

EVERY CONNECTION COUNTS



Dear Big Sisters Community,

As we approach the spring, I am conscious that this can be a time for renewal and a time of celebration.

I'm so proud to share that, with your help, we served over 595 youth last year!

This includes our dedicated team not only supporting youth in our programs, but also their families, our volunteers and continuing to help ignite potential and build resilience ensuring the brightest possible future for all Little Sisters.

Successes of the last year are part of a long history of dedicated individuals helping to make a real difference in the lives of all the youth Big Sisters serves. As you'll read, this is truly exemplified by the story of Big Sister Sheryl, who recently passed, but who has left an indelible impact on her Little Sister, Rita and their families.

We are grateful to be able to celebrate Sheryl and know that a simple connection can make a Big difference in a life.

Hanne Madson
Executive Director of Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland



BECOMING A BIG SISTER



Big Sister, Sheryl with Rita's daughter, Emma

How one mother's Big Sister inspired her daughter to become one, too.

2020 will forever be a year marked by a lot of hardship, sadness and loss.

For Sara, it was an especially hard year as she had to say goodbye to her beloved grandmother, Sheryl. It was nearing the end of Sheryl's life that Sara truly discovered just how remarkable her grandmother was and what a critical role she had played in her mother Rita's life. Sheryl wasn't Rita's biological mother - she was her Big Sister.

Rita was raised in East Vancouver by a single mother who made life extremely difficult for her children. She took her frustrations out on Rita. "You're your father's daughter," she would say. At age 9, Rita's world would be forever changed when she met her Big Sister, Sheryl. Rita vividly remembers meeting Sheryl for the first time. "She came over to me and said, You're such a sweet little girl," recalls Rita. "This was the first time I'd ever heard anything positive about myself."

Rita loved the time she spent with her Big Sister Sheryl, and dreaded being at home with her mother who continued to mistreat her. Her mother moved their home so many times but despite the frustration, Sheryl maintained her commitment to being in Rita's life.

At 16, Rita had a good boyfriend, but her mother disapproved. She became extremely violent towards Rita, who eventually fled her home without even shoes on her feet. She went to Sheryl, who promptly responded with: "You're coming to stay with me." Rita became a ward of the state, and when the judge witnessed

mistreatment by her mother in the courtroom, she was given the power to leave her.

Throughout all of life's important milestones, Sheryl was by Rita's side. From Sheryl, Rita learned the importance of having a good work ethic and a true sense of justice. When Rita witnesses injustice around her, she doesn't hesitate to stand up for what's right. "If it wasn't for Sheryl, I wouldn't have built the strength" says Rita. "Because that's what Sheryl did. She helped no matter who needed help."

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POSITIVE ABOUT MYSELF"**

Later in life, Rita married that same high school boyfriend, and together they moved to Chilliwack and raised their children, Colin and Sara. Her children have always known Sheryl as their grandmother. "We're a family because of Big Sisters," says Rita.

Sheryl had no children of her own but considered Rita to be her daughter. "I felt very proud of her calling me her daughter," she says. "To me, I just see her as Mom." Through her relationship with Sheryl, Rita found a sense of belonging and worth. Rita believes that without Big Sisters Mentoring and the help of Sheryl, her life would've been completely different. Sheryl helped guide Rita from right and wrong when

her mom didn't give her the time. "If I didn't have Sheryl, I would've been totally lost," Rita says.

Now as a Teacher Assistant, Rita witnesses the same need for extra guidance in the young lives around her. "I see lots of kids in foster care. Social workers are so swamped. Parents are so busy. Single moms, working parents, different cultures..." she says. "Kids feel so lost. They need someone who can guide them."

Rita urges supporters of the Big Sisters program to listen to the many stories of those who have lived through the experience and put themselves in the children's shoes. "If Sheryl wasn't there, I might not have been, too. I've done a lot with my life."

Rita and Sheryl's relationship was 46 years strong until Sheryl passed away last year. She was in her 70s. "She was my guiding light," Rita recalls. "I am so blessed that she was in my life." Now in her 20s, Rita's daughter Sara is following in her grandmother's footsteps and has enrolled to become a Big Sister, too. She hopes to continue the legacy of Sheryl and ignite the potential within a young girl who needs it, just like her mother needed 46 years ago.



Big Sister, Sheryl(left) with Little Sister, Rita(right)



Big Sister, Sheryl

KEEP PEDALING FORWARD

The importance and involvement in physical activity are crucial to the female identifying youth that we serve every day. Providing an outlet in physical activity is vital in improving youth's mental wellbeing and confidence. **Girls involved in sport report feeling the benefits of enjoyment, having a sense of community, increased confidence, body image positivity, and sharper cognitive skills.** It also provides a network and access to positive role models, helping youth to envision future possibilities.

We at Big Sisters strive to ignite the youth's potential within all aspects of their wellbeing. **One of the Little Sister participants, Emmalee achieved an incredible milestone this past summer by learning to ride a bike for the first time- We couldn't be more proud!** Emmalee and her Big Sister Melissa worked towards this goal for more than a year and with hard work and dedication, Emmalee achieved this goal. **Congratulations Emmalee, keep on pedaling!**

Through our mentoring programs, we want to create opportunities for all female identified youth to succeed in their desired goals. **Our Go- Girls! program empowers youth aged 10-14 to help promote active lifestyles, balanced eating, and building self-esteem.** The virtual program works with youth to overcome social pressures and provide them with the necessary tool kits to gain confidence. Physical activities help with providing a safe space for youth to practice mindfulness and self-awareness. After this 8-session program, **93 % of our Go Girls feel better about their self-esteem.** The participants complete the program with a stronger sense of self and they are ready to take on whatever comes next.

Follow us at: [@gogirlsbclm](https://www.instagram.com/gogirlsbclm)

"1 in 3 girls drops out of sport vs. 1 in 10 boys drops out of sport."

"1 in 3 girls reported low confidence, poor perceptions, negative body image, perceived lack of skill of belonging and feeling unwelcome...as factors preventing them from continuing in sport."

The Podcast Hosts

IgniteHER Podcast

A BSBCLM PODCAST; CONNECTING YOU TO A COMMUNITY OF EMPOWERED WOMEN

Presenting IgniteHER Podcast! A podcast connecting you to a community of empowered women. This monthly podcast will explore mentorship, and female empowerment through ongoing conversations with inspiring guests.

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Meet Angie



Angie's family situation growing up was chaotic and unpredictable, she often felt unseen and powerless. As an adult Angie always had a strong desire to connect with kids to ensure they feel valued. To her, igniting potential is helping kids discover their passions. Angie's passion for music and creativity provided her with a strong sense of self which allowed her to remain resilient despite what was happening in her family. Through this podcast I hope we can amplify voices to create positive social change.

Meet Vanessa



Vanessa is all about building self-esteem and confidence in youth and young women so they are empowered to pursue their dreams! Throughout Vanessa's life, she struggled with shyness, self-acceptance, and mental health. This is why Vanessa is so driven to do the work that she currently does today. Vanessa ignites potential by building on strengths, providing opportunities, and discovering each person's 'why'.

Meet Vineeta



Mentoring has always been an important component in Vineeta's life. Being a daughter of two immigrant parents, a girl and an only child made it hard for her to connect with others and feel comfortable with taking up space in this world. As an adult, Vineeta enjoys creating spaces for others to share their stories. She ignites potential by showing acceptance and compassion for herself and others. Vineeta believes women are incredible and she can't wait to connect with more extraordinary women and share their stories.



STUDY BUDDY

No cost mentoring that ignites academic success



REFER A CHILD TODAY

NEWS AND UPDATES

Upcoming 2021 Events

MAR 8 International Women's Day Webinar

APR 14- 50/50
MAY 5 BC LOTTO

MAY 6 Grapejuice Virtual Event

JUN 1-30 Move For Mentoring Month

JUN 4 Spring Lunch Virtual Event

YOUR LEGACY IS HER FUTURE

Is our organization in your will?
Please let us know so we can thank you!
Email: akjennings@bigsisters.bc.ca



CALLING ALL RUNNERS!



Vancouver Marathon

May 2, 2021

[Click here to sign up](#)

June 1-15, 2021

[Click here to sign up](#)



RUN & FUNDRAISE



Big Sisters
OF BC LOWER MAINLAND

Big Sisters applauds the continued support of funders like

THE RIVER FOUNDATION

By making a significant donation to our Big Sisters Mentoring program year over year, The River Foundation plays a pivotal role in mentorship opportunities for youth. THANK YOU!

HELP US MAINTAIN MENTORING IN THE LOWER MAINLAND.

We do not know what the future holds, but what we know is that the Littles we support will need our help and their Big Sisters as the world recovers. [Click here to make a donation!](#)