

NATIONAL MENTORING MONTH: BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF ERIE, NIAGARA AND THE SOUTHERN TIER

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My sisters and I grew up in a supportive environment where our parents balanced their professional responsibilities with their roles at home. They worked tirelessly to provide for our family, ensuring that we had every opportunity to explore our interests and pursue our goals, and were actively involved in our daily lives, always present to offer guidance, encouragement, and a strong sense of stability.

Growing up, I attended Ss. Peter & Paul in Williamsville for elementary and middle school, followed by St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute for high school, and later St. John Fisher College. Throughout those years, my parents played an active role in my education and extracurricular activities. They dedicated countless hours to attending school events, assisting with homework, and driving me to and from sports practices and games. Beyond that, they instilled in me a sense of discipline, perseverance, and

the confidence to pursue my ambitions. Now, as a father of three young children, I often find myself wondering how they managed to balance it all so seamlessly while making it look effortless.

After earning my undergraduate degree from St. John Fisher College, I continued my education at the University at Buffalo School of Law. During my time there, I was fortunate to learn from many dedicated professors who provided invaluable mentorship, going beyond classroom instruction by dedicating significant time to helping me refine my legal skills, develop a strong professional foundation and navigate the complexities of the legal field. Looking back, I am grateful for the lasting impact my law professors had on me as I entered the legal profession. After law school, I spent a decade practicing real estate and environmental law, gaining extensive experience in transactions, financing, and development projects and, after that, I transitioned briefly into the private sector. Much like the guidance I received from my parents and professors at UB Law, I was fortunate to work with several experienced lawyers and business professionals who invested significant time in mentoring and training me during those times.

Today, as a partner at Hodgson Russ LLP in its Corporate & Securities Practice, I leverage both my legal expertise and firsthand business experience to provide clients with a comprehensive approach for their projects. My work now centers on addressing legal issues with respect to private investment funds, joint ventures and other sophisticated investment and real estate transactions. Due to my personal and professional experiences, I am fortunate to be able to balance legal risks with commercial objectives, helping clients successfully navigate the complexities of real estate investment and finance.

Recognizing the impact that mentorship has had on my own development, I remain committed to giving back. I am excited to recently have become a Board Member of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Erie, Niagara and the Southern Tier to help to work to ensure that other children have access to the same guidance, mentorship, and leadership that my parents, professors and professional colleagues provided for me. Big Brothers Big Sisters empowers children to reach their full potential by pairing them with adult mentors ("Bigs") who provide guidance and support. Serving communities nationwide, the organization has operated since 1904 under the belief that every child has untapped potential. Through meaningful, one-on-one mentoring relationships, Big Brothers Big Sisters creates a lasting, positive impact on young people's lives. Without doubt, investing in the next generation is something we all should value deeply, and play an active role in helping others achieve their own success. This past January, we celebrated National Mentoring Month, highlighting the critical role mentors play in shaping young futures. However, the need for mentors remains urgent beyond just one month of recognition. Today, one in three children in the U.S. lack a consistent, positive adult mentor. Locally, more than 120 children are on the Big Brothers Big Sisters waitlist, hoping for a mentor to help guide them. Being a mentor doesn't require

special skills—just a willingness to invest time and show genuine care for a child who could benefit from support and encouragement. The impact of mentorship is profound, and even a small commitment can make a lasting difference in a young person's life.

On behalf of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Erie, Niagara and the Southern Tier, I encourage everyone to become involved, whether it is through volunteering and giving, or sharing your story if you have been involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters in the past. Any level involvement is valued and appreciated, and if you are interested in obtaining more information about Big Brothers Big Sisters and learning how you can get involved, visit BiggerTogether.org or call (716) 873-5833.

ABOUT BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF ERIE, NIAGARA AND THE SOUTHERN TIER (BBBS)

The mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Erie, Niagara and the Southern Tier (BBBS) is to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that IGNITE the POWER and PROMISE of youth.

Since the agency was founded, BBBS' carefully designed one-to-one mentoring programs have provided thousands of local children with the opportunity to have a Big Brother or Big Sister in their life to help them defend their potential and clear the path to their biggest possible future.

BBBS is always looking to engage members of the community to join them in support of their mission and help more local children through the power of mentorship.

Ways for You to Get Involved!

1. VOLUNTEER
2. GIVE
3. SHARE YOUR STORY

For more information about Big Brothers Big Sisters and to learn how you can get involved, visit BiggerTogether.org or call (716) 873-5833.

VOLUNTEER

Become a Volunteer Mentor – a Big!

Big Brothers Big Sisters is looking for people like YOU to become a volunteer mentor, a Big. As a Big, you will be matched one-to-one with a child in your community. It only takes a few hours a month to make a BIG difference and help a child reach their full potential!

Volunteer mentors are needed for:

- Community Based Mentoring Program, the mentor (Big) picks up their mentee (Little) at their home and together they participate in a variety of activities in the community. These activities can include trips to libraries and other educational sites where they

work on homework or tutoring. Activities can also include attending theatre, music events, or sporting events with tickets donated to the agency.

- Site Based Mentoring Program, the Big and Little meet at a fixed location, on a set date and time with the support of a BBBS staff member. BBBS currently operates a Site Based Mentoring Program at Enterprise Charter School in Downtown Buffalo every Tuesday from 4:00-5:30pm.

BBBS asks all volunteer mentors for a minimum one-year commitment and to see their mentee 2-3 times per month for a few hours each time. All volunteers are required to attend an orientation session prior to being matched. Topics covered include building healthy relationships, communication, planning activities, hygiene and health, youth development, cultural diversity, impact of mentoring, behavioral concerns, working with parents, and child safety. A BBBS staff member is assigned to each mentoring match to provide support to the volunteer, child and parent/guardian.

Become a Leadership Volunteer

Leadership volunteers help support the mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters by committing their time, skills and resources to serve as members of its Board of Directors, Ambassadors Board or other Committees that focus on the fundraising, marketing and programmatic success of the organization.

GIVE

Every dollar invested in Big Brothers Big Sisters will help make a BIG difference to a child in your community. Give a donation to support the power of mentorship today. You can make a one-time gift or choose to set up monthly donations.