

Big Brothers/Big Sisters— Teen Mom Program

By: Heather Spivey

The statistics can be staggering to most individuals, yet the reality is that there are 600 teen moms in Forsyth County alone. Big Brothers / Big Sisters of Forsyth County has been actively developing a program for these teen moms for the past 2 years. The Winston-Salem Foundation and the Women's Fund of Winston-Salem have both generously provided grants for this unique program. These grants support program development, volunteer recruitment, staffing and monthly information sessions for the teen moms.

The only requirement of the teen moms (age 13 – 18) is that they be in school. They are referred to the program by parents or friends, by word of mouth, or by their school. Amy Mack, President and CEO of Big Brothers / Big Sisters Services, Inc. in Forsyth County, said, "There are currently 9 matches for Big and Littles. The goal is to match 25 during the first year of these supporting grants."

Matches are made possible through Teen Mom volunteers. Volunteers need no experience other than the desire to work with teen moms. The volunteers are asked to make a one-year commitment to their teen, giving him or her at least a few hours of their time once a week. Mack adds, "A case manager will observe and supervise once a month and is available anytime to ensure the match is a positive one."

The Teen Mom Program thoroughly screens and trains its volunteers. To become a volunteer, there is an initial background check, then orientation, training and ultimately making the match. "This is far from a superficial process," Mack states. "The case managers are visibly excited, especially when a match is close to connection."

A typical activity for the Little / Big match might entail going to the park, the library, or simply running errands and incorporating these special young people into everyday-life activities. Mack emphasized how even the conversations in the car are effective. "A busy person



can make this work," she explains. "It's the one-to-one relationship that is fulfilling and rewarding. Our volunteers are providing a selfless service and giving what so many of us take for granted—time. They are there to listen, offer guidance and encouragement, and they are there to be impartial—not to judge these teens for the situation where they have found themselves. These volunteers are there to see the teens through the moment."



Amy Mack

Volunteering to help these young people is rewarding in itself, because these young mothers really need someone to serve as a resource, a mentor and as a sounding board for issues that they will necessarily encounter as teen mothers. Add the element of establishing an enduring relationship with a young person, and the reward becomes boundless. These relationships can often last years, with the roles switching somewhere along the way. Mack concludes, adding, "Volunteers will often say that they feel they are learning more from their Littles than vice-versa."

Coincidentally, January is National Mentor Month. To learn more about this program and the many others that Big Brothers / Big Sisters offers, you can contact Judi Saint Sing, Director of Volunteer Recruitment and PR at (336) 724-7993, or jsaintsing@bbbsnc.org. Please visit their website at www.bbbsnc.org for additional information about opportunities in Forsyth County, or www.bbbsdaviecounty.org for opportunities in Davie County.

(Big Brothers / Big Sisters—Little Moments. Big Magic)