

PROFILES

January 2011

A Big Organization with a Big Heart: All You Need is Love

By Deanna Adams
Today's Family Writer

January is National Mentoring Month and with the advent of a brand new year, it seems a perfect time to widen your horizons and share your time, talents, and love with those in need. One of the most gratifying ways of becoming a mentor is joining the Big Brothers Big Sisters organization.

This premier mentoring agency provides children with quality friendships through supportive adults and educational programs. Big Brothers Big Sisters currently operates in all 50 states and in 12 countries around the world. The Northeast Ohio branch covers the Lake, Geauga and Ashtabula areas.

"I think our Big Brothers and Big Sisters would [agree] that one of the greatest benefits of being a "Big" is that feeling they get when they realize that their "Little" really trusts them—enough to share their fears, problems, accomplishments, or just the silly little things that make them happy. And in return, Bigs often find their relationship with their Little makes them happy, too," says Lynne Strah, Director of Marketing

and Communications for BBBS.

With more single parents on the rise, their goal is to provide children who lack a father or mother with a positive adult role model in their life. "We work hard to match the right adult with a child based



on mutual interests so both parties enjoy a unique friendship," adds Strah.

Those friendships begin with just a couple of hours of activities that can be enjoyed by both adults and children. The end result is cherished relationships that often last a lifetime. Some adults become Bigs while their own children are young, while others are empty-nesters who "still have a lot of love to give," as one Big Sister put it.

**How do you become a Big?
What's involved in the process?**

All it takes is a phone call or stop in at the administrative office located in Painesville. "Naturally, there is a process we go through for the security of the child," Strah says. After an application is filled out, it's reviewed by social workers, followed by a background check and home visit. Because the agency always has a list of children awaiting a Big (men especially are needed), the organization is anxious to fill those voids.

What can I do with my Little and how much will I need to spend?

The best thing about Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs is that they require spending little or no money. The only requirement is time. Bigs are encouraged to focus on being a friend to the child, someone he or she can have fun with and be able to talk to easily. Activities can include visiting a park, playing a board game, taking walks or bike rides, shooting hoops, or simply sharing a pizza. Volunteers must be 18 and over and are matched with children from ages 6 to 15.

See www.bbbsneo.org or call 440-352-2576 for more details.