

BIG SIS LIL SIS MENTOR PROGRAM

A Project Presented to the Faculty
of
California State University, Stanislaus

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Social Work

By
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

BIG SIS LIL SIS MENTOR PROGRAM

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents, Francisco and Cristina - without all your unconditional love and support, I would not be the person I am today. Thank you for all the hard work you have done for the betterment of my future and instilling the values I live by everyday. This work is also dedicated to my brothers, Frank and Esteban - thank you for constant encouragement. Also, thank you to my boyfriend, Miguel - thank you for your love, support, and motivation when I needed it most.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	vii
Description of the Project	1
Objectives of the Project	5
Significance of the Project	6
Review of the Related Literature	8
Overview	8
Poverty	8
Mentorship	10
Design and Structure	11
Summary	13
Methodology	14
Conclusions and Recommendations	17
The Big Sis Lil Sis Meetings	17
Lessons Learned	22
References	25

ABSTRACT

This project focuses on developing a mentoring program. The Big Sis Lil Sis mentor program connects underprivileged girls at Empire Elementary School in Empire, CA with college students, the young women of Phi Lambda Rho Sorority Inc. from California State University, Stanislaus. The objectives of this project were accomplished by gaining participation and support for the project, implementing the design and structure, and facilitating the implementation of the mentorship program. The mentor program consists of meetings once a month for three months during an academic semester. A total of 8 mentors (from the sorority) serve as ‘big sisters.’ A total of 36 young girls (‘little sisters’) participated in the program at the first meeting, 39 at the second, and 32 at the third. Feedback of all participants at the conclusion of the project speaks to how well-received the program is, and to the desire to continue it past the academic semester. As there was no existing mentor program at Empire Elementary School, this project creates a unique supportive empowering connection between mentors and mentees and the mentees (little sisters) look forward to each meeting. The little sisters requested continuation of the program and it is hoped the project will continue in the next academic year.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this Graduate Project was to develop a Big Sis Lil Sis mentoring program that would create an empowering connection between mentors and mentees. The Big Sis Lil Sis program connected underprivileged girls at Empire Elementary School in Empire, CA with college students, the young women of Phi Lambda Rho Sorority Inc. from California State University, Stanislaus, in a mentorship opportunity. The expected outcome of the Big Sis Lil Sis program was the development of a positive support system for the Empire Elementary students with the college students. Given findings in prior research, it was anticipated that this would also be a positive growth experience for the college students.

Poverty is an evolving issue worldwide, specifically in the United States. “The United States has one of the highest average incomes in the industrialized world and, strikingly, it has one of the highest rates of poverty” (Curtis, 2012, p. 146). The United States (US) Census Bureau reported that in the year 2016 there were 40.6 million people in poverty (Semega, Fontenot, & Kollar, 2017). As a result, many American families are falling short of basic human necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. Families living in impoverished communities are specific victims to this issue. A large number of the individuals living in impoverished communities are ethnic minorities, with few resources available to them.

Significant numbers of children who live in poverty are children of color. “Poverty rates for children of color, particularly African-American and Hispanic

children, are two and one-half to three times the rate than that of Caucasian children” (Manny, 2005, p. 247). According to Manny (2005), studies on childhood poverty have revealed that poverty restricts a child's access to food, shelter, clothing, and community resources such as good schools and social services. Children from disadvantaged communities are often sent off to school lacking basic human necessities and facing the challenge to equally perform with their peers. Many minorities are living an oppressive repetitive cycle of high poverty rates with little to no access to resources in order for the vicious cycle to repeat.

When poverty and other forms of disadvantage are concentrated in neighborhoods, they often have a negative impact on the children. Disadvantaged neighborhoods place children at a greater risk for a variety of stressful events such as crime, physical and social disorder, violence, drug use, substandard housing, and child maltreatment (Formoso, Weber, & Atkins, 2010). Children’s poor school performance and behavior problems are often connected to the disadvantages and stressors that exist within their neighborhoods (Formoso, et al., 2010). These disadvantages and stressors are not within the control of families, let alone the children, yet the children are being held accountable to perform as their peers who are not experiencing the same risks. Just by the virtue of where families are located, some underprivileged children are at risk.

A mounting body of literature suggests that the ethnic and racial structure of neighborhoods is significant in determining the availability and number of organizational resources in them. Research has demonstrated that white

neighborhoods compared to black neighborhoods are more likely to have commercial establishments needed for day-to-day living, such as grocery stores and banks (Garrow & Garrow, 2014). As stated above, poverty lies more within the minority communities; yet non-needy communities are the ones being catered to by resource organizations. Nonprofit organizations are sometimes organized to serve as additional support resources or to bring awareness for communities in need. According to Garrow and Garrow (2014), however, there is growing evidence that minority neighborhoods are also lacking nonprofit organizations, in part because the resources for the community are less available. Lack of resources are disadvantages within the community, in turn affecting the conditions in which people live. Having resources within a community has been found to be tremendously impactful in helping develop connections for positive life outcomes.

There is an extensive amount of research claiming that mentoring can be a vital factor in changing the life course of a youth at risk for negative life outcomes. Mentorship at a young age has been found to have a positive influence and be beneficial in a youth's life. For instance, the mentoring program of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS) gives youth the chance to partner with a mentor whose purpose it is to promote positive growth (e.g., improved self-esteem) and prevent participation in risky behaviors (e.g., delinquency) (Timpe & Lunkenheimer, 2015).

A significant amount of research has documented the positive effects of mentoring programs with youth. According to Dappen and Isernhagen (2006), in areas of personal and social growth students who have been in a mentoring program

have reported to have experienced a decrease in alcohol and drug use, the probability of joining a gang or becoming a teen parent, and the incidence of violence and hitting toward others compared to children in similar socio-economic circumstances who did not participate in mentoring programs. In addition, mentoring programs have been shown to enhance relationships with others in general and specifically with peers, adults, and parents (Dappen & Insernhagen, 2006). In turn, social and personal growth can lead to increased self-confidence and an improved ability to express ones' own feelings. Mentoring has also been shown to have a positive effect on children's school performance. In school, mentoring has improved the attitude of youth toward school and has resulted in fewer absences, greater academic achievement, and less likelihood of being retained in grade (Dappen & Insernhagen, 2006).

Mentor programs can highly alter the future outcomes of both the mentors and mentees. There is an extensive amount of research reporting the benefits of mentorship programs with underprivileged youth, but also vice versa. Studies have found that being a mentor resulted in adults developing a clearer understanding of adolescent development (Dappen & Insernhagen, 2006). Mentors also report that being a part of a mentorship program can bring a form of awareness about the importance of a mentorship. Dappen and Insernhagen (2006) found that college student mentors of at-risk fourth graders gained a greater understanding of themselves, the children, and their work as a mentor. Involving college students in the participation of mentoring programs can bring an outcome of beneficial success for the children and the college students, alike.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to develop the Big Sis Lil Sis mentoring program. This involved collaborating with Empire Elementary School and Phi Lambda Rho sorority. The project involved multiple steps and was guided by a series of specific objectives. The first objective was to propose the idea of a Big Sis Lil Sis mentoring program to Empire Elementary School personnel and gain agreement and support for the development of the program. Similarly, the second objective was to propose the idea to Phi Lambda Rho sorority to obtain their interest and agreement to participate. The third objective was to design and structure what the Big Sis Lil Sis program would look like and to facilitate the relationship between the sorority and the school. The final objective was to launch the Big Sis Lil Sis mentoring program and facilitate the first meeting.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

There is extensive research available regarding the benefits, outcomes, and experiences of mentoring programs. As previously stated, in relationship to school, mentorship can improve the attitude of youth toward school, and youth who participate in mentor programs have been found to have fewer absences, greater academic achievement, and they are less likely to be retained at grade levels (Dappen & Insernhagen, 2006). This project provided young girls from an underprivileged and impoverished city, Empire, CA., with an opportunity to create a connection with currently enrolled college educated young women. In essence, this connection was designed to empower and bring awareness to the young girls of the positive opportunities for their future. The Big Sis Lil Sis mentoring project was intended to promote social justice for an underprivileged community, empower both the mentors and mentees, and include diversity within the mentorship. Diversity, specifically, was addressed in this project due to the mentors being chosen from a Chicana/Latina sorority, Phi Lambda Rho. Phi Lambda Rho's sorority objectives are to: encourage Hispanic females to pursue higher education; engage in community service specifically with kids; experience sisterhood; and encourage academic success. The majority of the young women who are a part of Phi Lambda Rho come from underprivileged backgrounds and share the struggle of being a minority. This makes them individuals the young girls at Empire Elementary were likely to be able to identify with, and with whom they could share common interests.

The Big Sis Lil Sis program hopefully illustrates the importance of youth developing a connection with a mentor to the community of Empire Elementary School and to social workers, in general. The hopeful outcome of the Big Sis Lil Sis program is that the young girls will use the connections developed with their mentors when needed. In essence, Phi Lambda Rho mentors will continue the Big Sis Lil Sis program after the completion of this project.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

There is a wealth of information developed in the realm of mentoring programs. This chapter begins by providing information about research available on the benefits of having mentor programs in impoverished communities. In addition, this chapter documents some of the challenges schools in low socioeconomic communities face, and describes how the benefits of mentoring programs can be of use but are often unable to be implemented. The chapter also provides information about the benefits to mentees as a result of being a part of a mentor program (highlighting key behavioral, social, emotional, and academic development) as well as the benefits to volunteers developed through serving in the role of a mentor. Finally, literature related to the design and structure of mentoring programs is considered, particularly as related to the screening, training, and supervision that is vital to launching a mentor program.

Poverty

As mentioned earlier, impoverished communities often have a significant number of minorities and scarce resources, ultimately negatively impacting the children in those communities. Connecting youth who live in disadvantaged communities to resources and guidance can alter the direction of their lives. Children who live in underprivileged communities have a greater chance of experiencing crime, physical and social disorder, violence, drug use, substandard housing, and

child maltreatment (Formoso, Weber, & Atkins, 2010). Prior research has found that students in mentor programs tend to have a reduction in alcohol and drug use, a reduced likelihood of becoming a teen parent, a lower incidence of hitting and violence toward others, and are less likely to join a gang (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006). The literature indicates that mentorship programs in impoverished communities tend to have a positive influence on the youth who participate in them.

Impoverished communities often present tremendous challenges to schools. Schools in impoverished areas are often under-resourced and lack financial support.

The Government Accounting Office reports that 80% of our nation's urban schools are funded at a lower rate than their suburban counterparts, with some urban schools spending up to 10% of their budget on security-related measures, resulting in increased class sizes. (Dappen, & Isernhagen, 2006, p. 154)

This leads to school resources being spread thin. Other areas of difficulty relate to school attendance and school disruption. "Student absence is described as a problem with 81% of urban students and 35% of suburban students; class disruptions a problem with 53% of urban students, 30% of suburban students; and violence a problem with 32% of urban students, 9% of suburban students" (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006, p. 154). It is clear that these challenges are more prevalent in urban schools, yet the students living in urban areas are expected to equally perform academically. The benefits of mentoring programs are evident, but such programs are frequently unable to be implemented.

Mentorship

According to Weiler et al. (2013), recent meta-analyses revealed that mentoring programs can generate positive results for youth across behavioral, social, emotional, and academic areas of development. Broussard, Mosley-Howard, and Roychoudhury (2006) state that mentors serve as critical supports for children at risk as a result of poverty, trauma, or other negative life events. Timpe and Lunkenheimer (2015) found that natural mentors play a critical role in economic outcomes for youth, which may vary based on sociodemographic factors. Their study provided evidence that male natural mentors may be influential in providing long-term economic benefits for youth without a father figure, benefits that were predominantly high for African American youth. Following the literature, low socioeconomic status tends to be higher among minority families and in single-family households.

Tierney, Grossman, and Resch (2000) conducted a study evaluating the effectiveness of the Big Brother Big Sister program with at-risk youth ages 10 to 16. They found that

Little Brothers and Little Sisters were less likely to have started using drugs or alcohol, felt more competent about doing schoolwork, attended school more, got better grades, and had better relationships with their parents and peers than they would have had they not participated in the program.

(Tierney, et al., 2000, p. 29)

Through the literature presented it becomes evident that mentorship can play a key role in the lives of many youth.

Benefits of mentorship are also found among the mentors involved in mentoring programs. Some benefits noted by Tierney and Branch (1992) were that mentors showed improved self-esteem, apparent scholastics competence, and satisfaction with their social skills. Tierney and Branch (1992) further stated that protégés were exposed to additional social and cultural activities and their sense of control over their lives improved. According to Weiler et al. (2013) college students in a youth mentoring program ($n = 390$) in comparison to college students who did not participate in the program ($n = 258$), had a significant increase in scores at post-intervention regarding mentors' civic attitudes, community service self-efficacy, self-esteem, interpersonal and problem solving skills, political awareness, and civic action. Mentoring programs that provide college students the ability to mentor at-risk youth are beneficial for students, youth, and the community.

Design and Structure

According to Tierney, et al. (2000), “the years of early adolescence ages 10 to 14 are society’s last best shot at preventing social problems” (p. 2). Following the literature, mentoring is most influential between the ages of 10 to 14 due to young adolescents forming important assumptions about society and their potential role in it during this time. Further, these assumptions are shaped through observations and interactions with adults. “If caring, concerned adults and role models are available to young people, they will be far more likely to develop into healthy, successful adults themselves” (Tierney, et al., 2000, p. 2).

According to the literature related to developing mentorship programs, mentors need to be properly evaluated and assessed prior to participating in the mentorship program. The purpose of the screening procedure is to protect the youth by recognizing and screening out candidates who pose a safety risk, are unlikely to comply with the time commitments necessary, or are unlikely to develop positive relationships with the youth (Tierney, et al., 2000). Mentors and mentees must be willing to commit to fulfilling the entirety of the mentorship program. Both mentors and mentees should be screened and evaluated to determine their 'fit' given the criteria of the program.

When implementing a mentorship program, it is beneficial to provide an orientation for the mentors in which the program requirements, rules, and expectations are explained. According to Tierney, et al. (2000) agencies offering mentorship training usually include presentations on the developmental stages of youth, communication and limit-setting skills, tips on relationship-building, and recommendations on how to interact with the youth. Some agencies also provide information regarding child abuse indicators and how to appropriately respond to suspected child abuse. Trainings are designed to assist volunteers to interact with the youth.

In order to insure the effectiveness of a program, supervision is vital. Contact with parent(s) of child participants is also required. Supervision is essential in order to provide guidance when problems arise in the relationships (Tierney, et al., 2000). Tierney, et al. (2000) state that they

found that youth and mentors in programs with less infrastructure are less likely to meet, and therefore less likely to achieve a necessary condition for affecting the life of a youth: meeting long enough and with enough consistency to establish a relationship. (p. 5)

Summary

The literature discussed in this review was utilized in the planning and development processes for the current project, and was directly related to project objectives. The benefits of mentorship provided the inspiration for the culturally-specific academic focus of the project. Prior research about the benefits of mentorship to both mentees and mentors contributed to the discussions with Empire Elementary School personnel and the Phi Lambda Rho sorority to solicit their collaboration in this project. The literature related to the critical elements of mentorship programs contributed to the development of the design and structure plan. Collectively, the prior literature informed the conceptualization, development, and implementation of the graduate project. The specific steps involved in the project completion are provided in the Methodology section which follows.

METHODOLOGY

In order to complete the first objective of proposing the idea of a mentoring program to Empire Elementary School, I first had a meeting with Claudia Manzo, a teacher at Empire Elementary, to determine what needs and services the school community had. After deciding that the lack of mentorship of the young girls who attended Empire Elementary was a problem, I proposed the idea of the Big Sis Lil Sis mentoring program. Empire Elementary School was in agreement with the development of a mentoring program.

As an alumni of Phi Lambda Rho sorority, I knew the philanthropy of the sorority was targeted to helping children in need. As part of my second objective, I met with the young women of Phi Lambda Rho sorority to discuss the proposal. The sorority was excitedly supportive of the idea and provided their approval.

In order to complete the project objectives, I had to design and structure the Big Sis Lil Sis program and facilitate a relationship between the elementary school and the sorority. First, I connected with Claudia Manzo to establish the school's availability for participating in and providing physical space for the mentoring program. Once I confirmed the availability of Empire Elementary, I connected with Phi Lambda Rho sorority to create tentative dates, times, and structure for the Big Sis Lil Sis program. Working with both groups (school personnel and the sorority), we decided to begin the program in the second semester of the school year after the winter holidays. A tentative launch date of Friday January 19, 2018 from 2:35 pm to

3:35 pm was chosen. After the first meeting, we decided to meet the first Friday of every month from 2:35 pm to 3:35 pm. The tentative dates set were February 2, 2018, March 2, 2018, and ending with April 6, 2018.

The final objective of this graduate project was to launch the Big Sis Lil Sis program and facilitate the first meeting. The mentoring program was designed to consist of monthly meetings over the Spring 2018 school semester. This was consistent with the availability of both the children at Empire Elementary School and with the college student members of the Phi Lambda Rho sorority. Development of a one semester program also provided an opportunity to determine interest and to test out the structure of the program. Information gained from this one semester mentoring program can inform decisions about whether to continue or modify such a program to better meet participant needs.

In order to complete this objective, I partnered with Claudia Manzo from Empire Elementary School to design the initial meeting, which was designed to be an informational session for young girls of Empire Elementary School about the Big Sis Lil Sis program. Claudia and I approached the topics of the program using a Freire approach. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paulo Freire emphasizes having dialogue through conversations and people working together rather than one person acting on another (Freire, 1972).

Using this approach at the initial introduction of the Big Sis Lil Sis program, the mentees and mentors collaboratively decided the possible conversational topics for each meeting. For instance, topics could be self-esteem, education and academics,

leadership, etc. In the month of December prior to the initial informational meeting in January, I collaborated with Claudia Manzo to create a flyer for the program to draw in perspective mentees and for youth to share information with their parents. Signed permission slips by the parents' were needed in order for the mentees to be able to participate. The permission slips were created and collected by Claudia Manzo (as the school representative) for the girls interested in attending the program.

I also hosted an informational session with Phi Lambda Rho sorority to discuss the purpose of the mentorship program. During this session we established the rules and roles of the mentorship. By doing so I helped the sorority members envision their roles as mentors. The key role of the mentors was to actively listen, support, and engage with the mentees. Their role as a mentor was to develop a relationship with the mentees that would enable the opportunity for resources, empowerment, and awareness. Also, information about needs of the students, such as the importance of consistency needed from the mentors, was shared. This informed a discussion of rules that needed to be set up for mentor participants in the program. While I provided guidance, the rules of the mentors were established and implemented by the mentors. For example, some of the rules consisted of active participation, being punctual, no profanity, etc. Lastly, I informed them of my hope to be able to provide a healthy snack during each event and create a party for the last event.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Big Sis Lil Sis Meetings

The first meeting of the Big Sis Lil Sis mentor program took place on Thursday, February 15, 2018 from 2:45 to 3:45 pm at Empire Elementary School in Empire, California. All mentors and myself had to sign in at the front office to receive visitor passes prior to entering the classroom. I arrived 15 minutes early to Mrs. Claudia Manzo's classroom #12 to set up all materials prior to everyone's arrival. A sign in sheet, name badges, along with small bags of chips and water bottles were provided at the entrance to the classroom. I had a PowerPoint displayed on the projector with the title "*Big Sis Lil Sis.*" Unfortunately, due to the small number of active sorority members at this time, only eight members were able to be mentors. I had asked the mentors to also arrive at 2:30 pm to review the itinerary and greet all mentees with a warm welcome, which they did. I also had music playing in the background from YouTube's Inspirational songs for girls. After the bell rang at 2:36 pm, the young girls started to quickly arrive.

As the young girls began to show up I welcomed them in and had the girls (the little sisters) sign in, write their names the nametags provided, grab a snack, and take a seat at a desk. The Sorority group mentors (the big sisters) had name tags on and were also provided a snack. The desks were set up in groups of four desks with a total of eight groups; a big sister was assigned to each group. At 2:45 pm there was

still a big rush of little sisters walking in, so I waited until everyone was signed in to begin. At around 2:55 pm, a total of 36 little sisters were settled in and ready to begin.

I started by formally welcoming everyone to Big Sis Lil Sis. I introduce myself and went around the room to have everyone introduce themselves. Due to time constraint, I had the little sisters state their name, grade, and something interesting about themselves. The big sisters stated their name, majors, and something interesting about themselves also. After everyone introduced themselves, I handed out an icebreaker activity to reduce anxiety and develop trust with each other. The ice breaker activity consisted of a scavenger hunt with the big sisters and little sisters. The scavenger hunt consisted of a list of squares defining specific items, in which the participants seek to complete all items on the list. We then proceeded by asking if any of the little sisters knew what Big Sis Lil Sis was. Several little girls raised their hands. Their responses were “mentors,” “help us go to college,” “to come have fun with us,” and “to support us.” I then went to the next slide of the PowerPoint and began to explain the purpose of Big Sis Lil Sis.

I stated that the purpose of Big Sis Lil Sis was to be a mentor program with Phi Lambda Rho Sorority from California State University Stanislaus with Empire Elementary Schools fourth through sixth grade girls. I went on by informing the little sisters that a sorority is a club or organization made up of a group of female college students who share common interest and goals. I had the big sisters explain what Phi Lambda Rho was and what the mission of the organization was. Big sisters stated that Phi Lambda Rho focuses on Academics, Community Service, Promotion of the

Chicana/Latina culture, and sisterhood. Following this I stated the importance of sisterhood and building connections and having support from my sorority sisters. I then tied this into the mentor opportunity to gain support, build connections, and create empowering relationships as part of my project for the Master of Social Work program.

I then informed everyone that I had chosen a topic for today, but as a collective the big sisters and little sisters would decide on what topics they would like to cover during the next two meetings which would be held during the semester. I gave examples of topics covered in previous Big Sis Lil Sis groups, such as self-esteem, bullying, leadership, college preparation, etc. We broke out into small groups (the big sister and the girls at each of the tables) and each small group identified two topics they would like to suggest. After approximately ten minutes, we regrouped and voted on which two topics would be selected for the next two meetings. After voting, the two topics they chose were 1) color therapy and 2) sports/teamwork for the dates of March 15, 2018 and April 12, 2018, respectively.

After these plans were completed, I introduced the theme I had chosen for this first day. I informed that the topic for the connection of the big sisters and little sisters was kindness. I chose the topic of kindness because Mrs. Claudia Manzo, the Empire Elementary School partner in this project, had previously informed me the young girls have recently had difficulty with being kind with one another. I informed the big sisters and little sisters about the importance of kindness and showed a video about kindness. I then introduced an activity of planting a seed of kindness in which each

big sister and little sister planted a marigold seed into a cup. The cups were painted and decorated and were left in classroom #12 to be watered occasionally as a reminder to spread kindness. While decorating the cups, big sisters and little sisters had conversations. Some conversations I overheard were the little sisters asking the big sisters how to be kind in difficult situations. Lastly, we ended with a group picture and reminded everyone of the date of the next Big Sis Lil Sis event.

On March 12, 2018, the date of the second meeting, the big sisters arrived prior to Big Sis Lil Sis starting in order to sign-in at the school office and to set up the classroom. Snacks, nametags, and a sign in sheet were again provided at the classroom entrance. A total of 39 little sisters eagerly showed up at the start of program and those who had attended before sat with the big sister they previously sat with. Additional girls were welcomed and joined various groups around the room. There was an option given for little sisters to sit with a different big sister, since there were new members present and four little sisters were not present. To my knowledge, however, every little sister stayed with the previous big sister, representing the fact that connections and relationships were formed at the very first meeting.

I started the second meeting by introducing mindfulness and being in tune with ourselves, and began to explain how color therapy works. Color therapy was explained as an approach to being in tune with yourself and having self care. We started by having everyone grab a piece of paper with an uncolored design and began to color the design, while soothing music played in the background. The activity was free flowing with no instructions so therefore participants could engage in meaningful

conversations. There were discussions among the big sisters and little sister about the ways they self-care while they were engaging in color therapy. As the facilitator, I felt the group was very engaged in the activity and members reported finding an interest in color therapy. We concluded the session with “high lights” and “low lights,” which is a tradition that the sorority ends each meeting with. The high lights and low lights consisted of participants volunteering in expressing a positive and negative experience of their week.

The third Big Sis Lil Sis meeting was held on April 12, 2018. On this date the big sisters and myself arrived prior to the event to check-in the front office and set up all materials. Since it was the final meeting of the semester, this session involved a celebratory potluck for all members. Sign-in sheets and nametags were, again, set up at the entrance of the classroom. A total of 32 little sisters signed in and patiently waited for the session to begin. This session began by welcoming everyone and reminding them about the chosen topic for the day of sports/teamwork. We then proceeded by everyone going outside for the first activity. The first activity was the “human knot” which consisted of everyone gathering in a large circle and crossing hands with someone across from them. They had ten minutes to untangle themselves and to my surprise the activity was completed less than eight minutes. The next activity consisted of the group members getting into order according to their birthday. For instance, the big sisters and little sisters had to get into a line from birthdays beginning January 1st to December 31st. The catch to the team building activity was that there was no talking allowed. The group struggled with completing this activity

without talking. We then proceeded to go back to the classroom to have a celebratory party. We had pizza, soda, water, chips, and cupcakes all supplied by the big sisters and myself.

At the end of this final meeting, the big sisters and little sisters took their plants, which had grown to flowers by this point, home along with a tag that tied around the cup. The tag had a message stating, “empower, support, mentorship.” It also stated “Big Sis Lil Sis.” We then gathered to express our “high lights” and “low lights” of the week, I also asked members to report what they liked and what they would change about the Big Sis Lil Sis program. The little sisters reported what they liked was, “I used color therapy when I was sad,” “I want to go to college,” and “I made more sisters.” The little sisters reported they would like “to have Big Sis Lil Sis more than once a month” and “to have more big sisters.” A big sister reported, “I feel like I made an impact on the girls.” Another big sister stated, “I ran into a student and her mom at the store, and her mom said her daughter always mentions her [the big sister] and how much she enjoys going to Big Sis Lil Sis.” I concluded this session with thanking everyone for their participation and ending with a group picture.

Lessons Learned

As an only daughter and a first generation college student, I often pursued guidance and mentorship from older female role models. Fortunately, I had a couple of role models in my life who I could approach for support. Now as an adult, I seek to be of support and create encouraging relationships for younger girls. One of the many reasons why chose to create this mentorship program was because of the need for

mentorship in the impoverished community of Empire, California. As I created the Big Sis Lil Sis mentor program, I wanted to create a supportive and empowering mentorship with underprivileged girls and young women who could be a positive influence in their lives.

One of the many lessons learned from this project was the usefulness of support and mentorship in creating the conditions for empowering relationships. The mentees in this project (the little sisters) learned that they could have a positive support system with the big sisters, and also gained knowledge and self awareness. The mentors gained information about the importance of positive guidance for underprivileged girls and the importance of consistency as a mentor. The reasons for the establishment of this project, I believe, definitely gained importance via the lessons learned by both the mentors and mentees of the project.

It is hoped that this partnership between Phi Lambda Rho and Empire Elementary School will continue at Empire Elementary during the next school year. The mentorship program was well-received by the young girls of Empire Elementary, and continuation of this mentorship program could be beneficial to them.

As for the recommendations for an individual wanting to implement a Big Sis Lil Sis mentoring program, I would stress the importance of consistency within all the participants. The mentors, mentees, and possibly the agency would have to commit to fully participating at each session of the mentoring program. As the facilitator, there are times that unexpected events may arise which may cause for mentors and mentees not to attend a session, but address the importance of attendance. Some decisions you

will need to plan for are who will be the mentors and mentees of your program and how will they be selected. In addition, you will need to plan for where the mentorship will take place and how will you measure if the mentorship is effective. Lastly, if the mentors are college students, you will need to organize for having more mentees than mentors. It is difficult to get a matching number of mentees and mentors, since the mentees are full-time college students.

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