

Literacy for Littles

Ontario Trillium Foundation Invests \$60,700 in Big Brothers Big Sisters of Grand Erie Pilot Program: “Literacy for Littles”

By Renee VanderHarst



Photo from left: Pat Meiklejohn, Rotarian & “Big Sister”; Krista Kitchen, “Literacy for Littles” Mentor Coordinator, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Grand Erie; Ross Gowan, Past President, Rotary Club of Norfolk Sunrise; Patti O’Reilly, Executive Director Big Brothers Big Sisters of Grand Erie

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Grand Erie is thrilled to announce the start of something big! Thanks to a partnership with the Rotary Club of Norfolk Sunrise and the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we will be launching a pilot program, “Literacy for Littles”, this coming school year.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation has committed \$60,700 over the next three years. That funding will be used to increase access to mentoring supports for local children aged 5-7. This literacy based mentoring program will help reduce later difficulties in school by providing early intervention and one-on-one support from enthusiastic, caring volunteers.

“Literacy for Littles” will see our agency expand our current “In-School-Mentoring” program to include Senior Kindergarten and Grade 1 students. In the initial year, eight children will be matched with trained volunteers who will visit the school for one hour each week. During that time they

will engage in literacy-rich activities that will increase their confidence, self-esteem, and school engagement. The pilot will grow to twenty children served in the second year, and year three will be critical in measuring the success of the program.

Early identification and intervention are the keys to school success for children. Our focus at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Grand Erie is to ensure that our local youth reach their full potential. We believe investing time in our children means a stronger future for our community. The Rotary Club of Norfolk Sunrise has identified literacy as one of its key priorities, and has made a long term commitment to this project.

“We are very excited about this new community partnership and what it will mean for our young people, schools, and community. 2013 marks our Centennial: Big Brothers Big Sisters has been around for 100 years. Part of the reason for our success is that we evolve to meet the needs of the community. According to a new study from The Boston Consulting Group over their working lives, “Littles” will earn on average \$315,000 more than individuals from similar family and economic backgrounds who did not have a “Big”. Participants in our mentoring programs were significantly more likely to give generously to charitable causes and volunteer their time to community work. Most impressive the study found that every dollar invested in Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring generates \$18 in social return on investment. “Literacy for Littles” is one more exciting way that we hope to make positive life-long impacts. We are truly thankful to our partners: The Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the Rotary Club of Norfolk Sunrise, for their investment in our children.”

~ Patti O’Reilly, Executive Director, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Grand Erie

“Literacy is a priority for both the Rotary Club of Norfolk Sunrise and for Rotary International. Rotarian (and Big Sister) Pat Meiklejohn has championed this project from the beginning, and we sought to partner with Big Brothers

Big Sisters of Grand Erie because of their successful track record in working with youth and with volunteers. Early intervention is widely understood to be critical in literacy, and expanding the already successful in-school mentoring program run by BBBS of Grand Erie makes a whole lot of sense. With the financial support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the expertise of BBBS of Grand Erie, we are excited to see the pilot program launched and begin to address the literacy needs of our local youth.”

~ Ross Gowan, Past-President, Rotary Club of Norfolk Sunrise “

"Our area's Trillium Foundation board has an excellent track record of decision-making. Building on the 'In-School-Mentoring' program offered by the Big Brothers Big Sisters the 'Literacy for Littles' is a pilot program wellworth exploring to benefit the kids involved."

~ Toby Barrett, MPP for the riding of Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant