

## Embarking on Second Century of Service, Big Brothers Big Sisters to Match One Million Children Through Expanded Programs for At-Risk Students and Children of Prisoners



Website

'The Apprentice' Winner Kelly Perdew Issues Call to All Americans to Support Big Brothers Big Sisters

U.S. Sen. Ensign, Congressman Schiff Challenge All Congressional Staffers to Become a Big Brother or Big Sister

WASHINGTON, June 8 /PRNewswire/ -- As Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) embarks on its second century of service, BBBSA President and CEO Judy Vredenburgh today renewed the organization's commitment to serve more than one million at-risk children annually. At a Capitol Hill press conference, Vredenburgh said BBBS will continue to expand its youth mentoring platform to reach the most at-risk children nationwide, including students in Title I schools and children of prisoners.

U.S. Sen. John Ensign (R-Nev.), and Congressman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), both Big Brothers, and Kelly Perdew, winner of NBC's second season of "The Apprentice" and a former Big Brother, joined Vredenburgh in calling on all Americans to support Big Brothers Big Sisters as it works toward reaching its goal of one million matches annually. Ensign and Schiff also challenged all Congressional staffers to become a Big Brother or Big Sister.

The bipartisan and celebrity support comes on the heels of BBBS' centennial anniversary and as the organization reasserts its commitment to helping fulfill America's Promise. In the last four years alone, BBBS has doubled the number of matches to 225,000 in 2004.

"More than 10 million children between the ages of 6 and 18 are considered at-risk, but it's the youth from economically underprivileged backgrounds or with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents who are most in need of our support," Vredenburgh said, with the Capitol as the backdrop. "Research has shown that these two groups of children can benefit greatly from a Big.

"At-risk students who are matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister show improved academic performance, higher levels of self-confidence and better attitudes toward school," said Vredenburgh. "And without positive adult intervention, studies show that 70 percent of children of incarcerated parents are at some point likely to be incarcerated themselves. We want to break that cycle of incarceration."

BBBS has already seen significant results with earlier efforts to mentor students in tough schools and children with a parent in prison.

Since BBBS began school-based mentoring programs in the 1990s, the number of school-based matches has risen exponentially -- quadrupling to 104,000 in 2004 from 27,000 in 1999 -- resulting in significant benefits to students. School-based mentors spend at least one hour a week during the school day with

their Little Brother or Sister. Today, school-based mentoring accounts for almost half of all BBBS matches. Its success is the result of effective partnerships with school officials to establish an on-site program and to identify youth that could most benefit and local corporations and civic groups that provide the volunteers.

While Big Brothers Big Sisters has always served children with incarcerated parents, the organization made a concerted effort to focus on children of prisoners in 2001, when it partnered in the creation of a groundbreaking Philadelphia-based program called Amachi Big Brothers Big Sisters. That program matches church congregants with children of prisoners. (Amachi is a West African word that means "who knows but what God has brought us through this child"). Through partnerships with juvenile justice officials and congregations, this initiative aspires to break the cycle of incarceration in our nation. Today, 121 BBBS agencies nationwide have dedicated programs to serve children of prisoners.

Kelly Perdew, who triumphed in the second season of NBC-TV's hit reality program, "The Apprentice," urged all Americans to become more involved in helping at-risk youth by donating to and volunteering with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Perdew, a former Big Brother himself, has practiced what he preaches: "I became a Big Brother after graduate school while I lived in Los Angeles and it was a terrific experience. I had no idea at the outset how much fun and joy it could bring not only to my Little Brother, but to me as well."

Ensign and Schiff, who presented a bipartisan joint resolution on April 28, 2005 in support of Big Brothers Big Sisters, said they will offer informational seminars this summer to all Congressional staffers interested in learning more about becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister.

"Studies show that Little Brothers and Little Sisters are less likely to begin using illegal drugs or consuming alcohol, skip school and classes, or engage in acts of violence," said Schiff. "Partnering with Big Brothers Big Sisters benefits America's most important national treasure -- our children."

"Having a Little Brother has made a tremendous impact on my life," said Ensign. "It is amazing what a difference we can all make by opening our hearts and giving a little of our time. Through this partnership, I hope we can encourage and inspire others to make that commitment."

#### How to Get Involved

Visit <http://www.bigbrothersbigsisters.org> to get more information about BBBS, to make a donation, to support a Big and Little match, or to become a volunteer.

Big Brothers Big Sisters has proven success in creating impactful one-to-one mentoring relationships between adults and children. The organization works closely with parents to match every child with the appropriate Big Brother or Big Sister. Each potential volunteer is screened, trained and supervised to help ensure that the match will be a safe and rewarding experience.

No special skills are required to become a Big Brother or Big Sister. Any caring adult who is willing to devote an average of one hour each week can be a mentor. Through friendship, Big Brothers Big Sisters share the beauty and magic of everyday life with their "Littles." Those Little Moments become Big Magic in the life of both. Many "Littles" return to the organization to become Bigs and pass on the magical moments they shared to other children who need or want a "Big."

Donations to Big Brothers Big Sisters support the costs of professional staff's recruiting and screening volunteers, making and supporting the matches and building BBBS's capacity to reach its goal of serving one million children.