

# Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program



OKLAHOMA  
COMMISSION ON  
CHILDREN AND  
YOUTH

2022 Annual Report



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# Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program

## Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report

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“ Big Brothers Big Sisters nurtures children to strengthen communities. Our monitored matches tackle the problems of social justice, generational incarceration, and mental health.”

### Children of Incarcerated Parents Initiative

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) is dedicated to serving and improving the lives of Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) through strategic partnerships, joint planning, and service coordination with stakeholders from across the state. To better inform and create lasting systemic change, OCCY works toward engaging meaningfully with individuals and families with lived CIP experience. Recent CIP projects managed by OCCY and partners include the development of an educational toolkit, a doctoral research fellowship program, professional continuing education, CIP partnership evaluation, fatherhood initiatives, the coordination of the statewide CIP Advisory Committee, and funding for the Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program.

### Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program

In accordance with Title 10A2-10-101 and Title 10A 2-10-102, OCCY is charged with annually issuing a request for proposal to establish one-to-one mentoring for children whose parents are incarcerated and/or youth who are at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. Entities eligible to apply to administer the program are limited to non-profit organizations. In accordance with Title 10A2-10-103, OCCY is required to publish an annual report describing the Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program and its effectiveness.

OCCY awarded Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma (BBBSOK) \$55,000 to provide one-to-one mentoring to children of incarcerated parents for State Fiscal Year 2022 (SFY2022). The OCCY award allowed BBBSOK to provide (or match) 46 children with individual adult mentors who were committed to meeting with each child on a consistent and regular basis for at least one year. OCCY has supported BBBSOK since SFY 2015. Since that time, BBBSOK has served more than 3,800 matches. In the last seven years, 356 matches have been supported by funding provided by OCCY. These mentors have changed the trajectory of those children's lives.

## The Challenge

Oklahoma has the highest incarceration rates of any democracy in the *world*,<sup>i</sup> and more than one out of 10 Oklahoma children (11%) have experienced parental incarceration during their childhood.<sup>ii</sup> Without positive intervention, many of these children could be incarcerated in the future. Many may be left with caregivers who see them as a burden and are certainly not trained to help a child cope with a crisis.

A child's early years can have lifelong physical, social, and emotional impacts. While positive experiences and environments can set a young child on a stronger life-long path, traumatic experiences or environments during those formative years can have a long-lasting, detrimental impact. Many of the children served by BBBSOK are considered 'at risk' because of the environment in which they live. Living with their family is the best setting for the development of a child. Risk factors such as poverty, single parenthood, or low educational levels can undermine a child's development. Further, the child's community or neighborhood can contribute to this risk status, especially when they grow up in neighborhoods that have low levels of English language proficiency, high unemployment, low high school graduation rates, or high crime rates.

Nearly 70% of the matches funded by OCCY involve children who live in single-parent households. Children from single-parent households often live in poverty, enjoy less parental time and supervision, and have fewer opportunities for positive youth development. Statistically, these children are twice as likely to drop out of high school and are more likely to be placed in foster care or juvenile justice facilities. Young women have three times the

risk of bearing children as unwed teenagers, and young men with absent fathers face a much higher probability of growing up unemployed, incarcerated, and uninvolved with their children.<sup>iii</sup>

Risks for these children include poor life outcomes, such as school failure, death, economic dependency, substance abuse, or incarceration. The greatest opportunity for the prevention of poor outcomes in a child is a strong relationship with a parent or other adult. One-to-one mentoring relationships support the critical social and emotional development needed to help build resilience in youth; while promoting children's mental health and well-being.

BBBSOK strives to promote positive changes in scholastic confidence and competence, social acceptance and peer relations, the avoidance of delinquency, and improved parental relationships by matching youth aged six to 18 years with volunteer adult mentors (Bigs). Having an adult mentor can buffer the negative effects of a single-parent home, traumatic experiences, and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

BBBSOK's monitored one-on-one relationships have proven repeatedly to be a successful deterrent to poor choices, intergenerational incarceration, and dropping out of school. Due to its success, this program is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and supported by the Department of Juvenile Justice. In a current study by Dr. David DuBois (University of Illinois, Chicago) and Dr. Carla Herrera (independent research consultant), children who have a Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS) mentor are 54% less likely to be arrested, and 41% less likely to engage in substance use.

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## Adverse Childhood Experiences

Other dysfunction in the home can generate traumas for a child such as food insecurity, parental incarceration, parental separation, physical abuse, addiction, and emotional neglect. These Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) change the architecture of the child's brain, which can affect their decision-making skills, schoolwork, and future health outcomes. ACEs

are linked to risky behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death.

ACEs are categorized into three groups: abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual), neglect (emotional and physical), and household challenges (incarcerated parent, mother treated violently, substance abuse, mental illness in

the household, parental separation, or divorce). Exposure to ACEs can cause prolonged toxic stress, which can lead to a higher risk of learning and behavioral issues, obesity, heart disease, alcoholism, and drug use.<sup>iv</sup>

with nearly one in five Oklahoma children under the age of 17 saying “yes” to at least two of the questions below.<sup>v</sup> All of the children in the BBBSOK program who are supported by OCCY funds answered “yes” to the final question.

The percentage of Oklahoma children impacted by ACEs is higher than the national average,

<sup>i</sup>Prison Policy Initiative. States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2018.html>

<sup>ii</sup>Children who had a parent who was ever incarcerated: KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9688-children-who-had-a-parent-who-was-ever-incarcerated?loc=38&loct=2#detailed/2/38/false/1648,1603/any/18927,18928>

<sup>iii</sup>Children who had a parent who was ever incarcerated: KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9688-children-who-had-a-parent-who-was-ever-incarcerated?loc=38&loct=2#detailed/2/38/false/1648,1603/any/18927,18928>

<sup>iv</sup>American Academy of Pediatrics. Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Lifelong Consequences of Trauma. (2014) Retrieved from [https://www.aap.org/en-us/documents/ttb\\_aces\\_consequences.pdf](https://www.aap.org/en-us/documents/ttb_aces_consequences.pdf)

<sup>v</sup>America’s Health Rankings United Health Foundation. Adverse Childhood Experiences. (2021) Retrieved from [https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/ACEs\\_8/state/OK](https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/ACEs_8/state/OK)

### Take the ACE Test

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you? Insult you? Put you down or humiliate you? Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?  
Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you? Have you touch their body in a sexual way or attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
4. Did you often or very often feel that... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Did you often or very often feel that your family didn’t look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
5. Did you often or very often feel that... You didn’t have enough to eat? Had to wear dirty clothes? Had no one to protect you?
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
7. Was your mother or stepmother often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Sometimes, often, or very often, kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Ever repeatedly hit over a minimum of a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill? Did a household member attempt suicide?
10. Did a household member go to prison?



## Big Brothers Big Sisters Mission

The mission of BBBSOK is to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth. The goal of BBBS has remained the same for over a century – to match one caring, stable, and positive adult role model with one at-risk or high-risk child. Matches are made based on common interests and personalities, child needs, and volunteer abilities. BBBSOK requires at least one year of involvement in the program. BBBSOK’s program offers children one of the greatest protective forces in their development: a nurturing adult who cares enough to build a relationship with them, encouraging trust and resilience.

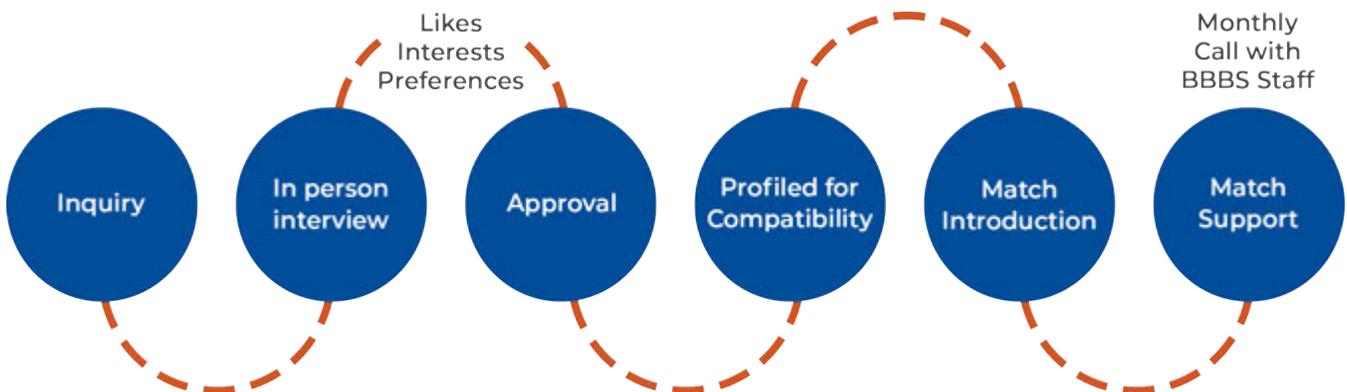
### BBBSOK match costs include:

- In-person or video interviews with volunteer, child, and their parent/guardian
- Extensive background check for volunteers
- Staff salary for client assessments, match profiling, match introduction, and monthly match support conversations

### Impact of OCCY Funding on BBBSOK

Funding from OCCY has allowed BBBSOK staff to recruit dedicated volunteer mentors, fully vet them to ensure all child safety standards are met, and match these mentors with children of incarcerated parents. BBBSOK’s professionally-trained specialists provide support from the start and maintain the integrity of the match by offering ideas and outside resources to the Big and the parent/guardian. This support is key to the longevity of the match and helps the friendship to grow into a lasting fruitful relationship. BBBSOK asks that Bigs commit a year to the program. Most matches last well beyond that year.

### How a Match is made at BBBSOK



# Meet Real Oklahomans

## Mary, Harper, and Tatum

Harper, a fourteen-year-old Native American, has faced several hurdles in life. Harper's father was in jail for many years. After his release, their relationship has been strained and distant. Mary, Harper's mother, has struggled with addiction and in the past was often abusive. Other members of the family also perpetuated abuse. A close family friend sexually abused Harper. Because of these situations, Harper was removed from her home and was temporarily placed in foster care. During this time, Mary received treatment for her addiction.

After Mary's treatment, the two began to repair their relationship. However, the negative impacts on Harper's early childhood experiences remained. In early 2022, Harper admitted to having suicidal thoughts and was diagnosed with severe depression. Due to Harper's shyness, she chose to be homeschooled and leaving the house caused her to have severe anxiety.

Mary recognized that Harper needed help and began building a support system for the two of them. Harper started regular therapy, but Mary also wanted Harper to have a role model and mentor. That's when Harper reached out to BBBSOK.

With an ACE score of seven out of ten, Harper needed help with building relationships, finding friends, increasing self-confidence, and managing future hardships. BBBSOK staff knew they needed to find the right mentor for Harper. Tatum joined BBBSOK after learning about the mentorship program. Fortunately, Tatum has experience in the field of mental health as well as working with teens from underserved communities. Tatum knew exactly how to connect with Harper.

Although Harper and Tatum have been matched for less than a year, everyone involved is seeing improvements in Harper's behavior. Tatum is helping to increase Harper's confidence. They have a shared love of art and music, and Tatum is intentional when choosing their outings together. Since being matched, Harper's relationship with family members has improved. Due to an increase in confidence, Harper is going out into the public more often. Harper has returned to attending school in person, has made new friends, and has joined the school's band. Harper's plans for the future include becoming an animator or a psychologist.

Harper, Mary, and Tatum are real people who live in Oklahoma. For anonymity purposes, their names were changed. **Inspiring and life-altering stories like this one play out across our state every day.**



## Outcome Data for OCCY-Funded Matches

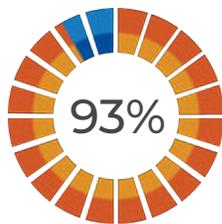
Through connections with their Bigs, Littles overcome shyness and self-doubt, build trusting relationships with peers, and improve their academic performance. BBBSOK utilizes instruments developed by BBBS to monitor program effectiveness. These include surveys that monitor the strength of the relationship between the Big and Little, measuring outcomes like connectedness, safety, the importance of the match relationship, and the child's feelings about his or her Big. Other performance outcome and measurement tools are administered in a pre-test/post-test format and are given at the initial match introduction and annually at the anniversary of the match. These tools work as a direct measurement of academics, relationships, and risky behavior. Staff members assess the child's positive outcomes through the survey responses.

In addition to these annual evaluation tools, BBBSOK program specialists collect anecdotal data from the Big, Little, and parent/guardian through regularly scheduled match support conversations (performed monthly for matches that have been together for under a year and quarterly for matches that have been together for over a year). The BBBSOK staff are trained to evaluate and monitor these conversations so they can assist in ways that lead to the longevity of the match.

## Outcome Data Survey Results for OCCY-Funded Matches

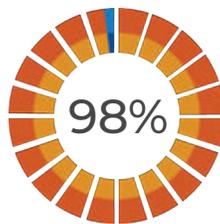
Littles reported the following outcomes:

### Academic



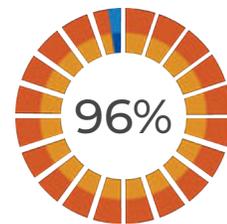
Maintained or improved their educational expectations

### Behavioral

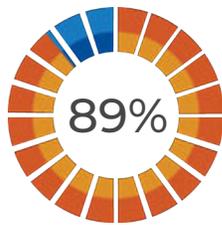


Avoided contact with the police or juvenile justice system

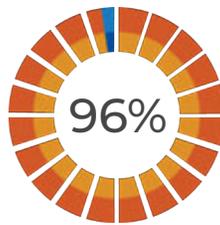
### Strength of Relationships



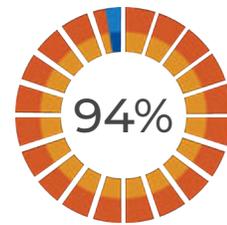
Say their relationship with their Big is important to them



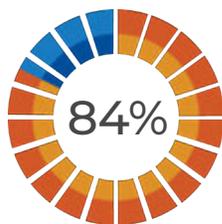
Maintained or improved their academic performance



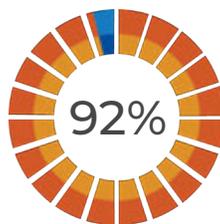
Avoided substance abuse



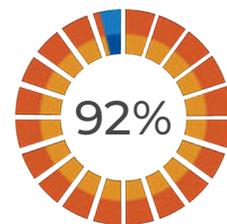
Feel close to their Big



Maintained or improved their goal-setting skills

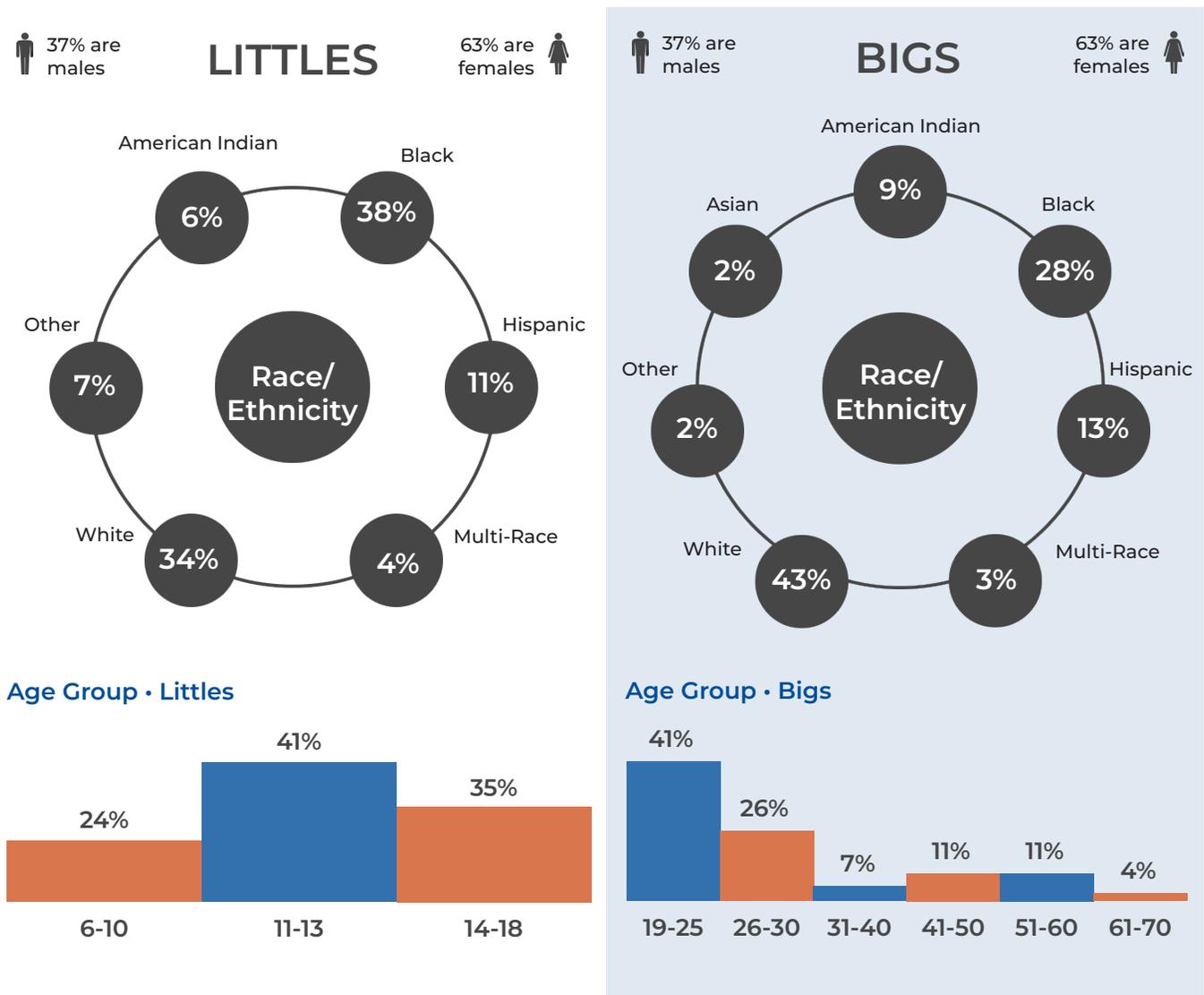


Avoided disciplinary action at school



Say their Big helps them solve problems

## OCCY-funded BBBSOK Match Demographics (SFY 2022)



## OCCY-funded BBBSOK Match Lengths

Since 2015, OCCY has funded 356 one-on-one youth mentorships. BBBSOK is still supporting matches from the very first grant awarded by OCCY. The longest OCCY-funded match has been together for more than seven years.

A closed match does not equal a failed match. A match may close because the Little ages out of our program or because the Big moves out of the area. Often these relationships continue in ways that positively impact the Little.

Since 2015, the average match length for these matches was 18 months.

- 60% of the matches made it beyond their first match anniversary
- 26% of the matches made it to the second anniversary of their match
- 34% of the closures were due to the volunteer or child moving
- 3% of the closures were due to the Little aging out of our program

## Counties Supported by OCCY Funds

Cleveland:	22%	Payne:	2%	Tulsa:	41%
Oklahoma:	20%	Pottawatomie:	9%	Washington:	6%

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## We Have More Work to Do

In 1904, the original mentoring model for BBBS was founded in New York City with the hopes of reducing the number of children interacting negatively with the judicial system. Today, youth living in compromised situations need help to understand the implications of poor decisions, build their self-esteem, and stay on track with their education.

Many refinements and generations later, BBBSOK continues to seek innovative ways to serve Oklahoma's children. At this time, more than 130 children with incarcerated parents are waiting to be matched with a willing volunteer. Funding from OCCY will help BBBSOK to continue to affect hundreds of lives positively. It will also enable Oklahoma's children to grow into productive members of the workforce, parents, volunteers, and community leaders.

## The Journey Ahead

OCCY strives to strengthen Oklahoma's families and communities. By utilizing innovative public and private partnerships, OCCY builds awareness about the impact of incarceration on children and families.

Public and private partnerships help OCCY develop policies and programs that increase the community's capacity to respond in helpful and healing ways. It also helps amplify parent voices and those with lived experiences. OCCY will continue to support mentoring programs throughout the state and increasing funding to the Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program will lead to a path of success.

## Contact Information



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