

## BETHECHANGE



## Making a Big impact

*Madison students' one-on-one relationships help area children reach their full potential* BY ROB TUCKER

Madison students are changing the lives of hundreds of children in the local community through volunteer service with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Harrisonburg-Rockingham County.

In a prime example of the university's commitment to community engagement, 477 JMU students helped children facing adversity by serving as caring role models in one-to-one mentoring relationships. That represents 67 percent of the individual mentors provided to 712 local children through Big Brothers Big Sisters in 2011, making it the largest such program in Virginia.

"We owe this largely to our ongoing partnership with JMU and the involvement of its students," says Cara Hopson of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

The organization matches volunteers (Bigs) with children (Littles), who range from 5 to 18 years old.

Graydon Uyeda ('14), a junior from Lynchburg, Va., who aspires to become a secondary school teacher, has been matched with his Little Brother Henry since February. Uyeda volunteered at a day care while in high school and has enjoyed working with children since. He says that engagement is not only rewarding, but it informs his academic experience.

Uyeda tells the story of going out to eat and being surprised when 11-year-old Henry began talking about a problem he was

having in school. "I listened," Uyeda says, "and then I asked, 'Why are you telling me this?' Henry answered 'Because I trust you.' Then he asked for my advice on what to do. It's a great feeling when you know you have had a positive influence, and you feel very proud when you see your little brother grow and learn."

Uyeda stresses the importance of education and putting forth effort in school and thinks that his Little is paying attention because "he sees me as a friend, not as an authority figure."

Healthy doses of fun balance out the serious talks, says Uyeda, who likes making homemade ice cream with Henry and hanging out at Barnes & Noble to indulge their shared passion for books and reading.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Harrisonburg-Rockingham County was highlighted at JMU's Community Day Celebration prior to the first home football game. Before kickoff, approximately 50 staff members, supporters, JMU volunteers, Bigs and Littles took the field for the presentation of a plaque to President Jonathan R. Alger in appreciation for the ongoing partnership between the two organizations. ■

**JMU students are engaging with 477 area youth in the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Big Brothers Big Sisters program.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE MIRIELLO ('09M)