

The Miami Herald

Mentor a child, change a life

*By Lydia Muniz
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The year that just ended brought continued progress in education — with a growing awareness of the role that emotional and mental wellness play in children’s academic progress. Also 2014 demonstrated that early detection and intervention of challenges to that emotional wellness can help prevent tragedies like the shootings that occurred at Florida State University and other communities across the country.

A new study of more than 62,000 youth in Florida’s Department of Juvenile Justice reveals that an astonishing 97 percent have suffered at least one childhood adversity (abuse, neglect, an incarcerated or mentally ill family member, etc.), and more than 50 percent have suffered four or more adversities.

Although we might not be able to eliminate all of these adversities, we know that we can help teach and inspire children to turn certain challenges into opportunities through the involvement of mentors.

During more than 50 years in Miami, Big Brothers Big Sisters has trained volunteer mentors to help us identify the triggers and challenges that can hinder emotional wellness and, ultimately, academic and educational progress. As a result, we’ve seen the life-changing impact that a Big Brother or Big Sister can have in empowering children to make more mindful choices today toward a purposeful tomorrow.

We see students with failing grades evolve into high school valedictorians, gang membership transition into university scholarships and hopelessness transform into inspiration.

Our volunteers participate in a broad range of innovative and evolving programs. From one-on-one mentoring to the School to Work corporate mentoring program that places kids directly in the corporate sector to “Bigs in Blue” that involve police officers, our volunteer mentors are awakening new possibilities and making Miami a better place for children to grow into amazing adults.

January is National Mentoring Month. Across America, people are being asked to step up and get involved in changing our nation, one child at a time. We’re looking for volunteers to help us change Miami, one child, one afternoon at a time.

Resolve to make this a year in which we all get involved in building the power of potential in our youth and community. To learn more, visit www.wementor.org or call (305) 644-0066.

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