

CLUB & GREEK

Big Brothers/Big Sisters: Seeking Active Student Members

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The Big Brothers, Big Sisters (BBBS) College Program in Asbury/Monmouth, otherwise known as Project BAM, is in its tenth year of partnership between Monmouth University and Asbury Park High School.

According to its official website, BBBS' mission is to provide children with professional support, and overall help them succeed in life.

The program allows high school students from Asbury Park High School to be mentored by Monmouth undergraduate and graduate students. They have the opportunity to help children gain confidence, create strong bonds, avoid risky behaviors, and educate and prepare them for real world.

The mentees in the program are different every school year to allow for the maximum number of individuals to take part in the program. Some of the high school students have been involved in BBBS in the past, but many are new to Project BAM. This semester there are 12 Monmouth mentors and 16 Asbury Park mentees.

Genna Rutka, a BBBS Program Manager, has overseen the program for one year now. The program meets twice a month. The meetings include lunch, conversations between the mentors and mentees, and campus presentations or tours.

"We have gone on a lot of different tours. We had an athletic tour where they shows us the basketball court and all of the locker rooms. The basketball coach actually came and spoke to the group," said Rutka.

"We were able to tour the radio station. They let some of the kids get on there and say, 'Shout out from Asbury Park.' Which was cool, they all loved that," continued Rutka.

The most important part of the program is to engage the high school students and expose them to all of the possibilities that are out there. Other presentations that the group has been exposed to include a resume and interview workshop, Capoeira, which is a Brazilian dance form of martial arts, and an anti-violence presentation.

"We had the anti-violence presentation which was really nice. They talked about the different forms of violence and ways to stay away from it. We went through positive quotes from famous people throughout time like Martin Luther King, Bob Marley," said Rutka. "They got to pick their favorite and they all made a bookmark to keep on hand and always remember to stay away from violence and keep positive vibes in life."

Dae'Sani Clarke, a sophomore at Asbury Park High School, heard about the program from her guidance counselor, took part in other programs put on by the organization. "My freshman year I actually did the business school program here at Monmouth, so I was here last year too," said Clarke.

Clarke was matched with Monmouth undergraduate student, Pernille Kirkeeide Hjelmeland, a sophomore finance and real estate student who is originally from Norway. She heard about the program from a bowling event that the group hosted. After the event she knew that she wanted to get more involved and began as mentor in Project BAM last fall.

Despite not being from the same country, not even the same state, the two have an incredible bond. "She is very understanding. That has helped me open up to her more so that I can talk to her about anything without a problem, and not keep it to myself," said Clarke.

Hjelmeland appreciates everything that the program has done not only for her, but for the mentors. It has helped me get another view on everything. Just how lucky I am to be here and how I can make a difference, help others get into college maybe and just be a motivation,” said Hjelmeland.

The mentors are not allowed to contact their mentees outside of the program meetings. It is only after the school year ends that they can exchange information and continue their communication outside of the program.

Hjelmeland feels that this aspect of the program helps to strengthen the relationship between the mentors and the mentees. “I kind of like that we don’t have connection outside of the meetings because then its two weeks and we have so much to talk about. It’s good to catch up after two weeks,” said Hjelmeland.

Hjelmeland hopes to continue as a mentor next year. After graduating from college, Clarke hopes to earn a cheerleading scholarship and major in journalism.

For more information on Project BAM and BBBS of Monmouth and Middlesex Counties visit www.bbbsmmc.org. If you are interested in becoming a mentor for Project BAM please contact Genna Rutka at grutka@bbbsmmc.org, Susan Shumard at sshumard@monmouth.edu, or Corey Inzana at cinzana@monmouth.edu.

PHOTO COURTESY of Genna Rutka