

BIG BROTHERS-BIG SISTERS

by Amy Gallan

Internationally, Big Brothers-Big Sisters have been helping children from one-parent families since 1903. On PEI the organization was started in 1975 by a group of local citizens. This means that this year is the twentieth anniversary of Big Brothers-Big Sisters on the Island. With headquarters in Charlottetown, the university is an obvious source of possible volunteers who could make good "Bigs" -- Big Brothers or Big Sisters -- for "Littles" -- Little Brothers or Little Sisters. This volunteering by students, however, has not been happening.

Currently there are only three or four Big Sisters who are university students, and only one Big Brother who is a part-time student. "We would like to see more guys like this become Big Brothers and spend time with a 'little fella,'" said Cindy Leard, who works in administration at Big Brothers-Big Sisters.

There are approximately eighty children on the waiting list for Big Brothers-Big Sisters, the majority of which are boys. Some of these have been on the waiting list for more than a year. "Some people come in here and put their kids on the list when they are three, because the list is so long, so that when they turn six, hopefully we'll have a big brother for them," Leard explained. "It's just too bad we don't have the people to give to these kids. . . it's really sad because they are really good kids, just looking for a friend."

Over the past few years Big Brothers-Big Sisters have seen a decline in volunteers. The economy has been a major reason for this. "The times are not as easy as they once were, and so people just don't have time for things like this," said Leard.

Because of the decline, the organization must campaign through events such as Bowl For Millions, which is their biggest event. Big Brothers-Big Sisters information sessions are also held in many different areas to inform people of the need for help. The organization targets communities to recruit volunteers, thus UPEI has become a target. As Leard explained, "I look at the university as a community in itself. . . there's a large student body there."

"I know a lot of people are scared of the commitment," said Leard, "and you do have some kind of commitment -- a commitment of three to four hours a week." Dates set for meetings between the match are also flexible, and do not have to be the same every week. If one week must be skipped and understanding must be made with the child and together other plans can be made.

The organization emphasizes activities between Bigs and Littles which do not cost money, such as outdoor activities, or simple activities that can be done at the home of the Big. A typical three hours with a Little could be spent on simple tasks, "Just having them over to watch a show and maybe making popcorn. . . many times all these kids really care about is having somebody else to talk to," explained Leard.

The children in the program range in ages from 6 to 16, and come from one-parent homes; many are boys who have no male influences in their lives. "Having a Big Brother is a . . . big thing for them because it's somebody they can talk to and ask questions," emphasized Leard. Because of the one-on-one interaction, the relationships between Bigs and Littles often mature into long-lasting friendships. There are matches who have been together for as long as ten years, others have lasted as long as five to seven years.

Many university students, however, do not think that they have the opportunity to become a Big Brother or a Big Sister or have one of these relationships with a child. One reason for this is that many students do not own a vehicle. This, however, according to Yvonne Cartner, executive director of Big Brothers-Big Sister is not the case. In the Big Brothers-Big Sister program a car is not a prerequisite to becoming a member. The caseworkers, people experienced in matching volunteers with children, take into consideration that the student has no vehicle and then decides which child the volunteer could be best matched with. "Obviously," says Cartner, "we would not match them so that they were miles and miles apart, we would make a match based on the ability of the Big to get to the Little's home."

Another concern of students is that they may be from another province, but according to Cartner this can be dealt with the help of caseworkers. When the child chooses a Big that returns home for Christmas and summer vacations, the child and the parent must understand and accept that the Big will leave for long periods of time. "We have, before, matched students who have gone home for the summer; we encourage that the student and the child do say in contact either by phone or by letter during the summer so that they can resume their friendship in the fall when they get back. . ." explained Cartner.

Living in dorms, as many university students do, should also not be a concern when one considers volunteering for Big Brothers-Big Sisters. It would be fine for the Big to bring the Little back to the dorm to play games of watch movies because the dorm is considered the Big's home. "I think it's kind of neat for our kids who haven't really got much exposure to university and maybe someday would like to go. . . I think it just show them how students live," Cartner said.

Cartner believes that an increase in university volunteers is very important. "Our need for volunteers is great," she emphasized. "We have, in the past, had a lot of success in recruiting students as volunteer Big Brothers-Big Sisters, I would like to see that come back again and grow."

Cartner also believes that having a university student as a Big Brother or Big Sister would be excellent exposure to university life for the Littles, and says, "It takes away some of the mystique or mystery around going to university. . . it shows that university is an option for some of our kids. . . I think that's a unique opportunity for our kids -- just to be exposed to that."

Cartner would like to see more university students volunteer. She thinks that their youth, energy, and vibrancy would have a very positive effect on the children, "Their way of looking at the future is great for our kids."

Don't be an APATHETIC SLOB
VOLUNTEER!!

Myths And Facts About Big Brothers-Big Sisters

MYTH: Being a Big requires a lot of time and is a huge commitment.

FACT: Volunteers generally spend three to four hours a week with their Littles, depending of course on their schedule. Bigs see the time spent with their Littles as relaxing, fun, and an opportunity to participate in activities they both enjoy. The commitment lasts at least 6 months

MYTH: Bigs are young, single, athletic types.

FACT: People who volunteer to be Bigs do not have to be gifted athletes, community leaders or any other type of person. Volunteers are just nice people, and come from a variety of backgrounds and are all different ages.

MYTH: To be a good Big Brother or Big Sister you have to spend a lot of money going on super outings.

FACT: Volunteers are encouraged to spend as little money as possible.

Outings can be incorporated into the individuals lifestyle. The focus of the program is friendship and guidance.

MYTH: The Volunteer Screening Process is lengthy and intimidating.

FACT: In addition to an information session, a caseworker will need to meet with the individual to get to know the individual better. References and police checks are also obtained. The process takes approximately four weeks, and is painless.

MYTH: Many of the children in the program are "problem kids."

FACT: Little Brothers and Little Sisters are children from single parent families. Like any other group of children, some may be having problems, but most just want an adult friend.

MYTH: Big Brothers and Big Sisters of PEI has enough volunteers.

FACT: Although there have been many successful matches, more volunteers are always needed. The popularity of the program means that there are many children waiting to be matched. The biggest challenge is trying to recruit volunteers -- especially men.

ANATOMY 6th @ 9:00 AM Rm 102

#1. 20% OF ALCOHOL IS ABSORBED FROM STOMACH AND GOES INTO BLOOD STREAM, REST GOES INTO SMALL INTESTINES AND ENTERS BLOOD STREAM FROM THERE.

BORING **#2. TAKES ALCOHOL IN BLOOD STREAM**

#3. LIVER CHANGES SMALL AMOUNTS OF ALCOHOL TO H₂O, CO₂ AND ENERGY Kcal/Kg.

#4. HIGH LEVELS AFFECT BALANCE, VISION & ALERTNESS

#5. HUMAN BODY CAN PROCESS ABOUT ONE BEER AN HOUR.. WHAT ABOUT MY CAT?

#6. SWEATING AND BREATHING CAN ELIMINATE SMALL AMOUNTS OF ALCOHOL

#7. TIRED, TENSE OR ON MEDICATION CAN INCREASE ALCOHOL EFFECTS

#8. NO SOBER-UP FORMULA!!

#9. BEER: FROM LATIN BIBERE TO DRINK

ALCOHOL REDUCES SENSITIVITY

NOT A GOOD OPENER

KNOW WHEN TO DRAW THE LINE

Labatt