



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From New Jersey to National Leader: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties Named 2025 Agency of the Year

Atlanta, GA. September 22, 2026 — Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties (BBBSEHU), headquartered in Newark, NJ, was named the **2025 Agency of the Year** by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) at its national conference in Atlanta, GA this summer. This highest honor recognizes overall excellence in mentoring impact, volunteer engagement, youth outcomes, organizational leadership, innovation, growth, and sustainability.

Selected from 230+ agencies nationwide, BBBSEHU earned the distinction through its best-in-class results and demonstrated impact to advancing social mobility, strengthening youth mental health, improving educational attainment, and creating pathways to economic opportunity for young people.

U.S. Senator Cory Booker (NJ-D), a longtime champion of mentoring and youth development who helped launch the agency's innovative "Bigs in Blue" initiative as Newark Mayor over a decade ago, congratulated the agency on the national recognition.

"This agency has long shown what becomes possible when a community truly invests in its young people," **said Senator Cory Booker (NJ-D)**. "Through innovative efforts like their Global Leadership Program, expanded mental-health and wellness supports, and a steadfast commitment to creating real pathways to opportunity, they are breaking down the barriers that too often limit achievement and social mobility. Their work builds trust, forges connections across differences, and ensures that more young people have access to the relationships and resources they need to thrive. This 'Agency of the Year' honor is a testament to the extraordinary leadership, vision, and community impact that Carlos and his team continue to deliver—not only in New Jersey, but as a model for our nation."

For BBBSEHU, the recognition reflects years of sustained growth, innovation, and investment in the power of one-to-one mentoring.

"This award is a reflection of what happens when an entire community rallies around its young people," said **Carlos Lejnieks, President & CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties**. "Mentoring is a positive force multiplier for society. A single relationship can change the trajectory of a young person's life, creating ripple effects that strengthen families, build economic mobility, and transform communities for generations. We share this recognition with every volunteer, parent, donor, partner, and young person who has helped make this impact possible. Together, we are proving that empowering youth is one of the most powerful investments a community can make."

In 2025, BBBSEHU continued to distinguish itself as a national leader in mentoring, achieving year-over-year growth for young people served in one-to-one mentoring relationships. More

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than 90 percent of youth served come from low-income households, 96% graduate from high school, and nearly three-fourths pursue higher education.

The agency's commitment to relationship quality and evidence-based practices results in a remarkable 91 percent 12-month match retention rate and nearly triple the national benchmark for average match length, significantly strengthening the long-term impact of mentoring relationships. Research consistently demonstrates that longer-lasting one-to-one mentoring relationships produce stronger developmental outcomes for young people.

"This team of dedicated professionals exemplify the incredible work being done across our national network," said **Artis Stevens, President & CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America**. "Their commitment to quality mentoring relationships, measurable youth outcomes, community engagement, and innovative growth strategies has contributed to our national mentoring movement and created transformational opportunities for thousands of young people in New Jersey and its surrounding communities. We are proud to recognize this agency as our 2025 Agency of the Year and celebrate the extraordinary impact they continue to make each and every day."

Those outcomes are reflected in the success of BBBSEHU participants: more than double the national average for low-income youth enrolling in college or trade school. Through innovative programming, strategic partnerships, and a grassroots approach to volunteer recruitment and community engagement, the agency remains a credible messenger that continues to create pathways to educational achievement, economic mobility, and lifelong opportunity.

National research further validates the long-term impact of mentoring. A recent study conducted by leading researchers at Harvard using IRS data found that young people who participated in Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs earned 15 to 20 percent higher incomes as adults, experienced increased college enrollment, and significantly improved economic outcomes. Additional analysis by Boston Consulting Group estimates that every \$1 invested in mentoring generates approximately \$23 in societal benefit through improved educational outcomes, workforce participation, and reduced social costs.

"I've known Carlos for nearly 25 years and was one of the first to join him as he launched this Newark-based Big Brothers Big Sisters organization. Early on, I saw what he was building - a solid business plan, meaningful results and a purpose-driven culture for staff and board alike. There are fewer things more important than investing in young people and what Carlos and his team produce is an incredible return for that investment." - Rick Rieder, BBBSEHU Advisory Board Member, and Chief Investment Officer, Global Fixed Income, BlackRock

"Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties has earned this recognition. Agency of the Year reflects years of steady work: pairing young people with mentors who show

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up, building partnerships across Newark and the surrounding communities, and delivering results that hold up over time. We are proud to support their work and prouder still to see it recognized at the national level." - **Asahi Pompey, Global Head of Corporate Engagement, Goldman Sachs**

"As Chairman and founding board member, it's been a privilege to watch our agency evolve over decades into one of the nation's premier mentoring organizations. My own commitment to philanthropy began with my father, who first introduced our family to Big Brothers Big Sisters. Across generations, we have seen firsthand that supporting young people is one of the greatest returns on investment a community can make. And witnessing the unwavering care and commitment of the team has been deeply meaningful. This national Agency of the Year recognition is not only a celebration of what we have accomplished since our founding—it is a testament to the enduring impact of mentoring and the legacy we are creating for generations to come." - **Leslie Quick, III, BBBSEHU Board Chair, and Founder, Simon Quick Advisors**

The Agency of the Year recognition adds to a series of consecutive national honors earned by BBBSEHU since 2022, including Quality, Growth, Platinum, and Pinnacle Awards, underscoring the organization's continued leadership within the Big Brothers Big Sisters network.

For more information about Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties, including opportunities to volunteer, donate, or partner, visit www.bigsandkids.org.

Photos Attached

Photo 1: *Carlos Lejnieks, CEO and the team of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties (BBBSEHU) accepting the "Agency of the Year" award on stage at the BBBS of America Conference in Atlanta.*

Photo 2: *The Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties (BBBSEHU) pictured with the "Agency of the Year" award alongside colleagues.*

All photos courtesy of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties. Media use permitted.

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About Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson, & Union Counties, NJ

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson, & Union Counties, NJ (BBBSEHU) creates and supports one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth and is a credible social justice organization embedded in our community. Founded in 2008, the local affiliate of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) has served over 5,300 youth and their



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families, is a national thought leader in youth development, and has received national recognition for its success and positive impact through 4 consecutive awards since 2022, and the 2025 BBBS of America “Agency of the Year” award—the highest honor recognizing overall operational excellence in mentoring impact, youth outcomes, innovation, growth, and sustainability. Agency youth achieve an average four-year high school graduation rate of 95%, 20 percentage points higher than the communities it serves, and a 75% college enrollment rate, more than double the national average for low-income youth (31%, Pew Research, 2019), closing the achievement gaps in our community. BBBSEHU is a leader within the BBBSA network with a 91% annual 12-month retention rate for mentoring relationships. Decades of research show that strong, sustained mentoring relationships drive improvements in youth mental health, social connections, academic achievement, workforce readiness, positive behavioral outcomes, and social mobility.

Learn more at <http://www.BigsandKids.org> or follow the local agency on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), or [X](#).

About Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

Founded in 1904, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is the largest and most experienced youth mentoring organization in the United States. The mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth. Big Brothers Big Sisters’ evidence-based approach is designed to create positive youth outcomes, including educational success, avoidance of risky behaviors, higher aspirations, greater confidence, and improved relationships. Big Brothers Big Sisters local agencies serve more than 5,000 communities across all 50 states. For more information, visit: bbbs.org.

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