

JENNIFER JUNGWIRTH: In just 4 hours, you can change a child's life

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What can you do in four hours?

Fold the laundry? Shovel the driveway? Binge-watch "House" on Netflix?

In four hours I changed a life.

As a mentor in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Black Hills program, it takes only four hours to make a positive impact on a child. Big Brothers Big Sisters is a nationwide mentoring program that matches a mentor, the "Big," with a mentee, the "Little" for a one-

on-one relationship that will change their lives for the better, forever. Youth enrolled in the program range from 6 to 16 years old and oftentimes face adversity at home.

January is National Mentoring Month, and I encourage you to take an active role in your community and mentor a child in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

I've been a Big Sister for more than six years, serving in both Sioux Falls and Mitchell prior to mentoring in the Black Hills. The program was a draw for me when I was looking for a way to give back to the communities I lived in.

A young professional at the time, I knew contributing to my community financially was not an option for me. Instead, I gave my time and attention to a teenage girl, boosting her self-esteem, giving her hope for the future and having some fun along the way. The relationship immediately changed her life, as well as mine.

Now I am mentoring my fourth Little Sister, a 9-year-old girl, who in the short month we've been matched already has shown me you need to have a sense of humor about life and you should always follow your heart.

We need more dedicated and passionate mentors in our community. Currently, 55 Black Hills youth are waiting for a mentor. Of those 55 children, 42 are boys.

These numbers break my heart.

If you've been contemplating on how to become involved in your community, I suggest learning more about the Big Brothers Big Sisters organization. Volunteering and making a difference is important, no matter where you live. By choosing to become a mentor, you immediately give to our youth, as well as shape the future generations of our community.

Studies show youth enrolled in the program are nearly 50 percent less likely to do drugs and alcohol and 52 percent less likely to skip school. When children feel good about themselves it impacts their friends and family, their classmates and their community.

Take four hours of your month and begin shaping the life of a child. Spend time at a Rush hockey game. Help with a math assignment (or English, if you lack algebra skills, like me). Bake cookies. Or, simply sip hot chocolate and talk. Sometimes all a child needs is someone to confide in and someone to believe in them.

Put your laundry on hold. Watch Netflix later. Call Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Black Hills and start something today.