

FEATURES

Local children find friends and role models in Big Buddies

By Anna Meadows
Staff Writer

Beverly Fearrington's twin boys were 7 when she became concerned that they needed to spend time with positive adult role models.

As a single parent working full time at the UNC School of Nursing, she was worried that she didn't have the time. "The options for my sons to be exposed to older role models were limited," Fearrington said. "I knew they needed

to spend some time with another adult who could influence them positively."

The twins, Brandon and Carlton, brought home some literature from school that described a UNC program that would be the answer to her worries.

Fearrington's boys had been recommended for the Campus Y's Big Buddy program. The twins, if they were interested, could have a UNC student assigned to each of them who would take them out about once a week to see movies, visit museums or just hang out.

"They ended up with two female buddies," Fearrington said. "I was surprised. I thought they would be paired up with males, but I haven't been disappointed."

The lack of male Big Buddies is a problem the program directors would like to see corrected, said co-chairwoman Stormie Forte, who has been Brandon's Big Buddy for two years.

Sixty percent to 70 percent of Little Buddies are male, while only 40 percent of Big Buddies are men.

"We always pair off the male Big Buddies with male Little Buddies first, so male Big Buddies are assured they'll get a male child to work with," Forte said.

Since a lot of the Little Buddies are in households headed by single mothers, the boys often need male role models.

The major focus of the program is to provide role models to local children, regardless of gender. The program offers children an outlet for fun activities, yet the primary goal is to develop a

constructive relationship between a needy youngster and a caring adult.

Fearrington has been pleased with the results. "There are conversations (between my sons) about 'What are you going to do when you grow up?' that weren't there before," she said. "And I don't have to initiate them."

"There has been a lack of hope in the black community. But if children can get this one message from their Big Buddies: 'If I can do it — if I can go to college — so can you,' this may be enough of an incentive to keep a child in

school.

"The kids can learn that they don't need to settle for things. They know they don't have to work at McDonald's if they don't want to. They don't have to go into the Army. There are other things they can do with their lives they didn't think of before."

The Big Buddy program works directly with area elementary school guidance counselors who recommend children they think will benefit from having a UNC student as a friend.

The children are paired up with students who have been trained by experienced Big Buddies. New participants are also armed with a guide that has ideas about how to break the ice with Little Buddies and a list of free or inexpensive local activities.

"The emphasis is on the relationship and the friendship between the two people," Forte said. "We encourage the Big Buddies not to spend money on their kids, but to be more involved in building a trusting and lasting relationship."

Big Buddies must commit to the program for one year and spend a minimum of two hours a week with their Little Buddy. "Sometimes they spend more than that with their kids," Forte said. "They get really involved with their Little Buddy."

The program recruits students through ads in The Daily Tar Heel and the Black Ink.

"But word of mouth is the major way we attract people," Forte said. "People will come to the (Campus) Y and say they really want to work with kids."

Students interested in the Big Buddy program should contact Stormie Forte or Joel Rosenstein at the Campus Y, 962-2333.

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Democrat from page 9

"We're trying to make students aware of all their options," Dunn said.

Students at UNC will be very active in the registration drive, said Katherine Wilson, a senior from Gastonia. Wilson was the youngest N.C. delegate at the Democratic National Convention.

The goal is to make registration available by having on-campus and off-campus registration sites, Wilson said.

"We want to get students involved on the national level as well as on campus," she said.

Jim Hunt, the Democratic candidate for governor, and Wicker are hoping benefit from this enthusiasm as they tour the state, Geis said.

Hunt, who served as governor from 1976 to 1984, will face Lt. Gov. Jim Gardner in the November election.

Wicker will attend a rally Sept. 15 on the UNC campus, and Hunt also is scheduled to make an appearance in September, Wilson said.

Many Democratic candidates, including Wicker and Hunt, will be in Chapel Hill Sept. 27 for a unity barbecue sponsored by Orange County Democrats.



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