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Big Brothers Big Sisters of Great Falls PROGRAM INFORMATION SHEET

Our Mission

To provide youth with positive mentoring relationships through a high-quality, one-to-one, volunteer program designed to help them become productive, self-reliant adults.

Our Vision

Every child in the Great Falls community who wants or needs a positive role model is provided with a long-term, caring friendship with a supportive mentor.

Our History

The Big Brothers Big Sisters movement was initiated in 1903 by a man named Ernest Coulter. As a New York City court clerk, Coulter became increasingly alarmed by the thousands of suffering children that came through the court system. In late 1904, he appeared before a group of businessmen and described a boy about to be jailed. Coulter stated: "There is only one way to save that youngster, and that is to have some earnest, true man volunteer to be his Big Brother, to look after him, help him do right, make the little chap feel that there is at least one human being in this great city who takes a personal interest in him. Someone who cares whether he lives or dies. I call for a volunteer!" With that said, every man in the room raised his hand.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is based on the premise that in order for youth to reach their full potential as a man or a woman, they need the influence of a mature, responsible adult during their formative years. The mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is to make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth, primarily through a professionally supported one-to-one relationship with a caring adult.

Continuing with this mission, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Great Falls has provided positive, professionally supported relationships to Great Falls children since 1976. In accordance with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Great Falls provides youth with a volunteer program designed to help them become productive, self-reliant adults. Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs are effective through reliance on trained, educated and professional staff members, carefully screened and oriented volunteers, ongoing match support and supervision, and uniform case management standards and procedures.

Programs

- The ***Community-Based Mentoring Program*** provides one-to-one mentoring between adults and children ages 5- 17 in need of a positive adult mentor. The program requires volunteers to commit to the program for at least 9 months. Volunteers must spend two hours a week or a minimum of eight hours a month with their Little doing a variety of activities that are recreational, educational, work related, and social.
- The ***Site-Based Mentoring Program*** provides children in an elementary setting with a mentor. Elementary school mentors can be a student in high school or an adult community member. Mentors meet with their Little at the school for one hour per week. This program typically takes place during the school year, but can extend past that in some circumstances.

Eligibility

Child Eligibility Criteria

A. Eligibility

1. Age: 5-17
2. Family Status: The child must live in a family environment where the Program Specialist deems the need for a significant caring adult or positive role model is necessary.
3. Need Determination: The child must exhibit need for this specialized one-to-one service. This need will be determined through information obtained in the Parent/Guardian interview, the child interview, and family history.
4. Criteria for Participation: (see Parent and Child Job Descriptions for more details of eligibility and ineligibility)

Note: It is our policy to provide service for children who meet our basic criteria and who do not have other resources providing this one-to-one interaction. Big Brothers Big Sisters will avoid duplication of services with other agencies in the community.

Volunteer Eligibility Criteria

A. Eligibility

1. Age
 - a. At least 19 years old for Community.
 - b. Site-Based community volunteers must be 18 years old. (High school volunteers in the School Program have different eligibility requirements; please ask for appropriate forms)
2. Resident of Great Falls or surrounding area for a minimum of six months. (military exemption -three months)
3. Provides a minimum of three references. 1) your current or past employer (school, if student) who has known you for at least a year; 2) a co-worker or friend who has known you at least 2 years; and 3) Spouse/domestic partner or a second friend who has known you for at least 3 years.
4. Demonstrates respect for the safety and well being of children.
5. Demonstrates appropriate motivation for becoming a volunteer.
6. Willing to work within agency guidelines.
7. Volunteers are required to make a 9 month commitment to the program with a minimum contact of 8 hours per month. Group Volunteers are required to make a 6-month commitment to the program and are required to participate in three activities.
8. Agrees to a comprehensive background screening.
9. Participates in an applicant in-person interview.
10. Completes required agency paperwork.
11. Agrees to home visit, if requested by Program Specialist.
12. Introduces spouse, roommate and other living in home to Program Specialist if asked.
13. Has a valid driver's license, adequate vehicular transportation and evidence of current insurance.
14. If has history of alcohol or chemical dependency, the applicant must be sober/chemically free for a minimum of one year.

B. Ineligibility

1. Sporadic job history that the Program Specialist deems is symptomatic of the applicant's ability to maintain commitments.
2. Major upheaval (positive or negative) in applicant's life within the last six months that may affect the applicant's ability to be successful in a match.
3. History of criminal activity including, but not limited to:
 - (1) Physical/Mental/Sexual Abuse of an adult or child.
 - (2) Misdemeanor or Felony Offenses
 - (3) Driving Violations (DUI, reckless driving, suspensions, accidents, etc.)
4. Current substance abuse problems.
5. Current or recent history of mental problems.
6. Inability to establish and sustain close relationships.
7. Applicant receives negative responses from references.

Note: Rejected applicants can reapply to be volunteers after one year.

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Process

Child Application Process

1. Parent/Guardian requests a volunteer for their child.
2. Parent/Guardian completes a child application and fills out all appropriate forms.
3. Program Specialist conducts a child intake at the family home.
This intake consists of:
 - 1) An interview between the Program Specialist and the Parent/Guardian discussing the child's history, personality and interests.
 - 2) An interview between the Program Specialist and the child discussing school, home life, personal interests, and personal safety.
 - 3) Discussion of program expectations, match and safety guidelines and any additional questions.
4. Program Specialist assesses the needs of the child.
5. Child is placed on unmatched list.
6. Program Specialist finds a volunteer for the child.
7. Parent/Guardian and child approve volunteer
8. Match is made.

Volunteer Application Process

1. Prospective volunteer contacts agency.
2. Prospective volunteer completes application packet and fills out all appropriate forms.
3. Program Specialist interviews prospective volunteer.
4. Program Specialist reviews criminal background check and references.
5. Program Specialist selects several children on the unmatched list that are compatible with the volunteer.
6. Volunteer selects a child.
7. Match is made.

Many factors are taken into consideration when matching a volunteer with a child. These factors include:

- Personality of the volunteer and child.
- Interests of the volunteer and child.
- Traveling distance between the volunteer and child.
- Cultural background.
- Needs of the child.
- Expectations and personal preferences of the volunteer, child and Parent/Guardian.

Length of Match

Both the volunteer and child/Parent/Guardian must commit to at least a 9 month match commitment. However, it is important to note that the match can be closed at anytime for the following reasons:

- If the match is incompatible.
- Once the Little turns eighteen, the match is closed. If requested, the match can remain open until the Little graduates.
- A match may close because of relocation of either party.
- A match may be ended because of inappropriate or uncooperative behavior on the part of anyone in the match.
- If either parties want to close the match.