

Big Brothers and Sisters wants branch in Bancroft

By Nate Smelle

Mentoring co-ordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Kylie Caume said while BBBS is already serving kids in the area, the organization is planning to expand and hopes to eventually open a Brancroft branch. For more than four decades, Big Brothers has been facilitating life-changing relationships that inspire and empower children and youth to reach their potential as individuals and citizens.

Caume has been working with the agency in the area for the past three years now. During her time with the organization, she has seen firsthand how much the children they serve benefit from the programs they offer. When kids are enrolled in their programs, she said they are matched with a big brother or sister ? what the agency calls a ?Big.? Caume said these newfound friendships have proven to be invaluable for the children, or ?Littles,? who tend to show several improvements in many aspects of their life.

?Children who are a part of our agency are able to have a ton of new experiences, and can adopt new hobbies that they can become passionate about, which gives them more to bond over with their big brother or sister,? said Caume.

?Having a caring friend to spend time with also gives children a positive role model in their life [and] can give them guidance and support when going through the hardships of growing up. Having a mentor that can offer [them] insight and experience on the challenges that all kids face can be an extremely positive life changing relationship.?

Through the program, children are exposed to activities that they might not have otherwise had the chance to experience. Caume said big brothers or sisters will often take their ?Little? to see a movie, out for lunch or just hang out and play games with them at home. She gave the example of one child and his big brother that have been building their friendship for the last two years. After engaging in several different activities in the community, they quickly discovered that the ?Little? really enjoyed skating. From that point on, public skating became a regular outing for them. A year later, the big brother heard about an opportunity with Bauer Hockey to get equipment for a first-year hockey player, and managed to get a full set of gear for the boy. Caume said now the little brother is playing on a community house league hockey team that is coached by his big brother.

?This was a big brother who had time to give back to his community, and now enjoys spending his time with his little brother and the activities they do together,? she said.

Caume attributes much of the programs' success to the many volunteers who give their time to the organization as big brothers and sisters, and as board members. As an integral part of the organization, she said all volunteers undergo extensive training, so that they have the tools and knowledge they need to become a valuable role model for the children they are matched with. While donations are much appreciated and needed, Caume said the best way for people to support Big Brothers and Big Sisters is to become a volunteer.

?They are the backbone of all our services,? said Caume.

?Our volunteers can also always come to us if they have questions or concerns about their matches, as we offer continuous match support throughout the entirety of the relationships they form through our agency. We are always looking for positive and eager people to offer their time and experience to us through volunteering.?

According to Caume, there are several benefits for the children who participate in the programs. Some of these benefits include improved attendance in school; having a more positive outlook on life and a greater eagerness to succeed; improved grades; a better understanding of the importance of co-operation; and better behaviour at school and at home.

?The effects that we've seen on our ?Littles' over the years are countless, but always positive,? she said.

?Even those that are stubborn and resistant to the idea of having a ?Big' at first eventually end up coming around and taking something positive from the experience. Every little bit helps us continue to aid children in the challenges of growing up, and we are truly grateful for every bit that we receive from our amazing community.?

To make a donation, or to learn more about Big Brothers Big Sisters in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties and how to get involved visit: **www.bigsneeded.ca**.