

Volunteering as a mentor is a gift to a child

No one knows better than John Gadd what it means to have someone volunteer to become a mentor to a child.

“Ever since I can remember, I didn’t have a father in my life,” says Gadd. “I almost didn’t notice what I was missing.” Today, at 22, Gadd is already a remarkably successful businessman and has recently launched his own software development and digital printing company. He credits a large part of his success to the fact that he had his “Big Brother” Frank in his life.

“My relationship with Frank grew into one of trust, understanding and respect,” Gadd says. “My mom raised me as best as anyone could. But, because of Frank I gained a new perspective and an additional set of morals. He helped keep me on the right track, taught me things my mother never could, and helped me make the right decisions going into my adult life.”

Sadly, there are hundreds of children like Gadd. Today parents, many of them single, are struggling to maintain a job and their households and often can’t spare time for the one-on-one attention their children need.

Fortunately, parents can turn to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Ohio for help and support. Big Brothers Big Sisters provides children with a carefully screened adult mentor who acts as a friend and positive role model.

By offering guidance, support, encouragement, understanding and respect, mentors can help reduce the incidences of violence, drug use and alcoholism. Their presence spurs the child to

achieve better grades and cut the number of days absent from school. A mentoring relationship allows children to take part in new experiences, to develop self-confidence and values so they can become contributing, responsible, self-sufficient members of their communities.

And Their Gift to You

The children aren’t the only ones who benefit from a mentoring relationship. The mentor also reaps some pretty hefty rewards from the experience.

Being involved increases a volunteer’s sense of purpose. It provides increased self-esteem and a feeling of satisfaction, creates greater social networks, and actually helps reduce the risk of disease. In a national survey of adults who mentored young people, 83 percent indicated that they learned or gained something personally from their mentoring experience. Volunteer mentors reported feeling that they had become a better person, developed more patience, gained new friendships, felt more effective and acquired new skills.

Little Time and Less Money

Most people believe that becoming a mentor requires a huge investment in time and money. The opposite is true. Big Brothers Big Sisters asks that the volunteer mentors spend only an hour or two a week with their Little Brother or Sister; and encourages the match to do things that cost little or no money. “The most important

thing to remember when considering becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister,” says Tim Kehres, BBB-SNEO executive director, “is that it’s not the amount of time or money you spend, it’s about what you do in the time you spend together.”

Every child wants to feel special at some point in their life. They want to be the center of attention. To have someone listen when they talk. “Sometimes just a simple phone call asking how they did on a test is all it takes. That is what a Big Brother or Big Sister does. They are not intended to take the place of the parent. Their role is to offer a little extra attention, guidance and friendship,” says Kehres.

Some of the most fun can be had and the best memories created by doing simple things like going for a hike, baking cookies, riding bikes or playing a video game together. To the children, having someone to hang out with is the most important thing of all.

In Desperate Need of Men

The agency always has children waiting to receive a Big Brother or Big Sister. Right now there are 28 children waiting — 21 are boys.

According to the agency, they are seeing a small, but steady increase in the number of men making inquiries and following through. They believe more men are following the national trend to give back.

Seriously, how hard is it to play video games and sit around eating pizza? Being a Big Brother is a fun way to give back.

To learn more about becoming a mentor or about BB/BS, log onto www.bbbsneo.org or call 440-352-2526.