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Group expands after-school program thanks to grant

Regan Lauscher may not have won her luge competition at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics, but to 20 Lloydminster kids, her appearance at Big Brothers Big Sisters was as good as gold.

Ian Ross
Sunday September 26, 2004

Lloydminster Meridian Booster — Regan Lauscher may not have won her luge competition at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics, but to 20 Lloydminster kids, her appearance at Big Brothers Big Sisters was as good as gold. Lauscher, 24, is an Olympian and five-time Canadian luge champion. She was at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lloydminster this past Thursday to announce a \$40,000 grant to the organization from the RBC Financial Group.

She shared her story with the kids and encouraged them to reach their highest potential. "Big Brothers and Big Sisters is a very important place for kids to be able to grow," said Lauscher. "The programs provide them with role models and mentors, as well as keeping them busy and active."

Lauscher told the kids that determination and not getting discouraged is the key to achieving goals.

"I've learned a lot through sports and one of the lessons I've learned is that you're going to fail and sometimes it's good to," said Lauscher. "It gives you a definite appreciation for when you succeed."

The money from RBC will be used to fund the after-school program for a year. The grant to Big Brothers is one of 15 programs nation-wide that received grants for the first time. There were 57 grants given out this year.

Barb Willard, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lloydminster, said the grant will have a major impact on the organization's ability to offer better programming.

"We struggle for funding because only six per cent of it comes from the government," she said. "The rest of it comes from local grants, the City of Lloydminster and a lot of independent fundraisers. It is a lot of onus on us to find our funding."

Big Brothers Big Sisters is able to offer more services to more kids in the community because of their new facility on 49th Avenue near 44th Street. The spacious building gives volunteers and employees lots of space to work, and the kids lots of space to play.

"Something like this has helped us out immensely because last year we had an after-school program one day per week. With this funding, we're able to offer it five days per week," said Willard.

Big Brothers Big Sisters' operating budget for a year is under \$500,000.

To be chosen for an RBC grant, after-school programs must offer structured, supervised activities in an environment that provides what RBC calls the 'three S's.' Safety, social skills and self-esteem are the core values RBC wants to see, and advisory panel of experts helped RBC choose which programs get the grants in each province.

"An amount like this is substantial," said Brenda Robinson, administrative assistant and volunteer co-ordinator at Big Brothers. "It is an application process and RBC is part of the funding process for a lot of other organizations, so I think (their support of community organizations) is common-known."

The money goes specifically to the after-school program and will pay for everything from supplies, staff members, and any other costs that may arise. As well, more money means being able to include more kids and expand the program's availability.

"The number of kids varies each day, but in the new facility we have room for 30 to 40 kids every day," said Willard. "It's open to the kids who are in our program, so if a kid qualifies to be a 'little' — that's what the children in our program are known as — its open to them and we let their parents know what is going on and let them decide."

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