

By Victoria Calderon

• Leader & Times

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) organizations across the the state of Kansas are piloting a brand new program called Matches on the Move (MOTM), which will, hopefully, not only improve the lives of young children, but their health as well.

“We’re basically wanting to get kids active, out and moving,” Liberal’s BBBS executive director Kerry Siebel said. “Trying to cut down on the obesity rate in young children, giving matches something to do together, incorporating physical activity.”

MOTM is an optional activity available to any match in the BBBS program, and will also be offered to future matches. Matches are given a bag and pedometer upon entrance into the program.

A majority of Littles in the BBBS program have less than ideal living situations, and these kids are at a higher risk for obesity because of their backgrounds. Some examples of where many Littles come from are as follows:



- 73 percent live in families with income at or below the poverty level
- 82 percent live in single-parent homes
- 61 percent live in families with alcohol or drug addiction backgrounds

To combat the obesity problem, MOTM has come up with several ways for matches to lead healthier lifestyles together. A walker tracker is accessible on computers, smart phones and other Internet connected devices to help Bigs keep track of the physical activity they and their Little have completed.

Their case managers will be available to help the matches make goals, and points are awarded in this system. Incentives are also offered after certain goals are reached, such as water bottles and gift cards for sporting goods stores and healthy restaurants.

Bigs and Littles will be encouraged to spend at least 30 minutes in physical activity every time they meet, which is, typically, once a week.

Educational opportunities are also going to be plentiful within the program. Liberal's BBBS will be pairing up with entities such as Southwest Medical Center, the Parks and Recreation Department and the K-State Extension Office to provide workshops on healthy eating and leading active lives.

MOTM will also become involved with social networking and provide Internet resources. The Kansas BBBS Facebook page will include a section for MOTM where matches can share inspirational stories and have access to additional opportunities. The website will also be updated to include information on safe places to bike, walk, and engage in other fun physical activities in every community.

To celebrate the new program, BBBS will be hosting a Little Color Big Fun 5K Run/Walk sometime in July. As of now, details regarding when and where are still forming. However, Siebel said of the run, “(There will be) a big celebration afterward, maybe something fun in the park, trying to get everyone involved and educated on the program and getting active.”

Siebel not only talked about the benefits of the new MOTM program, but about the general impact of Bigs in the lives of Littles everywhere. Although BBBS used to only include single parent households, it has expanded.

“There’s just a variety of adversity nowadays that we’re trying to help with: bullying, loners, academic failure. A lot of these kids don’t know what their potential is. They start out and don’t even know if they’re going to finish high school and then they see that they have potential... They see that there are better things out there,” Siebel said.

Unfortunately, there is a misconception among many about the kids in the Little program.

“They are in adverse situations, that if they don’t have somebody to look up to, they could potentially become delinquents,” Siebel said. “But as of right now, they’re not bad kids, they’re just from bad situations.”

Anyone is encouraged to apply to become a Big and help change a child’s life. The only age requirement is Bigs must be at least 15 years of age and sophomores in high school.

“There’s benefits not only for the Littles, but Bigs, too,” Siebel concluded.