



# Be a Mentor!

## Site-Based Mentoring

Build lifelong friendships

It makes you smile

It takes no special skills

It takes only 1 hour per week



NUTMEG

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM BROWN

# The Power Of Role Models

>>3Q

*Laura Green, 58, has been executive director of Hartford-based Nutmeg Big Brothers, Big Sisters for 11 years. The program pairs young people with adult mentors who volunteer time and can have an enormous impact on children who don't have a positive male or female role model, she says. Green has bachelor's and graduate degrees in human development and family relations from the University of Connecticut. In 2005, the Hartford Business Journal named her one of the region's "8 Remarkable Women in Business." She recently discussed her group's program with Courant Staff Writer Greg Seay.*

**Q1 Why is Big Brothers, Big Sisters relevant to the lives of 21st century youths?**

When you think about the challenges that children are facing today, certainly, sadly, single-parent families continue to be on the rise. Children are more isolated from extended families than they were in the past [and there is an] absence of adult role models that are positive. Children are very much influenced by the media, by their peers, and I think that kids today have many more temptations present in their lives at much earlier ages than certainly I experienced growing up in the 1950s.

I think [the challenges youths face include] peer pressure to be involved in gangs, to be involved in drugs, to be surrounded by ... people in your neighborhood who are tempting you to do things that are not healthy. I think that Big Brothers, Big Sisters really provides an alternative for kids.

We work with volunteers who are doing this only out of the goodness of their hearts. They are not in this for financial gain. They really, truly want to be a role model for kids. What we have found over the years is that a simple act of kindness on the part of a stranger can have tremendous results for kids, showing them that there are choices they can make in life, and helping them to realize that these choices are relevant for them. Kids who are involved in mentoring relationships do better in school, they have fewer absences from school, they are more successful in resisting peer pressure to engage in drugs, violence. I can't imagine another time in history when BBBS was more relevant than it is today.

**Q2 What evidence is there that your organization fosters self-esteem and self-discipline in young people?**

There was a national study done of children in BBBS mentoring relationships, and it was done by an outside research firm ... It [was] probably one of the first major studies of prevention programs for youth ... and it really tried to follow scientific processes. There was a control group for kids who were on agency waiting lists and there was a experimental group — kids in mentoring relationships ... Eighteen months later [the mentored group performed better] on measures like self-esteem and self-discipline... Self-discipline is really evidenced by the ability to control impulses, to stay focused, and certainly the results in regard to school work were huge for kids in the program. We do an annual evaluation of every child in our program here and the 111 towns that we serve. We're constantly assessing the effectiveness of our program for individual kids as well as a group ...

**Q3 Your mentors are asked to spend only six to 10 hours per month with their assignees. Is that enough time to positively influence a child?**

The mentor and the child get to decide... along with the parent, of course... when they are going to get together and how much time they're going to spend and the kind of activities they are going to do.

In many instances it may end up being more than that six to 10 hours a month. But even with six hours a month, remember that's six hours of one-on-one time between an adult and a child. That's very

powerful. It's hugely powerful. And, yes, because we do our annual evaluation with children and our annual evaluation of our programs, we know that that six hours makes a huge difference.

**Q4 Isn't there something your organization can do to lessen the rash of child-on-child violence?**

Being able to provide more children, in particular in the inner city, with mentors is something that we can definitely do. I think that schools and the cities and many of the youth prevention programs have really tried to focus resources on this area, and we're certainly one of those resources that can truly help. We know from national studies that the kids who were in the experimental group, the kids who had the mentors, were 33 percent less likely to engage in any kind of violent behavior than the kids who were not. The size of the two groups [studied] were 900 each. So that's 300 children who are not going to behave in such a self-destructive, physically dangerous way. That's pretty huge. As an organization, for this program to work, we need volunteers — the real interaction, the real street-level work, the real gutsy day-to-day stuff is done by our volunteers. How absolutely inspiring is that?

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☞ William Rice of Simsbury suggested Green as a subject for 3Q. If you know of someone who might be a worthy subject, e-mail [3Q@courant.com](mailto:3Q@courant.com) and we'll see what we can do.

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