



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS BRINGS HOME BIG HONORS, NAMED AUGUST FAYETTE 'FACE'

Uniontown, PA – The staff at Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Laurel Region works hard to bring young people in need together with volunteer mentors who can guide and support them. The agency's efforts didn't go unnoticed.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Laurel Region recently was named Agency of the Year by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. The agency's dedication to children facing adversity also earns it this month's Fayette County Public Relations Initiative's Faces and Places designation.

"It was very surreal," Executive Director Stephanie Babich Mihleder said of winning the national award. "We found out we were finalists, and that was very exciting to us and also very validating for what we were trying to accomplish at such a difficult time."

Babich Mihleder said the Laurel Region agency found out during the BBBS national conference that it had, in fact, won the award. She said there are 279 agencies, and an Agency of the Year award was given in each of three size categories – small, medium and large.

"We were elated," she said. "It's nice to be recognized for everything we've been through, and we came through and prevailed."

Babich Mihleder said BBBS of America looks at several aspects of an agency's performance before bestowing the award.

"They're looking for agencies that go above and beyond," she said. "They're also looking at data. They want to make sure you're serving the community to the best of your ability – the whole picture."

Babich Mihleder said the Laurel Region agency serves all of Fayette and Westmoreland counties, and the agency was told that its recognition came due to excellence on several levels.

"(They said) we did a great job making matches while also being creative and innovative with other efforts," she said.

Babich Mihleder said while most people know the basics of what Big Brothers Big Sisters does, they often don't realize how much need there is for mentors.

"I think what a lot of people don't realize is we have 127 children on our waiting list right now," she said, noting that becoming a big brother or big sister means "changing two lives at once. It's just an incredible thing that people do."

The agency currently is serving 102 children, she said, but that number is typically around 180 when its school-based programs are up and running in full force. Babich Mihleder said the school program is in effect in certain districts, such as Uniontown Area.

"We actually serve five districts, and we're excited to get back into schools," she said.

School-based programs ask volunteers to visit the school once a week to have lunch with a child. The agency recently got the green light to go back into schools after the COVID-19 pandemic forced that part of the program to close.

"We're celebrating," she said. "We're excited because the kids have such a gap from last year, and they really need our support."

Babich Mihleder said BBBS always can use more mentors, and she noted it's not the huge commitment many people believe it to be.

"A lot of people think it's a huge time commitment," she said.

In reality, the agency asks only that mentors devote two outings a month to the child.

Anyone interested in becoming a big brother or big sister can contact the agency by phone at 724-439-8055 in Fayette County or 724-837-6198 in Westmoreland County or email mentor@bbbs.org. A coordinator will set up an information session to get the process started.

Babich Mihleder said it's a simple process, and mentoring works.

"We are an evidence-based program," she said. "What that means is we absolutely know that it works and it changes lives."

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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