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OPINION

Big Brothers still gives hope

BY HECTOR BATISTA

Ernest K. Coulter was a clerk in the NYC courts more than a century ago when he decided to speak to a group of community and business leaders at a men's club about a very modest dream. He spoke to them about a boy who was expected to be convicted and sent to a reformatory for 18 months.

"There is only one possible way to save that youngster," Coulter told the group 110 years ago this week. "And that is to have some earnest, true man volunteer to be his big brother . . . to look after him . . . help him do right . . . I call for a volunteer."

He got 40. And with that, the seed for Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City was planted.

Since then, the organization has grown to more than 3,200 mentors guiding some 3,600 young people across the five boroughs each year.

All from one modest dream. Imagine what we all can do if we dream big.

Too many New Yorkers feel they are not qualified to mentor. They are wrong. All the children want is time and attention.

This week, we celebrate Coulter's vision by renewing our commitment to fulfilling his dream.

In NYC, more than 150,000 young people live below the poverty line in single-parent households. Few of them truly believe success is within reach.

Childhood and adolescence are trying enough under ideal circumstances, but the added challenges create obstacles that many youngsters find difficult to overcome. That is where the value of mentoring lies: in showing children what is possible and helping them believe in themselves.

Yet countless young people each year continue to struggle in school, at home and with their peers simply because there are too few men and women volunteering. It's not that New Yorkers don't care, but too many of them feel they are not qualified to mentor. We often hear from caring adults who want to help, but think they have nothing to offer young people. We assure those potential volunteers that they are wrong. All the children want is time and attention.

As New Yorkers, we have a responsibility to the next generation. People of all races and creeds. Our educators and our business leaders. Our city, state and federal governments. Men and women. We all have roles to play and only by working together can we succeed.

Today, I echo Coulter's words and I call for a volunteer.



Hector Batista is executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City.