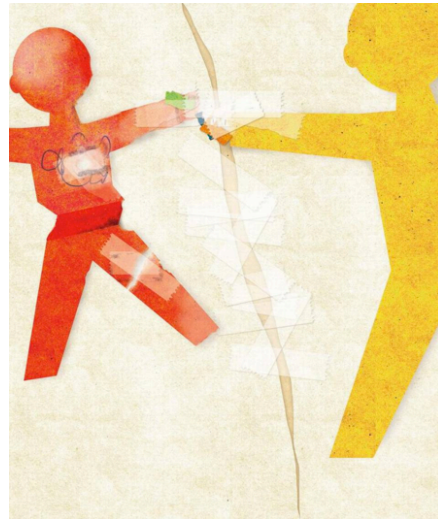


# The Miami Herald

## Mentoring is vital to children's future

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*By Lydia Muniz*



While our local news and cultural headlines provide ample evidence of possibility and evolution in Miami-Dade County, there's one particularly dissonant statistic: South Florida ranks dead last among 51 major metro areas for its volunteer rate. This was the result of a report from the Corporation for National & Community Service, a federal agency that oversees AmeriCorps.

The results were based on analyzing U.S. Census data and a three-year moving average between 2010 and 2012. And because we continue to be a city that attracts newcomers, it is likely this still held true in 2015.

There are a host of theories as to why South Floridians are slow to participate in civic or volunteer activities, including residents' broad dispersal across South Florida; heavy traffic and long commutes; and a high incidence of immigration and short-term residents. It's challenging to commit time to civic engagement in a city you've recently decided to call home.

While all are valid reasons, what these factors have in common is the perceived lack of time.



But in a study conducted by Wharton's Cassie Mogilner, the Harvard Business Review reports that spending time helping others left study participants feeling as if they have more time, not less. Spending as little as 10 minutes helping others can make people feel less time-constrained.

How can we use that finding to reassure Miami residents that we all have enough time to engage in volunteer activities we care about?

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami has been an active "social profit" enterprise in South Florida for more than 50 years. We have seen many changes affect the city, from immigration and the continually evolving composition of residents to real-estate development that is changing its facade.

Still, we've persisted in awakening possibilities for children at risk — one child, mentor and afternoon at a time. We have succeeded in attracting and recruiting volunteers because our formula for mentoring has demonstrated tangible, measurable results. We have also been an innovator by creating volunteer options that provide solutions not only to the children that are mentored — but that address the time challenges of our volunteer Bigs — mentors.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami has promoted civic engagement in South Florida by creating solutions that integrate mentoring directly into the daily rhythm of Miami.

For example, our School to Work program — which includes corporate partners such as Baptist Health of South Florida, Burger King Corp and Carnival — affords employees the opportunity to volunteer once a month during the school year — while the mentoring takes place on-site at their place of business. We transport Littles from a nearby public high school to their business for four hours once a month.

Our school-based program, "Bigs in Schools," invites volunteers to mentor kids directly at their school — ensuring that the context for their mentoring can be done where kids spend the most time developing social skills, overcoming academic challenges and learning what possibilities are available to them.

Bigs in Schools provides volunteer mentors with a clear framework for what to discuss with their Littles, how to awaken them to new (academic and life) possibilities and how to identify an action plan to get there.

The needs of Miami's underserved families are growing — particularly as marked by the economic divide. A new report by the Brookings Institute reports that Miami has the fourth-highest rate income inequality of any American city. We can't expect that reality not to have repercussions for Miami's at-risk kids.

January is National Mentoring Month, an ideal time to make Miami a more-incredible city for incredible kids to grow up by volunteering a bit of time. To continue our work of

awakening at-risk kids to new possibilities, we need Bigs. We also need Miami-based companies and institutions that invest in corporate social responsibility to offer four hours of their business day each month. Go to [bbbsmiami.org](http://bbbsmiami.org) or call (305) 644-0066.

The lives of kids, employees and our community will be better for it.

*LYDIA MUNIZ IS PRESIDENT AND CEO OF BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF GREATER MIAMI*