

Big Brothers Big Sisters.[®] OF CEDAR RAPIDS & EAST CENTRAL IOWA

SUPPORTER NEWS

FEBRUARY 2026



Letter from our President & CEO

To our incredible supporters,

As we wrap up our 50th year serving youth in our community, we find ourselves both reflecting with gratitude and looking ahead with purpose. Thank you for believing in the power of mentoring and in the potential of young people across our region. Your generosity fuels more than programs, it fuels relationships, stability, and hope.

This past year alone, together we served **399 young people** through one-to-one mentoring relationships that continue to deliver meaningful, measurable impact. **87% of youth demonstrated educational success, 94% were less likely to engage in risky behaviors, and 75% showed improved social-emotional competency.** Even more telling, **95% of our matches reported a positive match experience,** reinforcing the strength and quality of the relationships you help make possible.

We are also proud to share that the strength of our mission is reflected not only in outcomes—but in our culture. In the most recent Coolest Place to Work survey across the Corridor, Big Brothers Big Sisters earned an average score of **5.68 out of 6.** That recognition is a powerful testament to the dedicated, passionate team your support helps sustain.

While we celebrate this milestone year, our work is far from done. **The Empowering Potential Campaign;** launched during our 50th anniversary, will continue for the next four years, ensuring Big Brothers Big Sisters is positioned to serve youth for decades to come. Your continued investment helps strengthen programs today while building long-term sustainability for the future.

Thank you for being part of our first 50 years, and for helping shape the next 50. Together, we are changing lives, one relationship at a time.

With gratitude,
Stephanie Hartson
President & CEO
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cedar Rapids & East Central Iowa

MISSION MOMENT



SHELBY & JACION — BUILDING CONNECTION BEYOND THE LUNCH TABLE

Shelby is a Lunch Buddy matched with her Little, Jacion, and her impact reaches far beyond their time together at school. In addition to regular school visits, Shelby has intentionally built a strong, supportive relationship with Jacion’s mom. They communicate often, coordinate school visits together, and occasionally connect outside of school with mom present—strengthening trust and consistency for Jacion.

This partnership has helped address a significant barrier Jacion previously faced: school attendance. By working together, Shelby and Jacion’s mom have created a stronger circle of support around him—one that helps him show up more regularly and feel more connected.

As Shelby shared, “being a Lunch Buddy [is] whatever you make it like.” While she recognizes “there is nothing wrong with the minimum,” Shelby chose to invest more deeply. By getting to know Jacion’s mom and checking in regularly—sometimes receiving “a picture of what they did on the weekend”—Shelby has become “more of a part of his life rather than just... this random person that comes to see him at school twice a month for a short time.”

Because of supporters like you, mentors are able to go beyond the lunch table—building meaningful relationships that strengthen families, improve attendance, and help young people like Jacion thrive.



YOUR 2025 IMPACT

Lunch Buddy Program Growth:

- 98 youth served, up from 86 in 2024

Longer, stronger matches:

- Community-based matches now average 39 months (+9 months)
- Lunch Buddy matches now average 15 months (+3 months)

Youth Success:

- 94% of youth achieved their personal goal(s)

CURRENT BBBS NEEDS

Youth Are Waiting for a Mentor

- 35 students in the Cedar Rapids School District are waiting for a Lunch Buddy
- 100+ youth across Benton, Linn, and Jones Counties are waiting for a Community-Based Big

Get started at: www.BigCR.org

UPCOMING BBBS EVENTS

Bowl For Kids' Sake

February 11–27

Still room for more bowlers!

GiannaH@BigCR.org

Big Magic Breakfast

Thursday, May 7 | 7:30–8:30 AM

DoubleTree by Hilton Downtown

Cedar Rapids

FREE to attend

<https://givebutter.com/CZyl3u>

Annual Party

September (Date TBD)

Big of the Year Celebration

October 17

**MENTORSHIP
IS RIGHT
UP  MY ALLEY.**



Big Brothers Big Sisters
OF CEDAR RAPIDS & EAST CENTRAL IOWA

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO
THE 21ST ANNUAL

*Big Magic
Breakfast*

JOIN US OVER BREAKFAST AS WE
CELEBRATE OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS
AND LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE

DOUBLETREE CEDAR RAPIDS
350 1ST AVE NE, CEDAR RAPIDS, IA
52401

THURSDAY, MAY 7TH, 2026

7:30 - 8:30 AM

QUESTIONS? CALL: 319-377-8993
EMAIL: GIANNAH@BIGCR.ORG

SCAN THE
CODE TO
RSVP:

