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Charity for fatherless boys embraces sponsor-partnership growth

STARTS

A charity that finds good-hearted mentors to enhance the lives of 7-14-year-old fatherless boys is realising staff and expansion plans at an accelerated rate, thanks to a new business relationship model.

Big Buddy has always received far more requests to find Big Buddies than there are available men. But the agency is planning to close the gap of unmet need by combining a flourishing sponsor-partner focus with the standard income from annual funding rounds.

Nationally, Big Buddy has 95 boys waiting to find a big Buddy, and 40 more at enquiry processing stage. Conversely, 18 potential Big Buddies are currently being screened, and 20 more have passed through screening to approval stage; they are now waiting to be matched.

Ideally, the service that has matched close on 800 boys and mentors since it's 1997 beginnings, would quadruple serious enquiries for it's North Island offices in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington. Big Buddy CEO Paul Burns is certain that appointing a Partnership Manager to nurture current sponsor relationships and seek out new ones is key to reaching that target. Sponsor relations that already exist include GJ Gardner Homes, ITM, and Barworks.

Partnering with sponsors appeals strongly to the recently appointed Burns, an ex-Fonterra sales manager who fondly remembers his relationship building days with the dairy giant. It was in Burns' third month at Big Buddy that he and the team won the coveted position as the charity of choice at the Grocery Charity Ball 2018. He claims it is the most rewarding sales work he's ever done, and sums up the proposition that sponsors find so appealing.

"These [Big Buddy] positive male role models might spend as little as 2-3 hours a week with a boy between the ages of 7-14 years. That time commitment drastically improves boys' confidence, their sense of personal value, and an understanding of what being a man is. Boys learn a lot of this through modelling other men's behaviour and the benefits to society by starting here, at the top of the cliff, are astoundingly far-reaching."

The up and coming food and grocery mega-event, the Grocery Charity Ball, should not only increase enquiries from FMCG associates and members, but also bring in enough funds for

Big Buddy set up office in Christchurch in 2019 – a move that almost came to fruition just prior to the Global Financial Crisis.

But with funding and expansion now in their sites, the team will need another clinical /operational team member to support the current workload, and to cope with the work a Relationship Manager will bring in. Programme Manager Steve Sobota is charged with initially locating that Coordinator, who will join the four existing Coordinators that manage the sourcing, screening, and matching of potential mentors and Little Buddies.

With 13 years in the job, Sobota is only too familiar with the funding challenges facing not-for-profits and welcomes the opportunity that a balance of working with businesses as well as grant-based funders is starting to bring.

“The benefit of having a broader range of funding sources such as corporate and business sponsors, is that once the long term relationship vision is established, funding is usually committed over multiple years. This makes helping more boys in more areas a certainty, as opposed to only operating on the one-year application cycle that charities are used to” says Sobota.

Burns feels it is a privilege to work alongside partners that is also passionate about making a life changing difference for Little Buddies: “Relationships like this are very motivating. However, we are mindful of the need to conserve the integrity of our program and the expertise that attests to our history, as well as enhancing duty of care to our service users. Our coordinators live and breathe this duty and we’ll hold fast to that as we navigate the next few years.”

Burns says there are many fatherless boys in the Canterbury region and if all goes to plan, they’ll have their hands full from day one with the new Christchurch office.

“There is an intensive amount of support required from the Auckland based team to recruit and train the right sort of Coordinator to run the program in a brand new city. It is likely to be mid to late 2019 before we are ready to take on other regions after Christchurch and we will probably look at the Bay Of Plenty and Northland next. It is inspiring and humbling when courageous Mums put their hand up to ask for help and we are committed to trying to find as many Big Buddies for these Little Buddies as possible.”

ENDS

Please contact Sally Webster for more information, interview contact details and image requests.

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EDITORS NOTES:

- Big Buddy mentors (aged approximately 25-65 years) spend roughly 2-3 hours a week with their Little Buddies, doing simple activities like going to the beach, throwing balls around, making or fixing things and visiting interesting places.
- The most important thing Big Buddy mentors do is show up. This regular contact and genuine interest in a Little Buddy's life proves to be a real anchor for him as he grows up.
- The first funding for the Big Buddy programme in 1997 came from the Crime Prevention office of the Prime Minister.
- Since Big Buddy's official move-away from the Man Alive organisation in 2003, we have matched close to 800 boys with mentors. Over 500 of these are long-term matches, meaning they last more than a year.
- Qualitative data suggests that for every 100 boys we help, two of them would otherwise have ended up living a life of crime and/or incarceration. This makes the \$8000 total cost to set up one Big Buddy/Little Buddy relationship a fractionally small investment when measured against NZ Treasury's \$90,000* per annum prisoner price tag. *reference: <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/government/longterm/fiscalposition/2009/15.htm>
- Time and again, mothers report on the transformative effects of having a Big Buddy. Last year, Wellington mum, Laura Virgo, shared her son Jonathan's experience with [ZB's Tim Foulkes](#) and Hamilton mum, Penny Perano, reflected on one year of mentoring for her son Nicholas in [Hamilton](#).
- The Big Buddy Big Auction campaign that GJ Gardener Homes franchisees in Hamilton and Papakura championed have meant house sale sums (less cost) have put \$149,000 and \$160,000 into the Big Buddy Hamilton purse respectively. ITM was also a major sponsor on this project and collectively, the funds have paid back debt from the set up and operation of the Hamilton office for the past 18 months.
- This year's [Grocery Charity Ball](#) will take place on September 1, 2018 at Sky City. Charities are expected to contribute to the event with gratis auction items and an engaging MC. Big Buddy has secured the iconically friendly Simon Barnett, who already appeared on Big Buddy Big Auction TVCs earlier this year. Charities from previous years have taken home (after costs) between \$100,000 to \$500,000. It is estimated that funds raised will pay for Big Buddy to set up in Christchurch, and cover operational costs for one year.