

# Redwood Roots Digital Magazine

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Volume 3 *Redwood Roots Magazine, Spring 2022*

Article 4

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January 2022

## Find Your Why: Big Brothers Big Sisters of the North Coast

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### Recommended Citation

Sonia, Savannah and Becker, Stacy (2022) "Find Your Why: Big Brothers Big Sisters of the North Coast," *Redwood Roots Digital Magazine*: Vol. 3, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rr/vol3/iss2/4>

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# FIND YOUR WHY: BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF THE NORTH COAST



By Savannah Sonia  
and Stacy Becker


Many of us can identify relatives, friends, teachers, artists, and leaders who have acted as mentors for us at various times on our life paths. Mentors can help provide a compass for personal and professional choices, support us in challenging times, and inspire us to reach our highest potential—they can help answer the question of why we make the choices we do. For the children in the Humboldt region who are in need of mentors, whether they are in need of friendship with a caring adult role model, or lack support in school or at home, [Big Brothers Big Sisters of the North Coast](#) (BBBSNC) has connected local youth with adult mentors in the community for over 52 years.

BBBSNC pairs children from ages 6-16 (Littles) with adults (Bigs) with the goal that these mentors will have a positive impact on the mentee's life forever ([read stories from Bigs and Littles here](#)). One type of in-person mentoring is [community-based mentorship](#), where Bigs and Littles share, “outdoor activities like riding bikes, hiking, and going to the beach while others prefer to stay in and bake cookies, watch movies, or play video games,” according to the BBBSNC website. Site-based mentorship is focused toward after-school activities at designated places and times. During COVID, the organization has adopted “Mentoring 2.0,” or virtual mentoring.

Jennifer Maksim, the office manager for BBBSNC and a Cal Poly Humboldt alumni, has worked with the organization since 2014. Maksim noted that even though working through the pandemic to find solutions for pairing Bigs and Littles has been difficult, the kids are “still finding value in the distance, which they’ve learned to adapt to.” She also spoke about the inclusivity and accessibility that the team has worked to incorporate into their every day business over the years. She shared, “We want all kids to be involved with BBBSNC, because at the end of the day we believe that all kids deserve to ignite their full potential.”

Maksim expressed that this search for inclusivity further motivates her to continue this work, “Knowing that we can help shape these kids to be kinder, full of joy and love, and how we’re going to be able to change our world with love through activities like mentoring, and just showing up--more than showing up, right?--that’s what motivates me. Just seeing how we can build our community, locally, statewide, and nationally, it really does start with our kids.”

Florence Parks, BBBSNC Executive Director, has worked for the organization and with Cal Poly Humboldt students for three years, and has been involved in mentorship practices for the past 25 years. When asked



what motivates her to do this work, Parks said that “We need mentors in different stages of our life to do the work that we’re doing, to learn new skills and new talents. I’m motivated every day for the youth, but also by our volunteers.” Volunteers include Cal Poly Humboldt students who not only serve as staff, but also participate in internship placements with BBBSNC.

Nicholas Higgins, a recent Humboldt graduate with a Bachelor’s of Science in business administration management, participated in an internship with BBBSNC in the fall of 2020. Higgins decided to serve BBBSNC because he admired the organization’s purpose of communicating with the youth, especially during a time when it has become more difficult to connect with people in the community. He mentioned that it was rewarding to see the Littles able to connect with their Bigs in such meaningful ways, and “experience the world for how it actually is, so when they grow up... [they can make] their community and families better.”

During his internship, Higgins was tasked with creating, administering, analyzing, and presenting an extensive survey to gather information about BBBSNC and their reach within the community. Higgins noted that the implementation of this survey greatly increased the conversations that community members were having about the organization, and helped to spread the word about the incredible work that Bigs and Littles accomplished in their time together. Not only was the survey helpful for the organization, but it was helpful for Higgins in “getting my feet wet...building my own set of skills for how to operate in design...and designing something to educate the public about the organization.”

Higgins also played a major role in BBBSNC’s annual [Big Chili Cook-off](#) fundraiser event by contacting businesses for donations and also securing silent auction items, such as a week-long excursion with lodging, food and entertainment supported by businesses in Crescent City. Maksim stated that the work that BBBSNC interns put into collaboration on these events is so much more than making cold calls to folks. “They put their insight, they put their passion and creativity into it...They’re very, very vital when it comes to our event planning and fundraising around here.” BBBSNC tries to put the “fun” into their fundraiser events, which include [Bowl for Kids’ Sake](#) and the [Big Humboldt Jam Brewfest](#).

When discussing the impact of the work that Humboldt students have done as interns with BBBSNC, Parks expressed, “We all have experienced great people that have helped, that we model ourselves after, or model portions of our professionalism after and that’s why I love the opportunity to work with Cal Poly Humboldt interns like Nicholas. He’s so humble, but he came and he did so much with us during a very questionable time.”

Higgins shared that what motivated him to work with BBBSNC, is the fact that “every member of the team [does] their best to help each other in order to make the organization more influential for the youth in the community.” For Parks, the work of volunteers at BBBSNC inspires her, “My love language is service, and just knowing that we can help more kids by equipping volunteers to support the Littles in ways that we [as staff] couldn’t begin to afford in time or dedication, Seeing how the volunteers pour their hearts into each child...the volunteers motivate me all the time.”





**Big Brothers  
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OF THE NORTH COAST



### **Big Brothers Big Sisters of the North Coast Internship**

Supervisor: Florence Parks

Intern: Nicholas Higgins

#### **Description:**

I was tasked to help the event coordinator and to create a survey, distribute, and analyze the results.

#### **Goals:**

I expected to learn professional skills that I could use for my career later on and gain knowledge of analyzing data.

"Nicholas has been an asset to the team at Big Brothers Big Sisters of the North Coast, he came at just the right moment giving BBBSNC a bolt of energy to meet our quarterly goals. He helped organized our silent auction and advanced teamwork. Nick also took the initiative to actualize a project that will grow our mentoring community. He's been dependable and has in every way exceeded our expectations!"-Florence Parks, Executive Director



#### **Outcomes:**

I learned how to communicate to businesses and how to create surveys and how to analyze the results of 81 participants.

#### **Lessons:**

- I learned there are many youth mentoring groups in Humboldt County.
- I learned how to professionally talk to businesses on the phone and by email.
- I discovered from the results from my survey that many people are wanting more information on how they could help educate and mentor the youth in our county.

Parks summarized the experience during the semester with Higgins, "When we all look back and reflect on 2020, it was a hard time for a lot of people who didn't even show up, so we just started saying that 'showing up is enough,' which came to be our mantra. And Nicholas did more than show up." For more insight on Higgins' experience with BBBSNC, view his poster reflection titled "Big Brothers Big Sisters of the North Coast Internship."

Parks shared the carry forward effect of mentoring and the impact it has on youth who participate in the program. She explained that, "More than 90 percent of our youth go on to mentor others and experience leadership in some capacity." Not only is it rewarding for Parks and her team to see the kind of impact that mentorship has on the youth in the community, but also for those offering the mentoring, including the Humboldt students that have supported BBBSNC programs, events, and mentorship with Littles. Parks expressed, "I'm inspired by our Bigs who are doing the real work at our agency." While BBBSNC volunteers play crucial roles carrying on the work of the organization, for Humboldt interns, the community-based learning experience is often about carrying with them what they learn from these experiences to support themselves and others in the future.

If you are a Cal Poly Humboldt student who would like to take part in this work and connect with local youth, there are a number of ways you can get involved. Besides serving and being trained as a Big for a Little (a yearlong commitment to honor the child's need for continuity in their lives), you can participate in the fundraising events or volunteer to increase public outreach about BBBSNC's programs. To learn more about local BBBSNC programs and how to get involved, visit the [BBBSNC website](#).

Parks mentioned that the entire BBBSNC team looks forward to new beginnings and the opportunity to reach more children. She thanked Higgins for the time and dedication he contributed to the BBBSNC team during his internship with them, and shared that he "greatly expanded [the organization's] ability to reach out to new community members."