

# BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY SUCCESS STORY



## “Deja and Shmeika”

Little Sister Deja was accustomed to shouldering the responsibility of being a big sister within her family, providing support and guidance to her younger sibling. She longed to experience the joy of being a little sister and having someone she could look up to and rely on. “I wanted to join the program because I wanted the weight lifted off my shoulders and to feel what it feels like to be the younger sibling,” said Deja.

Enter Big Sister Shmeika, a US Navy veteran and accomplished professional at Ingevity. Shmeika’s enrollment in Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Lowcountry stemmed from her profound desire to become a mentor and create a meaningful difference in the life of a young person.

When Deja and Shmeika were matched through the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, they embarked on a journey of growth, friendship, and self-discovery. Their first encounter took place over Zoom due to the limitations of the pandemic, but despite the virtual barrier, a connection was formed. Soon, they were able to embark on fun outings, engaging in activities like roller skating, bowling, and enjoying meals together as they got to know one another.

As their relationship progressed, Deja’s mother, Alyshia, began to notice a transformation in her daughter. What was once a shy and withdrawn girl started to blossom into a confident young woman. Shmeika’s mentorship allowed Deja to find her voice, express her opinions, and embrace her leadership qualities. Through dancing, laughing, and heartfelt conversations, their bond grew deeper with each passing day.

As Deja steps into adolescence and prepares to begin high school next year, she has the full support of her family and her Big Sister Shmeika. Shmeika works with Deja’s mother Alyshia to be a team of support for Deja. They communicate well with one another, and Alyshia is a proactive member of Shmeika and Deja’s match.

Since being matched with Shmeika, Deja has discovered her leadership skills, embraced her unique qualities, and has learned to take pride in her academic pursuits. She has also developed a profound sense of self-awareness, understanding the importance of accountability and responsibility for her actions. Deja shared, “I feel that I have grown as a person since I met Shmeika. I have matured a lot throughout the last two years.”



"Deja has become much better at articulating her feelings," said Shmeika. "She is very transparent and I admire the maturity and growth she has shown over the last two years. I truly feel like her big sister, just watching her grow up. It's a beautiful thing."

Deja and Shmeika's relationship has also positively impacted Shmeika's life by allowing her to evolve as a woman, a leader, and an attentive listener. As a mentor, she has learned the value of patience and the power of silence, realizing that being present and actively listening can be just as impactful as providing advice or planning elaborate outings.

Shmeika's hope for Deja's future is that she continues to be aware of her leadership potential, becoming a mentor herself one day. "I hope that Deja continues to figure out who she is and what her path is. I am excited to be right there alongside her to watch her journey," said Shmeika.

As they continue this journey together, Deja and Shmeika inspire others with their growing bond, reminding us all of the transformative power of human connection.