



Big Brothers
Big Sisters
OF PICTOU COUNTY

Strategic Framework 2023-2026

Resilience

2023-2026

At Big Brothers Big Sisters of Pictou County we build thriving communities by empowering lives through mentorship.

Our mission is to enable life-changing mentoring relationships to ignite the power and the potential of young people.

We work with children and youth aged 6 - 18 and match them with a mentor based on mutual experiences and shared interests. Our Youth Outreach program serves youth aged 12 - 24.

We are guided by a deep commitment to the responsibility we have to make sure all families and children that need us, have the opportunity to be served.

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Introduction

Herein we lay out the strategic framework for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Pictou & Antigonish Counties for the next three years. This document builds upon our last strategic plan, takes lessons from how our organization adapted through the pandemic years, and charts our course for the period ahead. It considers the national framework of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada. And, importantly, it reflects a clear understanding of the unique needs and conditions of the communities we serve.

Our organization aspires to have an even greater impact on the lives and success of children, youth and families in Pictou County.

The process of consultation that has led to the strategic framework included extensive review of data and outcomes, input from stakeholders and consultation with our staff and volunteer leaders.

Our Board, staff, and volunteers are the life blood of our organization. They will be guided by this strategic plan as they lead and support the organization in the years ahead. Together we share a deep commitment to the responsibility we have to make sure all families and children that need us, have the opportunity to be served.



Context



We have served children, youth and their families throughout Pictou and Antigonish counties, as an agency, since 1980. In our 40+ years of operations, the 2019-2022 pandemic brought changes and challenges more profound than any other period in our history. Our teams have long taken pride in our culture of responsiveness and adaptability, and at no time was the value of this ethos more evident than during the pandemic.

Our service staff adapted quickly to the shifting needs of the children, youth and families we support. Increased isolation, mental health issues, homelessness, school closures, food insecurity and lack of technological connectivity rose to the fore as significant challenges. Our fund development programs pivoted to minimize the pandemic's impact on the economy, and on our ability to conduct traditional fundraising events.



During this time we learned how to fully deploy technology and be creative in providing essential services to our families, thereby making sure children and youth in rural communities maintained connections with their mentors and community resources. We became more flexible in how we engage volunteers to help children. We ensured that both town and county children in Antigonish received the same program supports. The emphasis always remained on children and their families.

Our catchment area has a high rate of childhood poverty (est. 1 in 4 children here, versus 1 in 5 provincially), with minority and immigrant children facing even higher poverty rates. Over the last three years we have become more knowledgeable regarding appropriate engagement and cultural competence in our service delivery to diverse and marginalized groups in our catchment area.

Despite the challenges of the economy, our budget was balanced.

Finally, the last three years have shown us why and how we must continue to be respond quickly and effectively to conditions over which we may have no control, as well as to the often rapid changes to the contemporary needs of children and youth. Resilience is a quality we strive to strengthen in our work with young people. It is also a quality that will guide our strategy for the next three years.



Current Stats



13,104
Hours
volunteered

New Programs:



3




172
Youth receiving
service

Schools:



18
Different schools
across Pictou &
Antigonish have
students supported by
our mentoring
programs



257
Children
waiting



126
Young people
in mentor
programs

Who We Serve



Our Families:



88%

of Littles live with a single parent.

66%

have a household income under \$40,000.



ACES Experienced by Children and Youth:

Our Volunteers are also a diverse group of individuals:



3

Counties Served:
Antigonish
Guysborough
Pictou

72%

WOMEN

28%

MEN

58% experiencing social isolation

88% Parental separation or divorce.

60% Experience bullying

42% Been involved with child protection

66% Exposure to financial stress

24% Experienced violence in the home.

Measuring Our Impact

BBBSPC mentorship leads to significant impacts on a young person's life.



SUCCEEDS IN SCHOOL

87%

of Littles reported that they feel their teachers care about them



93%

of Littles reported that they are motivated to do well in school

MAINTAINS GOOD MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH



93%

of Littles reported having positive self-esteem

12%

increase in Littles who reported feeling they have a sense of purpose

92%

of Littles reported having a positive view of their personal future



SHOWS LEADERSHIP & DELAYS GRATIFICATION

92%

of Littles reported having a sense of responsibility

23%

Littles reported a 23% increase in their ability to plan ahead and make decisions after a year of being mentored



OVERCOMES DANGER & RESISTS DANGER



89%

of Littles reported that they can resolve conflicts peacefully after a year of mentorship



90%

of Littles reported they have some control over the things that happen in their lives



HELPS OTHERS & VALUES DIVERSITY

93%

of Littles reported that they believe it is important to help other people



93%

of Littles report an increase in cultural competence. Our Littles have a greater knowledge and comfort with people from different cultures, ethnicities, and racial backgrounds

IMPACT

GEOGRAPHY — For the period of this strategic plan, we will focus more aggressively in two areas of geographic concern: *Antigonish, and underserved rural communities* in our catchment area.

Our work will continue to focus on mentoring children and youth in Antigonish and Pictou Counties. Many of our Littles reside in single parent environments in rural communities often characterized by low household incomes.

We remain committed to *expanding our impact footprint*, particularly in Antigonish. Geographic distance, staff availability and travel time have historically challenged our work to recruit and adequately support volunteers in these areas, and so we will redouble our efforts to seek creative solutions, ranging from fuel subsidies, to connecting people virtually, to increasing our deployment of staff in some communities.

Many of the schools in our rural communities are underserved and asking for support, and we will pursue creative solutions to help ensure we are able to deliver mentorship programming to them.

PROGRAMMING — We know that positive Big/Little *one-on-one mentoring* relationships have the most significant beneficial impact on the children we serve, and this will remain the central priority for our ongoing programming and operational activities.

At unprecedented levels, the children who come to us today seeking one-on-one mentorship present with increasingly complex life and environmental challenges:

58% Experiencing social isolation

88% Parental separation or divorce

60% Experience bullying

42% Been involved with child protection

66% Exposure to financial stress

24% Experienced violence in the home.

Other critical needs have come into clear focus in the last three years, and these inform our forward approach. Many younger children in particular have had their social development arrested during a pandemic that interrupted almost two full years of traditional schooling.

Schools reach out to our organization with greater frequency seeking services. The need for us to focus on *in-school activities* has never been greater...partnering with schools to ensure we can guide children back through gentle support, encouragement, and empowerment.

Inventive new ways to deliver *group programming* were initiated during the pandemic, including Big Bunch Group programs, Virtual Mentoring and our High School to Elementary Mentoring. We will build on these success and take critical lessons learned as we expand and evolve into new program opportunities that bring Littles and our communities' seniors together.

The pandemic, economy, and inflation have resulted in profound *food security and housing* issues for many families and communities we serve. Over the previous two years our team and focus pivoted quickly to partner with other community support organizations to help families mitigate these issues. Our essential work in this area will continue.

Increasing our impact is central to all aspects of our strategic plan for the three years ahead. Our focus will be on consistently delivering evidence-based mentoring services and supports to more communities in the region we serve.

OPERATIONS

HUMAN RESOURCES— Trust and confidence in our personnel is a hallmark of our organization. The success of our programming and operational sustainability rests on our ability to recruit and retain the most qualified and capable staff to deliver on our mission. The pandemic and related economic climate resulted in us experiencing staff turnover for the first time, as we have historically been able to retain our skilled and dedicated staff team members long term.

We have recently reviewed and made some positive changes to our staff compensation structure and must continue to ensure we continue to be fair and competitive in supporting our dedicated team.

Our dedicated team members deal regularly with complex, often heart wrenching, family situations, Burnout and other negative impacts of their work is becoming more common. As an agency, we are placing staff mental health at the forefront of our operational and strategic decision making, and are ensuring that staff feel supported in this area.

As well we will consistently assess efforts in skills- and knowledge-based staff recruitment to ensure our team is fully equipped to meet emergent needs in programming and communities.

Moving beyond the pandemic, we have embedded technology-supported flexibility into the ways both our staff and Board meet and interact. Learning how to deploy virtual contact when and where in-person contact is not necessary has enabled us to make more efficient use of the time of our team and leadership.

BUDGETARY — Entering the pandemic we had a solid base with a well laid out fund development plan. We had a surplus, that allowed us to weather over two years of the pandemic. We did however take a substantial hit with a drop in revenue from 2019 – 2020 of over 32%. We were fortunate however to qualify for Covid relief from the Federal government which lowered this loss to 17%. We also cut many areas to decrease the loss as much as possible. Cash flow remained steady and budgets realized a surplus at the end of both years 2019 and 2020.

GOVERNANCE —Our organization’s exemplary volunteer Board of Directors represents a breadth of community stakeholder entities, and continues to dedicate its collective time and expertise to oversight and community engagement activities on our behalf.

Through the course this strategic plan, the Board will focus on exploring new opportunities for situation-relevant programming and outreach; exploring revenue development opportunities; pursuing financial sustainability; and building cultural competence for our organization ... particularly as we support of newcomer families and First Nation communities. As well, the Board will maintain its focus on strengthening our organizational leadership by attracting new Board talent that reflects the diversity, values, skills and experience needed to guide our work.

FUNDRAISING —The children, youth and families we serve benefit from broad and generous community support through our fundraising efforts. Revenue we generate directly impacts our ability to deliver on our mission. The past two years have demonstrated that this generosity is not wholly dependent upon our ability as an organization to convene traditional in-person fundraising events, but rather, that our donor community understand the essential role we play and are willing to step up when the need is great.

Financial sustainability is central to our ability to deliver on our mission. Our fundraising and other revenue streams must be structured for sustainability and sound return-on-investment.

Revenue development is an area that has the potential for strategic innovation in our organization. Our fundraising in the three years ahead will therefore focus on diversification of revenue streams, increasing cost-efficiency using technology appropriately, and enhanced communication with our donors, while we also explore new opportunities for earned revenue through social enterprise, community partnerships and leveraging our existing capital assets.

And finally, with a view to our intention to increase impact in Antigonish and small rural communities in our catchment area, we will see out new funding partnerships with some of the major corporate interests that operate within our region, either in support of expanded program roll-out or providing food to those BBSPC children and families with the most urgent need.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

ADVOCACY— The pandemic amplified many of the day to day challenges in meeting basic needs, that are faced by the families of the children and youth we serve. Housing and food insecurity, gasoline costs and geographic isolation emerged as significant impediments for families desiring meaningful mentoring support for the children through involvement with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Our role as advocates in these areas emerged during this period of time and our work in this area is expected to continue for the period of this strategic plan.

We are privileged to be trusted by the families we serve. They often reveal the dire nature of their circumstances to our team. We believe we can play an even greater role as advocates for these families, both at the public policy level, as a provider of community service navigation assistance, and, importantly, by providing healthy food for children and youth as a critical stop-gap measure.

ALLIANCES— We will continue to participate in pilot projects to identify tools and training effectively employed Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies across the country. As well, as an agency we will work to help shape and strengthen our national BBBS movement nation-wide, fostering a greater public understanding of our Theory of Change construct.

Here at home we will collaborate with diverse community partners for program design, development and delivery, in order to best serve the emerging needs of children, youth and families.

We will work to reconnect with allies and partners with whom we have had limited contact through the pandemic, including NSCC, Aberdeen Hospital Foundation, Schools Plus, and local service delivery organizations that benefit the families we serve in areas like food security, housing, and access to technology resources. As well, we will forge new allegiances with local companies, municipalities, and community organizations like churches and libraries, whose resources assist us in program delivery. As our focus on Antigonish increases, we will engage in outreach to members of the St. Francis Xavier community to explore partnership opportunities that will facilitate this work.

REPUTATION— The strength of our reputation is based on high caliber, skilled staff and Board members engaging with community stakeholders in ways that are respectful and that contribute to wellbeing and community health. With the apex of the pandemic behind us, in-person community engagement activities are re-emerging as an important way to build our community of friends, donors, volunteers, partners, and champions.

Locally, we will focus on building greater awareness of the benefits of mentoring....amplifying our voice in order to foster heightened interest in voluntarism, new community partnerships and more supportive public policy. And we will continue to work on elevating the visibility of our organization's brand through effective public education, marketing and communication strategies.

We must work to re-establish our position as "front of mind" with our allies, partners and community friends. As well we will focus on elevating awareness of the work we do with the 15-30 age demographic in our catchment area.

RECONCILIATION— BBBS's commitment to equity, diversity, access and inclusion extends to our ongoing commitment to reconciliation and engaging indigenous communities in the life and work of our organization. Cultural competence is an ongoing area of focus for us, and we will increase our efforts to engage local indigenous leaders, educators, families, and volunteers to help us build out our work with members of our regional First Nations.

Conclusion

CONCLUSION - We are excited to enter the next phase of our evolution as an organization...stronger than ever in our commitment to children and youth, and the families in our community.

We enter it with greater confidence in our ability to adapt, take calculated risks, and innovate. Together with our committed allies, we will work to nurture and uplift the vulnerable young people in our care, help strengthen their ability to adapt to the world around them and help position them for success in their lives.

PRIORITIES TIMELINE

PRIORITY	2023				2024				2025			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
IMPACT												
Geography — Antigonish and rural												
Programming — in-school, group, essential services												
EXTERNAL RELATIONS												
Advocacy — public policy + local												
Alliances — connect and reconnect with allies												
Reputation - education, marketing, communications												
Equity, Diversity, Inclusion - cultural competence + engagement												
OPERATIONS												
Human Resources — health, compensation, skills												
Budgetary — balance, grow revenue												
Governance — impact evaluation and outreach												
Fundraising — streamline and diversify												

We thank all those
who continue to
support the work that
we do in our
community.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to our dedicated Board of Directors who set the foundation for all the work that is done for children and youth in Pictou County.

To our staff who give of their heart and soul to continue to serve our families and do so with grace and respect.

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