

# Big Brothers Big Sisters Update

by Amanda Brahmer

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The stated mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwestern Wisconsin is to “help children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one relationships with measurable impact”. Their vision is to provide adult mentors for all children who want and need them. These mentors, also known as “Bigs”, develop a one-to-one relationship and become friends with the “Littles”.

According to Amanda Brahmer, Marketing and Partnership Coordinator, prior to World War II, children had meaningful contact with an adult 3-4 hours per day, while today it averages 15 minutes. Studies have shown that children need 3-5 caring adults, other than their parents, involved in their lives.

Studies have shown that this type of mentoring works. 83% of children have increased self-confidence, 60% have improved academic performance, and 96% demonstrate a trust in their “Big”.

The children served by BBBS are ages 5 to 15 and have varied back-grounds. Some are from single parent homes, others from large families, and still others where parents are simply too busy to give them the hours that they need.

BBBS has a variety of programs to fit different situations. Under the traditional program, volunteers are expected to commit for at least one year, and during that period spend one-to-one time with the Little 2-4 times per month doing some of the simple things in life. They might go to a movie or a restaurant, take a walk, scrapbook, play catch... just being there and being a constant in a child’s life makes an impact. It has been proven that a period shorter than a year can actually do more harm than good. Fortunately, many relationships last much longer than a year. And even after a child ages-out of BBBS at 18, many Bigs and Littles still stay in touch.

Another program is “lunch buddies”, a school based program, where a Big goes to the school one hour per week to just “hang out” with the kid... maybe playing a board game, help with school work, or just talk.

BBBS puts a great deal of time and effort into the screening and matching process. They are looking for individuals with common interests and other suitability traits. More Bigs are always needed, especially men. There are currently 80 children on the waiting list.

For more BBBS information, including programs, staff, funding and fund-raising activities, and volunteer opportunities, go to [www.bbbsnw.org](http://www.bbbsnw.org)



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