



**MENTORING YOUTH.
CHANGING FUTURES.**

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Local Big of the Year Award Winners Announced

In recognition of National Mentoring Month, Big Brothers Big Sisters names an Orange County man and woman as honorees in its annual competition.

SANTA ANA, Calif. – Jan. 21, 2016 – Big Brothers Big Sisters of [Orange County](#) and the [Inland Empire](#) today announces its Big of the Year award winners, Michael Keyser and Laura Stahlberg. The winners are selected by the agency for the positive impact they've made on the lives of the children they mentor. An annual competition, the Orange County Bigs of the Year will advance to vie for the state title in early spring, along with other mentors from agencies across California.

Michael Keyser, a Costa Mesa resident, is recognized as Big Brother of the Year for his commitment to guiding Little Brother Jorge down a better path. Jorge struggled with controlling his emotions, and isolation led him to depression and loss of hope for the future. Keyser helped secure necessary resources for Jorge to get counseling and served as a consistent male presence he could trust.

"Jorge showed patience as I learned to be a mentor, and we built trust. Over time, he began to let me into his world," Keyser says. "My role became clearer: As a mentor, I'm here to support his individual growth and to challenge him to follow a life path based on his own definition of success."

Laura Stahlberg, of Laguna Niguel, is honored as Big Sister of the Year for six years of dedication to mentoring Little Sister America. When America's mother, a non-English speaker, had trouble navigating through the educational system, Stahlberg stepped in to communicate with her teachers and ensured America was on the right track. With Stahlberg's help, America is successfully enrolled in an ROP class in the medical field, has an internship and a part-time job, and volunteers with Big Brothers Big Sisters in the High School Bigs program.

"Over the past six years, America and I have engaged in conversation about everything from drugs and bullying to the importance of a quinceañera in her culture," says Stahlberg, who helped arrange a small quinceañera celebration when she learned America's mother could not afford one. "To be chosen as the agency's Big Sister of the Year is an accolade I share with America; she is the inspiration for all that we've experienced and worked toward together. The impact we have had on each other's lives has been profound, and we both know that we'll always be connected no matter where our lives take us."

Other nominees at the regional level included:

- Angelica Ayon, *Huntington Beach*
- Rocky Berlanga, *Anaheim*
- Brian Brady, *Mission Viejo*
- Joshua Cornejo, *Anaheim*
- Monica de la Cruz, *Fullerton*
- Kenneth Francis, *Long Beach*

- Art Grichine, *Mission Viejo*
- Joe Kaslowski, *Tustin*
- Joan Howard, *Irvine*
- Jacqueline Mejia, *Fullerton*
- Lorri St. Clair, *Costa Mesa*
- Natak Davis, *Inland Empire*
- Louis Kovacs, *Inland Empire*

One of the national organization's leading agencies in the country, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire provided more than 3,000 children facing adversity with professionally supported, one-to-one mentoring relationships in 2015. Ninety-eight percent of children in the program graduated high school on time, 90 percent enrolled in college, and 100 percent said their mentors were their biggest influence on pursuing a higher education. For more information, visit ocbigs.org.

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About Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire

Big Brothers Big Sisters believes that with the support of a caring mentor, every child has the ability to achieve his or her full potential. It is the nation's largest donor- and volunteer-supported mentoring organization, serving a quarter-million children annually. Based in Santa Ana, Calif., the Orange County agency was incorporated in 1958 and works as a local extension of the national effort to make professionally supported, one-to-one matches between mentors ("Bigs") and children ("Littles") facing adversity. Together with the Inland Empire agency, which opened its doors in 2013, the local organization served more than 3,000 children in 2015 through programs that improve the odds of youth performing better in school and avoiding violence and illegal activities. For more information, visit ocbigs.org.