

# TOGETHER, WE ARE DEFENDERS OF POTENTIAL

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Big Brothers Big Sisters State Association of New Jersey Honors Bigs and Littles of the Year

ASBURY PARK, NJ — The Big Brothers Big Sisters State Association of New Jersey has named Ernest Ebanks of Mount Olive Township and his Little Brother Dreveon of Rockaway as Big Brother and Little Brother of the Year, and Staci Clark of Deptford and her Little Sister Dominique of Millville as Big Sister and Little Sister of the Year.

"We are inspired by Ernest and Staci's dedication to the BBBS program, commitment to their matches, and the incredible impact they have had on the lives of their Littles," said stated William Salcedo, Big Brothers Big Sisters State Chair. "Ernest and Staci are true role models, the epitome of what mentors can and should be, and excellent ambassadors for Big Brothers Big Sisters."

Ernest and his Little Brother Dreveon were matched in Morris County in March of 2016, and in addition to being named the 2021 NJ Big Brother & Little Brother of the Year, they are also being honored as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Coastal & Northern New Jersey's Big Brother & Little Brother of the Year.

Dreveon was without a consistent male figure in his life and going through the process of being in a new school in a new town. A friendship built on his and Ernest's common interest and love for sports blossomed into a wonderful mentorship. Frequently attending and watching football games and simply spending one on one time together has grown this match into what Dreveon, Ernest, and Dreveon's mother call "family."

Ernest ignited a fire in Dreveon by encouraging him with academics & building his self-esteem. Once stating that he felt he would not be able to achieve going to college, Dreveon has now started to look at colleges he would like to attend in the future. Both Dreveon and his mother have expressed that Ernest is one of the main reasons why Dreveon is more confident in himself and has followed along a positive path. Dreveon has shared that due to his positive experience in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program with Ernest, he plans on being a Big one day himself to mentor a child in need!

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"I feel so blessed to be a part of such a great organization, which afforded me the opportunity to be a good influence and role model for my little brother," said Ernest. "I love being able to enjoy different experiences with Dreveon and helping him to grow into a mature young man."

Big Sister Staci and Little Sister Dominique are a Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cumberland & Salem Counties match that is supported by the Cumberland County Human Services Advisory Council. The two met when Staci was Dominique's first grade teacher. As the school year progressed, Staci saw Dominique struggling and wanted to offer help beyond the classroom, so when Dominique enrolled in the Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring program, Staci decided this was her opportunity to make a difference. Staci volunteered to be Dominique's Big Sister.

Staci and Dominique began their relationship meeting once a week for lunch to play board games or with dolls. As their connection grew, they decided to spend more time together through the school-based "Plus" program. They were able to make new, fun memories together--going to the movies, enjoying Easter egg hunts, and trips to the zoo!

In the coming years, Dominique leaned on Staci through some tough times. Each day their relationship grew closer and they knew they'd be "sisters for life." As the years went on, Staci and Dominique battled through the ups and downs of middle school, connecting over trips to the beach, swim lessons in Staci's pool, dinners with Staci's family, and always working through any academic challenges that arose.

Staci and Dominique have now been matched for eight years. Over this time Staci has taught Dominique to always be kind to herself and others, to get involved in school clubs and activities, and to make better choices even when life is tough. She taught Dominique to celebrate her uniqueness and know that she can count on Staci for guidance and support now and in years to come.

"When I am with my Big, I feel safe and loved," said Dominique. "I never have to think twice about whether she will give up on me because I know she will always be there. I know my Big Sister is only a text or call away when I need her. She always pushes me to try my best, and I hope after everything that she has taught me, that I will make her proud."

To learn more about BBBSNJ, apply to become a Big, or make a donation, visit [www.bbbsnj.org](http://www.bbbsnj.org).

### **About BBBSNJ:**

For over a century, Big Brothers Big Sisters has been helping change kids' perspectives and giving them the opportunity to reach their potential. By working together, the BBBS Agencies in New Jersey have been supplementing the financial and organizational support each program needs to respond to the children on their waiting lists. More New Jersey children than ever before are benefiting from the positive impact of having Big Brothers or Big Sisters in their lives, but our work is not done. The New Jersey State Association of BBBS Agencies is focused on providing support so each agency can expand services to provide a mentor for every New Jersey child who needs and wants one. With the support of its corporate community and generous philanthropists, this vision can become a reality. Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies in New Jersey have serviced thousands of youth each year through mentorship. To learn more about BBBSNJ, apply to become a Big, or make a donation, visit [www.bbbsnj.org](http://www.bbbsnj.org)