Big Brother

Students are volunteer ‘brothers and sisters’

By Marcie Greedel

Because being a big brother and sister need not be too time consuming, approximately 100 OSU students were a part of the Big Brother-Big Sister program in 1980.

According to Harry Steward, program director, potential Big Brothers and Sisters are interviewed, and then put through screen tests to determine personality traits which help to match the children with their adult companions.

The Big Brother-Big Sister chapter in Columbus is the fourth largest in the nation. The program has had nearly 1,000 Big Brothers and Sisters “in some stage of affiliation with the association,” Steward said.

Because these children are suffering from emotional neglect, Steward stressed those who come to the center are “in need of adult guidance and companionship.”

For example, boys without a father need interaction with a male adult and by giving him a Big Brother, he receives the kind of direction he might have had from a father.

Steward gave an example of a 7-year-old boy who was without a father since the age of 2. He entered the program not able to bat or catch a ball, which made him an outcast with his peers. Within time, the Big Brother taught him how to do both and the boy’s self-esteem rose and he was no longer an outcast.

Steward explained that as each goal is achieved, “we revise the goal and set new ones. We are interested in developmental guidance from that point on.”

Steward said each Big Brother and Sister is instructed to work on the developmental needs of the child, which means to concentrate on the particular child’s needs.

Although the Big Sister program is not as large as the Big Brothers, girls are also in need of this adult companionship. Steward said sometime mothers find it difficult to give a girl all the developmental experiences and activities she’s entitled to, because of illness or full-time employment, and refer them to the program.

Each Big Brother and Sister is required to meet with the child twice a month engaging in a two to four hour activity, perhaps going to a concert at Mershon Auditorium or a performance at the Ohio Theater.

The Big Brother-Big Sister program is a non-profit organization. Sixty percent of the operating funds are from United Way, 25 percent from the federal government and the rest from private donations.