

Big Brothers/Big Sisters seeks volunteers

Barb Rayner

ST. GEORGE

More volunteers are needed to help with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program here in Charlotte County.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Charlotte County, which was revived three years ago, is still part of the Saint John agency which has launched a vigorous year-long recruitment campaign called 1 Year 100 Men: The agency serves more than 200 children from Hampton to St. Stephen.

The campaign will work on recruiting volunteers to match more than 100 children who are currently on the waiting list - and 70 per cent of these children are young boys.

"Unfortunately, there are potentially many more children that are hesitant to request mentors because of the intimidating waiting list and potential wait times," said Deanna Gamble, public relations officer for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Saint John.

The 1 Year 100 Men campaign will help inform potential volunteers about what is required to become a mentor and hopefully eliminate any misconceptions that mentoring is too time consuming.

"Many people think that you have to parent these kids or that it will be a burden when actually it can be quite the opposite. To become a mentor is to become a friend and can actually benefit your life more than you would think," said Gamble.

Dolores Borthwick has been the co-ordinator for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Charlotte County for the past three years and works out of an office at Fundy High. Ear-



Big Brothers/Big Sisters St. Stephen caseworker Lori Hall, left, is shown here with Dolores Borthwick.

Image submitted

Borthwick attended the launch of the 1 Year 100 Men campaign in Saint John and said she learned that when a similar campaign was carried out in Newfoundland, they had so many Big Brothers come forward that they ended up having to recruit children for the program.

"We are actually growing here in Charlotte County. Last March we hired our coordinator in St. Stephen and I am the full-time coordinator in St. George. We are expanding this year into Blacks Harbour. "I have wanted to do that for some

looking after all the county."

Currently, said Borthwick, they have eight traditional matches in Charlotte County - two in St. Stephen, two in Saint Andrews and the remainder in the St. George area.

They also have an in-school mentoring program which served more than 60 children last year and she said they are hoping to increase this to 100.

She explained that with the mentoring program, volunteers come into the schools for one hour a week to meet with the child

the volunteer meets the child once a week. There are a lot of people who are not really sure if they want to become a Big Brother or Big Sister so the in-school program is an excellent place to start because it is just one hour a week.

"I have had some volunteers who have then gone on to traditional matches. They can still do the one hour a week at school plus do outside things as well which is really good. A couple of my matches that are now traditional go to the school and take the student out to lunch. You couldn't do that if you are just a mentor."

Borthwick said they have between 15 and 20 children on their waiting list and, unfortunately, she has yet to have people call her asking to become a Big Sister - she goes out to recruit volunteers. She feels people are afraid they will not have enough time to devote to the child they are matched with.

"But it's not necessarily extra time you have to have. Each of us already do things in our lives that we could include a child in such as raking the lawn or weeding the garden. You can do simple things such as watching a movie together.

"It is about spending time with a child and including them in your everyday life. You are not looking for extra time to spend with a child. It goes back to the saying - it takes a community to raise a child - and what better way to do it than through Big Brothers/Big Sisters."

If you would like to volunteer to help with the program, Borthwick can be reached at 755-2002 or by e-mail at dolores.borthwick@bigbrothersbigisters.ca and Hall can be reached at 465-9771 or by