

STRENGTHENING RURAL, REMOTE & INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY SERVICES PROJECT



Strengthening our Knowing to Strengthen Engagement



Prepared By: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada
Network Development & Members Services Team
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Project Description

September 30th, 2021 was marked as the first Canadian National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – an annual commemoration honouring the lost children and Survivors of residential schools, their families and communities. Furthermore, a series of discoveries of unmarked graves across the sites of former residential schools made national news and brought to the forefront of Canadians' minds conversations about how individuals and organizations contribute to Reconciliation. Given the reach of BBBS agencies into communities across Canada, it was acknowledged that more than ever there was a need to recognize the trauma and histories of rural, remote, and Indigenous communities as we work to reach, engage, and serve the youth that live in them. Without strengthening the knowledge, understanding and skills of BBBS staff and mentors, we cannot hope to strengthen our reach, build inclusive communities, and safely serve vulnerable community members.

Therefore, this year's CIBC Strengthening Reach Project was focused on strengthening our awareness of trauma-informed service delivery as it relates to Indigenous people and communities across Canada – "**Strengthening our Knowing to Strengthen Engagement**" launched in 2021 and has achieved its goals through consultation, co-design and pan-Canadian learning opportunities.

Strengthening Reach Approach

Within the Strengthening Reach Project, BBBS set out to create a new National educational resource for BBBS staff and mentors across the country to further their understanding of Indigenous history from a trauma-informed lens. Consultation and co-design with the BBBS network were highlighted as being of fundamental importance; given the significant differences across the areas served by BBBS agencies and the varying levels of experience and knowledge possessed by BBBS mentors working with children and youth, it was important to create a resource that both addressed the needs of BBBS staff and mentors and captured and scaled up best-practices from across the network. As such, a participatory design model was developed that included multiple points of feedback and contribution from knowledge holders across the BBBS Network.

To deliver on this work, BBBS contracted **Botting Leadership Inc.**, a Saskatchewan-based consulting firm with specific expertise and experience in the development of training materials, trauma-informed practice, Indigenous cultural competency, and building relationships between settler and Indigenous communities.

These experts in the space of Indigenous relations, were tasked with walking alongside BBBS and BBBS member agencies in the creation of a final awareness training resource that filled the skill-gap and promoted best practices for building inclusive communities across Canada, reaching and serving Indigenous children and their families.

Strengthening Reach Project Milestones & Timeline

SUMMER/FALL 2021: FORMATION OF PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP

To initiate Strengthening Reach Project, BBBSC conducted a survey of member agencies to identify BBBS agencies that:

- Were at risk of terminating their rural or remote service delivery
- Struggled with reaching and serving Indigenous communities
- Were in position to reach rural, remote or Indigenous communities
- Had capacity to explore new approaches to reaching diverse communities and building new inclusivity across services

Based on the Network survey results, a **core advisory group** was formed, compiled of BBBS staff from six agencies meeting the above criteria:

1. BBBS of Wood Buffalo;
2. BGCBig of Edmonton;
3. BBBS of Saskatoon and Area;
4. BBBS of London and Area;
5. BBBS of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox, and Addington;
6. BBBS of Cape Breton



This advisory group were positioned to inform the work of Botting Consultants and BBBSC as we strived to build a national awareness training package for our Network of over 95 BBBS sites across Canada with the potential to reach over 20,000 mentors who reach over 40,000 children and youth.

"Our organization recognizes that reconciliation is not an end itself but a process of change that is needed in our community [...] we have begun conversations, relationships and partnerships within the Indigenous community and organizations to ensure that we are creating culturally appropriate services and ensuring sustainability in our practices." –
BGCBig of Edmonton

"We are committed to meeting the calls to action as a part of Truth and Reconciliation in our program delivery, through culturally informed and trauma sensitive work. [...] It has been a standing strategic priority [...] to have a consistent, regular presence in the rural/remote Indigenous communities so that residents in all areas have equal access to mentoring." –
BBBS of Wood Buffalo

WINTER 2021/2022: MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT AND BBBS NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

During the winter of 2021/22, the project was focused on the development of training materials by the project consultants. With support from BBBS and the core advisory group, the consultants developed a training framework and designed training modules.

This period also saw continued engagement with the BBBS network, via a network-wide survey gathering resources, materials, and perspectives on trauma-informed practice and Indigenous cultural competency, an open-invitation National Insight Gathering Roundtable hosted by BBBS in January, as well as a presentation at an all-agency Mentoring Lab Town Hall facilitated by BBBS in early March. Each of these engagement opportunities provided vital knowledge to inform and shape the training materials to be relevant and useful to the BBBS Network.

"A National training would be prudent to ensure agencies and staff are receiving equitable and accurate information." – BBBS York

"It is refreshing to see such tangible and informed action items that agencies can use. Thank you [...] for bringing such amazing resources forward for our network. Our programs and services will be safer than ever before." – Anonymous feedback from BBBS Agency Staff during Mentoring Lab Town Hall

SPRING 2022: LAUNCH OF TRAINING MATERIALS

During the final period of Strengthening Reach Project, the project consultants, and the core advisory group of agencies pressure tested and fine-tuned the cultural awareness resources. As a part of this process, a BBBS Mentor and member of the BBBS National Youth Mentoring Advisory Council was also engaged to provide their perspective, representative of a key audience for the final training resources.

In April 2022, at the time of the writing of this report, the final resources are scheduled to be launched to the entire BBBS Network by the end of the month.



Project Reach

The Strengthening Reach Project was designed to ensure multiple layers of impact and reach across the BBBS Network:

- ✦ **6 BBBS Agencies** forming the Core Advisory Group engaged regularly on topics relating to the training of BBBS Mentors to work with and support Indigenous young people.
- ✦ Over **20 members of the BBBS Network**, including members of our National Youth Mentoring Advisory Council, attending a National Insight Gathering Roundtable to share best practices, learnings, knowledge, expertise, and aspirations related to the training materials and topic.
- ✦ The training framework was presented to the BBBS Network during a Mentoring Lab Town Hall, with over **100 BBBS staff members** in attendance. These staff gained insight into the training development process and a framework to approach gaining knowledge about and engaging respectfully with Indigenous communities.
- ✦ In April 2022, the final training materials will be shared with the entire BBBS Network in Canada, to be made available to over 95 agencies, approximately 1000 staff, and over **20 000 volunteer mentors reaching over 40 000 children and youth**. This reach will help to ensure that our agencies, staff, and mentors are more knowledgeable and skilled to serve Indigenous youth across the country and champion inclusive community building.

Project Success

Since 2019, the CIBC has supported the continued and ongoing work of activating, testing, and scaling-up best-practice learnings across our members of nearly 100 BBBS agencies, of which 73% report serving rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

The CIBC Strengthening Reach Project has allowed for necessary explorations of new operational strengths that can sustain program delivery in these communities. To date, the project has facilitated the formalization of partnerships with Indigenous communities, the filling of service gaps in rural areas, exploration of novel shared operating models between rural and urban BBBS agencies, the strengthening of relationships with rural communities, and more.

This year's project has provided resources that will introduce BBBS staff and mentor to a self-reflective process to help connect with Indigenous youth in a culturally safe way, as well as a self-explorative process to increase awareness of what mentors bring into a relationship with a young person. The foundation of the training has been built on an Indigenous Worldview that all humans are connected, and that one must know oneself to know one another. It reflects the varying levels of Indigenous cultural competency across the Network, introduces the complex histories and

intergenerational trauma that could be present in Indigenous young people and their families that BBBS serves, and aims to establish authentic human-to-human connections.

Ultimately, this year's project has built resources to increase community inclusiveness and promote a journey of continuous growth, learning, understanding and curiosity of one another, our truth in history, and in finding new ways to connect as a whole community.

CONCLUSION

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is extremely proud of our work made possible through the CIBC Foundation. And we deeply thank the foundation for their support. We have promoted CIBC's investment in this work across all our social media channels and through out partnership recognition on our national website.

We were thrilled to be apart of the **37th Annual CIBC Miracle Day**. We were honored to be mentioned as a non-profit who was strengthen the foundations mission across communities.

The **CIBC Strengthening Rural, Remote, and Indigenous Community Services Project**, a vital exploration of how our services can continue to reach and serve rural, remote, and Indigenous children and youth. With the increasing inequalities caused by the global pandemic, BBBS is positioned to strengthen our services and champion inclusive community building, reaching those who are often underserved or unreachable.

Building trust and local partners takes time and BBBS has been serving and reaching diverse communities for over 100 years. In Canada, there are only a few charities that reach across Canada like we do. BBBS's footprint across Canada is unique and positioned for social impact. No two communities are alike, and each has a unique set of challenges and strengths. Incredibly, BBBS services and mentoring is a globally trusted and accepted movement that has positive impact across generations and across diverse populations.

Our programs create social and economic opportunities for all, and **we respectfully request continued support from CIBC** to continue this journey reaching vulnerable populations and providing equal opportunities.

We look forward to exploring the next phase of this important work, championing inclusive communities and helping all youth realize their full potential.

