

## Big need for Big Sisters in Surrey



By Surrey Leader  
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Growing up in a low-income household in Surrey in the middle of four siblings, 11-year-old Britney wanted a Big Sister mentor so she'd have "someone to trust, someone who could pick me up and do fun things with me."

"And be my greatest friend," Britney says quietly, hugging Mandy Thoohan.

Britney and Mandy found each other through Big Sisters, an organization that matches adult women with girls aged seven to 17.

Thoohan, 23, is currently putting herself through university to become a teacher.

"I didn't receive the kind of support I needed as a young girl," she explains, "and after I heard about Big Sisters through a classmate, I wanted to prevent another girl from feeling that way too."

When asked how she manages her job, a full course load, and weekly visits with Britney, she laughs and explains that she doesn't think of it as "volunteering," and that her time with Britney is exactly what she needs to "decompress and have fun."

At the beginning of their match one year ago, the pair decided one of their goals would be to stay active. They enjoy swimming, watching puppy training classes at the local pet store and trying different kinds of sushi rolls together. Thoohan says Britney's mom is always happy to hear that Britney has tried something new with Thoohan and that she is opening up to someone.

Thoohan says that although her main goal has been to help Britney gain confidence, her little sister has actually inspired her to face some of her own fears, such as sliding down a waterslide for the first time.

"I can't swim!" she laughs, "It was extremely scary, but I'm happy Britney pushed me to try it."

When asked how Britney thinks her life might be different without Thoohan, she looks down and shyly says, "I'd probably be on the couch watching TV."

The Big Sister program has had such a positive impact on Britney that she now wants to be a Big Sister as soon as she turns 19. She also wants to be a teacher when she grows up, just like Thoohan.

Big Sisters of B.C. Lower Mainland has an ongoing need for Big Sister volunteers in Surrey. There are currently 29 girls waiting to be matched. As Big Sisters looks for volunteers who live nearby and have the same interests, some girls in Surrey are currently waiting up to a year to be matched.

To become a Big Sister, you must be at least 19 and be able to commit two hours each week to a girl ages seven to 17 for one year.

For information on how you can become a Big Sister, or volunteer in another program, visit: <http://www.bigsisters.bc.ca> or email [info@bigsisters.bc.ca](mailto:info@bigsisters.bc.ca).

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