



Chad Van Horn, Esq.
Board Chair, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Broward County

As we commemorate Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Month this September, we celebrate the 30,000+ mentors who have given their time to change the lives of young people in Broward County.

The impact of a Big Brother or Big Sister mentor influence cannot be overstated – by helping the child make better choices, his or her future is changed, thereby positively changing the legacy of the entire family. Improving the life of one family member has a ripple effect that transforms and improves the family legacy for generations to come.

Families served by Big Brothers Big Sisters typically are struggling: 57 percent live in single-parent households; 77 percent receive free or reduced school lunch and 21 percent receive income assistance. And COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing issues facing these vulnerable families, stretching them to the breaking point.

A Big Brother and Big Sister stands alongside parents who may be overwhelmed with other priorities, in addition to helping the Little Brother or Little Sister navigate daily challenges. A mentor lifts the burden on the parent just a bit, by letting parents know there is another adult who is guiding their child along a safe and secure path.

That's what our volunteer Big Brothers and Big Sisters do. They encourage their Little Brother or Sister to excel in school, embark upon higher education, make good choices and stay on a positive track. They invest time and talent in their Littles, teaching them life skills that will serve them forever. They empower each child to reach their maximum potential, bringing out the very best in them.

From a big picture standpoint, mentors open the child's eyes to a different perspective, and with this new frame of reference, the child begins to dream of a different, more prosperous future. This ignites the drive for economic and social progress, which plays out as the child is further mentored, succeeds in school, takes advantage of higher education opportunities and realizes his or her dreams.

Big Brothers Big Sisters nurtures and grows the hopes of children, changing their lives today, so they may grow into successful adults in the future. We do this one child at a time, over and over again.

The impact is profound, yet the need is great. While we served more than 1,320 youth last year in Broward, there are still 728 children on our waitlist. We need men and women in our community to step up to become mentors – to give their time to change the life of a child.

This year, we're committed to matching every child on our waitlist through our Broward Bigger Better Stronger (BBBS) initiative. Will you stand up for a child in need? You could change a life, a future and a legacy.

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Chad Van Horn, Esq., Big Brother to Desmond for the past eight years, is the board chair of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Broward County, dedicated to creating and supporting one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth. Its larger vision is for all youth achieve their full potential. For more information, visit www.bbbsbroward.org or call (954) 584-9990.