



PRESS RELEASE

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THE CAPITAL CALLS FOR MENTORS WITH HEART

STARTS

A national organisation that finds mentors for fatherless boys says that after 20 years in the business, they're still looking for men with a kind heart rather than a saintly disposition.

The message is vital for an increasingly busy Big Buddy, a charity that has just added a Hamilton post to its Auckland and Wellington bases.

Right now, in Wellington, increasing interest from mums and grandmas who valiantly raise boys without a father figure means the area's usually fulsome list of mentors is dwindling fast.

Area coordinator Dave Burcher says men who can spare 2-3 hours a week to share with a 'Little Buddy' should know they don't have to consider themselves perfect in order to pick up the phone.

No one knows this better than Wellington mum, Laura Virgo. Nine-year-old son Jonathan was 'matched' with his Big Buddy Kevin Stevens 3 years ago (pictured). She explains why it is so important that men with something positive to offer don't fear the chance to share it.

"Just having a bloke in a boy's life is good enough. It's a different dynamic and as much as I can provide emotionally and financially, enabling my son to become a decent human being, there are just some perspectives, as a female, that I can't give him.

"It's difficult to put in words but men approach things differently and that's OK. I'm lucky that Jonathan is a great kid anyway but it warms my heart to see how he is identifying how to be a young man because that cornerstone of his life – an adult male role model - is present on a regular basis."

Big Buddy CEO Richard Aston adds that once someone puts themselves forward, they have a world-class vetting process and matching system to make sure they're dealing with safe, sound men. It puts mum's mind at rest and is reassuring for the potential Big Buddy to know that a thorough approval process has taken place for everyone in the programme.

"We start with a year's commitment – that's a minimum – but so often this becomes a lifelong relationship. It is that 'time spent', that willingness to be alongside boy as he becomes a man that is probably the greatest gift that our organisation channels through to these boys."

Once someone is ready to become a Big Buddy, they will meet the 7-14 year-old boy that coordinators have worked painstakingly to match them with.

Big Buddy staff, mums, and grans know that showing up at a stranger's house to meet a fatherless boy whose life you are going to better is no mean feat. But young Jonathan has some sage advice for men and boys alike.

“Don't worry about being nervous. Whatever you have in your head, it will be OK. Because having a Big Buddy in real life is so much better than you can imagine.”

Knowing that the gap left by a father's absence has been filled to some extent is invaluable to Laura too: “I can be re-assured that Jonathan is getting similar experiences to his friends in a two-parent family. And I know for a fact that Kevin enjoys Jonathan's company just as much as the other way around. He has often said it is such a rewarding role.”

ENDS

EDITORS NOTES:

- Since 1997 Big Buddy has created over 700 matches. At 2017 capacity, Big Buddy can create 80 new matches per year. Additional funding through donations and sponsorship is directly focused on increasing these match numbers.
- The first funding for the Big Buddy programme in 1997 came from the Crime Prevention office of the Prime Minister.
- Big Buddy's work is proven to steer young men away from crime. People working at the coal face of crime will attest to the fact that this prevention needs to start early.
- Our statistics show that for every 100 boys we help, 2 of them would otherwise have taken the route leading to a serious criminal action. The NZ Treasury estimates the cost of crime is \$3 million per criminal. Mentoring one boy costs \$8000 in total. By saving 2 boys, Big Buddy potentially saves the country \$5, 992, 000.
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