



## TAG in Action: Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central West Virginia

As part of its national call to action, **Adolescent Health, Think, Act, Grow<sup>SM</sup> (TAG)**, the Office of Adolescent Health, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service has identified a number of successful strategies for improving adolescent health throughout the country.



### The Goal

Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central West Virginia (BBBS SCWV) matches youth facing adversity with professionally supported adult mentors that can help change their lives for the better.



### The Game Plan

Through both school- and community-based programs, Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central West Virginia works closely with teachers, parents, guardians, social workers and juvenile justice officials to provide mentors to children and youth who need a positive role model. Adult mentors receive training and ongoing support from professional case managers to help build lasting relationships between the mentors and mentees. Mentors also attend group discussions where they talk through how to address specific challenges their mentees may face, such as dealing with illness or food insecurity.

BBBS SCWV incorporates the *Focus5 Initiative* throughout its mentoring programs. *Focus5* promotes key skills sets for personal and professional success: problem solving, team building, financial literacy, health and wellness, and entrepreneurship. As part *Focus5*, mentors (BIGS) and mentees (LITTLES) can use the local YMCA facilities at no cost to play sports and be active. The BIGS and LITTLES take a selfie, submit how many active hours they logged, and receive rewards for reaching milestones.

In 2014, BBBS SCWV received a three-year grant from the Department of Labor through Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. The funding helped start a local *Youth Workforce Opportunity Initiative*, a mentoring program for adjudicated youth age 14-20. The mentors work with youth to improve academic success, avoid truancy, and gain employment or access to higher education.



### The Winning Plays

Sara McDowell, Executive Director of BBBS SCWV, shared that; “[t]he mentors and our professional case managers are the key to our success. Case managers help mentors problem-solve and develop strategies for empowering youth. West Virginia has the highest rates of juvenile detention and truancy in the country, so mentoring is a successful strategy to help kids stay out of placement and in school. Mentors are there to encourage and support their LITTLES to believe they can achieve and succeed – that their current circumstances do not have to define their future. It’s hard to be what you can’t see, so our goal is to show them opportunities do exist and then help them develop strategies to overcome obstacles and barriers to achieve success.”



### Learn More

Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central West Virginia  
<http://www.biglittlewv.org/>

