



OKLAHOMA
COMMISSION ON
CHILDREN AND
YOUTH



2023 | ANNUAL REPORT
Oklahoma Mentoring Children
of Incarcerated Parents Program

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Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program

Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report

“ 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) and their families/caregivers through 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 who have lived CIP experience. Recent initiatives of the CIP partnership program include the coordination of a statewide advisory committee, developing an educational toolkit, administering the CIP partnership evaluation (year 2), professional continuing education, fatherhood initiatives, and funding for the Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program.

Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program

In accordance with Title 10A § 2-10-101 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) \$75,000 to provide one-to-one mentoring to children of incarcerated parents for State Fiscal Year 2023 (SFY2023). The OCCY award allowed BBBSOK to provide (or match) 68 children with individual adult mentors committed to meeting with each child consistently and regularly for at least one year. OCCY has supported BBBSOK since SFY 2015. Since then, BBBSOK has served in more than 4,200 matches. In the last eight years, 380 matches have been supported by funding provided by OCCY. These mentors have changed the trajectory of those children's lives.

The Challenge

Because of Oklahoma's continued high incarceration rate (the third highest incarceration rate of any democracy in the world!), children in this state suffer significant negative consequences. Manifesting in various ways, these consequences affect a child emotionally, academically, and socially – all of which show up in the classroom. Children often experience stigma and shame associated with a parent in prison, leading to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, high anxiety, and depression. Children with incarcerated parents often live in single-parent households or with other family members. They may feel the financial strain surrounding the family, lack the support needed in their schoolwork, or have no access to educational resources like tutoring or extracurricular activities. They may face difficulties establishing and maintaining peer relationships, which further impacts their social development.

All of this can cripple a child's ability to focus and engage in learning. Statistically, children with an imprisoned parent have an increased risk of delinquency, dropping out of school, and mental health issues.ⁱⁱ Research has found that kids with incarcerated parents are more likely than their peers to be placed in special education, be held back in school, receive poor evaluations from teachers, demonstrate increased delinquency, and drop out of school.ⁱⁱⁱ

Lacking the ability to effectively communicate their feelings, children with incarcerated parents can present in the classroom as aggressive, defiant, or overly impulsive, disrupting the learning environment for other children and developing a negative reputation with teachers and administrators. Poor educational attainment further limits their future career opportunities, increasing the possibility that they will become involved with the criminal justice system as adults. Today, one out of every 10 Oklahoma children has experienced parental incarceration during their childhood.^{iv} Without positive intervention, many of these children will be incarcerated in the future.

Most of the children served by BBBSOK have a history of traumatic experiences in the home,

such as poverty, single parenthood, or guardians who are unprepared for the rigors of parenting. Through no fault of the child, these problems can have long-lasting and detrimental impacts on his or her future.

Support for these families includes social services, counseling, and mentorship programs. By far, the cheapest and most easily facilitated program to profoundly impact children is mentorship. Mentors share knowledge, experience, and insights, often opening doors for hope and individual accomplishment. This personalized guidance can directly offset social development problems, improving communication skills and decreasing feelings of shame. Mentors also foster feelings of acceptance, resiliency, and adaptability – giving a child the ability to better cope with problems.

Through a one-to-one mentoring relationship, a strong relationship with a child can support the critical social and emotional development needed to help build resilience in that child while promoting 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 6 to 18 years (Littles) with volunteer adult mentors (Biggs). Having an adult mentor can buffer the negative effects of single-parent homes, 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.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Other dysfunctions in the home can generate traumas for a child, such as food insecurity, divorce or separation, physical abuse, addiction, parental incarceration, and emotional neglect. These Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) change the architecture of the child's brain, which can affect their decision-making, 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 or mental illness in the household, and 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.^v

The percentage of Oklahoma children impacted by ACEs is higher than the national average, with nearly one in five Oklahoma children under 17 saying "yes" to at least two of the questions below.

^{vi} All children in the BBBSOK program whom OCCY funds support answered "yes" to the final question.

ⁱ Prison Policy Initiative. States of Incarceration: The Global Context. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html>
ⁱⁱ Society for Research in Child Development. A Developmental Perspective on Children With Incarcerated Parents. Retrieved from <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cdep.12392>

ⁱⁱⁱ The Hechinger Report. Opinion: The Invisible Toll of Mass Incarceration on Childhood Development. Retrieved from <https://hechingerreport.org/opinion-sentenced-at-birth-the-invisible-toll-of-mass-incarceration-on-childhood-development/#:~:text=A%20diverse%20body%20of%20research,increased%20delinquency%20and%20drop%20out.>

^{iv} Annie E. Casey Foundation. Children who had a parent who was ever incarcerated: KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/9688-children-who-had-a-parent-who-was-ever-incarcerated?loc=38&loct=2#detailed/2/38/false/2043,1769,1696,1648,1603/any/18927,18928>

^v 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

^{vi} America's Health Rankings United Health Foundation. Adverse Childhood Experiences. (2021) Retrieved from https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/ACEs_8/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?
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? Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
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 based on common interests, 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.

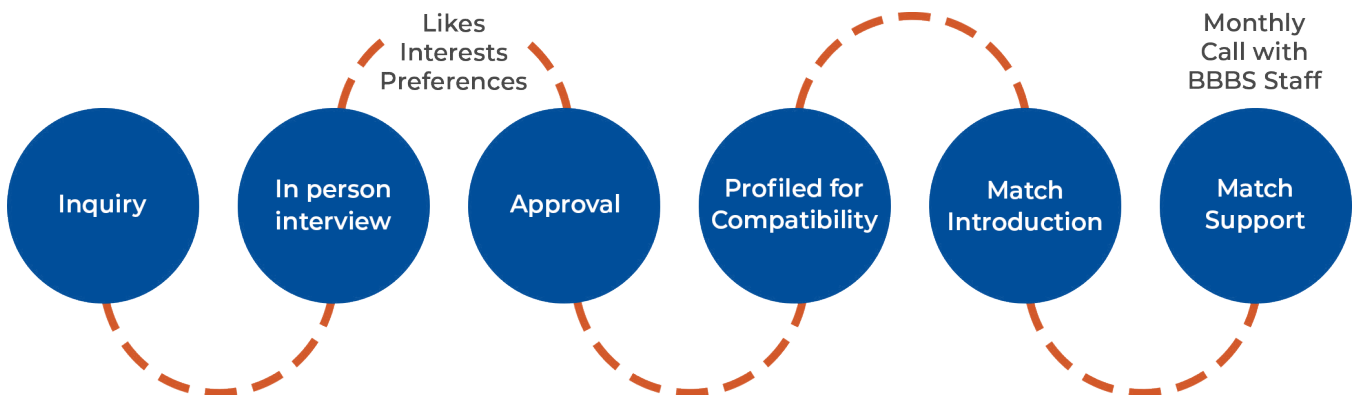
BBBSOK match costs include:

- In-person or video interviews with volunteer, child, and their parent/guardian
- Extensive background checks 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, thoroughly 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

Hannah, Zane, James

Little Brother Zane's life was difficult from the start. Fourteen years ago, he was born to Hannah while she was serving time in prison. Hannah was in and out of prison throughout Zane's early years, and Hannah's brother adopted Zane. However, this new home life wasn't much easier. His uncle had alcoholism, and Zane experienced neglect and emotional abuse. As a result, Zane fell in with a bad crowd, began stealing packages from porches, and failed all his classes.

Eventually, Hannah turned her life around, found a steady job, and adopted Zane and his younger sister back. Zane stopped many of his previous risky behaviors, but he was still facing a steep uphill academic battle. He was extremely shy, had trouble opening up to his mom, and needed extra motivation in life.

Hannah reached out to BBBSOK, looking for mentors for her children. She wanted someone who could help Zane improve his decision-making skills and school performance and be a supportive male role model. At that time, Zane's ACE score of four meant he was 32 times more likely than his peers to have learning and behavior problems and 12 times greater risk for substance abuse or attempted suicide.^{vii}

BBBSOK Program Specialists found the right mentor for Zane with Big Brother James. James signed up for our program after being motivated by his father, who is a former Big Brother. James is a college student involved on campus and in his fraternity. He has become one of Zane's most reliable and consistent influences. The pair meet at the same time every week, working to build Zane's trust and motivation for improvement. The two often make trips to various spots around campus, sparking Zane's interest in pursuing a higher education. When Zane and James were matched, Zane still failed every class. In less than a year with his Big Brother, he is achieving an A or B in all but one!

Hannah, Zane, and James are real people who live in Oklahoma. For anonymity, their names were changed. Inspiring and life-altering stories like this one play out daily across our state.



^{vii} U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/trauma-adverse-childhood-experiences-aces>

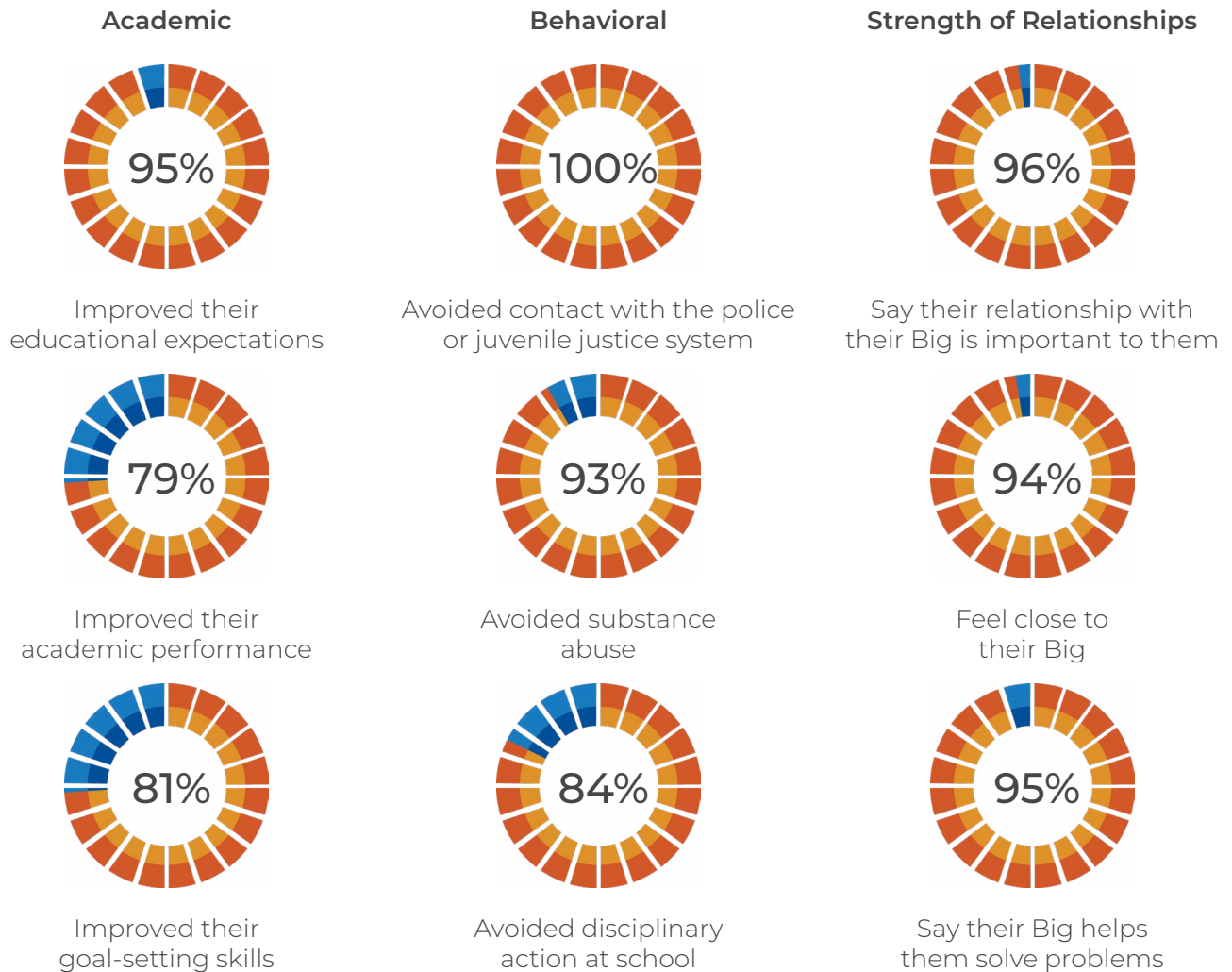
Outcome Data for OCCY-Funded Matches

Through connections with their Bigs, Littles overcome shyness and self-doubt, build trusting relationships with peers, and improve their academic performance. BBBSOK utilize instruments Big Brothers Big Sisters of America developed 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 outcomes and measurement tools are administered in a pre-test/post-test format. They 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 assess the child's positive outcomes through the survey responses.

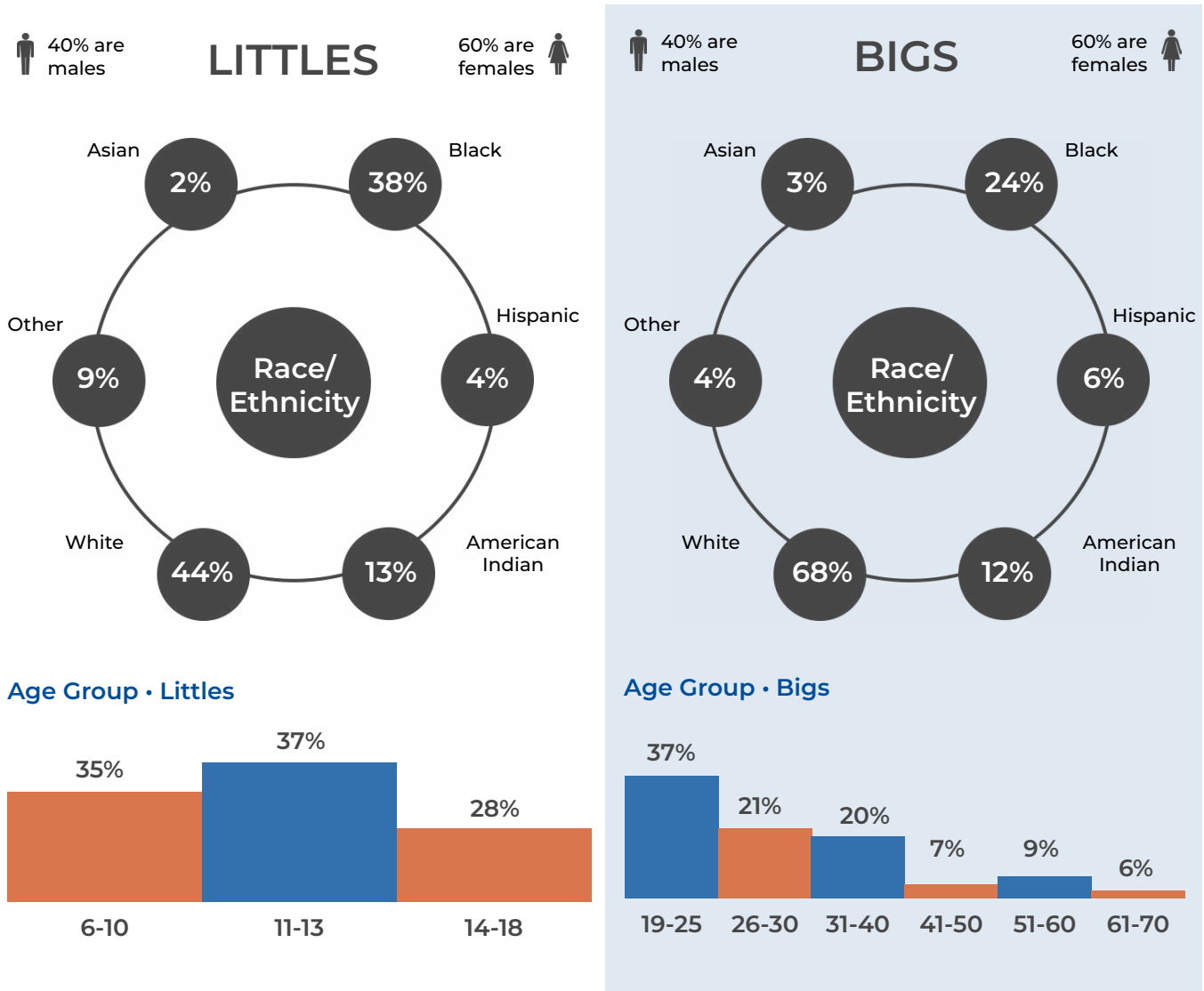
In addition to these annual evaluation tools, BBBSOK program specialists collect anecdotal data from the Big, Little, and parent/guardian through regularly scheduled match support conversations (performed monthly for matches that have been together for under a year and quarterly for matches that have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

Outcome Data Survey Results for OCCY-Funded Matches

Littles reported the following outcomes:



OCCY-funded BBBSOK Match Demographics (SFY 2023)



OCCY-funded BBBSOK Match Lengths

Since 2015, OCCY has funded 380 one-to-one youth mentorships. BBBSOK is still supporting matches from this very first grant. The longest OCCY-funded match has been together for over seven years. A closed match does not equal a failed match. A match may close because the Little ages out of our program or the Big moves out of the area. Often, these relationships continue in some way that positively impacts the Little.

Since 2015, the average match length has been 19 months.

- 60% of the matches made it beyond their one-year match anniversary
- 27% of the matches made it to their two-year match anniversary
- 32% of the closures were due to the volunteer or child moving
- 2% of the closures were due to the Little aging out of the program

Counties Supported by OCCY Funds

Cleveland:	22%	Payne:	12%	Tulsa:	31%
Oklahoma:	24%	Pottawatomie:	1%	Washington:	9%
Osage:	1%				

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 understanding the implications of poor decisions, building their self-esteem, and staying on track with their education.

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

The Journey Ahead

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

Strategic partnerships help OCCY develop policies and practices 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



Danielle Dill, Program Manager

OCCY Office of Planning and Coordination
Danielle.Dill@occy.ok.gov
(405) 606-4906



Melissa Ramirez, Chief Executive Officer

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma
Melissa.Ramirez@bbbsok.org
(918) 579-6402



2915 N. Classen Boulevard, Suite 300
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73106
(405) 606-4900

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