



**Big Brothers Big Sisters**

# Adult Little Research

Conducted by Harris Interactive  
March 3 — April 16, 2009

This booklet includes:

- June 16, 2009 Big Brothers Big Sisters Press Release
- Executive Summary for the Adult Little Research
- How the Adult Little Research Fits in Our Outcome Measures





**Contact:** Kelly Williams, Media & Public Relations  
215-665-7795 • Kelly.Williams@bbbs.org

## **Breakthrough Study Finds Adults Mentored as Children in Big Brothers Big Sisters are Better Educated and Wealthier than Peers**

*New Study Released at Big Brothers Big Sisters' National Conference Suggests America's Largest Donor-Supported Network of Volunteer Mentors for Youth Breaks Cycles Linked to Poverty*

**Miami, FL, June 16, 2009** -- A study conducted by Harris Interactive® on behalf of Big Brothers Big Sisters finds adults mentored as children through Big Brothers Big Sisters are more likely than peers with similar backgrounds but who were not involved in the program to have a four-year college degree and incomes of \$75,000 or more. They also report strong relationships with their spouses, children and friends.

Big Brothers Big Sisters released the findings this week during its National Conference. The 2009 conference is being hosted in Miami and is sponsored by Comcast.

“The children we serve are among America’s most vulnerable, whether they have one parent, live in households experiencing poverty or have a parent who is incarcerated,” said Judy Vredenburg, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America President and Chief Executive Officer. “Independent research has told us for some time that Big Brothers Big Sisters improves the odds that children we serve will succeed educationally and socially. This is our first large-scale examination of the long-term benefits, suggesting we have the potential to break cycles too often associated with family and community poverty.”

The cross-sectional study was commissioned by Big Brothers Big Sisters to gather evidence that its long-term structured mentoring program’s effects reach far beyond the time that children are enrolled in the program. The nation’s largest donor supported volunteer mentoring network’s 255,000 community- and school-based mentoring matches depends on donations to recruit, carefully match and screen volunteers and provide ongoing support to the mentors, children and their families.

## **AMONG THE STUDY'S SPECIFIC FINDINGS:**

- Alumni were 75% more likely than non-alumni to have received a four-year college degree (28% of alumni vs. 16% of non-alumni).
- Alumni were 39% more likely than non-alumni to have current household incomes of \$75,000 or higher (46% of alumni vs. 33% of non-alumni).
- A majority of alumni are extremely or very satisfied with their relationships to friends (72%), family (65%) and spouses (62%). Fewer non-alumni report the same level of satisfaction (46%, 50% and 40%, respectively).
- Approximately two in three (64%) alumni are extremely or very satisfied with life compared to just over one in three (35%) non-alumni.
- A majority of alumni (62%) perceive themselves to have achieved a higher level of success than their peers who were not involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters. Furthermore, this is twice as many as the 31% of non-alumni who report being more successful than other people they grew up with.
- Adult Littles are more likely than non-alumni to be engaged in their community over the past 12 months, particularly when it comes to volunteering (52% vs 35%, respectively) and holding a leadership role in an organization working on an issue (29% vs. 16%, respectively).

“One of the most effective strategies for successful fundraising is to demonstrate the long-term value of our program,” Vredenburgh said. “Foundations, individuals, corporations and public funders – want to invest in programs proven to change lives and break cycles of poverty.”

A little more than half of the alumni Littles who participated in the study grew up in single-parent homes (52%) and described their childhood financial situation as worse off than the average American household (51%). The Big Brothers Big Sisters alumni reported that having a “Big” in their lives positively influenced their self confidence, provided stability and changed their perspectives on life, taught them new things, influenced aspects of their education, pushing them to set higher goals and make better decisions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Between March 3 and April 16 2009, Harris Interactive conducted an online survey of 449 adults, 200 of whom participated in Big Brothers Big Sisters as “Littles” for at least one year during their childhood and 249 who never participated in the program. Alumni Littles were sampled from a combination of Harris Interactive’s panel of respondents and Big Brothers Big Sisters lists. All 249 of the non alumni were sampled from the Harris Interactive panel of online respondents. The non-alumni segment allows for a comparison between Big Brothers Big Sisters alumni and adults who had a similar profile as youth but who did not have a Big Brother or Big Sister as a youth. A full methodology is available.

## **ABOUT BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS**

Big Brothers Big Sisters helps vulnerable children beat the odds. The organization depends on donations to help recruit volunteers and reach more children. Funding is used to conduct background checks on volunteers to ensure child safety; and provide ongoing support for children, families and volunteers to build and sustain long-lasting relationships. Big Brothers Big Sisters is proven to improve children’s odds for succeeding in school, behaving nonviolently, avoiding drugs and alcohol, and breaking negative cycles. Headquartered in Philadelphia and with nearly 400 agencies across the country, Big Brothers Big Sisters serves more than a quarter million children. Learn how you can change how children grow up in America by going to [BigBrothersBigSisters.org](http://BigBrothersBigSisters.org).

## **ABOUT HARRIS INTERACTIVE**

[Harris Interactive](http://HarrisInteractive) is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms. For more information, please visit [harrisinteractive.com](http://harrisinteractive.com).

### Background

**B**ig Brothers Big Sisters believes one of the most effective strategies for successful fundraising is to demonstrate the long-term value of the program. Therefore, Big Brothers Big Sisters commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a cross-sectional study in an attempt to gather empirical evidence that that the program's efforts reach far beyond the time when Littles are enrolled in the program.

### Objectives

Specifically, the Harris interactive study sought to:

- Understand various aspects of adult Littles' childhood
- Evaluate productivity and success of adult Littles in today's society
- Compare adult Littles to similar non-participants in order to identify associations between participation in Big Brothers Big Sisters and achievements later in life
- Gauge the extent to which adult Littles perceive Big Brothers Big Sisters to have made a difference in their life

### Methodology

#### **Sample**

- 200 adult Littles (Alumni) with one or more years of participation in Big Brothers Big Sisters
- 249 Non-Alumni, similarly profiled to Alumni on a selection of childhood characteristics and demographic variables

#### **Sample sources**

- Alumni: 109 were sampled from Harris Interactive's panel of online respondents and 91 were sampled from lists provided by Big Brothers Big Sisters.
- Non-Alumni: All 249 were sampled from Harris Interactive's panel of online respondents.

#### **Method**

- 12-minute Online Survey (approximately 50 questions)

## **Weighting**

- Alumni were statistically weighted to a profile of Big Brothers Big Sisters alumni, comprised of combined Harris Interactive and Big Brothers Big Sisters samples, on education, age, gender, race, region, income and propensity to be online.
- The non-alumni were also weighted to the same characteristics as alumni as well as some other elements while growing up, which included location and safety of neighborhood, family composition and childhood household relative financial situation, in order to control for these variables.

## Notes on Reading the Report

### **Non-alumni:**

The non-alumni segment allows for a comparison between Big Brothers Big Sisters alumni and adults of a similar profile who did not participate in the program as a youth. In addition to controlling for certain demographics like gender, age and race, we also controlled for other characteristics while growing up (location and safety of neighborhood, family composition, and childhood household relative financial situation) in order to minimize the likelihood that differences we see in the results are due to differences in demographics or characteristics of childhood life.

### **Causation vs. Correlation:**

Since Littles and non-Littles were not selected through a randomized process as youth and tracked through to adulthood, it is important to note that differences between alumni and non-alumni do not establish causation (i.e., program involvement is the cause for adult Little's attitudes, achievements and behavior), but rather a correlation (i.e., program involvement is associated with adult Little's attitudes, achievements and behavior).

### **Reading Results:**

An asterisk (\*) signifies a value of less than one-half percent. A dash represents a value of zero. Percentages may not always add up to 100% because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple answers from respondents answering that question.

# Key Findings

## Overall

- Adult Littles recognize that having been a Little contributes significantly to the person they are today. According to them, having been in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program as a child results in genuine, positive outcomes.
- The value of Big Brothers Big Sisters becomes apparent when comparing former Littles to their counterparts who were not involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters. Adult Littles are more likely than non-alumni to be confident, more educated, successful and satisfied with life.
- As shown in previous Big Brothers Big Sisters research, having a longer or more meaningful match with a Big oftentimes correlates with more positive outcomes.

## Value of Big Brothers Big Sisters

Large majorities of adult Littles recognize important benefits associated with participation in Big Brothers Big Sisters, as evident by their descriptions of the influence on their lives and their perceived success compared to peers not in the program.

- When asked in their own words to describe the value of being involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, the responses were overwhelmingly positive.
  - Having someone in their life who provided guidance and individual attention was the most frequently mentioned benefit. Many also mentioned the overall positive impact and some specifically mentioned that it helped them to become a better person, to change their life, to gain confidence, and to get them through school.
- Over six in ten (62%) alumni consider themselves to be more successful than their peers who weren't involved in the program. Only 31% of the non-alumni say they are more successful today than the people they grew up with.

More specifically, alumni report that having a Big played an integral role in who they are today by positively influencing their self-confidence, providing stability, changing their perspective on life and pushing them to set higher goals than they would have.

- Almost all (90%) agree their Big made them feel better about themselves, with most (52%) strongly agreeing. Further, 85% say being a Little has influenced them to have confidence in their abilities.

- Large majorities of adult Littles say their Big provided stability when they needed it (90%) and changed their perspective on what they thought possible in life (81%). Three-quarters (77%) set higher goals than they would have on their own because of their Big.
- Overcoming problems with courage, honesty, being a team player, and respecting others are all character traits that alumni say were also highly influenced by having been a Little.

Being in the program also taught Littles new things, influenced aspects of their education, and helped them to make better decisions overall.

- Alumni learned right from wrong (76%), the importance of helping others (84%) and other things they would not have otherwise learned (84%) from their Big.
- Bigs also had a major influence on school life. Over-three quarters (77%) did better in school because of their Big, two-thirds (65%) agree that their Big helped them reach a higher level of education than they thought possible and half (52%) agree that their Big kept them from dropping out of high school.
- Three in four (74%) say their relationship with their Big helped a lot in making better choices through their childhood. Nearly just as many (69%) said the same about making better choices throughout adult life.

Most former Littles perceive themselves to have strong relationships with others. They also have more solid relationships than their non-alumni counterparts.

- A significant majority of alumni are extremely or very satisfied with their relationships to friends (72%), family (65%) and spouses (62%). Fewer non-alumni report the same level of satisfaction (46%, 50% and 40%, respectively).
- The majority of alumni strongly agree that they have strong relationships with family (54%) and friends (51%).
  - Also, of those who have children, almost all alumni feel either extremely (48%) or very (34%) close to them.

## Adult Little Outcomes

Many Alumni have grown up to become responsible citizens and active members of their community.

- Alumni are more satisfied with their volunteering (46% extremely/somewhat satisfied) and community engagement (42% extremely/somewhat satisfied) than non-alumni (25% and 26%, respectively).
- Two-thirds (67%) of former Big Brothers Big Sisters participants donate to or volunteer at a religious or charitable organization, approximately half (52%) volunteer in the community and three in ten (29%) hold some type of leadership position in a community group.
  - Only a third (32%) of non-alumni volunteer and they are half as likely to serve on a board or hold a position in a local organization (16%).
- Almost a quarter (22%) of adult Littles have participated in a service program like AmeriCorps, which is double the number of non-alumni (10%).
- When it comes to overall satisfaction with life, Adult Littles are contented, especially compared to others who were not involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters.
  - Approximately two in three (64%) alumni are extremely or very satisfied with life compared to just over one in three (35%) non-alumni.
  - Large majorities (86%) of alumni agree that they lead a fulfilling life.

A large number of adult Littles have reached a significant educational milestone – earning a four-year college degree.

- Many alumni have achieved higher levels of education than their parents. For about half (46%) of alumni's fathers, the furthest they went in school was completing high school. For alumni, high school completion only is just 21%. Instead, most went on to earn their four-year degree (42% alumni vs. 22% father, 25% mother).
- Alumni are also more likely than non-alumni to have received a four-year degree (28% of alumni vs. 16% of non-alumni).

Alumni are more satisfied with their work and financial situation, and perceive themselves to have achieved high levels of success as compared to non-alumni.

- Over half (54%) of alumni are extremely or very satisfied with work compared to only 30% of non-alumni. Further, four in ten (38%) alumni are extremely or very satisfied with their current financial situation whereas just one in six (16%) non-alumni feel the same level of financial satisfaction.
- Almost half (46%) of adult Littles say they are better off than the average American household, whereas the largest percentage of non-alumni (41%) say they are in the about the same financial situation as the average American.
  - In fact, alumni have higher household incomes than non-alumni. Almost half (46%) of alumni have a household income of \$75,000 or more, compared to a third (33%) of non-alumni.

#### About Harris Interactive®

Harris Interactive is one of the largest and fastest-growing market research firms in the world. The company provides innovative research, insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for The Harris Poll®, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what it believes to be the world's largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its North American, European and Asian offices, and through a global network of independent market research firms. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com).

#### Harris Contract Requirements

Harris Interactive must review any final materials that you plan to distribute/share with the media/public. Together, our review process includes checking for accuracy, methodology disclosure and use of the Harris Interactive name/brand. To ensure accuracy and integrity, enough time should be built in to include this process. If you want to make any changes please contact Jessica Spikerman-Graham at [Jessica.Spikerman@bbbs.org](mailto:Jessica.Spikerman@bbbs.org) and she will coordinate with Harris Interactive.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters is adding to the outcomes research and what follows may be helpful in understanding how to use the available research as you talk to donors, funders and supporters.**

**How does this research fit in with the research of Public/Private Ventures and the Youth Outcomes Survey?**

Scope of Research	Outcomes for Big Brothers Big Sisters in general and National in Scope		Outcomes for Your Agency Today
Research Type	Research of Big Brothers Big Sisters by Public/Private Ventures	Adult Little conducted by Harris Interactive	Youth Outcomes Survey
Relevance	These nationwide studies provide the strongest evidence of outcomes from the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring model since they employ the “gold standard” where randomly selected youth receiving Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring are compared to randomly selected youth not receiving Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring. Research conducted by an outside evaluator.	This is our first step in a series of studies to understanding the long term benefit of Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring. This survey of adults who had been Littles in their youth compares their well-being to adults who had similar characteristics as youth but who did not receive Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring. It also provides descriptions from the mentored adults of how they feel the mentoring influenced them.	This will provide outcome evidence that is from the current year and specific to individual agencies. A pre-post test methodology plus comparison group methodology will be used. These methodologies will be a step up from methodologies used in the Program Outcomes-Based Evaluation (POE).
Usage	For descriptions of the effects of the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring model with the strictest research methodology.	For descriptions of the value of Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring found in former Littles now in adulthood (mean age of former Littles is 34 in the study)	For performance management where your agency sets goals and adjusts your program practices to improve outcomes.  Also, for descriptions of outcomes from the current year and for your specific agency.
Date of Research	Community Based—1995 School Based—2007, 2008	2009 conducted by Harris Interactive	Being launched in August, 2009 for AIM agencies and will be on-going

**How do we explain the categories of research that we have had and now will have?**

	Historically	Now
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public/Private Ventures Community and School Based Studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public/Private Ventures Community and School Based Studies</li> <li>▪ Adult Little Research</li> </ul>
Agency Dependent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ POE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Youth Outcome Systems</li> </ul>

**Please Note:**

- Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies may utilize any of the information provided in this Adult Little research. All language must be used as presented in this document and may not be changed in any way.
- You may use any of the information in this report as long as it is used in identical form and with the following attribution -- Harris Interactive® conducted the study online within the United States between March 3 and April 16, 2009
- Additionally, the results of this report apply only to Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring. These results may not be applied generically to other non-Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs.
- Please do not substitute any other language for Big Brothers Big Sisters, Big, or Little so that we maintain the integrity of this study being about our Big Brothers Big Sisters program and not other mentoring programs.
- Please do not refer to the study as a “Harris study” as this was not a Harris Interactive sponsored study.
- Harris Interactive must review any final materials that you plan to distribute/share with the media/public. Together, our review process includes checking for accuracy, methodology disclosure and use of the Harris Interactive name/brand. To ensure accuracy and integrity, enough time should be built in to include this process. If you want to make any changes please contact Jessica Spikerman-Graham at [Jessica.Spikerman@bbbs.org](mailto:Jessica.Spikerman@bbbs.org) and she will coordinate with Harris Interactive.