the communities. They have been able to provide resources to local families and give matches new activities they can practice together, while apart.

Thank you to our program teams for sharing their messages of support.



# #STAYCONNECTED

From the Go Girls Team:

A couple of weeks ago, we received the sad news that the amazing spring term we had planned for so many of our girls was cancelled due to school closure. We are really heartbroken to not be able to see our girls and serve the long list of schools who were eagerly waiting for our program this spring... In the meantime, we are taking this day by day! We have been reassigned to assist the Study Buddy team until the fall, so until then, take care of yourselves and stay healthy!

From the Big Sister Team:

*We know that a lot of our fittles are spending more time alone, or in front of their computers than usual. That is why we work everyday to remain present in their lives and help them not feel isolated. Our team and their Big Sisters are here to give them a break from the news and relief from their challenging new life. However, we know that many of the youth we serve are living in low-income or bigger families have restricted access to technology, making it difficult to connect. We are still lucky to be available to them as they are more than ever reliant on members of their important circles of support.*

From the Study Buddy Team:

As schools are closed, our Little Study Buddies are discovering and adapting to new ways to study. For those who already experienced difficulties in english, math or other subjects, it will be difficult to be alone in front of a computer without the help or social interaction they usually receive in school. We are doing our best to provide our Big Sister Study Buddies and families with ressources to maintain learning at home.

# NEWS & UPDATES

## HELPING MATCHES STAY CONNECTED

**Big Sisters is launching its first ever Pen Pal Program to help matches stay in touch during Social Distancing.**

As mentoring programs have experienced a temporary suspension of in-person match meet-ups, there is an opportunity to step back in time and explore new and old ways of communicating!

Bigs and Littles will each receive a package in the mail full of supplies (stamps, paper, envelopes, stickers etc.) to send three letters to each other!

We look forward to seeing their photos!



## THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

**First West Foundation, a division of Envision Financial recently granted us \$6,913 to support our Go Girls Program. As the novel COVID-19 was ramping up, our Go Girls! spring term was cancelled.**

We are very grateful to First West for allowing the relocation of these funds to our Surrey Mentoring Programs. With this, we will be able to tackle the growing needs our Little Sisters face in these challenging times.



## AN UPDATE ON OUR FUNDRAISING EVENTS

For the safety of our community, we have decided to postpone our GrapeJuice event presented by RBC on April 22nd and our Spring Lunch presented by Scotiabank on May 29th.

**Our events as a whole account for over 50% of our annual revenue,** so we will be looking for innovative ways to reinvent these and will keep you updated on our plans.

Our hope is to gather our community together for our annual Big Sisters' Luminary Award Soirée, as planned on November 7th.

**MAKE A GIFT TODAY**

**WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS, BUT WHAT WE KNOW IS THAT OUR LITTLES WILL NEED OUR HELP AS THE WORLD RECOVERS. HELP US MAINTAIN MENTORING IN THE LOWER MAINLAND.**

Is our organization in your will? Please let us know, so we can thank you! Email: [akjennings@bigsisters.bc.ca](mailto:akjennings@bigsisters.bc.ca)