

MATCH PROFILE: ALAN AND RJ

Date: November 1, 2020

When Little Brother RJ and his family first became involved with BBBSL, we were delighted at the opportunity to serve their family and his siblings. Believing in her son's immense potential, RJ's mom was intentional about finding a high-quality mentoring opportunity for RJ. She hoped that a mentor could help RJ share his feelings, provide him with a consistent and dependable male presence, and help him improve his grades.

Prospective Big Brother Alan, a recent doctoral graduate from Indiana University and new resident of Charleston, was eager to set roots and get involved in his new community. Alan had always thought about getting involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters as a volunteer mentor but knew he wanted to wait until his life could accommodate the commitment. As someone who had positive mentors in his own life, he understood the power of helping others and was ready to get started.

RJ began his journey with BBBSL back in 2017 with a previous Big Brother who unfortunately moved away after a year. Mom, RJ, and the BBBSL team were all in agreement that RJ should have another opportunity to gain a Big Brother. When BBBSL was able to match RJ with Alan in February 2020, the team was ecstatic and could not wait to follow along with their adventures! Alan and RJ shared a mutual love of all things sports and had similar personality traits. We could tell that they would make a good pair and would hardly have a quiet moment together.

After their first few outings, Alan and RJ were becoming fast friends. RJ was shy in the beginning but had started to come out of his shell. They had already seen Jumanji and started working on spelling words when the quarantine arrived in March 2020. Out of an abundance of caution, BBBSL matches went virtual overnight. With the encouragement of BBBSL staff, Alan made it a priority to talk to RJ weekly over the phone, and once BBBSL policy made it possible for them to see each other safely in person again, their outings resumed in a socially distanced manner.

When asked about what he likes most about his time with Alan, RJ shared, "Alan keeps me safe when we are together, and whenever I need to talk to someone, he is there for me." Ms. Shuler agreed and shared, "RJ has come out of his shell and is more comfortable speaking up to people about things that upset him."

Celebrating RJ's strengths, Alan is quick to laud RJ a boy that is "very smart and intuitive, and has a lot of empathy, and a big heart." This big heart is evident in RJ's desire to future become a police officer so that he can "help people" one day. When reflecting on the last few months as RJ's Big Brother, Alan explained, "I've enjoyed seeing RJ excel at transitioning to a new way of life during this pandemic. He never missed a beat when it came to school switching between virtual and in-person instruction and this serves as a powerful reminder to myself to be more resilient in the face of adversity."

As we see Alan and RJ's relationship grow over time, our staff could not be prouder of how creative and flexible their journey together has been. Their resilience and commitment to their friendship been inspiring to witness and support.

