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Former Little Brother credits mentor for changing his life: 'I was in a very, very low place'

By Tiffany Lizee • Global News
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WATCH ABOVE: Eliran Penkar went from being a troubled teen living on the streets of Calgary to graduating high school and becoming an engineer. As Tiffany Lizée reports, he credits the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program -- and specifically his mentor Henry Luong -- for helping him get back on his feet – Apr 2, 2021



Eliran Penkar went from being a troubled teen living on the streets of Calgary to graduating high school and becoming an engineer.

He credits the [Big Brothers, Big Sisters](#) program — and specifically his mentor Henry Luong — for helping him get back on his feet.

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Penkar said his parents had high expectations which led to a lot of conflict inside their home. Unfortunately, when he was 15 years old, that conflict resulted in him becoming homeless.

“I was in a very, very low place,” Penkar recalls.

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“I didn’t like my situation. So I had to pick myself up by the bootstraps. But that took an emotional toll on me.”

He says when his school found out about his situation, they introduced him to the mentorship program which led him to meet Luong.

The non-profit mentorship program pairs youngsters with a local role model, giving them someone to talk to and share experiences with.



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“At first it was more of board games, card games and it was more surface conversations until we built that trust,” Luong recalled.

The pair started out meeting at Penkar’s school for an hour each week.

“I think that really helped with our relationship,” Luong said.

“Because he knew — no matter what, no matter what week it was — I would be there and we would talk about everything”



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When Penkar looks back, he believes that hour a week with Luong is what set him on a much better path.

“High school is a very tough and mean place and having Henry essentially changed my life for the better.

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“That one hour a week with me, that allowed me to clear the haze in front of me.”

After over a decade of friendship, they both say their friendship has gone “beyond that level.”

“What started as just a mentor/mentee type relationship really turned into a long-lasting friendship... and brotherhood actually,” said Luong.

“He is kin, he is family,” Penkar said.

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After over a decade of friendship, Penkar asked Luong to be the witness at his wedding. **Eliran Penkar**

Luong has been a Big Brother now for 16 years and calls the experience “humbling.”

“With Eliran, we’ve actually experienced a lot of first-time events that he wouldn’t have gotten to experience otherwise,” he said.

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[Big Brothers, Big Sisters Calgary and Area](#) has almost 300 kids on their waitlist hoping to be matched with mentors.

“Kids out there are really looking for somebody just to talk to... somebody just to share experiences with and get guidance that is outside of their circle,” Luong said.

He hopes more people will take the time to sign up, saying the experience is just as important for the mentor as it is for the mentee.

“I would recommend it to anybody,” Luong said.

“It’s really fulfilling... I can’t describe it. It’s a feeling that everyone should experience.”

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If you're interested in signing up to be a mentor, visit the [Big Brothers, Big Sisters Calgary and Area](#) website for information on how to apply.

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