

Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Cape Breton, A Success Story!



Big Brothers and Big Sisters (BBBS) is a not for profit community organization serving children ages six to sixteen by connecting them with an adult who mentors the youth and helps them build their self-esteem. The organization also

connects with children in schools through the use of workshops aimed at developing those attributes like self-esteem and confidence.

Jessica's Story...

A number of years ago a little girl was taken by her father and not returned for months. The mother was frantic and when she finally did get her little girl back, Jessica was very shy, and had no self-confidence. Jessica's confidence was so low, in fact, that she wouldn't make eye-contact when having a conversation. This was a traumatic experience for Jessica and her mother wanted desperately to have her old Jess back. Big Brothers & Big Sisters matched Jessica with a retired nurse.

Jessica is six years old and is meeting her mentor for the first time today. As she walks in with her mother, she looks around the familiar office space and asks Francine, "When will my mentor be here?" To which Francine responds, "He will be here any minute dear; you don't mind that it's a man, right?" Jessica is quite for a moment, presumably thinking about the possibility of a male mentor, and finally she says, "As long as he doesn't have a huge beard!" Jessica's mother and Francine break into laughter at her innocent response. Jessica's mother approached Big Brothers & Big Sisters with hopes that Jess could benefit from having a male role-model in her life to mentor her through the ups and downs of childhood and to be a safe role-model who she can count on for safe advising. Jessica has been waiting for a mentor for a couple of weeks, and then he enters the office, sporting a very big beard!

This story is about nine years old, but it's one that has stuck with Francine Hall, the director of the Cape Breton Chapter of BBBS, because it was the first time a big brother was paired with a little sister. Jessica and her big bearded brother were connected for approximately seven years until he moved out of province.

In Canada, Big Brothers and Big Sisters have been serving youth for 100 years. The Cape Breton BBBS organization started thirty-five years ago and Francine Hall has been the Executive Director for 28 of those 35 years, so she has seen a lot of the benefits for the local community of CBRM.

Francine says referrals come from parents, schools or children's aid organizations, and the process of connecting the child or youth to a mentor begins. Possible mentors are screened by a criminal record check, child abuse registry check, interviews, and a training program. Once the person meets the criteria and is accepted into the program, they are matched with a little brother or sister. There is a 1 year commitment period, with 2 to 4 hours a week spent mentoring. "Basically we screen adults to make sure they meet standards set by our national office and then we match them one-on-one with a child. We also have programs where we go in to the schools and we teach, or facilitate in the classroom some of our programs, such as our 'Go Girls' and 'Game On' programs. It's usually grade five students we work with, preparing them for middle school and teaching self-esteem, healthy life-style choices including healthy nutrition."

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Big Brothers and Big Sisters has received funding from the provincial "START" grant and provincial JCP. They have also received funding from the Department of Community Services for \$18,500.00. Francine Hall says it wouldn't be possible without the commitment from their volunteers, and they can always use more volunteers.



**For more information
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