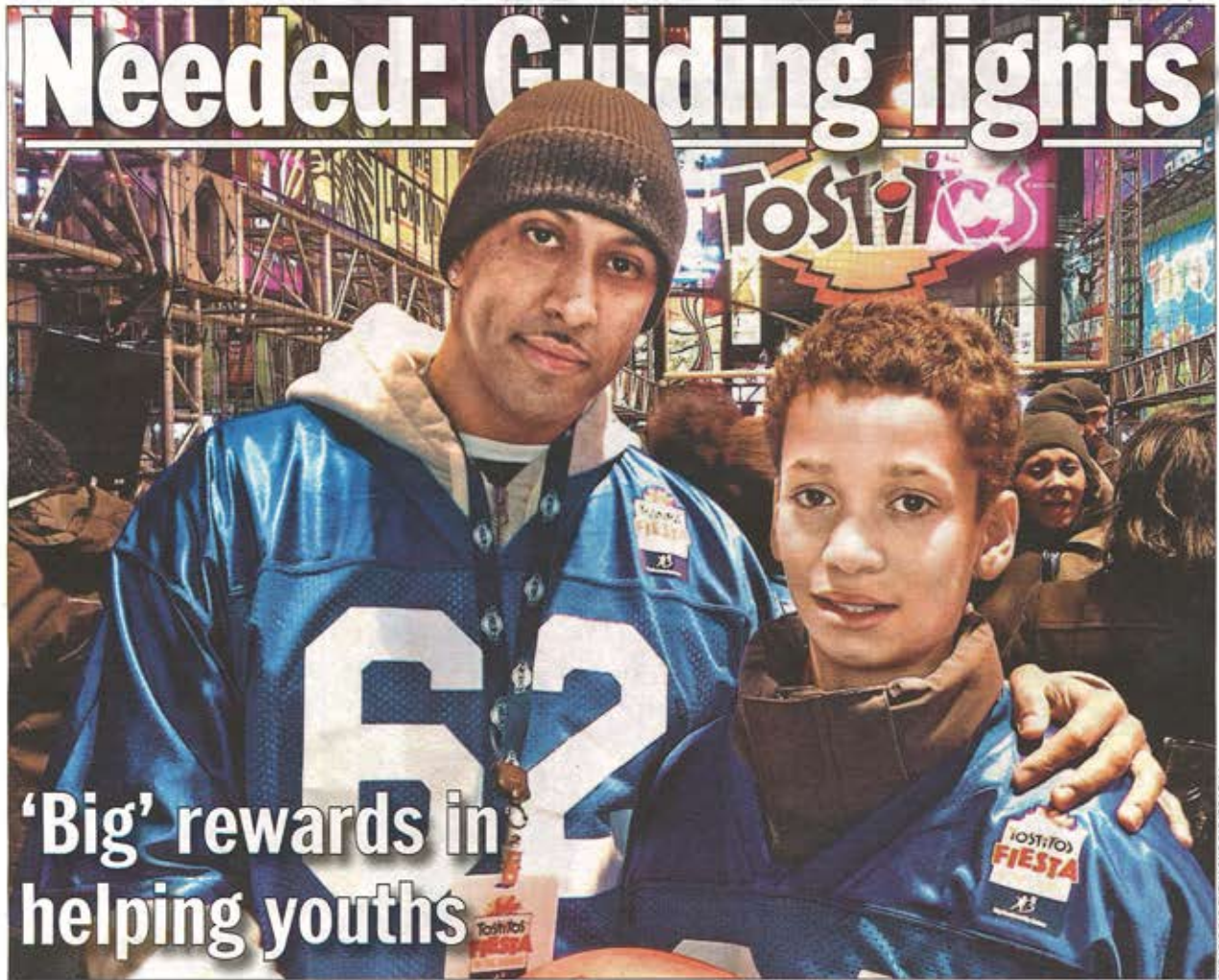




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'Big' rewards in helping youths

PHOTOS: BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS

Paul Pabon pals around with his "Little Brother" Justin at a promotional event in Times Square (above) and in Bryant Park (below) in 2012. They have been together for four years.

BY ANNALIESE GRIFFIN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

When he was growing up, Paul Pabon looked to a strong network of role model and mentors to help guide him into adulthood.

"My most obvious and most important mentor was my father," says Pabon, 32. "He taught me lessons about responsibility, right and wrong, morals and ethics, as I grew up. There were also some teachers that had strong influences on life, and a close family friend, who stressed the importance of academics, and helped me shoot for higher goals."

As an adult with a successful career working with people struggling with addiction, Pabon realized how lucky he had been to have so many strong positive influences in his life.

"I got to a certain point where I wanted to give back. I was grateful for the strong mentors in my own life, and I wanted to pass that on to someone else."

Pabon was aware that Big Brothers Big

Sisters of New York City is the oldest mentoring program in the city, and liked the fact that they match "Bigs" and "Littles" by interests and proximity and provide training and support for mentors, so he volunteered to be a Big. As of this February, he and Justin, his 13-year-old Little, will mark four years together.

Founded in 1904, the program got its start when Ernest Coulter, a children's court clerk, noticed an uptick in young boys being sent to prison for relatively minor criminal offenses. Convinced that early guidance from a strong male role model could make a difference, Coulter went to a men's club at a local church seeking a mentor for a specific boy. He left the meeting with 40 volunteers and BBBS of NYC was born.

Within a decade of founding the first chapter in New York City, organization chapters had spread across the country. Today, there



are 500 chapters in the U.S., serving 4,000 young people a year in New York City alone, says Hector Batista, CEO of Big Brothers.

"The mission hasn't changed much in 110 years," says Batista. "Kids still need positive role models. Even though they're dealing with more complicated issues today like incarceration, aging out of foster care, single-parent households, becoming young mothers and being recent immigrants, the theme, the mission hasn't changed."

Batista notes that BBBS needs more male volunteers and more girls to match with female Bigs, especially Spanish speakers. For his part, Pabon has added new volunteers from his own social network. "I've recruited friends to be part of it, and I wish I could recruit more," he says.