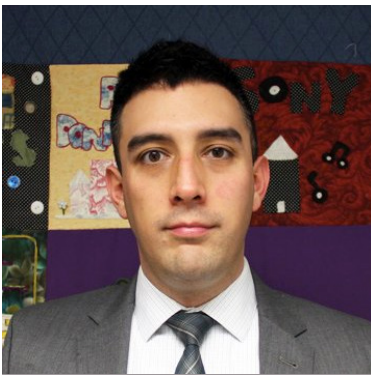


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NYC's Low Volunteer Rate Makes Mentoring In This City a Huge Problem

This post was written as part of the #Mentor series, which is tied to LinkedIn's student editorial calendar. Follow the stories or write your own.



Written by Diego Romero
Director of Outreach,
Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC

So reading these amazing posts from my colleagues over the past month has me thinking about a problem I have. And the problem begins like this: little boys are bad. There's something about middle and high school-aged boys that makes them curious, daring and a little rebellious. The guys reading this know what I'm talking about. For whatever reason, we just like to get in trouble. Because of this, here at Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC, 3 out of every 4 calls we receive referring children to our program are for boys. Good kids who usually just want someone to talk trash with about sports. Or ask questions about dating. And want to know more about going to college.

But these little boys aren't actually my problem. The real issue is that NYC suffers from one of the lowest volunteer rates of any major city in the country. And for a mentoring organization like ours, things get worse. Men sign up to volunteer as a mentor at a ratio of only 1:3 compared to women. So what I'm left with, is a list of nearly 100 boys currently waiting a mentor, and hundreds more we cannot serve because of our lack of male volunteers. A waitlist of good kids who just want someone they know they can count on.

Now let's be honest. A lot of guys, including myself, used to be one of these boys. Fortunately for most of us, we had a coach, or a teacher or neighbor who helped us along the way. Someone besides our parents (because let's face it, at that age, we didn't want to listen to our parents) who got us through a tough time or taught us an important lesson. We might not have called him a "mentor", but that's exactly what he was. A person who cared enough to make sure we didn't go it alone. But the boys in our program unfortunately don't have that privilege. They don't have someone they can go to for advice. Or have a hot dog with. Or learn about life while playing ball. But what they do have are a lot of options to get into trouble. A lot of bad influences and endless opportunities to not reach their full potential.

Now I don't have to tell you that mentoring matters. Esquire magazine has already said it. LinkedIn has dedicated this month to it. Even the President put out a call-to-action. By now, we all know that mentoring matters. But what I do have to say is that YOU mentoring a child matters. The issue is that too many men think that someone else is taking care of the problem. Well, I'm telling you that the need for YOU is greater than ever. And it's also easier than you think.

It doesn't take a history of community activism or an advanced degree in social work to be a Big Brother. Just someone willing to share a little bit of their time with a kid who's walking in the shoes they used to wear. Our decisions, whether good or bad, have taught us lessons that we've learned from and can now teach the next generation. A story you can tell as you help guide the next generation on the choices they'll make. Lessons that, over time, will have a life-long impact on a child in need. Lessons like the ones your mentor taught you.

The good thing is that my problem has a solution. But I need your help. It's simple too. All you have to do is make a new friend. Take the first step to learn more about mentoring opportunities with Big Brothers Big Sisters and find out how much fun, and convenient, making a difference can be. Visit our website, send me an email or just share this message with someone you know who likes to eat hot dogs. All you have to do is make a new friend, and for those of you here in NYC, you have the fortune of doing it while exploring the greatest city on Earth.

Diego Romero is a current staff member of Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City. To become a volunteer mentor or to learn more about Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC, log onto www.bigsnyc.org/BeABig or call 212-686-2042. And don't forget to #ThankYourMentor