



Press release

POLICE FORCE A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR MENTORING BOYS

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Ken Turner may have left the police force to study engineering like so many other men in his family, but he still fosters a strong care of duty towards others. Ken is now a Big Buddy mentor to 11-year-old 'fatherless' Wellington boy, Ollie.

The impetus came when the ex-sergeant moved to Porirua - as a very involved Auckland uncle, he reflected he could no longer do as much for his sister's son, but he could do surely do something for other kids in a position of need. Coincidentally, his wife saw an ad for Big Buddy.

"I was actually looking for some sort of volunteering to do so I emailed Big Buddy and very quickly I was attending one of their meetings and going off for psych assessments. They were very thorough and, having been a policeman, I really liked knowing that not just anyone can join," says Ken.

He explains that having known eleven-year-old Ollie now for 4 months, he has established the role he's playing in this boy's life when he picks him up each weekend: he's not there to replace his father; he's not there to be a counsellor; he is there to be a good friend.

"We might just do something like kick a ball around at the park for 2 hours, or go to Bunnings to pick up some supplies and have a tinker around on a little project. I think it's important that boys without father figures get the chance to do this more traditionally male-oriented stuff.

"As a policeman, I was well aware that a lot of the troubled boys we dealt with on the front line either never had a father figure, or had a terrible father. I think, more than mentoring, I'm actually just showing a boy that doesn't have a father how decent men do things"

Ken applies this to vitally important matters like how to treat women properly, or even working on a hardware project instead of giving in to boredom and finding trouble. This is what Big Buddy refers to as 'modelling', a learning behaviour that speaks to the act of walking alongside someone else, showing them, rather than trying to fix them.

Ollie's mum, Amanda, says there is also a deeper emotional dimension to her son having a mentor.

“Whether the father is not there because he passed away or by choice – in our situation Ollie’s dad left and went overseas- I feel boys can easily suffer from low self-esteem. I’ve noticed this in Ollie, as well as some anger which I feel is quite natural under the circumstances. For boys whose fathers left by choice, I think they can end up making that loss about them.

“One of the things I want to come out of this for Ollie is that he can feel ‘good enough.’ He can feel that someone really wants to spend time with him, to give him one-on-one attention. I’m pleased that someone is there to give that ‘man factor’ to my boy.”

Amanda realises there are many boys without dads out there, all of whom should have the opportunity of mentoring. She sees this lack of male mentors as one of the gaps in today’s society: “Society is not what it used to be. Everyone is doing their own thing, and single parents are stretched most of the time with work and life. People in the community don’t see the need. We’re just lucky that Ken is the person he is and that Big Buddy has such a robust screening process. Ken seems incredibly committed and responsible. He’s a real gentle giant.”

To find out more about stepping up for the next generation of boys visit bigbuddy.org.nz

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For more information and images please contact:

Sally Webster
Media & Communications Coordinator
M 021 599 191
sally@bigbuddy.org.nz
www.bigbuddy.org.nz
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