

A LETTER TO OUR PARTNERS

We recognize we are in a critical moment, a long overdue movement in our nation and local community's history. In addition to our social media posts, we wanted to reach out directly to our mentors, families, youth, and closest supporters to ensure Big Brothers Big Sisters stance on racism and the inequity people of color still face in our community today is clear and resolute.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is against racism, injustice, and inequity. We recognize that our beloved Black team members, Bigs, Littles, parents/guardians, and supporters are among those hurting the most – hurting from injustice and burdened by an inability to feel safe in our community and country. We need to approach change with open ears, open hearts, and empathy that creates safe spaces for each individual to feel comfortable to communicate and be heard in one's own time and way.

We stand for connection, inclusion, positivity, dignity, and empowerment. At Big Brothers Big Sisters, we believe through friendships and positive relationships we can gain empathy and understanding to heal and grow as individuals and a community. We believe the strong bonds created through one-to-one mentoring relationships can be a powerful part of solving the divisions that exist between people today.

For over 105 years, our local agency has been honored to be a part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters mission. We are tasked with defending the potential of all young people we serve, our Littles, and have witnessed firsthand the positive impact on our program youth, afforded through experiences and exposure that leads to a lasting sense of belonging and a vision of themselves in our community – all corners of our community.

At this historic moment, when change can be felt, what actions can Big Brothers Big Sisters take to strengthen and elevate our work with youth?

- First, we must take every opportunity to denounce racism, bigotry and prejudice. Defending potential means we openly and consistently address the systemic barriers our children of color face. Racism is part of the trauma in many young lives. We must name it and act upon it every single day.
- Second, we will create, compile, and share trainings for our volunteer Bigs, Littles, parents/guardians, and our BBBS staff members so they can be best equipped to talk to their Littles about this prevalence of violence and racism and the resulting trauma. Our organization is proud to have our Director of Volunteer Recruitment, Harlan Stallings, amongst the leaders on our BBBS National Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force. This committee will continue to facilitate national conversations to further understanding and actions, provide resources on how to facilitate meaningful reflection, connection, and action to create racial justice, and will also begin examining organizational policies and procedures, as we reflect on our own intentionality.

TOGETHER, WE ARE DEFENDERS OF POTENTIAL

- Third, this is an opportunity to examine and enhance our Bigs in Badges program. This program is designed to develop strong, trusting, and lasting one-to-one relationships between Police Officers, Fire and Rescue, First Responders, and members of our Armed Forces and our Littles. We have witnessed firsthand, this initiative help create positive associations, build stronger bonds, break down preconceived stereotypes at all levels, and increase trust within our community. We are proud to be a leader among the nation in this work and honored to partner alongside so many dedicated mentors and public servants. There are many ways this important program can be improved, and towards that end, our organization has elected to participate in a national BBBS task force to examine and make recommendations on how we can be advocates for change in our local communities and how this program can not only better serve young people, but Northeast Florida as a whole. We remain committed to these conversations and will continue to support community leaders in their efforts to find solutions, and be part of the solution, to our most challenging social justice issues.
- Lastly, we must engage in a dialogue with each of our partners to ensure that our respective values on racial justice and equity are aligned. We are an inclusive and equitable organization that values everyone from our staff, board members, volunteers, parents/guardians, and Littles. We, along with our Board of Directors, are continuing to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion as we hire and partner with individuals and organizations that align with our core values. Our partners must embrace the differences and the uniqueness of all people who will help support our organization in building bridges and igniting, empowering, and defending the potential of the youth we serve.

All of us, as human beings, are works in progress; learning, evolving, and changing. We must leverage this moment in our nation's history to make progress together. This work is urgent. This work is necessary. This work is all our work.

Thank you for your constant support. We continue to be honored to partner with each of you.

With appreciation,



Sara Alford
Chief Executive Officer