

Big Brothers

Program has provided benefits for both man and boy

By KATE GILDERDALE
Correspondent

Two years ago, Diane Strickland approached Big Brothers of York Region on behalf of her 12-year-old son, Brandon.

"At that time I was sharing a house with another single mom and she had three daughters, so Brandon was the only male in a household with five females." Like many parents in similar situations, Strickland felt it was important for her son to have a regular, positive male role model in his life.

After filling out application forms, they were advised that there was a long waiting list but, as luck would have it, they were matched with Tom Ross, also a Stouffville resident, within a few weeks of being accepted into the program.

"We were told that he was married and had two daughters of his own, but that he would like to spend time with a boy. He seemed like a great guy, really fun loving," Strickland recalled. "My son is a great fisherman and this guy loved fishing, so we decided to get them together to see how they would hit it off." At the time, Ross's wife, Bonnie, was pregnant with the couple's third child.

"(Big Brothers) asked Tom what would happen if his wife had a baby boy and he said that as far as he was concerned, this was a commitment, and he always honored his commitments."

The organization also interviewed Bonnie, who was very supportive of her husband's desire to get involved with a Little Brother. Happily, the two 'brothers' hit it off and became great fishing buddies, as well as getting involved in other activities.

And although Ross was incredibly

busy with work and his own family "he would still come and see Brandon," said Strickland, adding that Ross now has a son of his own, Tyler. She describes the developing relationship between the two 'brothers' as being "something like a marriage. It takes a lot of getting used to each

other and give and take on both sides." But there's no doubt in her mind that the

program is extremely worthwhile.
(Please see page 20)

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