

# Area kids get a positive influence through Big Brothers Big Sisters

- Ruth Brown Journal staff
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Craig Miske and Nathan LeBeau, 12, peddle their way up a trail off City Springs Road in Rapid City on Saturday, August 7, 2010. Miske and LeBeau participate in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Black Hills program. (Kristina Barker/Journal Staff)

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Black Hills helps almost 400 children in the area who are looking for a positive influence in their lives.

"You learn to be a better person and get to go out and do stuff," said Nathan LeBeau, a 12-year-old from Rapid City who has been paired with his Big Brother for nearly two years. "I get to do a lot of stuff that I wouldn't have been able to if it weren't for this."

Nathan's Big Brother is Craig Miske of Rapid City, who says he and Nathan enjoy spending time together.

"It's a way for them to learn that adults can be fun, and it is fun having that interaction," Miske said. "Some of the kids in the program have been through some pretty difficult situations, so this gives them the opportunity to just relax and have a good time."

Miske said he and Nathan enjoy mountain biking on the Centennial Trail, hiking, playing baseball and football, bowling and watching movies.

"I raised two daughters as a single parent, and I thought I had more to give," Miske said. "I enjoy the relationship that Nathan and I have, and I think we have a lot of fun together."

Nathan no longer lives with his mother, and his grandparents are his legal guardians. Dede Peterson, Nathan's grandmother, said she has seen great improvement in Nathan since she signed him up for the Big Brothers program.

"He needs someone who could do things with him and he needs a companion," Peterson said. "He gets to do more things now that he has a mentor and he is a lot more involved."

Peterson said it is nice that Nathan has a stable male influence in his life and a friend to do things with.

"He never got to do much before, and now he gets to do a lot of new things," Peterson said. "I think he's happier now."

Nathan said he always has fun biking with his mentor, and he really likes that Miske teaches him to "be better" and "have good manners."

Another opportunity for mentoring comes with Big Brothers Big Sisters' partnership with the South Dakota Youth Hunting Adventures Chapter of Pass It On, which gives kids the chance to explore the outdoors.

Thirteen-year-old Preston Pearce and his hunting mentor, Derek Nelson, have been paired for the second consecutive year.

"I was looking for a positive male role model for Preston when I signed him up," said Melanie Neumiller, Preston's mother. "His grades have improved, and he is getting in less trouble at school since he has been involved. It's made a huge difference."

Preston and Nelson not only go hunting and target shooting together, but they also fish, hike and do other outdoor activities.

"I thought being a mentor would a good way to share my passion and hobbies with someone who didn't have that opportunity," said

Nelson, a Rapid City chiropractor. "If it weren't for this program, there would be a lot of kids that wouldn't get into the outdoors."

The experiences that Preston has gained have been valuable to him.

"I learned a bunch of things," said Preston, who will be entering eighth grade. "I learned how to adjust the scope and where to shoot to the deer and how to gut a deer. I got to shoot a deer, too."

Both the mentors and mentees agreed that they enjoy being involved in the program.

"It's extremely rewarding and far more fun than I ever thought it could be," Nelson said. "I have learned from him and he has learned from me. ... It's great."

"I think my son has had an opportunity to do things with Derek that he wouldn't have done with me," Neumiller said. "He has taught him a lot of things that I don't know about and having a positive male role model is important for young male that are pre-teens."