



City of Bloomington
Community and Family Resources Department
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To: Mayor Mark Kruzan and Common Council of the City of Bloomington

From: Greg Tourner, Chair, Commission on the Status of Black Males

Re: 2011 Report from the Commission on the Status of Black Males

Date: February 8, 2012

The Commission on the Status of Black Males was created to address the challenges faced by African-American males in the areas of health, employment, criminal justice, and education. The group promotes local public and private remedies to some of the challenges confronting Black males, organizes and convenes community meetings to discuss the status of Black males, and networks with other groups in the community and the state. Commission members at the end of 2011 included Commission Chair Greg Tourner (appointed by the Common Council), Vice Chair Beverly Smith (Common Council), Secretary Cedric Harris (Mayor), immediate past Chair David Hummons (appointed by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration Commission), Michael Coleman (Human Rights Commission), Kourtney Gray (Mayor). There was one vacancy at the end of 2011 which has since been filled by the appointment of Eric Love (Mayor). Staff support is provided by Special Projects Coordinator Craig Brenner.

In January of 2011, Mayor Kruzan called for nominations for the Outstanding Black Male Leader of Tomorrow Award. The Commission selected Adrian Land and presented him the award at the Black History Month Gala on February 26, 2011.

The Commission decided to hold an event in February similar to last's Barbershop Conversations. Last year's conversation focused on role modeling. In view of the theme for Black History Month 2011 - Bloomington Style - "They Served with Honor" – the group decided that the conversation in 2011 would focus on mentoring and serving others in today's environment and culture. The conversation took place on February 26, 2011, at College Town Cutters, with thirteen youth and thirteen adults present. Following the conclusion of the event at the barber shop, the Commission escorted the youth to the Ivy Tech John Waldron Arts Center, where they took part in a question and answer session with visiting filmmaker Spike Lee.

In March, the Commission was approached by representatives of Delta Sigma Theta about co-sponsoring a 3-on-3 basketball tournament for local youth as a way to identify young people who might benefit from mentoring. City staff worked with and obtained the cooperation of Bloomington Parks and Recreation, securing the use of the Twin Lakes Recreation Center as the site of the tournament, which took place on June 26, 2011 and included teams from Bloomington, Ellettsville and Indianapolis.



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Throughout the spring the Commission discussed options regarding mentoring; i.e., should the commission establish its own mentoring program, targeting local African American youth identified as likely to benefit by mentoring, or should the Commission work with an existing group, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central Indiana, which has a successful mentoring program in place. Monroe Circuit Court Judge Stephen R. Galvin and Monroe County Juvenile Probation Supervisor Christine McAfee attended the April Commission meeting to discuss at-risk youth and mentoring programs. As a result of their presentation, the Commission invited representatives of Big Brothers Big Sisters to attend subsequent Commission meetings and discuss a potential mentoring partnership.

Kathy Delaney Willett, Outreach Coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central Indiana, attended the May meeting and shared information about their organization. At that time there were approximately 100 youth waiting for mentors, with boys being the largest group; at least 12 African American boys were on the list, all from single-parent homes. BBBS has national relationships with three national fraternities, and recently received a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to add 100 new matches. Ms. Willett's goals included recruiting more men and providing more African American matches. BBBS would help recruit, screen, and train mentors. Options for the Commission included identifying school-based mentors, meeting an hour a week in schools, or identifying community mentors who are not limited to that time frame or location. The Commission decided to continue meeting with BBBS staff and eventually reached an agreement which culminated in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by Mayor Krusan. The mentoring partnership will help find mentors for African American males in the schools; it will allow for occasional other community activities, such as visits to IU sports events; and mentors will meet periodically to share experiences and best practices.

In June, the Commission participated in the Juneteenth Celebration at the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center on the campus of Indiana University, sharing an informational booth with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration Commission. Commissioners also continued to meet with representatives of BBBS throughout the summer months, planning a "Call Out" that would help identify potential mentors.

In July, new Monroe County Community School Corporation Superintendent Dr. Judith DeMuth met with Commissioners David Hummons and Beverly Smith, along with Community and Family Resources Director Pete Giordano and Special Projects Coordinator Craig Brenner, to discuss academic engagement of young Black Males. Dr. DeMuth seemed very responsive to the Commission's new mentoring initiative.

James Garrett, Director of the Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males, attended the October meeting and reported on statewide initiatives and activities of other local commissions. The State Commission has been working on creating a grant funding for local commissions. Mr. Garrett hopes this will be up and running in 2012. This program will allow local commission to submit



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proposals to the State Commission requesting from \$500 to \$1,500. Mr. Garret would like to keep the process fairly simple: a program description, proposed outcomes, budget, and proposed collaborations with community partners, resulting in a 5-page proposal.

The “Call Out” for potential mentors took place on November 30, 2011, at the Monroe County Historical Society. Herald-Times reporter Dan Denny attended the meeting and reported favorably about it in a December 1, 2011 article entitled “Black men called to mentor,” which is copied at the bottom of this report. Rev. Dennis Laffoon and Bev Smith gave compelling presentations to the more than 20 potential mentors who attended. Big Brothers Big Sisters is contacting all those who signed a list indicating their interest in mentoring.

In November, members of the Commission began participating in a series of conference calls regarding minority health fair screenings being supported by the Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males. The proposed date for the event is April 28, 2012, and there is support for it being a nationwide effort. Screenings might include glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol. Community and Family Resources Health Projects Coordinator Nancy Woolery began meeting with the Commission and participating in the conference calls to assist.

The year concluded with a proposal from Omega Psi Phi Fraternity that the Commission partner with them and with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration Commission on health screenings at three different barbershops on Saturday, January 21, 2012. The proposal was unanimously approved, and the group began the year poised to help facilitate these screenings.

For more information about the Commission on the Status of Black Males, please refer to www.bloomington.in.gov/csbm

Black men called to mentor

Bloomington, IN, *The Herald-Times*, December 1, 2011, By Dann Denny 331-4350
<http://www.heraldtimesonline.com/stories/2011/12/01/news.black-men-called-to-mentor.sto?1328726223>

Dennis Laffoon, pastor of the Bethel AME Church in Bloomington, stood in the middle of a circle of two dozen African-American men gathered at the Monroe County History Center, and issued them a challenge.

“I don’t want any of you brothers to leave here tonight without putting your name and contact information on the sign up sheet,” he said. “Tonight, you can do your part to change the world.”



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Laffoon was the keynote speaker at a “call out” event Wednesday night asking African-American men to make a two-year commitment to an African-American youth through a new mentoring partnership between the Bloomington Commission on the Status of Black Males and Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central Indiana.

“There are 17.6 million young people in this country who say they are seeking a meaningful relationship with a mentor, but only 3 million say they have that kind of relationship,” Laffoon said. “That represents a mentorship gap, and we have an opportunity tonight to help close that gap.”

Forty-five-year old Eric Love, director of Indiana University’s Office of Diversity Education, was one of 19 African-American men who put their contact information on the sign-up sheet before leaving. He was one of several who filled out an application to become a Big Brother.

“I think it’s important for all young people to have an older mentor, but if there is a large population of African-American youth on the waiting list, it’s especially important that we step forward and show them what it means to be a successful black male and how he interacts with the community,” Love said. “I hope to teach my Little Brother some life lessons that will help him be successful.”

Kathy Willett, director of outreach for Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Central Indiana, said her agency and the Bloomington Commission on the Status of Black Males hopes the call out will lead five to seven African-American men to commit two years to either the Big Brother Big Sisters community-based program or school-based program.

Those in the community-based program see their Littles as often as they like, picking them up in their homes and taking them to some activity. Those in the school-based program see their Littles one hour a week in their school, stay in contact with them during the summer and go on group activities and field trips with other Bigs and Littles.

Willett said 18 months ago she gave an IU statistics class some data it used to produce a statistical analysis of the overall quality of the Big Brothers Big Sisters relationships, based on such things as how much the Little felt safe and comfortable with the Big.

“The analysis showed equally strong relationships regardless of the race of either party, but it found that the relationships in which the race was the same lasted longer,” she said. “And we know that strong relationships that last longer are the ones that produce the best outcomes.”

Willett, pointing out that about 20 of the 50 to 75 children on her agency’s waiting list are African-American, said the reason the “call out” is asking for at least a two-year commitment is that research shows that a 3- or 6-month relationship is actually more detrimental to a Little than no relationship at all, because it reinforces feelings of insecurity and abandonment.



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Six years ago Beverly Smith, MCCSC's director of school and community, was walking down a school hallway when someone asked her if she was willing to make a two-year commitment to the Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based program.

She agreed, but soon became so attached to her Little that she switched to the community-based program so she could become more involved in her life.

"You may not think you can make a two-year commitment, but you can," she said. "Your Little will almost become like your child. You will do all you can to make him or her do well in life."

For information about becoming a Big Brother to a young African-American youth, you can call 334-2828 or visit the website www.bigsindiana.org.