



ALPHA MEN TAKING ACTION: 10,000 in 2008

Addressing a Generation in Crisis



by BRO. LOWELL PERRY, JR

Overview

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. has enjoyed a long partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), the premier mentoring organization in the country. Both Alpha and BBBS were “born” more than 100 years ago and share the distinction of being the “gold standard” in their respective realms. Our dear fraternity has demonstrated great leadership in the area of volunteer mentoring by producing two national “Big Brothers of the Year” during the past 20 years, Bro. Dale Long and Bro. Sylvester Fulton. No other group or organization can make that claim.

Over a year ago, in an effort to respond to the absolutely critical need for African-American male mentors, General President, Darryl R. Matthews issued a call for Alpha men to step up and mobilize 10,000 men to mentor a young boy. And what better representative of what a man should be than one from the House of Alpha? Why then are many of us still on the sidelines?

Throughout history, members of our beloved fraternity have been at the forefront of nearly every major movement to advance the cause of our people. We are again confronted with another one of those moments. My friends we are witnessing before our eyes a form of cultural genocide that is killing off families and threatening our existence as a people. We are losing a generation of young black men to the criminal justice system in an insidious intergenerational cycle of incarceration where we are witnessing grandfathers, fathers, and sons spending the wrong kind of time together. This is unacceptable!

Yes, I may be speaking metaphorically, but consider the fact that if a young man has a felony on his record, he cannot get a decent job, cannot vote, and cannot buy a home or car, so as an American citizen, his “American Dream” is effectively dead. Alpha must take the lead in reclaiming our young men. As Brother Charles H. Wesley so eloquently stated, *“Where leadership was required in these past years, an Alpha man could be found to furnish it. Where ideas were needed to call out the best within the group, Alpha Phi Alpha has been equal to the emergency. Our march has been ever on-ward and upward toward the better life.”*

The Urgency to Act Now Is Compelling

- There are 2.4 million children with a parent who is incarcerated.
- At least seven percent (7%) of all black children have an incarcerated mother or father compared to just 0.8% of white children.
- A past U. S. Senate report stated that children of an incarcerated parent face a 7 in 10 chance of suffering the same fate.
- Following that logic, nearly 1.7 million of those children are at risk of entering the criminal justice system in this country.
- 1 in 8 African-American males between the ages of 25 and 29 is incarcerated.
- A Vanderbilt University study done by Professor Mark Cohen states that if a child drops out of high school and in fact chooses a life of crime, that child will cost society between \$1.3 - \$1.5 million dollars.
- In some areas, fewer than 20% of black males graduate high school.

My brothers, there is not only then a moral reason to get involved, but a compelling economic sense of urgency as well. The good news is that there is a proven solution through Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) that has been effective for over 100 years. According to a landmark study done by Public/Private Ventures in 1995, kids that have had a mentor through the BBBS program are:

- 46% less likely to begin using drugs,
- 27% less likely to begin using alcohol,
- 52% less likely to skip school,
- 37% less likely to skip a class, and
- 33% less likely to hit someone.

Several other studies document highly positive outcomes. For example, former Little Brothers average 14 years of formal education (exceeding the national average), and while the majority of these individuals grew up in single-parent households on public assistance, 91% of former Little Brothers were employed and NOT receiving any public assistance.

So What Are You Going To Do?

What would the Founders of our dear fraternity do? They would take action of course. Many of you across the country are already in the fight by finding ways to make a difference in a young man's life. I understand that for a variety of reasons, not everyone can be a "Big." However, in honor of the Seven Jewels of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., for those of you who have not yet chosen to get off the sidelines and get involved, here are several alternative strategies for you to make a difference in the life of a young black male who is looking up to you to provide the light.

You can be like

1. **Henry Arthur Callis**: and **sign up** to be a Big Brother to a young man. All it takes is 4 to 8 hours a month to make a huge impact on a child's life. We probably waste that much time every month on our Blackberries and/or in line at Starbucks. And not only will that child be positively impacted by you, your life will be changed forever too!
2. **Charles Henry Chapman**: and **be personally responsible** for recruiting seven others to become mentors. You may not have time to volunteer yourself, but you certainly know other brothers and friends who do.
3. **Nathaniel Allison Murray**: and **facilitate local BBBS staff** attending and recruiting at local Alpha chapter meetings.
4. **Eugene Kinckle Jones**: and **open doors** for local BBBS staff to recruit at businesses, universities and places of worship. Alphas have historically been men of influence in their respective communities and on college campuses. Now is the time to utilize that power and leadership by example.
5. **Vertner Woodson Tandy**: and **apply** for a staff position with a local BBBS agency, thereby using your talent for the greater good. Call the agency nearest you or go to http://hosted.bbbsa.org/careers/about_allops.asp.
6. **George Biddle Kelley**: and **volunteer to serve** and be active on the board of a local BBBS agency. Tapping into talent and treasure.
7. **Robert Harold Ogle**: and **organize** a Bowl for Kids' Sake event through your chapter. This perhaps can be done in conjunction with other Greek organizations. The services that BBBS offer are free to the many children it impacts, but paid professional staff must do the work to support the mentoring relationships and agencies must continue to attract the resources to grow those services.

Okay Brother Perry, I'm In But Where are the Kids?

That is a wonderful question and is the first step to making something happen like many Alphas before you have done. There are boys who are ready right now for a man to take a stand on their behalf. This is your opportunity to make a positive change happen in the life of a young person along with our partner organization, Big Brothers Big Sisters. So for those who are ready to demonstrate Alpha leadership with your time, talent, or treasure, just go to www.bbbs.org/alphaphialpha and follow the instructions on how to get involved.

To find the BBBS agency nearest to where you live is easy. Simply enter your zip code on the www.bbbs.org/alphaphialpha website to be directed to an agency nearest your home town or city where you attend college. Yes this is a task for both alumni and college brothers. Those of us who are in the fight need you to join US!

Real World Impact by an Alpha Man

“My Little brother is fifteen-year-old LaDaruss Douglas. We’ve been matched for almost four years. It has been quite a rewarding experience for me to watch him develop into becoming a young man. My wife Ellen, a Big Sister, is matched to a teenage Little Sister. At times we go on joint outings which create opportunities for LaDaruss to be taught the finer points of etiquette and how to treat a young lady. This is a skill that has almost become lost but is very important to me as I have daughters of my own.

LaDaruss is a special education student who has taught *me* the value of patience. We enjoy attending sporting events, museums, movies, concerts, running errands, eating pizza and burgers, attending church and in a few days will participate in my chapter’s Project Alpha session.

I invite all brothers of Alpha to become a part of what I have known for thirty-three years, the value of one-to-one mentoring to now six Littles. My message to you may be better articulated by paraphrasing Brother Sydney Brown who said, “...I am the eminent expression of friendship. Character and temperament change under my dominant power. Lives once touched by me become tuned and are thereafter amiable kindly...I assist the chemist to convert ungenerous personalities into individuals of great worth. I destroy all ignoble impulses...”

In order to be a man, our young boys must see a man!

Brother Dale Long – Six-time Big Brother, 1989 National BBBS Big Brother of the Year, and National Chair of the Alpha Phi Alpha/BBBS Partnership

Reach Back and Do Something!

“Jeremy Moore was a shy eleven-year-old when we met in the Big Brothers office. I was as nervous as he was shy, but upon seeing his eyes light up was well worth every second that we would spend together. Over six years, and it seems like we met yesterday, I have seen Jeremy grow into manhood. He has gone from a kid that enjoyed skateboards to be a responsible car driver; from a kid that would not look me in the eyes, to a young man with a firm handshake and a commanding persona. Through my interactions with him, I have received a bit of immortality as he has learned life’s lessons from me. Importantly, he has learned from me to “reach back” and give back to those less fortunate. It is expected of him to become the National Big Brother of the Year!

I challenge “too busy” Alpha Phi Alpha men and others to allow a young boy to tag along. Allow him to witness the positive busy work that you do. Let him see you reach in your wallet for your earned money from your honest efforts to pay for goods and services. Invite him into your work station, work space or work truck! Introduce him to the special lady in your life and let him see you respect her. Got children...he needs to see how a father loves his family.

Alpha men must embrace the 10,000 match vision of General President Matthews, my Big Brother Dale Long and others. This is a call for all Alpha men to move from worship (Fraternity accomplishments) to sacrifice! Be a Big Brother today.”

Brother Sylvester Fulton, 2006 National BBBS Big Brother of the Year

Time to Take Action

I am a third generation Alpha whose grandfather, Brother Lawrence C. Perry was one of the founders of Epsilon chapter at the University of Michigan, and dedicated his life to helping others through the cause of education and as a philanthropist. My father, Brother Lowell W. Perry, Sr. always said that “you make a living by what you earn, but you make a life by what you give.” You don’t have to change your life, just share a little part of it, to have a big impact.

To paraphrase Brother Wesley, ‘Are we equal to this emergency in this day and time?’ History says that we are. What do you say? The time for talking is over, let’s go to work today and show the world that *manly deeds* are more to the House of Alpha than just words in a verse of a hymn!

“Remember the challenge before us. We either save our children one at a time or we keep building jails to put them in ten or fifteen years from now. This is the time to stop building jails and get back to the task of building our children. No organization does this better than Big Brothers Big Sisters.”

Gen. Colin Powell (Ret.)