



ATVIROS LIETUVOS FONDAS  
OPEN SOCIETY FUND – LITHUANIA



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(Big Brothers/Big Sisters Lietuvoje)

STATUS REPORT FOR 1994–1996

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# **CHILDREN SUPPORT CENTER**

## **BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS OF LITHUANIA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Personality is the fundamental basis of free, democratic and civil society. Intellectual, spiritual and ethic potentiality of personality is developing through various forms of human relationship. Solidarity and volunteering shared support is the crucial factor in building creative and vital society. There is a lot of citizens in Lithuania looking for support and there are people who are willing to provide volunteer support for others. During enormous changes in social, economical life children and teenagers require exceptional help, aid and role model in their lives. One-to-one relationship with an adult is one of the various forms of non-professional support for a child or an adolescent in need.

A child from an incomplete family or child in crisis experiences a deficit of communication with an adult. Families vary with their socio-economical standards, but the lack of the efficient relationship for a child is similar. Children need additional care, support and understanding to become healthy, creative, independent, conscious and responsible member of society.

Open Society Fund Lithuania initiated the idea and financed the creation and development of a project of volunteer non-professional aid for children and teenagers from incomplete or single parent families. In 1995 was established Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Lithuania agency. The project is based on the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America national youth development organisation project based on the concept of a one-to-one relationship between an adult volunteer and a child in need. National network of BB/BS of America agencies is established in 1904 and has over 500 agencies throughout the country.

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Mission of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Lithuania is to bring into life and to spread the idea of an adult personal, volunteering, spiritual help for a child's positive development through one-to-one relationship under professional support by BB/BS of Lithuania agency.

### **THE GOAL**

The goal of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Lithuania is to create, apply and to put into practice an adult volunteer-child support program. The essence of the program is a direct one-to-one safe and beneficial relationship for a child to gain confidence, to increase self-esteem and to become powerful personality in achieving happy and successful future.

### **THE WORK**

To achieve this task, the following work has taken place:

- the development of a project strategy
- arrangement of facilities
- preparation of methodological tools for a program management
- search and selection of children in need and assessment of their psychological

- needs and characteristics
- familiarising parents/guardians with the idea, purpose and tasks of BB/BS service for children
- search and selection of adult volunteers and their training for the relationship with a child
- formation of the volunteer-child match and determination of individual relationship goals
- supervision and assistance of the volunteer-child relationship
- developing and maintaining public awareness of the BB/BS ideas through mass media
- establishment of contacts with youth and other volunteer organisations

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT STRATEGY**

Vytas Gruodis, Executive Director of OSF Lithuania, brought the idea and management materials of BB/BS to Lithuania in early 1994. Dagmar McGill, Deputy National Executive Director, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America visited Open Society Fund-Lithuania and had meetings with people interested in BB/BS ideas in October 1994. The decision was made to establish BB/BS Committee to get acquainted with a program and to discuss possibilities of starting this program as a pilot project. The Big Brothers/Big Sisters program Committee was established in November 1994 and consisted of 5 members:

Violeta Toleikiene - Social Work and Youth Program co-ordinator, Open Society Fund - Lithuania

Kristina Polukordiene - Director, Youth Psychological Support Centre, Vilnius

Vaida Bielinyte - Social Worker, University Centre Children with Developmental Disorders, Vilnius

Erna Petkute - Psychologist-Psychotherapist, Vilnius Psychotherapeutic Centre, Vilnius

Ausra Kuriene - Child Consultant, School Psychological Service Centre, Vilnius

These persons represented children service centres already existing in Lithuania, were well known specialists in their areas and showed interest in implementing Big Brothers/Big Sisters idea in Lithuania. The Committee in their meetings discussed and decided agency policy guidelines for the first two years. During the first year an agency was to study community needs of this particular kind of service, to start an advertisement actions informing society about BB/BS organisation, to prepare and to validate necessary methodological tools for the project implementation in targeted areas, to start co-operation with BB/BS of America in order to get help in management of BB/BS. Second year is to extend the number of children served, to widen the groups of possible volunteers, to popularise the BB/BS ideas in Lithuania and to involve various strata of society, to start co-operation with different volunteer service organisations. Based on this the budget was formed.

The preliminary project approved by program committee was:

- to start the project in a fourth grade of one Vilnius secondary school to select potential clients among 10-11 years old children from the incomplete families. This is the last year when children have one teacher for all subjects and it gives good possibility for co-operation with the teacher.
- to recruit volunteers among university students, because we considered academic youth as being more open to new ideas, being more active society members and

being comparatively not so overwhelmed by economical problems.

- to make 10 matches during the first year of one year duration.
- to start marketing activities.

The project and the budget were presented to OSF Lithuania and the Board of Directors OSF Lithuania approved it in December 1994. The program started in January 1995. Erna Petkute and Ausra Kuriene were hired for the positions of the full time program co-ordinators. During this first year the program co-ordinators were consulting with committee members and with Vytas Gruodis, Executive Director of Open Society Fund - Lithuania. There were meetings with Irena Veisaite, Chairwoman of OSFL Board of Directors, with Danute Puchoviciene, the Principal of the secondary school, with children's teachers. Dagmar McGill, Deputy National Executive Director of BB/BS of America, came and led four days training seminar for BB/BS co-ordinators and volunteers in September, 1995.

In October 1995 the committee took a decision to establish the Advisory Board of BB/BS of Lithuania. The Advisory Board was formed and approved by OSFL Board of Directors in January 1996. Members are:

Kristina Polukordiene - Director, Youth Psychological Support Centre  
Ausra Maldeikiene - Chief, Public Relation Department, Vilnius Bank  
Dalia Gruodiene - Artist  
Karin Aronson - Guest Professor, Vilnius University  
Vladas Gedmintas - Executive Director, Baltech-Idom, LTD, Vilnius

Program co-ordinators have met every member of the Advisory Board and also had common meeting. The Advisory Board discussed results of the public awareness raising campaign, fund raising possibilities and new areas of volunteer recruitment. The Advisory Board is public organisation and is meant to reflect public opinion about BB/BS activities.

#### **PREPARATION OF FACILITIES**

We had rented the office of two rooms in a public building - the bigger one for group work such as training or common activities and the smaller for the individual interviews and meetings and we moved into this office in February 1995. The rest cost is about 4200 USD per year. Then we bought the computer, printer, telephone, fax and copy machines, furniture and necessary office supplies.

#### **PREPARATION OF METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS**

From the very beginning we started to study and to prepare all necessary materials. Some of the materials are based on the Program Management Manual and the Volunteer Education and Development training modules of BB/BS of America and some are translated and adapted to the local conditions. The following is prepared:

- Inquiry Forms for Client and Parent/Guardian
- Client Interview Guide
- Parent/Guardian Interview Guide
- School Information Form
- Client Evaluation Forum for Teacher
- Volunteer Inquiry Form

- Volunteer Application Form
- Volunteer Interview Guide
- Match Preference Questionnaire
- Rejection Letter
- Parent/Guardian Orientation Outline
- Client Orientation Outline
- Volunteer Orientation outline
- Ground Rules for Program Participants: Parent, Child, Volunteer
- Confidentiality Form
- Match Contract Forum (Client, Volunteer, Parent/Guardian and Program Co-ordinator)
- Match Supervision Checklist
- Booklet about BB/BS of Lithuania for Adults
- Booklet about BB/BS for Children
- Memo about BB/BS of Lithuania for official and public organisations
- Volunteer Education and Development Program:
  - the essence of volunteer work, motivation and values clarification
  - communication skills: active listening, non-verbal communication, relationship building, communication barriers.
  - the roles of the volunteer
  - match life cycle
  - child development and psychological characteristics of the different ages
  - resilience building
  - evaluation and reinforcement
  - basic values and attitudes
  - children's crises
  - child abuse prevention

These methodological tools were prepared in order to define required standards procedures and to assure quality service for children, parents, teachers and volunteers.

#### **IDENTIFICATION, SELECTION AND ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN IN NEED**

Vilnius A. Vienuolio secondary school was chosen. The school was located not far from the BB/BS office and the school principal was known to be interested in reforms and innovations. We met great interest and support from the school administration and school psychologist and made the co-operation contract in March 1995.

We had four meetings with fourth grade students. We thought it was important for all (not only for our potential candidates) to understand what kind of program it is and what it can give and who can apply for participation in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program.

We worked individually with the selected children in order to clarify their psychological needs, made testing and interviews. The "typical candidate" has low self esteem, lacks close emotional contacts, has insufficient skills in social life, is not stable enough emotionally, which often brings academic and interpersonal relationship problems. Our clients have difficulties in making social contacts, lack skills and knowledge how to express positive or negative feelings, and obviously lack positive evaluation and reinforcement. Teachers considered these children as not realising their potential intellectual possibilities.

In Fall 1995 we met with the 30 school teachers from first to seventh grade and introduced them with BB/BS program mission and goals asking them to refer children in need to become Smalls. We visited all classes when teachers invited us to talk to children themselves.

In January 1996 we established contacts and began to work with two more Vilnius schools - Fabijoniskiu and Saltineliu. Now we have children in the program from different Vilnius schools as a result of our advertising campaign. Parents or children themselves make phone contacts and come to us. Today we have waiting list of 16 children to be matched.

### **FAMILIARISING PARENTS/GUARDIANS WITH THE IDEA, PURPOSE AND TASKS OF BB/BS**

Parents/guardians come to us two ways - they apply for their child to have a Big Brother or Big Sister or we invite them after their child applied to participate in the program. All parents have to go through interview procedures, to provide permission for the match and to sign the contract. They meet a volunteer the first time child meets him. We communicate with parents/guardians regularly (once per month) and encourage them to contact us if they have any questions.

During the first year we realised how important the parent/guardian attitude is towards stranger coming to the family and making contact with their child. Some parents we talked with felt suspicious about society opinion towards them if their child would have Big Brother or Big Sister, or were afraid to lose their authority over the child. Even if they gave formal permission in long term they were not helpful or even made relationships impossible. We have more boys from incomplete families than girls. Mothers easily accept male volunteer for their boys while in case of volunteer female there is much more hesitancy.

We believe that parents/guardians orientation and our continuous communication with them is very important especially introducing such a new kind of service for children.

### **RECRUITMENT, SELECTION AND TRAINING OF ADULT VOLUNTEERS**

We started the search of volunteers from introducing the idea of being a Big Brother/Big Sister to the Pedagogical and Vilnius University students. We met and talked with about 1000 people. We were looking for a reliable and responsible person over 18 years old who was willing to commit himself for at least one year meeting every week with the child. The University student volunteer is young, active, easy to find common activities with the child, represents the joy of learning.

We recruited some high school students and were working to recruit working adults as well through the advertising and speaking to them individually. We have working women volunteers, but not men yet. The idea of volunteering and committing themselves at least for a year to one particular child is very new in Lithuania, while other volunteer traditions have long and rich history. People usually say that it is very difficult to promise something stable in such unstable economical and political situation. Working adults very often have two jobs and are working long hours in order to make living. They need more support and encouragement to commit themselves as a volunteer, but often do not get support and understanding from his family members (wife, mother, etc.) as well.

Every prospect volunteer is required to attend orientation session, to fill application form, to get references and to pass interview and then at least 6 hours of training (relationship building, child development and children's crisis). We didn't have yet one not being interested in training sessions. Majority continues education while being matched. We have 48 volunteers now.

Volunteer training is organised as a group activity (2 hours per week) each week and lasts for 3 months. This lets us to get more acquainted with the volunteers, to evaluate them better and helps to decide the most appropriate match. Volunteers are encouraged but not obliged to attend these seminars after 6 sessions. We considered our training sessions as very important for the volunteer selection as well. There is no possibility to do Police check (child abuse is still not a serious issue in our system of justice) or to do home assessment (according family life tradition is not appropriate) so training hours and group activities allow us to assess personality traits and to prevent possible child mistreatment. According to our experience volunteers are very eager to participate in the training program. We have one day per week set up time (2 hours) for all volunteers to come for group supervision of their match. They share their experience, problems in relationship with a child or a parent, meet other volunteers. New volunteers re introduced also. This also lets us be in touch with them and know how the relationship with the Small develops.

For now we have three groups of volunteers trained and working with the children.

#### **MATCH**

First match was made in the end of April 1995 after all the required procedures were made with a parent, a child and a volunteer.

As of August 1996 we have 23 matches and a group of ten volunteers ready to be matched with children in September when children will be back at school. We have Lithuanian, Russian, Jewish and Polish children in the program.

We discuss with every volunteer individual goals to be achieved. There are some common goals for the majority of matches:

- to increase child's self esteem, self-confidence
- to reinforce child's motivation towards academic achievements
- to introduce to new leisure activities
- to develop new skills, to bring new knowledge
- to improve relationships with peers
- to prevent a child from negative environmental influence
- to show children other future possibilities for learning and studies

The volunteer and the child meet every week, most of them have a fixed meeting time and place. They go to the museums, movies, theatre, play basketball or go fishing, they come to our office to learn and to play with a computer, to play other games. Every match has its individual style and favourite activities.

Program co-ordinators provide supervision of the child and volunteer and also contact the caregiver every week for the first two months and every month later.

Three times per year (beginning of school year, Christmas and end of the school year) program co-ordinators organise common party for all program participants - parents/guardians, children and volunteers.

Parents/guardians and teachers told us that they like program, that they see changes in their children. Children became more responsible, they can more easily define their needs and wishes, they do better at school. Children themselves like to have Big friend and are proud of it.

### **MASS MEDIA AND MARKETING ACTIVITIES**

The kind of program we started to implement had no analogies in Lithuania. The idea of adult volunteering one-on-one relationship with a child is very new in Lithuania. In order to be accepted in Lithuania it was very important to introduce the idea and the program for society and to create BB/BS of Lithuania name recognition and to get feedback. The other reason was to inform parents, educators and children about our service. We also sought to attract more volunteers from different communities of the population to become Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

For now there are 16 articles, interviews published in all major daily and weekly newspapers. Several popular magazines published articles about our activities and our matches. Many journalists are interested to meet our volunteers and children and to write more about what and how they are doing.

We gave several announcements to the biggest Lithuanian, Russian and Polish newspapers and magazines informing about our agency and inviting parents, children and volunteers to take part in the BB/BS program.

We designed, printed and distributed the edition of 400 two big posters "Vienam liudna - kartu smagu". We go public transportation stop places to put our posters.

A commercial on the TV advertising BB/BS is made and is shown every Monday and Saturday on biggest TV program at the very popular time throughout the year until 1997.

The Memo "Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Lithuania" is written and sent to Seimas (Parliament) Members, to the Presidency officers, to Ministries and public organisations. We made contacts and co-operate with the existing in Lithuania governmental and non-governmental children support and children right protection organisations.

We designed and made booklets for volunteers and children to invite them to take part in the BB/BS program.

We took part in 4 radio and 3 TV programs where we told about Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Lithuania and answered questions of audience.

As a result of our efforts for increasing public awareness we go adult volunteers and a lot of telephone calls from parents who are seeking help for their children. Mass media campaign also showed us that it is the necessity of ongoing information about the BB/BS activities in order to attract new volunteers and to serve more children in need.

## **SUMMARY**

Year and a half experience of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Lithuania showed that there is a great number of children in need and real lack for positive relationship with adult outside family. There are adult people in our society who are able and willing to provide additional care and support for these children as well. From our experience we can also say that people need to be evoked, invited and educated to become a volunteer for the child in need. We believe that the idea of volunteer shared support of being Big And giving support for the Small society members in need is the crucial factor of building civil and open community.