

## **Op-Ed: Great Guys Mentor: Empowering Men to Make a Difference in Young Lives**

In her July 10, 2023, op-ed in The Washington Post, "Men are lost. Here's a Map out of the wilderness," Christine Emba highlights the evolving concept of masculinity in our society. She explores the idea that men are embracing new models of masculinity that prioritize emotional intelligence and empathy. While Emba provides an insightful analysis, it is crucial to recognize that these changes should not be confined to abstract discussions. We must encourage concrete actions that empower men to make a positive impact on the lives of young people in their communities. That is precisely what the "Great Guys Mentor" campaign by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Mercer County (BBBS-Mercer) aims to achieve.

According to a recent report by the Corporation for National and Community Service, volunteerism in the US experienced a significant decline of 4.3 percentage points in 2020, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This decline has had a direct impact on mentoring programs across the country, leaving one in three young people without a mentor today. Even more troubling: 11% of youth who have sought out mentors have been placed on waiting lists and were never matched.

To further emphasize the importance of male mentors, Emba cites data that shows that since 1960, the percentage of boys living apart from their biological fathers has nearly doubled, from 17 percent to 32 percent. She quotes Richard Reeves, whose book "Of Boys and Men" was released in 2022, saying, "If you're growing up in a single-parent household, and you go to a typical public school and typical medical system, there's a decent chance that you will not encounter a male figure of authority until middle school or later. Not your doctor, not your teachers. No one else around you. What does that feel like?"

Emba also spoke with Scott Galloway, author of the 2020 book "Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunity," whose work highlights the societal shifts we are experiencing and the need for men to embrace new models of masculinity. He argues that success in the post-pandemic world will depend on men who possess emotional intelligence, empathy, and a commitment to making a positive difference in their communities. Our "Great Guys Mentor" campaign aligns with both Galloway's and Reeves' vision by urging men to become mentors and impart their wisdom and guidance to young boys and men.

At BBBS-Mercer, we are seeing a mirror of national trends: we currently have nearly 50 boys and young men on a waiting list, some of whom have been waiting for over a year to find a mentor. These concerning statistics underscore the urgent need for men to step up and volunteer as mentors. The Great Guys Mentor campaign aims to raise awareness about this need, urging men from all backgrounds and age groups to step up and become "Bigs" in their community. "Great Guys Mentor" is a call to action, appealing to local businesses, churches, sports groups, influencers, community organizations, and social media platforms to support the cause. By leveraging these networks, BBBS-Mercer hopes

to engage and encourage men who want to make a difference in the lives of young people. It highlights the fact that even a small-time commitment of five hours a month over the course of a year can have a profound impact on a child's life.

It takes Little to be Big.

The benefits of mentoring are well-documented. Mentoring has been proven to reduce the number of young people disconnected from school and work, while simultaneously increasing their social and economic mobility. By becoming mentors, men can reinforce and encourage the better instincts of young individuals. As Flint Lane, CEO and Founder of BillTrust aptly puts it, "I am a better human, dad, and CEO because I mentor." The rewards of mentoring are not only felt by the mentees but also by the mentors themselves, as they grow personally and professionally through the experience. Mentoring expands perspectives and can broaden ones own worldview. Through mentoring, mentors may enhance their problem-solving abilities, emotional intelligence, active listening skills, and adaptability. These skills are transferable and can benefit mentors in their personal and professional lives.

Launched in June 2023, the "Great Guys Mentor" campaign has already garnered support from influential figures such as William Salcedo, current President and CEO of BBBS Coastal and Northern NJ, Mercer County Commissioner Samuel Frisby, President/CEO Princeton Mercer Regional Chamber Hal English, and former Bigs from around Mercer County. Their participation sends a powerful message that mentoring is a valuable and transformative experience.

As we continue to redefine masculinity and challenge traditional notions, it is essential to promote tangible actions that drive positive change. The "Great Guys Mentor" campaign serves as a beacon, inviting men to step forward and become mentors, empowering them to make a difference in the lives of young people. By heeding this call, men can embrace the evolving model of masculinity and create a future where empathy, compassion, and mentorship are at the forefront of their contributions to society.

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