

Mentor program steers the way for Black males

*By Robert Hightower
Tribune Staff Writer*

Philadelphia is riddled with all sorts of potential travesties a young Black man could engage himself in.

But Aaron Boyd cares too much to let that happen.

This is why he started his nonprofit mentoring program "There is Hope With Help" two years ago to give positive role models to some of the city's Black youth.

"I'm just trying to make a difference in the community," Boyd said.

Located in the Strawberry Mansion section of North Philadelphia at 2230 N. 29th St., Hope offers an array of activities that work to enrich the life of those who partake.

Because of a lack of paternal structure in the neighborhood, Boyd, 35, felt compelled to start Hope.

"I knew there was need for a Black positive presence," he said. "I felt they needed Black older men to help them out, I know I needed that when I was young."

As it stands now, there are about 15 young people between the ages of 7 through 22 in the program.

There is an after school program that meets every Monday from 3 to 6 p.m. The organization is also in the process of starting a chess and Scrabble club.

"What we try to do is match up the kids to the mentors," Boyd said.

To Boyd, the best thing that could happen for a young man is to develop into becoming a productive adult. He said that is a key goal of Hope.

"We want to take boys and teach them to be men," he said. "We want to give values, morals, and goals and show them how to apply them to the world."

Because Boyd is a Philadelphia native hailing from the West Oak Lane section of the city, he declared that he is equipped to lead the group because he knows the environment.

"I've seen the things that they've seen," he said. "I've been where they've been. They may not understand that or think that we have because we are so much older, but everything comes full circle."

One of the problems at the forefront of what is ailing young men today is the lack of jobs that are readily available.

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Boyd is now working to initiate a program that helps the young men become gainfully employed.

The program would not only alert them of what jobs are available, but also Hope would assist them in filling out applications and help to make constituents cognizant of what the particular job requires.

One of the mentors is LaSalle University sophomore Christopher Goins.

Goins, 19, who majors in English, said he understands the importance of having a mentor.

“I never had someone there for me,” he said. “My mom was a single mom and I didn’t have a positive male influence in my life.”

Goins went on to note that he has lived as a witness of a negative role model and has strived to be the opposite.

“I’ve seen a bad influence, so I know how to be a good one because of that,” he said.

Raymond Carstarphen, 16, is one on the participants of Hope.

He said he is appreciative that such a program exists.

“I can sit down with my mentor and have a conversation about the things that I am going through,” he said. “I just talk to them and try to get a closer relationship with them.”

To inquire about There is Hope With Help, go to www.thereishopewithhelp.org or call (215) 519-6253.

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Aaron Boyd, executive director of “There Is Hope with Help,” from left, with Raymond Carstarphen, 16, Simon Gratz student, and Christopher Goins, 19, LaSalle University student at “There is Hope with Hope” office at 2226-30 N. 29th St. in North Philadelphia. — ABDUL R. SULAYMAN/TRIBUNE PHOTOGRAPHER
