

MEDIA RELEASE
For Immediate Release

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**THE BIG START PROGRAM HELPS OVER 50 LOCAL YOUTH
START THE SCHOOL YEAR OFF RIGHT**

On August 26th and 27th, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara (BBBSN) hosted their first annual BIG Start shopping event at the Pen Centre. With funds from Mayor Siscoe's Score Charity Golf Tournament and the 2023 Regional Chair's Charity Golf Tournament, BBBSN was able to support 50 children and youth involved in their programs with a back-to-school shopping spree. The fun-filled 2-day shopping event allowed mentors and staff to take their mentees and waitlisted youth shopping with a \$200 Pen Centre Gift Card, an Industria Pizzeria meal voucher, and then given a backpack full of school supplies. In total, 250 backpacks were donated and filled with essential school supplies that will be further distributed to children, youth, and families involved in BBBSN programs.

"We would like to thank the community, our volunteers, our sponsors Meridian Credit Union, The Pen Centre, Switzer-Carty, and everyone else involved in making The BIG Start a success," says Erin Graybiel, Executive Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara. "Together we helped over 50 children and youth start school off right with a back-to-school shopping spree, and over 200 more feel prepared with brand new backpacks and essential school supplies."

"I had 30 things on my shopping list and I got them all," says Little Sister Olivia.

"Thank you for this day!" says Mentor Wendy. "I'm so excited and beyond grateful. Back to school can be so expensive and your generosity makes a BIG difference."

BBBSN hopes to support even more children and youth next year with The BIG Start program and make the shopping event an annual event.

About Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara

For 85 years, Big Brothers Big Sisters has been making a meaningful difference in the lives of youth ages 6 to 18 through our mentoring programs in Niagara. For both Big and Little, the mentoring experience becomes a life-changing relationship built on friendship, empowerment, and trust. Support from a caring adult mentor enables youth to experience essential developmental relationships, which help them to develop into healthy young people better able to deal with and overcome life's adversities. Youth with mentors are more likely to graduate from high school, go to university, secure full time employment and have on average higher incomes. For more information visit www.bbbsniagara.ca.

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