



Mentoring Matters: Carnival Center of Excellence Opens for Kids and Mentors

*By Vanessa Borge
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MIAMI – Mentoring kids in South Florida got a big boost on Monday with the official opening of the Carnival Center for Excellence, the new headquarters for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami.

The Carnival Center for Excellence, located at 550 Le Jeune Road, not only serves as headquarters for the Big Brothers and Sisters of Miami organization, the facilities are also a place for mentoring and educational activities for the organization’s participants, often referred to as “Littles.”

One of those “littles” is Kassidy Castellanos who describes her big sister as a “cheerleader,” and someone who “supports you, she’s a positive person. She’s a ray of sunshine.”

Tami Blanco is Kassidy’s Big Sister Mentor as part of the Big Brother Big Sister organization that pairs at risk youth with adult volunteer mentors.

“I never had any sisters or brothers so I’m gaining a sister as well,” said Tami.

Now, after Monday’s ribbon cutting at the Carnival Center for Excellence,” Kassidy and Tami have a new building they’ll be able to meet in and make sure Kassidy stays on the right track to success.

“We do a lot of school work. I have to google sometimes because I don’t remember high school math! But we also talk about being more social and things you do outside of school things you should get involved in,” said Tami.

The Carnival Center for Excellence was built with help from a \$5 million donation from Carnival Foundation, the corporation’s philanthropic arm. The donation marked the largest gift ever received by the organization’s Miami chapter.

“The most important thing in our community is the youth. It’s the future. And any impact that we can have to help young lives to become happy fulfilled adult lives is worth it for all of us,” said Arnold Donald, CEO Carnival Corp.

The building has a “You Media” creative area for music, video and digital learning. There’s also a state of the art computer lab and space for homework and tutoring.

But the students aren’t just staying mentally active here, the Miami HEAT Charitable Fund donated a \$350,000 fitness room as well to make sure the students stay moving.

The facility will help the non-profit continue to have a profound and positive impact on the lives of young people in South Florida for decades to come.

Big Brothers Big Sisters works with more than 2,100 pairs of mentors and youths every year and this facility allows that number to continue to grow.