



Local Big Brothers Big Sisters Loses Federal Funding for Mentoring Children of Prisoners

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Belleville, Illinois - Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern Illinois has lost the remaining two years of federal funding for their Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program. The grant funded program that started in October 2010 provides adult mentors for children who have a parent in prison.

"Cuts to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services zeroed out national funding by almost \$40 million for the Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program nationwide", said Barbara Cempura, President and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern Illinois. "Our agency had two federal grants - one for 2009-2012 and a second one for 2010 - 2013. We started the Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) program with federal funds committed for three years with the understanding we would secure the funding needed to sustain the program after our grant agreements ended in September 2012 for one grant and September 2013 for the second grant." Currently, the two grants, funded for a total of \$235,000, will expire at the end of September 2011.

Cempura stated, "Serving children of incarcerated parents is very important to our community." It is estimated that at least 4,000 children in Madison, St. Clair, Monroe and Clinton counties experience the detrimental economic, social and emotional effects of growing up in a family affected by incarceration. These children may experience the trauma of multiple changes in caregivers and living arrangements. National statistics indicate that without intervention, many of these children will follow in the footsteps of their parent into the criminal justice system.

Federal grant support of Big Brothers Big Sisters is an investment in a "research -proven blue-chip" prevention and early intervention program. A Washington State Institute for Public Policy study of government funded prevention and early intervention programs for youth found significant economic returns for a public investment in the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program. Based on proven outcomes, the study estimated that for every dollar of public investment in Big Brothers Big Sisters, there is a \$3.28 benefit. The economic benefits follow from improved educational outcomes and reduced violence and crime. The study estimates that based on the costs of incarceration alone, if just one in 100 youths enrolled in a Big Brothers Big Sisters program is put on the right path, stays in school and is not incarcerated, taxpayers break even on their investment.

According to Cempura, the two federal grants for Mentoring Children of Prisoner's represent 25% of the agency's annual budget. While the agency has responded to the cuts to begin in October by downsizing staff, Cempura stated that "Funding is needed to provide services to almost 100 children of prisoners currently enrolled in the program. We are hoping concerned individuals and donors will step in and help fill the funding gap."

HOW TO HELP

Contributions to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern Illinois can be mailed to 6400 West Main, Suite 1G, Belleville, IL 62223 or made online at www.bbbsil.org.

To learn more about becoming a volunteer, call 618 398-3162 or email darrellc@peaknet.net.