

# Buddies and pals

## Program allows chances for special friendships

By NANCY ATKINSON  
Staff Writer

Take a needy child and give him an adult friend, one who is caring, dependable and enthusiastic, and that's a special relationship. Multiply it 190 times and it's not just special, it's the Campus Y Big Buddy program.

"It's the biggest Big Buddy program in the state, and it's the biggest it's ever been," said Murphy Townsend, co-chairman of the program. "Everyone knows by word of mouth how much fun the program is."

Designed as a community outreach, the program begins at the demand level in the elementary schools. Beginning with the academic year, the program requires each Big Buddy to meet with the referring counselor of his or her Little Buddy and that he or she attend workshops.

Enthusiasm, time and stability are all important qualities in a Big Buddy, but stability is what these children most need from someone, Townsend said.

"We'd like the Big Buddy to set a time every week to visit, because we want the children to anticipate their coming and to know they can depend on it," Townsend said.

Big Buddies spend at least two to three hours a week with their Little Buddies, in many group and individual activities: rollerskating, bowling, horseback riding, holiday parties or just walking around campus and having fun together.

Rachel Shanberg, guidance counselor at Carrboro Elementary School, said, "It would be better for these children not to have the experience than to have it and be denied because a Big Buddy didn't follow through." Shanberg praised this year's Big Buddies for their dedication and enthusiasm.

"(The Little Buddies) are kids I think would benefit from a special relationship," Shanberg said. "They come from families where the parents may not have the time to talk or the resources to do things with the child."

The children do not need another disciplinarian or babysitter, but a role model and friend, said Glenwood Elementary School guidance counselor

**'Doug had heard all about Carolina basketball, but he'd never been in the stadium. I took him into Carmichael one day, and he just stared like it was the greatest place he'd ever been.'** — Tory Johnston

Becky McKee. "This (Big Buddy) is their adult friend who pays attention to them and not to anyone else; he's someone who they can trust," McKee said.

With more than 375 people interviewed this year, the popular program had to turn away many female applicants, but a shortage still occurred because not enough male college students signed up to be Big Buddies for the male Little Buddies, who outnumber females 120 to 70.

"Guys in general don't run over here and turn things in on time," Townsend said. He said they recruited more males through advertisements.

Although children with disciplinary problems often get along best with Big Buddies with athletic abilities, sophomore Tory Johnston said many guys might think the program is "not macho." Johnston said the time he spent with his Little Buddy, Doug Farrington, had been a great outlet.

"Being up at school, I didn't want it to be all school and fraternity, and it gives you a good feeling to do something you didn't have to do for someone else," he said. "From the time I've known Doug until now, he'll initiate conversation when I introduce him to people. He's becoming more open and confident."

Townsend, who has been with his Little Buddy, Seth, for almost two years, said he felt very gratified by the time they spent together.

"You just sort of watch his progress and it's really neat," he said.

Big Buddies also experience the joy of simple things as seen through a child's eyes.

"Doug had heard all about Carolina basketball, but he'd never been in the stadium," Johnston said. "I took him into Carmichael one day, and he just stared like it was the greatest place he'd ever been."

Through the success of the program, everyone has come out happy: the children, the counselors and the Big Buddies. Townsend said the children took pride in having a Big Buddy, and he had heard good reports from the elementary schools.

"The college students were every bit as excited as our children were when they called," McKee said. "I have never seen such an enthusiastic group."

Schanberg also said more Big Buddies are signing up and seem more dedicated to the program.

"The more students that sign up the more I feel like it will result in a match," she said. "Also as a program becomes more entrenched you tend to consider it as an alternative."

The program leaders spoke in glowing terms about this year's success, but they conceded it was hard work keeping up with buddy pairs and counselors, rematching buddies, counseling and offering ideas to Big Buddies, and organizing group activities.

"(The work) is dealing with little problems every day. There's a ton of organization with a group this size," Townsend said.

Missy Bell, also Big Buddy co-chairman, said the program was worth the effort. She said, "The most rewarding thing is seeing the Big Buddy groups around campus and to see that it's actually working and not just a bunch of paperwork."



Campus Y's program lets students have fun with their Little Buddies. Here, Doug Farrington, 6, of Carrboro, tosses a Frisbee.


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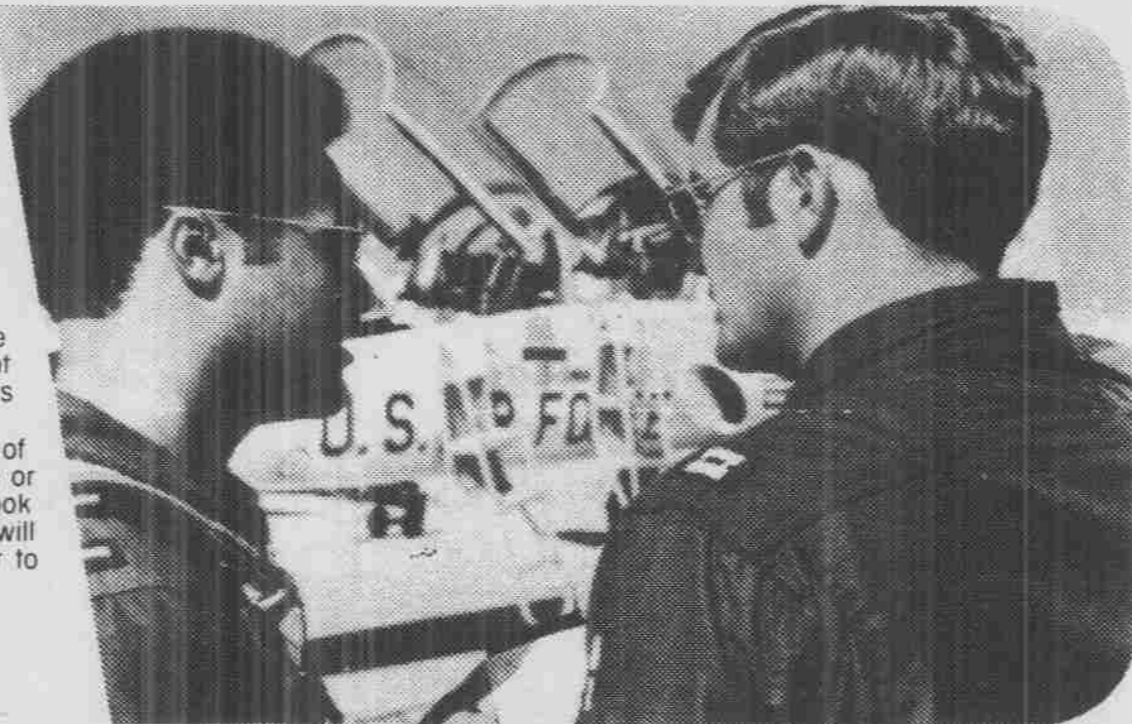
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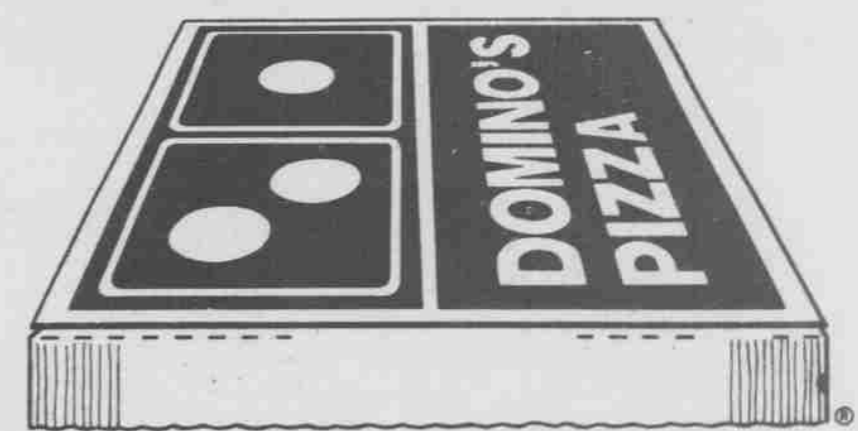
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