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(From left) Big Brothers  
Big Sisters Hawai'i youth  
program participant Danica  
Lee, board member Neill  
Char, chief operating officer  
Tyler Kurashige, former "big  
sister" Pam Kimura and  
youth program participant  
Vincent Tinajero

**MAKING A  
'BIG'  
IMPACT**

For six glorious decades, Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i has been a sizable supporter of island youth through its highly effective mentorship program.

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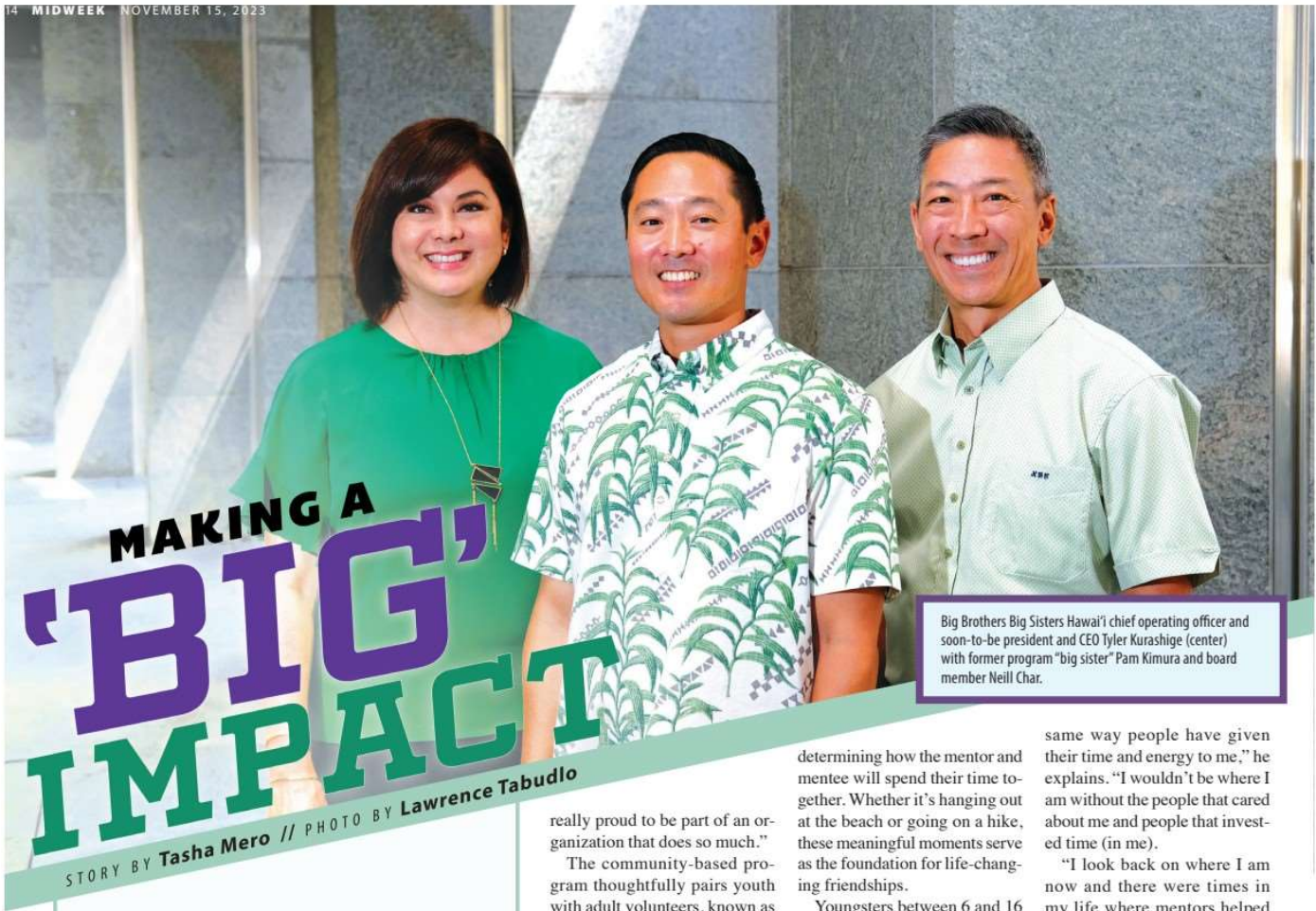
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Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i chief operating officer and soon-to-be president and CEO Tyler Kurashige (center) with former program "big sister" Pam Kimura and board member Neill Char.

# MAKING A 'BIG' IMPACT

STORY BY Tasha Mero // PHOTO BY Lawrence Tabudlo

**For six glorious decades, Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i has been a sizable supporter of island youth through its highly effective mentorship program.**

If family is one thing you can always count on, so is Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i. Since 1963, the nonprofit has proven that you don't have to be related to someone to form a tight and meaningful familial bond.

As a mentoring agency for

many island youth, BBBS Hawai'i understands the importance of providing them with positive role models.

"Our community, our volunteers, our team — they're the people who are really driving all of this," says chief operating officer Tyler Kurashige. "I feel

really proud to be part of an organization that does so much."

The community-based program thoughtfully pairs youth with adult volunteers, known as "big brothers" and "big sisters," to create one-to-one mentorships based on gender, common interests and personalities. Kurashige estimates the nonprofit helps between 200 and 300 youngsters each year.

"We tend to have it youth-led as much as possible," he explains. "Every child that we work with has their own individual plan that's created with the support of the parent/guardian."

With the assistance of a match support specialist, both the mentor and youth participant — along with the child's parents — work in tandem to ensure that the youth's emotional and social needs are met while also

determining how the mentor and mentee will spend their time together. Whether it's hanging out at the beach or going on a hike, these meaningful moments serve as the foundation for life-changing friendships.

Youngsters between 6 and 16 are eligible for the program. Mentors spend quality time with their respective "little brother" or "little sister" at least twice a month. While enrollment is capped at age 16, the organization still supports participants throughout their later teenage years.

"It's a privilege to be able to do this work," says Kurashige. "It's really a dream job for me."

Kurashige, who has held various positions at BBBS Hawai'i, reveals his passion for this line of work actually began after serving as an intern nearly 20 years ago.

"I started off wanting to be a part of this organization to give back to the community in the

same way people have given their time and energy to me," he explains. "I wouldn't be where I am without the people that cared about me and people that invested time (in me)."

"I look back on where I am now and there were times in my life where mentors helped me make the right decisions," Kurashige continues. "They've also helped to support me when I haven't made good decisions. Sometimes it's just the simple conversations and know that somebody is there."

Come Jan. 1, Kurashige will have new titles at BBBS Hawai'i as president and CEO of the nonprofit. These are roles he's excited to take on and he rates his excitement level "at 11" on a scale of 1-10.

"There's a history and track record of this organization doing great work, so I'm excited because I get a chance to take the baton and continue to do

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## Six Decades Of Big Sibling Mentorship

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great work," he shares.

In addition to its community-based program, Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i also offers a school-based mentoring program in which elementary school students meet one-on-one with high-school-age mentors in a supervised setting after school.

"This program typically runs the course of a school year," Kurashige says. "A lot of the times we get children that need a little boost of confidence. Maybe they're struggling with social support within the school, so counselors will hand select youth to participate in the program."

**B**BBBS Hawai'i celebrated its 60th anniversary last month with a gala at 'Alohilani Resort Waikiki Beach. The event honored a number of people, including Dennis Brown, the organization's current president and CEO. Brown will be retiring at the end of the year after a quarter of a century of service.

Aside from being the longest-serving CEO, Brown will always hold a special connection to the organization — he was the first Hawai'i youth to have benefited from the agency's services.

According to BBBS Hawai'i's website, more than 90% of children and teens enrolled in its mentoring programs experience noticeable growth socially, emotionally and academically within the first year. While the organization's focus is on youth support, Kurashige has seen how mentors positively benefit from the program, too. A perfect example of this is "big sister" Pam Kimura and her relationship with "little sister" Jade Barzoni.

"They're what we consider a lifetime match because they're still connected," says Kurashige of the two who were first matched in 1991.

Kimura and Barzoni were honored at the anniversary gala as Pilikana (special bond) Champions

and also received the organization's Lifetime Match Award. The duo's legacy with BBBS Hawai'i continues through their own children as Kimura's daughter, Sophia, and Barzoni's daughter, Nyla, have likewise formed an organic friendship/mentorship with each other. Sophia is even working on becoming an official mentor with BBBS Hawai'i and is currently waiting to be matched with a youth participant.

Board member Neill Char was honored as a Pilikana Hero for his contributions to the organization, including providing students with scholarships for higher education. With the help of friends, Char established Educated In Hawai'i, Born and Raised as Hawaiian, or E.I.H. B.R.A.H. In the past 10 years, the fund has provided \$95,000 to more than 30 students.

"We've been able to help a handful of them go to college for four years," explains Kurashige. "Neill has been so supportive and has been so instrumental to our success that we're seeing right now, and just our ability to reach and support children in a different way."

Kurashige encourages individuals to consider becoming a mentor in the organization's community and school-based programs. He notes that BBBS Hawai'i has an amazing slew of volunteer mentors, but that there's always a need for more assistance. Mentors are asked to commit at least one year to the program, although Kurashige has found that a lot of them decide to stay on for a longer period of time.

"I think sometimes the word 'mentoring' sounds intimidating," he says. "But when they start doing it, they realize that it's a lot of fun and they get back as much as they give."

*For more information or to learn how to get involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i, visit [bbshawaii.org](http://bbshawaii.org).*



BBBS Hawai'i COO Tyler Kurashige (left) and current president and CEO Dennis Brown. PHOTOS COURTESY BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS HAWAII'



Neill and Liz Char at BBBS Hawai'i's anniversary gala last month. Neill, who serves as a board member, was honored as a Pilikana Hero.



"Big sister" Pam Kimura (third from left) and "little sister" Jade Barzoni (second from left) were first matched together in 1991. Despite how much time has passed, the two still remain close. Also pictured are Jade's daughter, Nylah Barzoni (left), and Pam's daughter, Sophia Placourakis (right).