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## **Big Brothers Big Sisters accepting applications for children, mentors**

August 29, 2020 — Big Brothers Big Sisters of Alachua County, which announced its return to the Gainesville area earlier this year, is now accepting applications from caring adult volunteer mentors, as well as from children that would benefit from having a friend and positive role model in their lives.

The agency, an affiliate of BBBS of Tampa Bay, is part of that nation's oldest and largest youth mentoring organization. In the Community-Based Program, adults (called Bigs) are matched one-on-one with children (called Littles) who have similar interests or backgrounds.

“It is super exciting to see matches beginning to be made in our community. Alachua County has always been a community of philanthropic work. Now, we are looking to add additional caring adults to our program who are willing to share a small portion of their time to defend the potential of a child,” said Jasmyn Copeland, Alachua County Program Director. “Traditionally, our matches would spend time together a couple of times each month participating in an activity they both enjoy. However, right now we are following all guidelines relating to COVID-19 and offering virtual meetings until everyone feels it is safe to start face-to-face activities.”

Anyone can refer a child for participating in the program – parents, guardians, teachers or other family members. Children must be between the ages of 5-13 at the time of their initial match, although they are eligible to remain in the program through high school graduation.

“Children are not immune to the questions and stress of the current situation, and there's no better time than now to provide them with a trusted, caring adult friend,” said Stephen Koch, President & CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay. “We are also very proud that our mentoring programs here are supported by the Children's Trust of Alachua County.”

The safety of the Littles and Bigs is the agency's top priority. The volunteer mentors undergo extensive background checks, individual interviews and mentor training. The children, who must be between the ages of 5-13 to get initially matched, and their parents are also screened and interviewed and must be accepted into the program.

The one-on-one relationships typically ignite positive outcomes for the children and youth. In 2019, 99 percent of the Littles who had been in the program for at least a year were promoted to the next grade level, and 98 percent had no involvement in the juvenile justice system.

If you are interested in being a Big, or signing up your child as a Little, please contact Jasmyn Copeland at [JasmynC@BBBSTampaBay.org](mailto:JasmynC@BBBSTampaBay.org). Potential mentors are also invited to attend a virtual Orientation & Training session (no RSVP require) to learn more about the programs and, if interested,

begin the enrollment process. The complete orientation schedule can be found at <https://bbbstampabay.org/be-a-big>.

**About Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay**

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay is part of the nation’s largest donor and volunteer-supported mentoring network and holds itself accountable for children in its program to achieve measurable outcomes, such as educational success, avoidance of risky behaviors, higher aspirations, greater confidence and better relationships. Partnering with parents/guardians, schools, corporations and others in the community, Big Brothers Big Sisters carefully pairs youth, or “Littles,” with screened volunteer mentors, or “Bigs,” and monitors these mentoring matches throughout their time in the program. Big Brothers Big Sisters provides children facing adversity – often of a single or low-income household or families where a parent is incarcerated or serving in the military – with strong and enduring, professionally-supported one-to-one mentoring relationships that change their lives for the better, forever. In 2019, more than 2,800 children were paired with mentors in Alachua, Hillsborough, Pinellas, Pasco, Polk, Citrus, Hernando and Sumter counties. For more information please visit [www.bbbstampabay.org](http://www.bbbstampabay.org).

