



Frequently asked questions about Big Brothers Big Sisters

- 1. What is Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS)?**

BBBS is the oldest and largest youth mentoring organization in the United States, matching caring adults with children, ages five-to-18 years old, in one-to-one relationships.
- 2. Where is BBBS located?**

Approximately 500 agencies are located in 5,000 communities across the country. The national headquarters is located in Philadelphia, Pa.
- 3. How can I get involved?**

To volunteer, you may call 1-888-412-BIGS or contact your local BBBS agency.
- 4. Do I need special training to volunteer as a big brother?**

No special training is required. All you need is the willingness to spend time with someone who needs a friend. BBBS staff provides support and training as needed.
- 5. How much time am I expected to spend with my Little?**

It ranges from one hour a week to several hours a month.
- 6. How is BBBS different from other mentoring programs?**

BBBS is the only national mentoring organization with the primary mission of one-to-one mentoring with friendship as its cornerstone. It provides both national leadership and comprehensive program services at the local community level.
- 7. How does BBBS create a match?**

In the community program, parents or guardians apply to the program for their child to be matched with a “Big.” Potential Big Brothers and Big Sisters are screened for the role. Screening includes a personal interview by a trained staff member and criminal, background and reference checks. In community-based programs a home assessment is also made. The child and his/her parents meet with the Big and, if the parent gives consent, a match is made. During the course of the match, a trained caseworker maintains contact with the match, oversees its development and offers guidance, if needed.
- 8. Are there different ways Bigs and Littles can interact?**

Yes. There are essentially two different types of programs at BBBS: community-based and site-based. In the community-based program, Bigs and Littles are matched by trained professionals and spend time on activities they jointly select, such as attending sporting events, going out for ice cream and other everyday fun activities. BBBS also offers site-based programs where supervised meetings occur between Bigs and Littles at a dedicated site, usually a school. At BBBS In-Schools program, for instance, Bigs and Littles meet regularly at the school where they can have lunch together, play sports in the gym or use the computers in the library.

Strict screening of volunteers occurs for both programs and both involve ongoing support from trained professionals. BBBS In-Schools Program is the fastest growing program within the BBBS organization. In 2003, some 90,000 youths were served through this program.

9. What is the Amachi BBBS program?

Amachi BBBS matches children of incarcerated parents with adults who are members of church congregations, usually in the child's neighborhood. It is an initiative that BBBS started in Philadelphia in 2000. There are 2.5 million children in this country who have an incarcerated parent and research shows that a large percentage of them will end up in prison unless some type of intervention occurs. The Amachi BBBS program is now underway in 25 communities around the country. In Philadelphia, 700 children have already been matched through this program. Amachi is a Nigerian Ibo word that means "who knows but what God has brought us through this child."

10. Are the benefits of the BBBS program measurable?

Yes, a national study by Public Private Ventures documents the benefits to Little Brothers and Little Sisters who participate in the BBBS program. These youths are 52 percent less likely to skip a day of school and 46 percent less likely to start using drugs than peers who are not in the program. Studies of youths in the school-based program show improved school performance and attendance, better grades and greater self-confidence. In addition, impact of the match on the child is assessed each year.

11. How many children does BBBS serve today?

Today BBBS serves more than 200,000 youths in 5,000 communities in all 50 states. The agency has embarked on an ambitious plan to serve one million children by the year 2010.

12. Are there sufficient Big Brothers and Big Sisters to meet the needs of today's children?

Studies show that there are 14 million children considered "at risk" in our country. Ten million of these are within the ages served by BBBS. The agency has embarked on an aggressive growth plan with the goal of serving one million youths by the year 2010.

13. Where does BBBS get its funding?

Funding comes from individuals, federal, state and local government, foundations and corporations.

(* this is an edited list of Frequently Asked Questions from Big Brothers Big Sisters of America)