



MENTORING OUR YOUTH

By Kia Smith

Atlanta radio personality, Frank Ski, his wife, and the winners of his Galapagos Island essay contest.

More than 19 million children (around 25% of all children) in the U.S. live in households without a father present, according to a 2005 Census Bureau report. This burden is greatly increased in the African-American community where 56% of children grow up in a single parent household -- with most households led by females. Links have been found between negative adolescent behaviors (such as crime, unplanned pregnancy, poor academic performance, etc.) and the absences of fathers, and a large majority of individuals believe that the absence of fathers is a contributor to certain societal problems.

With such a large absence of African-American fathers, it is important that other black men take the

place of these missing fathers. "These days black role models are dudes that glorify drugs, guns and material stuff," said Blacklite, a recording artist and evangelist from Jacksonville, Fla. A large number of the youth left without fathers in the home are turning to

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the individuals closest to them who can fulfill the role of their missing fathers. All too often these individuals end up being a neighborhood drug dealer or local gangster or someone with money, status and power but who lacks the moral maturity to serve as a role model or mentor.

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lem will just fix itself and that's the scary thing," said Blacklite. "Churches will pay over a thousand dollars a month to keep their lawn cut but won't even have two youth events a year. These kids realize that they are not really being cared for, and as a result of this, there becomes a 'you don't care, I don't care attitude.' Adults have to really care from the heart if we want

to see change. You might say, 'Well that's not my kid,' but who are your kids going to marry? Caring from the heart is key."

Atlanta radio personality Frank Ski is one African-American man who genuinely cares and he frequently shows his care and concern to his



Dr. Mike (judge) and AJ Calloway from BET's 106 & Park fame (host) at the Black College Alumni Hall of Fame Queen competition.



Dr. Mike and U.S. Congressman & Majority Whip Jim Clyburn at the South Carolina Black Caucus annual meeting. Congressman Clyburn's cousin, South Carolina Representative Bill Clyburn, is one of Dr. Mike's mentors.

community. During the summer of 2007, he made history by taking a group of African-American students to the Charles Darwin Research Center in the Galapagos Island. They were the first American group to study there.

This history-making excursion was simply one of Ski's many contributions to the community. Ski heads the Atlanta-based Frank Ski Foundation, through which he and his staff

are committed to providing quality programming and financial resources through science, technology, athletics and the arts. The foundation began to provide youth athletic opportunities to youth in inner city Atlanta. "By starting a foundation, I would be able to use my celebrity status to get people to donate, and then I would be able to take the money into the hoods," Ski stated.

"Just in my personal experience,

kids need male role models, and don't get it wrong, not just little boys, but little girls too," Ski stated. "Little girls need to see what a real man is, so that when they get older and want to date, they know what a real man is to date. When you look around and decide what our problems are, the problem is that [youth] are not getting the mentorship to be a man or to be a woman."

"Women hold it down and give [youth] the foundation, but men teach [youth] how to act in the street. If you're a woman, your daddy is the one who tells you 'bring your butt in this house at this time or no you can't go out with that boy.'"


Knowing the vital role men play in the lives of youth, Ski encourages other men to step up to the plate and get involved. "Dads have to play the role. We have to get out of our little box of just looking out for our own and really have to start going out there and looking for ways we can help other kids."

Before getting involved in a youth's life, Dr. Mike F. Weaver, a public health and community consultant in Atlanta, would encourage mentors to evaluate the commitment they are able to make. "A person who mentors is more engaged in the young person's life and should be a part of their family network," he said. "Mentors not only should have a rapport with parents, but the young person should be a part of the mentor's life as well, while volunteering and role modeling are more akin to one-time scenarios (i.e. field days, sports events and career/shadowing days). In essence, mentoring is a commitment to a young person rather than showing up for an event that involves young people."


If you are able to make a commitment to mentoring, Ski recommends Big Brothers, Big Sisters as a starting place. "I would tell [mentors] to get involved with Big Brothers, Big Sisters. They have a waiting list for male mentors," Ski stated.

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If you are not able to make the time commitment to mentor a youth, Dr. Weaver does not let you off the hook and encourages you to get involved through volunteerism. "I'd counsel black men, particularly those who've prospered academically, financially and in their careers, to provide opportunities for young brothers even if they're not cut out to be mentors," he said. "There are those of us who were simply placed on this planet to be in the trenches with these young brothers, but others can't be let off the hook. As a community we owe our ancestors for the challenges they endured to pave a way for us. Again, not everyone is meant for the trenches, but everyone is meant for the work."

Once you get involved, the impact you will have on the lives of others will be priceless. "I've gotten emails from grown men who were just boys in the 'hood when I started doing radio," Ski recalled. "I would be like 'What y'all doing? Everybody jump in the car and let's go to the movies.' I had a kid hit me and say that was the first time a man had ever taken him to the movies.

"Think about you being 15 or 16 and you've never been to the movies. A lot of these kids have never been to the movies. They've never been to a museum. They've never seen a ballgame. Just taking a kid somewhere is a big deal. It gives them something to look forward to and it gives them someone to talk to, and that's the most important thing."^{8H}

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