Investing in Young People for Future Economic Growth

Brief from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada
To the Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector

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Who We Are

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is a federation of 108 local charities serving 41,700+ children and young people annually in more than 1,100 communities across Canada. We mobilize over 21,300 volunteers to provide youth with the highest quality mentoring programs, so that every young person has the confidence to reach their full potential.

Youth at the Centre of Canada’s Charitable and Volunteer Sectors

As the Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector studies the impact of public policy on charities and non-profit organizations, as well as the impact of the volunteer sector, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada welcomes the opportunity to highlight the impact of our volunteers and to underscore the urgency of investing in charities that offer youth mentoring services.

The lives of Canada’s 9 million youth\(^1\) are inextricably linked to the charitable and volunteer sectors. Young people are at the forefront of disruption within these sectors and they are beneficiaries of its services.

**Volunteer mentors are making an extraordinary impact on society.** Every young person deserves to reach their full potential, but many struggle with systemic barriers and face adversities in their lives like poverty, family violence, and identity-based discrimination. These risk factors result in the following situations:

- 11.8% of youth are unemployed
- Only 30% of Indigenous youth graduate from high school
- 1 in 5 youth have contemplated suicide
- Indigenous youth represent 3x the national average of youth crime

Youth and their families seek out Big Brothers Big Sisters because they see mentoring services as a life-changing intervention to minimize these risk factors. The one-to-one mentoring relationship is proven to have a Social Return on Investment (SROI) of $23-to-1 when it comes to long-term economic, health, and social outcomes for youth in the most vulnerable situations.\(^2\) Youth with mentors are 2x more likely to stay in school and 17% more likely to be employed.

Mentoring is crucial to a child’s development because these positive and supportive relationships promote the development of cognitive skills essential for personal and professional success in life. As providers of vital mentoring services, charities like Big Brothers Big Sisters are leveraging volunteer energy and talent to ensure a more inclusive Canada.

**Youth mentoring is the catalyst for a new generation of donors and volunteers.** The Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector has already heard from experts emphasizing that we need to engage the next generation of donors to overcome sector challenges linked to an aging donor population.

Our research shows that mentored youth become engaged citizens:

- 13% more likely to donate to charity, and they donate 20% more.
- 50% more likely to volunteer, and they spend 30% more time volunteering.

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\(^1\) Statistics Canada (February 2018). A portrait of Canadian youth.

By addressing sustainability in the charitable and volunteer sectors, the Government of Canada will be supporting a new generation of donors and volunteers. Direct investments in youth mentoring will generate a ripple effect that benefits Canadians for decades to come.

We would also like to emphasize that charities provide critical leadership opportunities for young people. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is implementing a national Youth Engagement Strategy to ensure that young people’s voices are heard within our federation of charities. The diverse members of our National Youth Mentoring Advisory Council are actively advising staff on the future of mentoring, and they recently shared their concerns on youth employment and youth mental health with political and government leaders in Ottawa. These youth leadership opportunities are critical to the future of our sector.

Last but not least, Canada needs to develop a national mentoring strategy to align the efforts of all stakeholders including youth-serving charities, private sector stakeholders, companies, different levels of government, diverse communities, and young people. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada has begun this work in partnership with organizations such as the Alberta Mentoring Partnership and the Ontario Mentoring Coalition. A Pan-Canadian approach would elevate the impact of mentoring by devoting shared resources to research, information systems, public education, and knowledge mobilization.

**Recommendations**

For the first time in history, the Government of Canada has focused on young people as contributing to Canada’s economic wellbeing. The time to act is now. Through the Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector, the Government has a unique opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to youth with smart investments in the charitable and volunteer sectors, particularly in mentoring as a cost-effective approach.

As a youth-led, youth-centred organization, Big Brothers Big Sisters asked its National Youth Mentoring Advisory Council to co-create the following recommendations as its pre-budget submission to the Finance Committee. We believe the Government of Canada should invest $25 million in youth mentoring, specifically:

1. Invest in **Expanding Mentoring Services** in Canada, focusing on underrepresented young people for equitable outcomes;
2. Invest in **Mentoring Research** in Canada;
3. Invest in Mentoring for **Youth Employment** through the Youth Employment Strategy.

Youth in Canada today have significant potential to become thriving, engaged, and productive citizens. Through direct investment in the charitable and volunteer sectors, the Government of Canada can leverage the volunteer energy of tens of thousands of Canadians, catalyze a new generation of donors, and provide critical leadership opportunities for youth.

We urge the Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector to recommend that the Government of Canada invest $25 million in youth mentoring to ensure strong communities and thriving economic growth.