

Nineteen Morris County Sheriff's Officers have volunteered to mentor 4th-graders from the Alexander Hamilton Elementary School in Morristown through Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Coastal and Northern New Jersey.

As a group, participating Officers from the Morris County Sheriff's Office Bureaus of Law Enforcement and Corrections met their "Littles" for the first time on the afternoon of January 15 in a large room at the Morris County Correctional Facility.

The Officers are volunteers in the non-profit's national campaign called "Bigs In Blue" that matches Public Safety and Law Enforcement Professionals with children who can benefit from a mentor and rise to their full potential.

The concept of being inside a jail intrigued the children, some of whom told Morris County Sheriff James M. Gannon they want a tour, along with wanting to see K-9 demonstrations. Those adventures are ahead on the agenda, arranged by Sheriff's Officer Kayla Santos and Bureau of Corrections Lieutenant Andrew Bileci and Sergeant Robert Horvot.

Sheriff Gannon greeted the children, who quickly overcame any initial shyness to join their Big Brothers and Big Sisters in activities and drawing games designed to reveal their interests and common likes and dislikes. The Officers all brought along pictures of themselves as 4th-graders to show the Littles.

Soccer, pizza and music were attractions overwhelmingly shared by the Bigs with their Littles.

Sheriff Gannon told the Officers he was proud of their volunteerism and desire to help young people succeed, despite juggling work

schedules and their own family lives. Prior to being designated as Big Brothers or Big Sisters, all the Officers attended an information session and volunteer training conducted by program specialists.

“Thank you for taking the time to make a difference in a young person’s life,” Sheriff Gannon said.

The Sheriff told the children he had mentors growing up, in addition to his parents, that were important to his growth.

“I think we all need a role model, someone to look up to, someone to emulate, someone to look up to. Not everyone has that,” he said.

All the future sessions between the Officers and their Littles will be conducted as a group, with plans calling, in part, for a Career Day, Field Day and County Correctional Facility tour.

William A. Salcedo, Executive Director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Coastal and Northern New Jersey, was at the first session to thank the Officers for volunteering and potentially helping the children overcome challenges and obstacles they may face.

The participating Officers from the Bureau of Law Enforcement are: Haider Asif, Daniel Chiarolanza, Philip DeLuca, Kevin Helmlinger, Joseph Longo, Philip Masi, Michael Minovich, Stephanie Mitchell, Stephen Nowatkowski, Corporal Jennifer Franke-Parrillo, Detective Deanna Gardner and Sergeant Brian Stanton.

The Bureau of Corrections participating Officers are: Gina Figliuolo, Raymond Miller, Michelle Molde, Dominick Nicastro, John Wiggins, Daniele Vandebos, and Ada King.