

The Telegram (St. John's)

Big and Littles reap rewards of program

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Illustrations: Little Sister Danielle (front) was matched with her Big Sister Renee Williams six years ago. They still get together to do fun stuff like fires on the beach.
- Submitted photo

For more than 35 years, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Newfoundland have not only been giving kids the opportunity to be kids, but it has also let adults re-live their youth.

Big Brothers and Big Sisters is the organization's traditional program that matches adult and children - "Bigs" and "Littles" respectively - based on personality profiling.

Little Sister Danielle was matched with her Big Sister Renee Williams when she was 10.

Now, at 16 years of age, Danielle still loves getting together with Williams.

"I don't have a (real) big sister so it's a different relationship that I get to experience," said Danielle.

Last names of "Littles" are not published by the organization due to confidentiality restrictions.

Mother recognized importance

Danielle's mother signed her up for the program because she was a single parent and didn't have the opportunity to do a lot of activities with her.

Danielle said she loves her time with Williams because it's that time of the week when she can put down her homework and get out of the house.

They have made a scrapbook covering all the activities they've done together from the start - including going to the movies, baking, minigolf, going to the park and out for dinner.

"It is the best experience. I just love when I show up at her house and I go in to get her and she's always smiling. She's just such a pleasant, happy person," said Williams.

"It's been great to see her grow over time into such a wonderful teenager. It just makes me feel good that (Danielle) enjoys it even after six years."

There are 355 children between the ages of six and 17 in St. John's and the surrounding area that receive services - from programs like the "Bigs" and "Littles," an in-school lunch hour mentoring program at 21 schools in the Eastern School District and healthy body image mentoring program for young women between the ages of 12 and 14.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Newfoundland executive director Kelly Leach said sometimes adults get more out of this experience than the children.

"You're making a difference in the life of a child," said Leach.

"These kids are going to feel more confident and they're going to go on and, hopefully, become productive members of their own society," she said.

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