

BBBS-NW Seeks Public Support For Survival

/EINPresswire.com/ Decreased Funding Creates Financial Struggle for BBBS-NW to Continue to Serve At-Risk Youth

Bellingham, WA, May 6, 2013 -- [Big Brothers Big Sisters](#) of Northwest Washington (BBBS-NW) is asking for donations from the local community to support their mission to mentor at-risk youth in Whatcom & Skagit counties. Decreased funding has recently forced BBBS-NW to cut programs, execute layoffs, and shrink the operating budget.

Discussions of mergers, heavy fundraising efforts, and continued cuts are being pursued. BBBS-NW went from an average of 7.2 full time staff in 2012 to 4.5 in 2013. Many Bigs and Littles remain unmatched on a waiting list. Each match costs approximately \$1,092 per year, with heavy staff hours going into interviewing, background checks, training of Bigs, matching, and ongoing support.

BBBS-NW has provided mentoring relationships locally for 37 years and weathered several recessions. In 1986, BBBS-NW saw huge success in the Bingo program, prior to the opening of local casinos. During those more prosperous times, BBBS-NW actually financially supported other non-profits. Over the last four years, one significant grant decreased from \$84,696 in 2009, \$40,635 in 2010, \$17,724 in 2011, and \$4,689 in 2012. Another grant, which had an annual average of \$184,879, ended in 2010. This drastic decrease in grants, combined with dwindling individual contributions from the community (\$14,947 in 2012), forced the elimination of the highly regarded School Buddies program, resulting in 115 fewer children served. Further drastic actions may need to be implemented.

The School Buddies program served children at nine local schools. When BBBS-NW evaluated continued viability last fall, they chose to suspend School Buddies in order to keep the organization open. The teachers involved, though saddened by the news, expressed a strong desire to see the program reopen if BBBS-NW found itself in a healthier situation in the future.

Executive Director Colleen Haggerty says, "While we don't have a facility to showcase our



program, the impacts to our community are profound. What we do changes lives. When a child thrives as they do with a mentor, the effects ripples into the community in positive ways. I don't think this community wants to see us close our doors."

Poverty is a strong indicator of risky behaviors in youth and 81% of youth served by BBBS-NW fall into that category, while 78% do not have two parents at home. Children mentored by BBBS are 47% less likely to use illegal drugs. 86% of alumni said they learned to make better choices throughout their adult life from their Big. 389 children were served in 2010, with only 89 in 2013 (YTD) throughout Whatcom & Skagit counties.

In order to remain a viable resource, BBBS-NW needs roughly 100 people to donate \$80 on a monthly basis. For those interested in donating to keep Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwest Washington a vital part of our community, call 360-671-6400 or go to our website: www.bbbs-nw.org. On Saturday, June 8th BBBS-NW is hosting a pledge drive event, "Mentoring Matters," at Boundary Bay beer garden from 4 – 10 pm. Entertainment, raffles and food will be available.

ABOUT BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwest Washington is the largest one-to-one mentoring organization in Northwest Washington. The vision of BBBS-NW is to provide children who face adversity with thriving one-to-one mentoring relationships, building stronger communities for generations to come.

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