



Big Brothers Big Sisters.

OF ORANGE COUNTY & THE INLAND EMPIRE

PARENT NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2025

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BBBS TEAM

As we start a new year, let's take a moment to look back on all we've accomplished together and look ahead to what's next. Over the past year, we've shared many meaningful moments—whether it was through educational workshops, community events, or simply connecting your family with the right resources when they were needed most. These moments have been a powerful reminder of the strength and dedication within our Big Brothers Big Sisters community. Your trust and engagement with our support services are what make it all possible, and we're grateful to walk this path together.

OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE

277

Families connected to essential resources and services

84

Parents & Guardians participated in BBBS trainings

535

Parents & Guardians joined us at community events

104

Trusted partners working with us to support your family's needs

As February leads us into a season of change, it's the perfect time to focus on the power of knowledge—especially when it comes to **knowing your rights**. Feeling informed about important topics, such as special education, housing, and immigration, empowers families to navigate life with confidence.

This quarter's Parent Newsletter is dedicated to providing the information and resources that matter most, ensuring every parent and guardian feels supported and equipped to make informed decisions for themselves and their families. Inspired by the values of leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., our goal is not just to share facts, but to empower you with knowledge that makes a real difference in your daily life. We made every effort to thoughtfully select three topics that reflect the needs of our BBBS community, offering guidance, reassurance, and a reminder that no one has to navigate these challenges alone.

Most importantly, please remember that support is always available from our agency. Whether it's guidance, resources, or simply someone to listen, no one has to figure things out alone. Alongside our families, youth, and mentors, our staff is committed to moving forward together—offering advocacy, empowerment, and the tools needed to navigate life's challenges.

Being part of this community means standing together, strengthening connections, and ensuring every family feels seen, heard, and valued. Thank you for trusting us to be a part of your village.



Jessica González

Director of Program Support Services

jgonzalez@ocbigs.org

To stay up on the latest news and updates for parents and guardians, visit ocbigs.org/parent-news



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: SPECIAL EDUCATION

Ensuring that every child receives the support they need to succeed in school is all of our priority. Children with a variety of learning differences and disabilities—such as autism, ADHD, speech and language impairments, and learning disabilities like dyslexia—may require additional support to thrive in the classroom. Understanding your rights within the special education system can empower you to advocate effectively for your child.



Here are some key rights that parents and students have under federal and state laws:

The Right to Assessments

Parents have the right to request a free evaluation from their school district to determine if their child qualifies for special education services. Whether a child is experiencing challenges related to learning disabilities, behavioral needs, or physical impairments, this evaluation assesses their unique needs and helps identify the necessary support.

The Right to an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

If a child is eligible for special education, they are entitled to an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that outlines their specific goals, accommodations, and support services. This can include specialized instruction, therapy services, and classroom modifications to support students with intellectual disabilities, developmental delays, and other conditions.

The Right to Accommodations

Students with disabilities have the right to receive appropriate classroom accommodations such as extra time on tests, specialized instruction, or assistive technology to ensure they can access learning opportunities on an equal basis. Accommodations can support students with conditions such as ADHD, hearing or vision impairments, and physical disabilities that impact their ability to fully participate in the classroom.

The Right to Dispute Resolution

If parents disagree with the services or decisions made by the school, they have the right to challenge decisions through mediation, filing complaints, or pursuing a due process hearing to ensure their child's needs are met. This process can be crucial when seeking services for children with emotional and behavioral disorders or other complex needs.

The Right to Transition Planning

Starting at age 16, students with IEPs are entitled to transition services that help prepare them for life after high school. These services focus on planning for higher education, employment, and independent living skills, which are especially important for students with autism, intellectual disabilities, and other conditions that may require long-term support.

The Right to Language Access

Parents who primarily use a language other than English have the right to be actively involved in their child's IEP process. Interpretation services and translated materials should be provided at no cost to ensure families can fully understand and contribute to their child's educational plan.

Special Education Rights continued on next page...



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: TASK CALIFORNIA



TASK California is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities and their families by providing support throughout the special education process. They offer IEP consultations, document reviews, and workshops on special education and transition planning. TASK also provides resources, referrals, and hands-on guidance to help families navigate educational challenges with confidence.

For additional resources and support connect with TASK California's at (714) 533-8275 or connect with Marissa Gonzalez, BBBS Family Resource Specialist at (714) 707-2821.

Remember, you're not alone in this journey. Navigating the special education system can feel overwhelming at times, but with the right information and support, you can advocate confidently for your child's success. Stay informed, ask questions, and reach out for help when needed.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: HOUSING PROTECTIONS

Having a safe and stable home is a basic human right. Understanding your housing rights can help you make sure you are treated fairly and know what to do if problems arise. Whether it's rent increases, repairs, or evictions, knowing your rights can help you take action when needed.

Here are some important housing rights in California:

Rent Increases

In most cases, your rent can only go up by 5% plus the cost of living, with a limit of 10% per year. You must receive a 30-day written notice for increases under 10% and a 90-day notice if the increase is more than 10%. Some areas have their own rent control rules, so it's a good idea to check local laws.



Evictions

If you have lived in your home for more than a year, you must receive a 60-day written notice if your landlord wants you to move out. If you have lived there for less than a year, you must receive a 30-day notice. A landlord can only ask you to leave for legal reasons, such as not paying rent or breaking your lease agreement. It is illegal for a landlord to lock you out, turn off your utilities, or remove your belongings without a court order.

Safe and Livable Homes

Your home must be safe and in good condition. This means having working plumbing, heating, and being free from pests like insects or rodents. If something needs to be fixed, you must ask your landlord in writing and keep a copy of your request.

Security Deposits

When you move out, you must receive your security deposit back within 21 days. The landlord can only take money for unpaid rent, cleaning, or damage beyond normal wear and tear. You must also receive a list explaining any deductions.

Fair Treatment

You have the right to be treated fairly, no matter your race, gender, disability, religion, or source of income (such as Section 8 housing assistance).

Protecting Your Rights

If you believe your rights have been violated, you can get help. There are free or low-cost legal services that can help you understand your options and take action if needed.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: FAIR HOUSING COUNCIL OF ORANGE COUNTY



The Fair Housing Council of Orange County provides free counseling to help individuals understand their housing rights and responsibilities. They answer questions about the legal rights of both landlords and tenants and offer guidance on issues such as rent increases, evictions, and discrimination.

For more information, call Fair Housing Council of Orange County directly at (714) 569-0823 or connect with Marissa Gonzalez, BBBS Family Resource Specialist at (714) 707-2821.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: IMMIGRATION PROTECTIONS

Understanding your rights when it comes to immigration enforcement can help you stay prepared and protect yourself and your family. Whether at home, work, or in public, knowing how to respond to immigration enforcement officers (ICE) is important.

Here are key rights and knowledge everyone should be aware of:

Plan Ahead

- Create a family preparedness plan that includes contact information for your lawyer, childcare providers, and trusted support.
- Keep important documents in a safe place to make it easier for your lawyer to assist you if needed.

If ICE Comes to Your Home or Vehicle:

- **Do not open the door.** Ask the agents to slide a warrant under the door or show it through a window.
- If they do not have a warrant signed by a judge, you do not have to let them in.
- Stay calm and do not sign any documents without legal advice.

You Have the Right to Remain Silent

You do not have to answer any questions about your immigration status.

You Have the Right to Legal Representation

- You have the right to speak with a lawyer before answering any questions.
- If you are detained, do not sign anything without consulting a legal professional.

Avoid Carrying False Documents

Carrying false documentation is a crime and can have serious legal consequences. Always ensure your identification and paperwork are accurate and valid.

Stay Informed

For the most up-to-date news and alerts regarding immigration enforcement in our county, follow **OC Rapid Response Network** on social media. Instagram: @OCrrn or Facebook: **OC Rapid Response Network**

Staying connected can help you receive timely updates and know where to seek support if needed.

If you have any questions or need additional support, BBBS Family Resource Specialist Marissa Gonzalez is available to provide guidance and connect you to helpful resources at (714) 707-2821.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: COALITION FOR HUMANE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS (CHIRLA)



CHIRLA

CHIRLA provides legal assistance, advocacy, and resources to help immigrants understand their rights. They offer a hotline for urgent questions and support in case of immigration enforcement encounters.

For more information or assistance, call the CHIRLA hotline at (888) 624-4752.

Legal Services

- CHIRLA): (888) 624-4752
- Public Law Center: (714) 541-1010 ext. 332
- Community Legal Aid SoCal: (714) 571-5200

Citizenship and Naturalization Services

Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development (OCCORD): (714) 621-0919



BBBS EVENTS



MIND & MONEY MATTER

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

AN EVENT FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE. Join us for an experience designed to benefit everyone in your match. **Parents, guardians, mentees AND mentors** are encouraged to attend together. Your presence matters!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22
10 AM - 2:30 PM
SAMUELI ACADEMY

1901 N Fairview St, Santa Ana, CA 92706

Child care and lunch provided, plus incredible raffle prizes like AirPods and tickets to Disneyland and Knott's!

CASH SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY!

\$100 for 6 elementary/junior high school students

\$200 for 7 high school students

Must be enrolled in a BBBS program

TOPICS
FINANCIAL LITERACY & MENTAL WELLNESS

Breakout Sessions <<<
For parents/guardians, mentees (by age), and mentors

Resource Fair <<<
To connect with community partners

REGISTER AT [OCBIGS.ORG/MENTALHEALTH](https://ocbigs.org/mentalhealth)





HOLIDAY GIFT DRIVE: WE COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU!

We can't thank you enough for being part of this year's Holiday Gift Drive. Your energy, kindness, and excitement made the event truly special. It was incredible to see our community come together to create unforgettable memories and share in the joy of giving.

With the support of our generous corporate donors and community members, we were able to provide gifts for **over 300 children!** Seeing the smiles and happiness throughout the day was a powerful reminder of what we can accomplish when we come together. Thank you for being part of our community!

**DON'T
MISS OUT!**

The best way to stay in the loop about opportunities like the Holiday Gift Drive is right here, the Parent Newsletter! We encourage you to stay connected and make the most of the programs, resources, and events we have planned for you in 2025. To access the latest Parent Newsletter anytime, visit: ocbig.org/parent-news.



FOR COMMUNITY PROGRAM PARENTS

Hello Parents and Guardians,

I'm Ariana Zavala, the Director of Community-Based Programs at Big Brothers Big Sisters, and I'm thrilled to introduce myself as the new leader of our match support team! I have been with the agency for nine years, specifically working with our enrollment and match support teams, before this transition. My team of Match Support Specialists and I work to ensure that all matches feel supported, guided, and included.

I want to personally thank you for the trust you place in us and for helping us foster the connections that make such a positive impact in your child's life. We understand the vital role that parents and guardians play in the success of their child's mentoring match, and we want you to know that we appreciate your commitment and support.

Please know that our Match Support team is here for you, not just during scheduled contact calls, but whenever you need us. Whether you have questions, need advice, or are seeking guidance, know you are not alone on this journey. If you are unsure about who your assigned Match Support Specialist is, or you require immediate assistance, I'm also personally here for you. You can reach me directly at azavala@ocbigs.org or give me a call at (714) 619-7031.

I look forward to walking alongside your family and continuing to strengthen the bonds that help your child grow and thrive. Thank you for being an integral part of this program. Together, we can create meaningful, lasting connections.

Warmly,



Ariana Zavala

Director of Community Based Programs

azavala@ocbigs.org

MATCH EVENT SPOTLIGHT: BOARD GAME AFTERNOON



Match Events are no-cost activities hosted by BBBS staff and volunteers and are a great way to work on Littles' social skills. Ask your child's Big to sign them up to attend one of these upcoming match events!

Our first match event of the year was a relaxing Board Game Afternoon at the BBBSOC Office. Our Littles loved reconnecting with their Bigs after the holidays and making new friends while playing games together. Everyone left a winner this day!

2025 Match Events: A Look Ahead...

- March 16: Art and Crafts
- March 23: Painting at The Montage Hotel
- April 5: Soccer Clinic
- April 26: Whale Watching



FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

The High School Bigs Program is proud to partner with school districts across Orange County! Below is a list of our 2024-2025 school partners and the Program Specialists who facilitate these weekly after-school group mentoring sessions:



Through mentorship, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County plays a pivotal role in addressing student absenteeism by providing meaningful connections and support, giving students a reason to show up and engage in their education.

— Dr. Stefan Bean, Orange County Superintendent of Schools

Ms. Dafne | ddeloera@ocbigs.org

- Pyles Elementary School - Monday
- Pacific Drive Elementary School - Tuesday
- Morse Elementary School - Wednesday
- Glenview Elementary School - Thursday

Ms. Jenny | jflores@ocbigs.org

- Hansen Elementary School - Monday
- Cerritos Elementary School - Tuesday
- Raymond Elementary School - Wed/Fri

Ms. Yvette | ylira@ocbigs.org

- Holder Elementary School - Wednesday
- Twila Reid Elementary School - Friday

Ms. Maria | mherrera@ocbigs.org

- Tynes John Elementary School - Monday
- Melrose Elementary School - Tue/Fri
- Ruby Drive Elementary School - Thursday

Mr. Marcos | mcubias@ocbigs.org

- Olive Street Elementary School - Monday
- Franklin Elementary School - Tuesday
- Gauer Elementary School - Thursday
- Danbrook Elementary School - Friday

Program Specialist TBD

- Diamond Elementary School - Mon/Thu

Ms. Mayra | mtorres@ocbigs.org

- Heideman Elementary School - Tuesday
- Westmont Elementary School - Wednesday
- Stoddard Elementary School - Thursday
- Ponderosa Elementary School - Friday

Ms. Jackie | javendano@ocbigs.org

- Victoria Elementary School - Monday
- Valencia Park Elementary School - Wednesday
- Beswick Elementary School - Thu/Fri

Ms. Sam | sschettini@ocbigs.org

- Maple Elementary School - Monday
- Topaz Elementary School - Tuesday

Ms. Stephanie | scastrejon@ocbigs.org

- Heninger Elementary School - Mon/Wed
- Esplanade Elementary School - Tuesday
- Davis Elementary School - Thursday

Ms. Vanessa | vmedina@ocbigs.org

- Wakeham Elementary School - Monday
- Sonora Elementary School - Tuesday
- Paularino Elementary School - Wednesday
- Bryant Elementary School - Thursday

We look forward to continuing to grow these partnerships and creating a brighter future for students throughout Orange County!

FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

BIGGER TOGETHER: PARENT ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS



You're invited to join us at your child's upcoming Parent Engagement Session—a unique opportunity for you to experience the High School Bigs program firsthand! This special session allows parents/guardians to:

- Meet their child's mentor and witness the meaningful connections they are building.
- Observe the structure and activities of a typical weekly session.
- Gain valuable insight into the program's impact on their child's growth and development.

Parent Engagement Session dates will vary based on your school's schedule. Your Program Specialist will send your child home with a flyer with specific details and a QR code to RSVP. We look forward to welcoming you!

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 MENTORS OF THE YEAR

During January, National Mentoring Month, BBBS honors six outstanding mentors and matches from its three cornerstone programs to celebrate the invaluable contributions of our Bigs and highlight the resiliency of our Littles.

This year, we are proud to recognize **Bethany Vu** (Middle College High School x Diamond Elementary) and **Cesar Mora** (Valencia High School x Topaz Elementary) as our High School Bigs Mentors of the Year!

[READ THEIR STORIES](#)



Bethany and her Little, Cristina



Cesar and his Little, Ian



Both Bethany and Cesar will receive a \$2,500 Angelitos Award to fund their college and career goals while our runner-ups will each receive \$1,000 thanks to the generosity of Angelitos de Oro.

Congratulations to our finalists: **Angela Boc** (Savanna High School), **Kendall Liang** (Cypress High School), **Alexander Safo** (Cypress High School), **Brian Huynh** (Oxford Academy).



FOR HIGH SCHOOL BIGS PARENTS

LITTLE TESTIMONIALS

What's the biggest change you've noticed in yourself since being matched with your Big?



"The biggest change has been that I feel much happier, and I've become kinder to people."

- Evolet, 5th grade

"Since being matched with Abigail, I believe I have been more creative and kind. Also I am more of a team player because we usually work together on activities."

- Anthony, 3rd grade

"I feel happier and more curious to learn new things. My Big makes me laugh a lot too."

- Kathleen, 4th grade

Why do you think having a Big is important?



"Because they boost my confidence in myself and how to overall be a better person."

- Isabella, 3rd grade

"Having a Big Sister is important because you get someone older and wiser to talk to and get advice from. Plus, you can relate to them and share things you both understand."

- Aliza, 5th grade

What is your favorite memory with your Big so far?



"Making gingerbread houses because it has allowed us to connect further and it has been a yearly activity we do."

- Diana, 5th grade

"When we went to the zoo during the summer, it was the first time I got to see my Big outside of school!"

- Alexa, 4th grade



ACTIVITIES

Each week, your child and their Big will work on academics and participate in social-emotional learning activities, such as:

- **Dreams for Schools STEM activities** - DrawBots, Slingshot Cars and a Wind Tunnel
- **Power of Words art project** - Encourages matches to reflect on and strengthen their bond while learning to express themselves
- **College Fair** - Bigs showcase their post-grad plans to inspire Littles to dream big
- **Big Bucks Store** - Students learn financial responsibility by earning "Big Bucks" for attendance and participation with the chance to spend it on rewards, celebrating their hard work and reinforcing their sense of accomplishment!



PERSONAL SAFETY RULES

At BBBS, safety is our number one priority. Here are some of the site rules your child must follow:

- **Respectful Behavior:** Students are expected to show respect to their Bigs, peers, Program Specialist, and the material at all times.
- **No Exchange of Contact Info:** For the safety of all participants, students are strictly prohibited from exchanging personal contact info with their Big, such as phone numbers or social media profiles.
- Additionally, **meeting outside of the supervised mentoring sessions is NOT permitted.**



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Throughout the year, your child and their Big will work on a Youth Outcome Development Plan (YODP) to help achieve their goals. Our proven curriculum focuses on five key goals:

- Increasing confidence
- Building social skills
- Learning self-regulation
- Future planning and exploration
- Creating stronger relationships

FOR WORKPLACE MENTORING PARENTS

Happy New Year, Parents!

We are thrilled to welcome 2025 and continue into the second half of our Workplace Mentoring Program year. We have an exciting curriculum planned for the months ahead, filled with meaningful activities and opportunities for mentees and mentors to grow. I encourage you to check in with your student to hear about the fun things they're learning and how their friendship with their mentor is developing—it's always inspiring to hear about their impact firsthand!

I'd also like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Katie Esparza, and I've been with Big Brothers Big Sisters for nearly eight years, working with the Community Program team. Recently, I transitioned to support the Workplace Mentoring Program, and I couldn't be more excited to be part of this incredible team. It's been a joy to support our mentees as they explore new opportunities and build meaningful connections with their mentors.

Thank you for being an important part of this journey. If you have any questions or would like to share feedback, don't hesitate to reach out. I'm looking forward to a fantastic year ahead!

Warm regards,



Katie Esparza

Workplace Mentoring Program Manager

kesparza@ocbig.org



PROGRAM REMINDERS



Match Lunches: Mentors can have lunch with their mentees at school during lunch hour.



Special Events: Mentors are welcome to attend mentees' school events (e.g. sports games, performances, etc.).

In addition to our monthly group mentoring sessions, we encourage Workplace Mentoring matches to strengthen their connection by sharing lunch together at school or attending special school events together. For both, **Program Specialists must be notified at least 5 days in advance**, and mentees' parents/guardians must sign a waiver before meeting up.



WPM DISNEY DAY

In November, our **Loara High School x Disneyland Resort** cohort had an unforgettable experience riding Disneyland's newest attraction, Tiana's Bayou Adventure! The day brought mentors and mentees closer as they shared in the magic of the ride's immersive storytelling. Following the adventure, Disneyland treated the group to a selection of the park's iconic snacks, including warm pretzels and beignets. It was a day filled with connection, fun, and lasting memories for everyone!



COMMUNITY RESOURCES & EVENTS



Pacific Symphony Lantern Festival

Don't miss this free family event that celebrates the rich traditions of the Lunar New Year. The Lantern Festival, celebrated for over 2,000 years, takes place on the first full moon night of the lunar calendar and marks the return of spring and symbolizes family reunion and new beginnings. Lighting and appreciating lanterns is a beautiful way to let go of the past and share hopes for the future.

Date & Time: February 22, 11 AM - 4 PM

Location: René and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall
615 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa, CA 92626

[Click here to learn more](#)

Festival of Whales

Join the annual Dana Point Festival of Whales for a weekend full of family-friendly fun! This free event features live entertainment, interactive exhibits, arts and crafts, and exciting activities for all ages, including a parade, sand sculpting, and a community block party.

Dates: March 7-9

Location: Dana Point Harbor



[Click here to learn more](#)



Día de los Niños, Día de los Libros

Celebrate the importance of children, literacy, and family at the 17th Annual Día de los Niños, Día de los Libros! This free event is open to all and features a variety of exciting activities, including live entertainment, interactive games, and a community outreach fair.

Dates: April 26, 10:30 AM - 2 PM

Location: Santa Ana Main Library
26 Civic Center Plaza Santa Ana, CA 92701

[Click here to learn more](#)



SHOP THE CLEMENTINE MOBILE FOOD TROLLEY AT BBBS

Get your fresh fruits and vegetables at Clementine, the mobile food trolley! Set up in the Big Brothers Big Sisters parking lot, free groceries and supplies for eligible OC families* as available. Advanced sign up is required.

March 12

SIGN UP AT [OCBIGS.ORG/FOOD-TROLLEY](https://ocbigs.org/food-trolley)

Registration opens March 3 at 4 PM

* Must be Orange County resident with school-aged child(ren) in the home



Big Brothers Big Sisters®

OF ORANGE COUNTY
& THE INLAND EMPIRE



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