

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County Awarded \$125,000 Grant from California Endowment to Support Programs for Minority Girls

Funding Will Focus on Efforts in Santa Ana Area To Provide Mentoring for At-Risk Youth

TUSTIN, Calif. (Jan. 14, 2015) – Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County, a Tustin-based, nonprofit organization that helps youth realize their potential and build productive futures through one-on-one mentoring, has been awarded a \$125,000 grant from the California Endowment. The Orange County award is part of an overall \$250,000 award made to the Orange County and Los Angeles County chapters of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

“Focused grants of this kind are an important component of support for our efforts in targeting segments of our community with special needs,” said Melisa Beck, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County. “Unfortunately, girls and young women often do not receive as much attention as their male counterparts, yet they are in just as much need. We must ensure that all our children have an opportunity to succeed.”

The grant is focused on supporting the organization’s mentoring programs for minority girls, specifically in the Santa Ana area. It will be used to help fund programs that match girls who experience elevated socioeconomic challenges with a “Big” in the organization’s traditional and High School Big programs.

The High School Bigs program partners local high school students with elementary students in one-on-one peer experiences” for an hour after school, one day per week. During these visits, the elementary student’s Big Brother or Big Sister provides one-on-one attention and academic assistance, while participating in educational activities and recreational games as well. The traditional program matches adult “Bigs” with “Littles” ages 6 to 18 for one-to-one mentoring through a variety of shared experiences and activities.

Last year, President Obama introduced the My Brother’s Keeper initiative to address opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color in reaching their full potential. However, missing from that agenda was the mentoring of girls and young women. The result was the gathering of more than 1,000 signatures from girls and women of all ages and backgrounds urging the White House to include girls and young women into the initiative.

In response, the California Endowment began a girls’ initiative to support young women facing adversity through a wellness-focused program to teach them how to rebuild from significant trauma they may have experienced earlier in their lives.

The program is based on collaborative research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente demonstrating a direct correlation between traumatic events such as divorce, abuse, neglect, hunger, housing instability, low income, violence or gang affiliation that occur during childhood and instances of serious illness later in life, including heart disease, heart attack, stroke and obesity. Moreover, the research also found that mentorship can curb some of these “later life” issues.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County, one of the leading chapters in the country, provided over 2,700 children facing adversity with professionally supported, one-to-one mentoring relationships in 2014. Positive outcomes have included: 98 percent graduated high school on time, 83 percent enrolled in college, and 100 percent said their “Big” was their biggest influence on pursuing a higher education. For more information, visit www.bigbrooc.org.

January is National Mentoring Month which comprises an awareness campaign and associated National Mentoring Summit to launch the mentoring movement’s yearlong drive for systemic change to make mentoring an integral component of youth and workforce development efforts. Research has shown that when matched through a quality mentoring program, mentors can play a powerful role in providing young people with the tools to make responsible decisions, stay focused and engaged in school, and reduce or avoid risky behavior like skipping school, drug use and other negative activities. To learn more, go to www.nationalmentoringmonth.org.

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About Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County

For more than 100 years, Big Brothers Big Sisters has operated under the belief that inherent in every child is the ability to succeed and thrive in life. Most children served by Big Brothers Big Sisters live in single-parent and low-income families, or households with a parent who has been incarcerated. It is the nation’s largest donor and volunteer supported mentoring network and makes meaningful, monitored matches between adult volunteers (“Bigs”) and children (“Littles”). The organization’s system of ongoing evaluation and support has been proven by independent studies to help families by improving the odds that “Littles” will perform better in school, avoid violence and illegal activities, and have stronger relationships with their parents and others. Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, with a network of nearly 400 agencies across the country, Big Brothers Big Sisters serves a quarter-million children annually. In 2014, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County served over 2,700 children. For more information, visit www.bigbrooc.org.