

Changing lives one child at a time



SISTERS FOR LIFE: Sharmayne (left) and Shannon Ritchie (right) were matched through the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program. “She’s a great little girl with a big heart” says Ritchie of 11 year old Little Sister Sharmayne.

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Photo: Contributed

LIKE MOST CLOSE SISTERS, Shannon and Sharmayne meet at least once a week to catch up. They go out to catch the newest chick flick, they do their nails together, or they simply hang out and talk.

Except Shannon and Sharmayne aren’t really your average sisters. They’re matched through the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program in Kamloops.

“I heard about it through friends,” said Shannon Ritchie, who now works as the mentoring coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Kamloops. “I found out that it was only two to four hours once a week. I thought, ‘How could I not fit in a couple of hours once a week?’”

“Once I got paired up with my Little Sister, it’s been great,” said Ritchie. The boundless energy of 11-year-old Sharmayne is contagious, said Ritchie. “It’s a healthy kind of energy and it’s just so de-stressing to come out and have fun.”

Ritchie has known her Little Sister for two years now. “She’s a great little girl with a big heart! We have a blast together even if we don’t plan anything.”

“She has a great family but it’s great to just take her out for some one-on-one time and talk about everything.”

The organization’s traditional mentoring program pairs up children from single-parent homes with mentors aged 19 and over for the purpose of providing the children with friendship and guidance. Apart from undergoing a screening process, the only requirement for volunteers is a two to four hour weekly commitment for a year.

Executive Director Lee Keim said volunteering in this program isn’t hard. “You’re hanging out with the child. You’re doing things that are fun for the both of you to do.”

Although mentors may certainly plan special activities for their Little Brothers and Sisters, they can also simply enjoy any of their regular activities, said Keim, who’s also an in-school mentor. He spends an hour each week with his Little Brother in a school setting, which has turned out to be the

highlight of Keim’s week.

“I think it’s just a lot of fun,” he said. “I really enjoy going out to see

My Little Brother, I go out to see him and I feel more productive for the rest of my day once I get back to work because I get that bit of a break.”

In-school mentors can also read books, bake cookies, paint or just hang out at the playground with their mentees.

Keim’s Little Brother is one of the lucky ones, as boys are disproportionately high in the organizations’ wait-list. “We always have a shortage of male mentors and more boys waiting than girls,” said Ritchie.

“Currently we have about 15 Little Sisters waiting and 50 to 60 Little Brothers waiting.”

People interested in volunteering can go in for a 10 to 15 minute orientation where they can learn about the different mentoring programs and ask questions.

So why should people consider mentoring? “Why shouldn’t they?” said Keim. “It’s a really fun thing to do. It’s a nice way to volunteer and help your community.”

The organization has discovered that having a mentor increases a child’s self-esteem and improves a child’s academic performance.

“It’s just amazing the difference having a role model in your life (can do),” summed up

Ritchie, “learning someone else’s values, lifestyles and beliefs and having someone to look up to.”

For more information call **Big Brothers Big Sisters at: 250-374-6134**