



Big Brothers Big Sisters relies on financial support from the United Way of York County's Community Fund, which makes relationships like Jim and Kohen's possible.



Retired city employee makes impact as a Big Brother by OUR YORK MEDIA

An 8-year-old York boy needed a big brother; a retired public works director had a promise to fulfill. This is the story about how Kohen Wray and Jim Gross became friends.

At age 2, Kohen lost his father.

"I think his mom felt it was important to have a male role model in his life," Jim says.

Earlier this year, she enrolled him in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of York and Adams Counties program. That's when he met Jim.

Making a difference

A few years back, Jim promised a friend he would become a Big Brother as soon as he retired. That friend was Mike Smith, who was the executive director of the organization at the time.

"So, I retired last year, but by then Mike had left Big Brothers Big Sisters," Jim says. "But, I still wanted to fulfill my promise."

A fear of the time commitment used to keep Jim from being a mentor while he was working.

"When you're working for the city, you're trying to help 40,000-some people," he says. "Here, you're only trying to help one person, and you can see the impact, so it's pretty nice."

It's a perfect match made possible by the United Way of York County's Community Fund – the financial support that Big Brothers Big Sisters relies on to make a difference. The duo loves to talk football, play mini-golf, and have even gone fishing together. They try to hang out three or four times a month when both are around.



Jim and Kohen hung out recently at York's James E. (Jim) Gross Park, which was renamed from Lincoln Park in 2017 in honor of Jim's work in the community.

Kohen says he enjoys spending time with Jim and thinks the two of them will still be friends when Kohen's older.



Big Brothers Big Sisters
of York & Adams Counties



United Way of York County

"Sometimes you're away," Jim says to Kohen.

"Sometimes you're away," Kohen jokes back.

They're making plans to visit the Shoe House and take a trip to go roller skating together, something Jim can't help but laugh about.

Seeing the bigger picture

Big Brothers Big Sisters of York and Adams Counties is a one-to-one mentoring program that matches children with responsible, caring adults in the community. Executive Director Linda Gorter says children enter the program between the ages 6 and 13 and stay until they turn 18 and/or graduate from high school.

The program accepts children who are "facing adversity" and need someone who can provide a positive influence, Linda says. About 79 percent of the 294 children in the program come from low to moderate income homes. Only 11 percent of the kids live in two-parent homes.

"The United Way of York County makes Big Brothers Big Sisters' work possible by providing financial support that allows our professional staff to recruit, screen, train and coach hundreds of adults and youth participants every year," she says.

It's a partnership that gives volunteers, like Jim, the chance to show kids in the program a different lifestyle. In return, they often develop a greater sense of gratitude for their own lives and an appreciation for how open children can be.

"Our volunteers are like you and me," Linda says. "They're not psychologists. They don't have a master's in social work. They're just people who want to make a difference in the community."

Lasting friendship

Jim and Kohen recently met in a city park to toss around a football. Along the way, Jim encouraged him about his passes.

He's also been lending that encouraging touch when it comes to school. Kohen's a smart kid, Jim says, but he has a hard time sitting still in class. He's been working on getting him excited for school and teaching him more about manners.

As the relationship progresses and Kohen gets older, Jim's expecting it to get more difficult. He has to balance the fact that he's Kohen's big brother — not a parent or a disciplinarian. He hopes Kohen's passion for sports such as football and wrestling help him as he ages.

"I'm a big believer in sports keeping kids out of trouble," Jim says.

This year, though, the pair just has to focus on getting Kohen through third grade and a successful football season.

Kohen says he enjoys spending time with Jim and thinks the two of them will still be friends when Kohen's older.

Jim agrees.

"I think we both hope this will be lasting."



"Our volunteers are like you and me. They're not psychologists. They don't have a master's in social work. They're just people who want to make a difference in the community."