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## FARM FAMILIES CAN BE STRONG ROLE MODELS

I have always felt growing up on a small farm in Nemaha County helped to foster a strong work ethic. But too much work all the time without taking time for the important things in life can sometimes present problems for rural families. There is a new program in Saline County that fosters those little moments in life that sometimes can make big differences. It's called "Big Brothers Big Sisters" and Saline County and rural families can really help fill a need.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a volunteer mentoring program designed to help children build upon their assets and to help them to make healthy choices. I do present a personal bias because my niece, Dana Stiers (a really cool person), is helping to get the ball rolling in Saline County and she is excited about the opportunities in our area to help kids. This program is called "Heartland Big Brothers Big Sisters." The community based program works with youth 7 to 18 years of age. A "Big" must be at least 16 years old and 5 years older than the "Little" brother or sister. Building self esteem and life skills are necessary for kids with special needs.

Dana is looking for more volunteers in the surrounding towns in the county who are 16 years and older. Volunteers spend 2 - 4 hours a week with a Little Brother or Sister. Matched couples do all kinds of activities ranging from sports to crafts, schoolwork to hanging out on a farm. This experience can make a real impact on a child's self worth.

Adults often think back to mentors who made them smile, taught them to cook and how to fix things or maybe that person that made days more special. The program really needs positive, caring teenagers and/or adults who can make a lasting commitment to a child. Youth who volunteer as a "Big" learn to by keeping promises and adding to their community needs.

Mentoring has a proven impact on the youth served, including a 46 percent less likelihood of using illegal drugs, 27 percent less likely to begin using alcohol, and 52 percent less likely to skip school. Youth become more confident in schoolwork and can respond by getting along better with their families.

The program is going strong in Crete and Dana would like to offer the rest of the county the opportunity to participate. If you would like to sign up your child, learn more about the Big Brothers Big Sisters program or be a volunteer yourself, please call their office at 402-464-2227 and ask for Dana Stiers. Dana's job is to make the best match-ups possible. Heartland Big Brothers Big Sisters program information is available on the web at [www.hbbbs.org](http://www.hbbbs.org). Flyers are also available at the Saline County Extension Office.

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County  
306 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Wilber, NE 68465

Phone (402) 821-2151 • Fax (402) 821-3398 • e-mail: [randy.pryor@unl.edu](mailto:randy.pryor@unl.edu)