

Board of Directors and CEO Statement

Be The Change, A Response to the Killings of Black Americans

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What must they be thinking?

They are our children. The Little Brothers and Little Sisters in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program are our children, and we worry about them.

They watch shocking images on TV. They hear stories their elders tell of racism and abuse. They feel personal micro-aggressions that chip away at their self-esteem and sense of future. All of this must leave our children and young adults angry, confused and terrified.

Our Big Brothers and Big Sisters impress upon their Littles to make good decisions: "Do the right thing," we tell them, "even when no one is looking."

And now in full view of a camera, played over and over, they watch a white police officer in Minneapolis with his knee on a Black man's neck. Over a \$20 bill. They watch as other officers either participate in the brutality or stand by and watch. They know the victim by name: **George Floyd**.

At the same time, they are hearing the name **Breonna Taylor**, a Black woman who lived right here in Louisville and was shot to death in her home. What she and George Floyd share are their race and the fact that both are dead, and both have been killed by police officers. The circumstances of their deaths are quite different from one another. But our children hear their names almost as one, often joined with other names of Black people whose deaths have raised a legitimate question: "Do Black lives matter?"

Yes, Black lives do matter. The reality is our Littles wonder who they can trust and where they can feel safe.

Our program offers a relationship that *is* safe, because we have strengthened the bonds between our Big Brothers and Big Sisters and their Littles. That bond is so important that parents ask for us to add their child to the waiting queue for a Big Brother or Sister *years before* they are old enough to be matched.

We cannot afford to lose this competition between fear and security. So, **we must listen.** That's number one. We must not dismiss the questions our Littles ask and the fears they live with. We cannot wait for them to look to the streets for answers.

Second, **we must respond.** Our youth are waiting to hear from us. We must engage them *now*, in crucial conversations and guide them toward the right kinds of solutions, the right kinds of decisions to make in their lives.

Third, we must acknowledge our own biases, be open to hearing how we can do better. Racism is personal and real, and should be called out instantly and publicly. **We must be open to talk and listen to dialogue on race and bias.**

Fourth, **we must insist on police reform,** to keep the list of victims of police brutality and racism from growing any longer. Individuals who separate us by race should not be wearing police uniforms.

Fifth, at the same time, **we must acknowledge officers who serve honorably as guardians and protectors.** Many are Big Brothers and Big Sisters themselves, and their Little Brothers and Sisters remain loyal, trusting and unafraid of the uniform. Though this current crisis will no doubt spark questions that children so pointedly ask, they must be assured that painting all officers with one broad brush stroke of mistrust and fear is wrong. Police officers who judge not by race but by actions deserve our support. **We must recognize and reward kindness.**

Sixth, we must build bridges, and we must include our youth in that bridge building. Children of color must now be thinking the world is not a very friendly place. Let's defend their potential to make their world a little friendlier. One Little Brother recently said he came to appreciate his Big Brother even more when he realized he's not being paid. He doesn't have to do this. He's a Big Brother simply because he wants to be. Even when no one is looking, our Big Brothers and Big Sisters are doing the right thing. The message: **Be the change you wish to see.**

These are the messages our children need to feel, hear, and see from us, their elders: *We are listening. We are responding. We are open to talk and listen to dialogue on race and bias. We insist on police reform. We acknowledge officers who serve honorably as guardians and protectors. We recognize and reward kindness. We are the change we wish to see. Above all else, we believe we will get through this together.*

Submitted by:
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