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Mentors ‘an absolute necessity’ for the future

*By David Green
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In high school, the hardest part about my AP chemistry homework wasn't the subject matter — it was the drug dealers, gunshots and fatal shootings outside the apartment where I lived with my mother. It was the fear of being envied or harmed for trying to pursue a better life.

I have worked hard to forget the years I now call my “dark years” — those days in elementary and middle school when I gave into the madness and did some negative things. My grades plummeted, I was at the bottom of my class.

Years later, as I entered high school with the goal of changing my life and becoming more positive, the peer pressure was strong to go back and do negative things. It took every bit of courage to ignore the little voice telling me to go back to that past, that I was one of them and that I was wrong for wanting to pursue an education.

Today, as a college student at the University of Florida pursuing dual bachelor's and master's degrees, I often wonder how I managed to get out.

Without a doubt, my loving mother and family had a lot to do with it. But I could not have done it without Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Miami. The organization and, in particular, my Big Brother Fernand, provided the mentoring and support system I needed. They not only told me that I could achieve great things, but that I deserved success like anybody else.

Since I was matched with Fernand in 2011, I saw a different side of the world and, most significant, of myself — one filled with promise and opportunity.

After graduating from Booker T. Washington No. 1 in my class with a 5.4 GPA in 2012, receiving eight college scholarships including the Battier “Take Charge” Scholarship (and even having dinner with former Miami Heat player Shane Battier and his wife to celebrate), I have confirmed that the only limits are those that you set for yourself. I have maintained a steady 4.0 in my master’s curriculum and am participating in a business-plan competition to kick-start my own company.

As a philosophy major, I have learned that you are the mind, and you become whatever you focus your mind on. My future will be bright because I am applying my mind and working hard.

But these days I am not as worried about myself as I am about others — specifically, all those youths in Miami who aren’t as fortunate to have mentors. Unless you have lived it for yourself, it is difficult to imagine how important a mentor can be for an impressionable, scared kid surrounded by negativity.

Currently there are many boys on the list waiting for male mentors at Big Brothers Big Sisters. But they are the lucky ones, because at least they recognize they need a mentor. It saddens me to imagine what may become of the kids who don’t have these opportunities.

This is a great time to think about what you can do to help. So few organizations give you the opportunity like Big Brothers Big Sisters to have a direct impact and improve the course of someone’s life. There are so many ways you can contribute. You can do it in whatever way makes you comfortable, by giving as little or as much time as you want. You can get involved as a Big Brother or Big Sister, donate money, get your company involved as a school-to-work site or, better yet, you can do all of the above.

For me, Big Brothers Big Sisters made all the difference. I hope more youths can be as fortunate as to get the mentors they need. This is not an option — it is an absolute necessity for the future of our youths and our community.