What’s your JBBBS story?

Here’s ours.

Since our inception in 1919, Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters has matched more than 6,000 children in need with adult mentors. And we’ve connected more than 1,000 adults with disabilities to new friends in their communities. A comparable number of volunteers have been impacted by their own experience in our programs – programs made possible through donor support.

Ours is an organization built on relationships: The relationship between mentor and mentee, social worker and match, board of directors and staff. Invariably, people come to JBBBS for different reasons: to seek help, to lend a hand, to support a cause.

They’re motivated by stories – the ones they’ve heard, the ones they’ve lived.

These are a few.
My story dates all the way back to 1972. I was living in Ohio, and a dear friend named Sadie had just given birth to her son, Isaac. About a week later, the new father abandoned the family, leaving Isaac, his sister, Rachel, and Sadie behind. The word “abandoned” is entirely appropriate, as Isaac, to this day, has had no contact whatsoever with his biological father. Sadie never remarried. She moved in with her parents, and Isaac’s grandfather became the closest thing he ever had to an actual father.

When Isaac was about 8 years old, Sadie contacted the Big Brother agency in Cleveland on his behalf. Over the ensuing years, Isaac was matched to two Big Brothers. One of those matches was with him all through high school and was the best man at his wedding. I always believed that Isaac’s mentoring relationships had a very positive impact on his personal development. Today, Isaac is happily married and a devoted father to his children, who are 10 and 13. With the absolute power of hindsight, my only regret is that the Cleveland agency didn’t have a comparable program that served girls. Rachel could have genuinely benefitted from the experience.

Fast-forward to the 1990s. I was living in Boston and very busy with my family and my professional career. My children were nearly grown. I felt it was the right time for me to begin some community service work. I served on various boards of directors but found myself longing for an opportunity with more depth, hands-on experience, and the potential to have a direct positive impact on someone’s life. I happened to be in Cleveland for a business trip that coincided with the local Big Brother agency’s annual gala. Isaac and Sadie were attending and invited me to tag along. Sitting there, next to a then adult Isaac, the proverbial light bulb clicked on. A few years later, right after my youngest child left for college, I contacted JBBBS by looking up the number in the phonebook. That was in 1998.

That same year, Jack Kadis was matched to Jonathan Soyt, a then-12-year-old Little Brother referred to JBBBS by his mom, a single parent. Today, Jack and Jonathan remain close — and both have assumed leadership roles in the agency. In December 2015, Jack was named Chair of JBBBS’ Board of Directors. Jonathan serves as a leader in the Young Professional community.

Over the last five years, JBBBS revenues have increased by 40%. This directly contributed to our nearly 19% expansion, across programs, over the same time period.

Over the last two years, 209 one-time JBBBS volunteers donated to the agency.

Jack Kadis
Chair of JBBBS Board of Directors, Donor, Alumni Big Brother
FY 2015-2016 Approved Budget

2015-2016 Expenses $2,263,438

- Programs: 72%
- Development: 14%
- Management: 10%
- Occupancy: 4%

2015-2016 Income $2,222,579

- Rodman Ride for Kids: 14%
- Endowment Allocation: 14%
- Annual Appeal: 16%
- Special Events: 13%
- CJP Allocation: 17%
- Foundation Grants: 12%
- Development: 14%
- Higher Education Scholarship Funds: 7%
- Campership Funds: 4%
- Special Activity Funds: 4%

Donor support enables us to:

- Employ highly-skilled, Master’s level social workers to support each Children’s Program match from its inception.
- Provide match activities for Little Brothers and Sisters.
- Offset the cost of MAGIC activities for adults who have disabilities.
Jonathan Soyt —
Alumni Little Brother, Educational Scholarship Recipient, Big Brother, Young Professional Leader

I’ve been a part of Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters for as long as I can remember. I think there are a lot of children who come to JBBBS a bit shy, unsure of themselves, but every kid is different. I was never shy like that. When my Big Brother, Jack Kadis, was looking for a match, he asked for someone who would speak his mind. He got more than he bargained for.

To me, Jack was a voice of reason, helping me to quiet down, listen, think. When I’m with my Little Brother, Josh, I continually think about how much like me he is, running around and looking at everything. It often feels like he’s thinking at a million miles an hour. When I hang out with him, I feel like my role is to share a lot of what Jack brought to me: enjoying what’s in front of us. For me, this brings a lot of what Jack and I had been doing together full circle.

It was hardly a choice to become a Big Brother after I moved back to Boston - the only question was timing. I decided that there was no time like the present, and I haven’t looked back. I’m proud to contribute to our community of young professionals, whose volunteering provides so many of the services we’ve come to expect from JBBBS. I look forward to many more years of service to this great agency. In many ways, it has given me an excellent mentor, a leg up on life and the means to pay it forward.

Jonathan will shortly celebrate three years with his Little Brother, Josh. He participates annually in JBBBS’ Scholars’ Dinner to share his impact story, in person, with donors to the Educational Scholarship Fund. He is also active in JBBBS’ Young Professional community where, this year, he served on its Strategy Committee.

Volunteer inquiries have increased by more than 11% since Jonathan was matched in 2013.

In FYE ‘15, JBBBS awarded 44 scholarships totaling $190,000 to alumni Little Brothers and Sisters to help defray the cost to attend college. To date, JBBBS has supported 221 alumni through its Educational Scholarship Fund.

JBBBS’ average match length is one of the top three of any of the 300+ Big Brother Big Sister affiliate agencies nationally.
The organization’s Young Professional (YoPro) community is dedicated to cultivating the next generation of JBBBS leadership through social and philanthropic opportunities for volunteers and donors under the age of 40.

More than 75% of JBBBS’ volunteer base is under the age of 40.

This year, a core group of JBBBS Young Professional volunteers and donors – funded, in part, through a Young Adult Grant from Combined Jewish Philanthropies – helped to develop the organization’s first-ever Young Professional Strategy, aimed at increasing volunteer engagement, philanthropy and leadership by young adult constituents.
I have been a solo parent since Josh’s birth. His dad lives in New York. He’s only ever seen him occasionally, so I knew that he could use the support, guidance and friendship of a strong male role model. I worked at Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters myself as a social worker in the early 90s, so I knew firsthand what an amazing opportunity it was for him to have a Big Brother. When Josh was old enough, I didn’t hesitate to request a match.

The support that Josh has gotten from Jonathan, his Big Brother, has been exactly what I hoped it would be. It’s a great, positive friendship and Jonathan is a role model. Jonathan really taught Josh that it’s cool to be a kind, strong man. He modeled that behavior for him over almost three years of being matched.

Over the past few years, it was really an added bonus to get help with school supplies and a scholarship to help pay for Josh to attend overnight camp at Eisner.

My experience with JBBBS has only been positive.

Josh adds, “Everyone should think about becoming a Big Brother or Sister. It’s great! It makes you feel good and makes someone else happy, too. Tikkun Olam!”

Josh and Jonathan, like each Big/Little match, are assigned a clinically trained, Master’s level social worker, who supports the match from its inception. His JBBBS social worker, Beth Levy, has provided match support to Josh and Jonathan since 2013.

Roughly 65-70% of JBBBS participants, across programs, identify as Jewish. In FYE ’15, JBBBS partnered with CJP’s Anti-Poverty Initiative to lend communal support to marginalized families in the Jewish community, including those who are unaffiliated with, or under-engaged by, synagogues.

JBBBS’ Friend 2 Friend Programs, which serve adults who have disabilities, have witnessed significant growth – from 112 clients served in 2010 to 185 in FYE ’15.

JBBBS Little Brothers and Sisters are ages 6-18. They hail from one- and two-parent families, families with grandparent heads-of-household and families with opposite and same-sex parents. They come from 93 towns and all economic strata and include Jewish and non-Jewish children, children experiencing loss (i.e. death, divorce, a parent’s incarceration), children who have disabilities, children whose parent, sibling or other family member has disabilities, children who are bullied, children who bully, children who are socially-isolated, those who identify as GBLTQ, new immigrants and others. Each could both benefit from and has sought the support of an additional adult role model.
JBBBS’ Friend 2 Friend programs serve adults ages 18+ who have mild to moderate disabilities including, but not limited to, cognitive and developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, mild mental illness, Autism Spectrum Disorders and Traumatic Brain Injury. They live in more than 90 towns and span all income categories. Some live independently, others with family, and others in residential living situations. They are Jewish and non-Jewish. Each could benefit from a strong, lasting friendship.

With the help of the first Ruderman prize for Innovation in Disabilities, Friend 2 Friend’s growth necessitated the formation of two additional MAGIC groups in 2014.

In 2016, two of Friend 2 Friend’s longest running matches will mark 20-year anniversaries.
Throughout my more than seven years at JBBBS, I have had the opportunity to watch matches develop and strengthen, as well as to see the wonderful young adults that our Little Brothers and Sisters grow up to become. It is an honor to be invited into the lives of the families/children/volunteers with whom we work.

For me and my colleagues on the clinical team, providing support to matches like Jonathan and Josh’s is at the heart of what we do. Our program is a collaborative effort between parents, volunteers and children. That time allows us to connect, check-in to see how the match friendship is developing and determine whether there are ways we could be helpful, such as brainstorming ideas, providing referrals, etc.

It’s also when we hear the impact stories … Big Brothers and Sisters teaching “Littles” to ride bikes, taking them to tour local colleges, introducing them to new music, “Littles” opening up to their “Bigs” about high school social challenges, parents sharing that their child’s time with their Big Brother or Sister makes their whole family feel better connected to the community.

The work we do is really special. I love the idea that we give a child an additional, supportive adult in his or her life, who by nature of showing up consistently, taking an interest in them, and spending time together, sends a message that they are valued and important.

Beth is JBBBS’ Senior Social Worker and Manager of School-Based Mentoring. She has been providing match support in the Children’s Program since 2008.
How can you be a part of our story?

Visit our website at www.jbbbs.org or call (617) 965-7055 to:

**Apply to Volunteer – Be a Friend**

Right now, children in need and adults who have disabilities are awaiting matches in our programs. Learn how you can support JBBBS with your time, and encourage someone in your network to do the same!

**Enroll – Make a Friend**

At JBBBS, our services are premised on the belief that one-to-one mentoring changes lives and improves family outcomes for the better. Decide whether we’re right for you and your family.

**Donate – Fund Friendship**

We aspire to serve more children in need and adults with disabilities in need of our support.

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- Offset the cost of MAGIC activities for adults who have disabilities.
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