

MENTORING CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: PRISONERS:

100,000 Matches Strong and Growing



I propose an ... initiative to bring mentors to ... children of prisoners. Government will support the training and recruiting of mentors; yet it is the men and women of America who will fill the need. One mentor, one person can change a life forever.

President George W. Bush
State of the Union Address, 2003



On July 16, 2008, Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans made history. That is when one caring American and one young person in exceptional need were joined together to form the 100,000th match of President Bush's groundbreaking mentoring initiative.

President Bush challenged Americans with the ambitious goal of 100,000 matches by the end of 2008 to quickly turn the tide on an alarming trend; more than two million children in the United States have at least one parent in federal or state prison. Already traumatized by losing their mom or dad, these kids are often shuffled from place to place, stigmatized, uncertain about their futures. All too frequently, they fall behind in school, get into fights, and abuse drugs and alcohol.

As a result, children of prisoners are more likely to go to jail than graduate high school.

They are seven times more likely to go to jail than children whose moms or dads have not served time behind bars.

Helping these children takes a huge commitment from faith-based and community organizations, governments, businesses, and schools. All must support and encourage Americans to give of themselves at least one hour, once a week, for one year or more to serve as mentors, life coaches, and friends to this population of young people who are so seriously at risk.



As a result of Jaderius's nomination letter, Joe Williams from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee was selected the 2008 Outstanding Mentor of the Year. Middle Tennessee has made more than 3,000 matches since 2003.

I think my Big Brother Joe should get an award. Joe is fun he takes me places to eat, to church, and the park. He is a good friend to me. He is kind and nice. He helps me by talking to me when I sad or mad. Sometime people make me sad by talking about me. Joe tells me to ignore them. I know Joe loves me. He is looking more like family to me. He take care of me by buying me stuff like shoes and clothes. He care about me. One time I was talking about bad things that happened to me and Joe listened. I think Joe and I will be friends for as long as we live. Please pick Joe because I love him. I hope one day I help people like he helps me.

Thank you :)

Jaderius "williams"

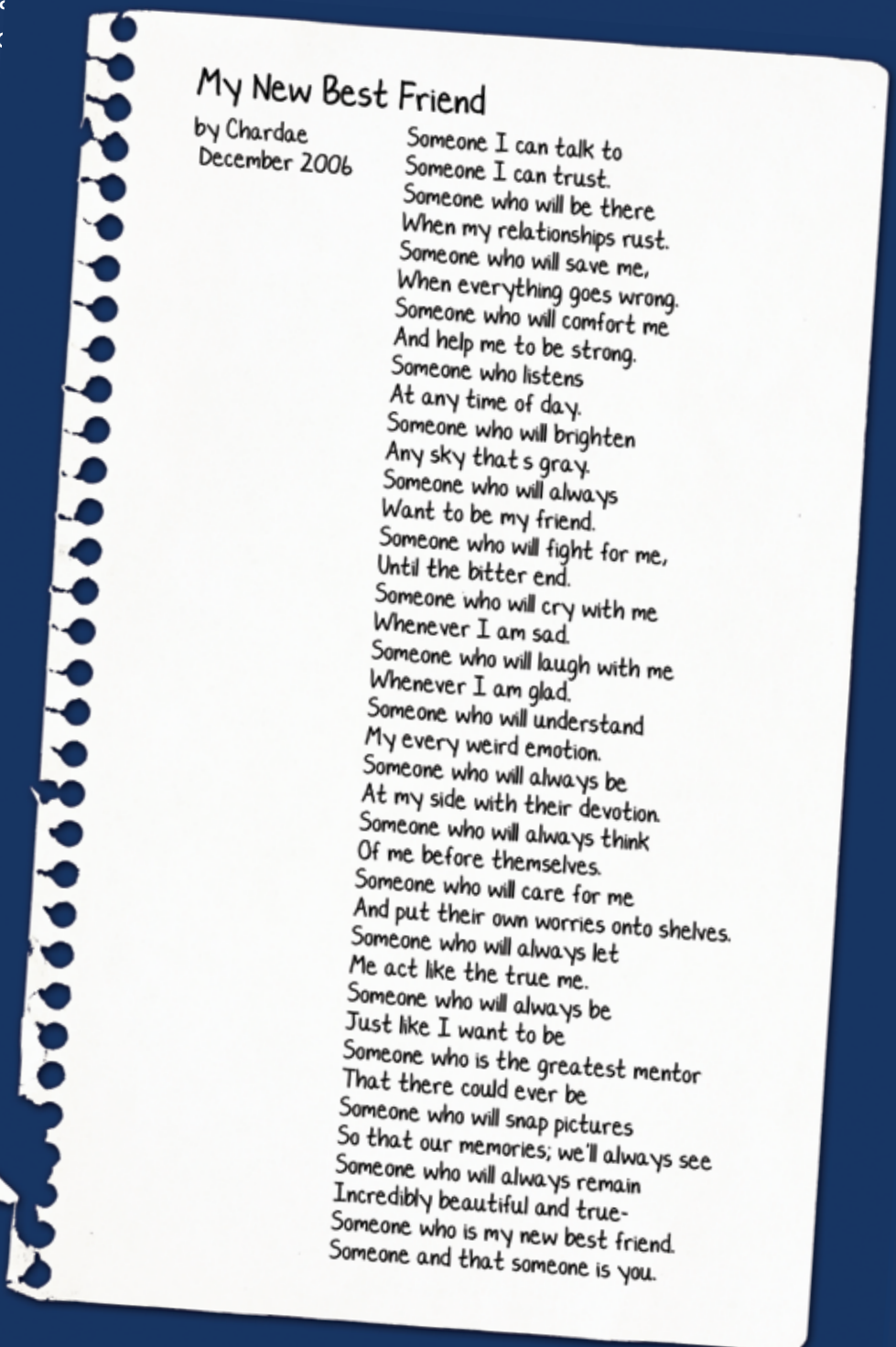
WHY MENTORING?

Spending quality time with a caring adult can have a profound impact on a child's life. Moments spent throwing a ball, sharing music, or cooking are often the most meaningful. So are a warm smile, a hug, and a shoulder to cry on. Under the glow of special attention, young people everywhere shine, and begin to discover the unlimited potential inside each one of them.



Matched by the Clemson University MCP program, Chardae and Carol traveled to Mississippi to rebuild houses after Hurricane Katrina. Chardae will be studying at Clemson this year on a partial scholarship from the Coca-Cola Foundation.

Indeed, research shows that all young people, no matter where they come from or what challenges they face, benefit from these one-on-one relationships.¹



My New Best Friend

by Chardae
December 2006

Someone I can talk to
Someone I can trust.
Someone who will be there
When my relationships rust.
Someone who will save me,
When everything goes wrong.
Someone who will comfort me
And help me to be strong.
Someone who listens
At any time of day.
Someone who will brighten
Any sky that's gray.
Someone who will always
Want to be my friend.
Someone who will fight for me,
Until the bitter end.
Someone who will cry with me
Whenever I am sad.
Someone who will laugh with me
Whenever I am glad.
Someone who will understand
My every weird emotion.
Someone who will always be
At my side with their devotion.
Someone who will always think
Of me before themselves.
Someone who will care for me
And put their own worries onto shelves.
Someone who will always let
Me act like the true me.
Someone who will always be
Just like I want to be
Someone who is the greatest mentor
That there could ever be
Someone who will snap pictures
So that our memories; we'll always see
Someone who will always remain
Incredibly beautiful and true-
Someone who is my new best friend.
Someone and that someone is you.

Even in Chaos, Strengthening Lives

Like a mirror of the city it serves, the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program at the Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans has rebuilt itself – and is rebuilding lives.

Nearly a dozen youth were in the program when Hurricane Katrina struck in August of 2005, dispersing city residents and destroying whole neighborhoods. After being in limbo for months, it is now back bigger and better than ever.

“We went out on Sundays and pleaded with the congregations and the pastors – that there were people who lived nearby, children with incarcerated parents, who needed help,” said Sherlyn Hughes, program coordinator at VOA New Orleans. “We got the word out. We were back!”

Now the program has 250 matches and continues to grow as program staff explore new ways to reach out to mentors through churches, social service agencies, and retired workers.

The young people, in turn, are getting to explore in ways they never had before, Hughes said. Mentors are taking them on trips, going to basketball games, watching movies. Some youth even went on a trip to Washington, D.C., to see the monuments and historical sites – a dream they could only imagine before in books.

“The youth are seeing that ‘somebody really cares about me, somebody wants to be with me,’” Hughes said.



Young people with mentors are:

- ☆ 53% less likely to skip school
- ☆ 46% less likely to start using drugs
- ☆ 32% less likely to engage in physical fights
- ☆ 27% less likely to start drinking²

And the success and acceptance these mentored children receive in the relationships they form with supportive adults encourage them to continue avoiding risky behaviors and choosing positive and healthy decisions. This is key to breaking the cycle.

ANSWERING THE CALL

Americans have never shied away from huge need, and mentoring is no different.

In 2002, more than two million U.S. children, from all walks of life, had a mentor through Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) and other mentoring organizations. As early as 2001, a faith-based organization that conducts a unique mentoring program in Philadelphia, called Amachi, began specifically targeting children of prisoners. Even today, Amachi continues to expand and change untold lives across the country.

“After much hard work by the Department, it is a great privilege to be able to say we met – and exceeded – our goal of 100,000 matches of mentors and mentees. The Mentoring Children of Prisoners program has been a top initiative of the Bush Administration, and it is wonderful to see positive results that will improve the lives of children around the country.”—Michael Leavitt, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services

But it was not until 2003, when President Bush called on Congress to fund the Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) program that the full weight of the federal government came to aid these young people nationwide, and momentum began to build toward a solution.

"President Bush's mentoring initiative has been the single most important program in history for changing the lives of children of inmates. Children who were headed for prison are now headed for college and other positive routes. Families have been strengthened through mentoring support provided to these children. More than 100,000 children of inmates are now on the road to success."
 –Rev. Dr. Wilson Goode, founder, Amachi Philadelphia

THE FIRST 52

With his first Executive Order as President, George W. Bush gave faith-based and community organizations across the nation – groups that had proven able to serve their local communities by curbing crime, conquering addiction, strengthening neighborhoods, and overcoming poverty – a level playing field when it came to receiving federal grants. In the summer of 2003, organizations turned out in droves to apply for the first-ever federal funding – \$8.9 million – to mentor children of prisoners. Fifty-two faith-based and community organizations, tribes, states, and local governments were selected.

Making Connections That Last

Youth Connections of Georgia knows what it's like to be young and not exactly sure of its direction.

The nonprofit began work in 2004 expecting to run group homes for boys. But seeing need everywhere, the organization broadened its mission to provide a variety of programs and services to boys and girls.

After several failed attempts at obtaining federal funding, Youth Connections got its first big break in 2006 from the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program.

Since then, the organization has partnered with AirTran Airways, the Georgia Department of Labor, Georgia State University, the East Point First Mallalieu United Methodist Church, and the Big Bethel AME Church.

"The staff volunteers and board members contribute their time, talents, and treasures in ways that cannot be defined on paper," said Mike Davis, executive director of Youth Connections. "Not only do they serve in their official capacity within the organization, but also as mentors in the program."

This year, Youth Connections became the lead agency for the Atlanta MCP Coalition.

"We now enjoy our new status as an organization that's forward-thinking and manages their programs and services effectively and efficiently," Davis said.

And Youth Connections is now sure it is headed for even greater success.



The Freshman Class

- 200 applications
- 52 selected by impartial reviewers
- Grants from \$30,000 to \$525,000 a year
- 3-year period

With attention and nurturing from these new grantees, communities across the nation started to recognize the scale of the need and the urgency for action. As a result, American arms and hearts began to open to this special population of children and youth.

“Amachi” in Nigerian Ibo means “Who knows but what God has brought us through this child.”

Amachi Texas: Coming Together to Turn the Tide

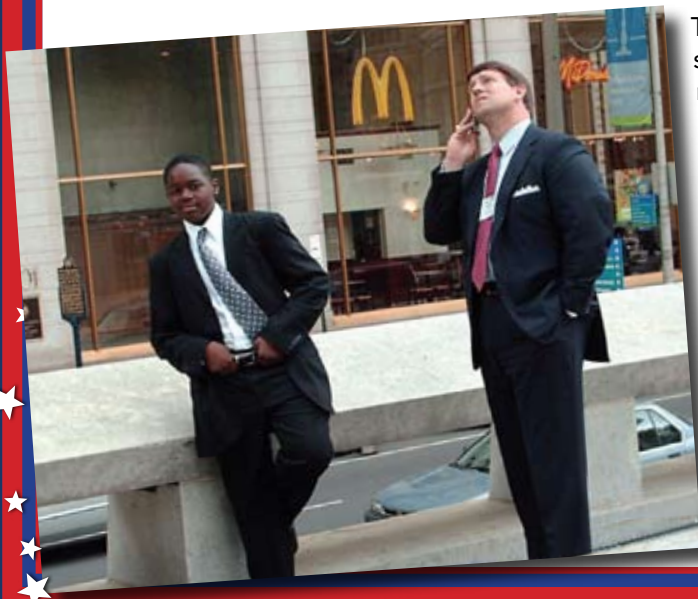
Texans are used to thinking big. So when the national spotlight revealed the challenges faced by children of prisoners, BBBS agencies in the state responded in characteristic fashion; they got big, banding together to form Amachi Texas. And then they convinced the Governor to chip in to the tune of \$5 million.

Working as a team is already reaping huge rewards.

“The essence of the problem is finding the children,” says Olivia Eudaly, executive director of Amachi Texas. “We now have an agreement with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice that gives us access to every prison in the state. The wardens welcome us.”

Amachi Texas has also partnered with Prison Fellowship and the Texas Offenders Re-Entry Initiative to tap into their statewide networks of incarcerated parents and children.

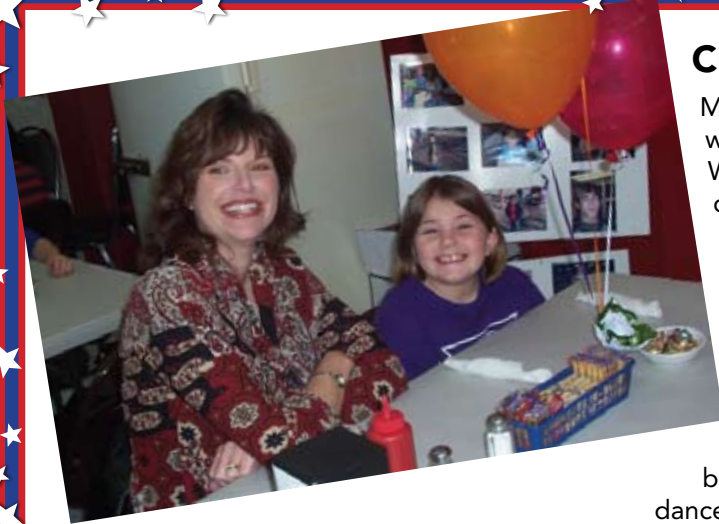
Finding mentors is also easier and more efficient because the coalition has state-level arrangements with groups such as the Texas State Association of Fire Fighters, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, United Methodist Men, and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. That means that staff from local BBBS chapters can walk into a community firehouse or a local church, flash the signed memorandum of understanding, and get straight to work, Eudaly says.



There are other benefits, too. Amachi Texas recently signed an agreement with First Book, a nationwide nonprofit that provides books to needy kids, to supply free books to Amachi matches statewide. Now the mentors and mentees have book clubs where they can work together on reading skills.

So far, the results are heartening. Over the last year, 1,301 Amachi Texas children were paired with caring adult mentors. “We have a tide that desperately needs to be turned,” Eudaly says. “What we are trying to do is broaden the impact in a big way, to bring enough resources together to reach the tipping point.”

Similar statewide efforts are being conceived or are underway in Missouri, Tennessee, and New York, and interest is growing in statehouses across the country.



Culture Matters to Navajo Mentors

Mentoring comes naturally to Native communities, where lessons are often passed down from elders. When the Navajo Nation was selected in 2004 to develop a large-scale National Native American Mentoring Program, they wanted to keep part of that tradition alive.

The mentors and mentees who now meet inside 12 Native American Boys & Girls Clubs in seven states have ice-cream socials, basketball games, bike riding, coloring contests, card playing, and model airplane building. They also have beading, basket weaving, drumming, traditional dance, and pow-wows.

The activities reflect the broad scope of the mentoring program, which includes both Native and non-Native mentors and mentees who reside in the communities.

“Our mentors meet their mentees once a week,” said Janice Randall, chief professional officer of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tahlequah, Oklahoma. “And we have mentors who provide consistency in the kids’ lives. They ask them, ‘How is school going? How are your lives going?’”

Having mentors and mentees meet one-on-one inside the Boys & Girls Clubs offers distinct advantages. The matches get to use game rooms, libraries, computer labs, and gyms. And with transportation at a premium in Indian Country, many youth can get a ride to Club locations after school.

“A lot of these youth have had disappointments in their lives and are used to being let down,” said Randall. “We have mentors who are there to listen and really focus on the youth.”

“Before I started spending time with Max, I really didn’t want to do this. My mom said, ‘Just try it and see how you like it.’ Now, there’s really nothing I don’t like to do with Max. Sometimes we just hang out and talk. I really didn’t have anyone to talk to about my career and my future. Max is a good person for that... I can talk to him and he helps me.”

–Anthony, 16, mentee



Orange County on Track, which matched Max and Anthony, has been serving children of prisoners since 2004.

“There are lots of volunteer opportunities out there, but I tell as many people as I can about this one. It gives you a chance to meet and engage some wonderful kids, have an impact, and build a relationship that can carry on into the future. I look forward to seeing Anthony into adulthood and seeing where he ends up with all the possibilities that he has.”

–Max, Anthony’s mentor for the past three years

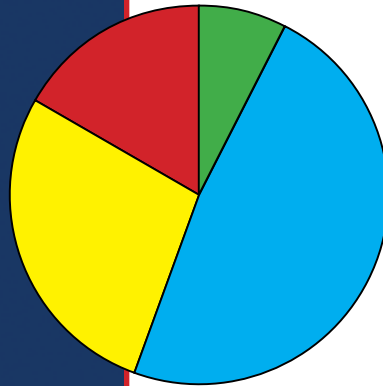
BUILDING MOMENTUM

Since that first summer, more than 300 faith-based and community organizations, five state and local governments, and six tribes have gotten down to the business of changing the lives of some of the nation's most vulnerable youth.

And they have done it by reaching

out – to other faith-based and community organizations, to neighborhood businesses, to local and state leaders – to find the children, recruit the mentors,

Grantees in July 2007:



- 11% faith-based organizations
- 69% community-based organizations
- 40% partnered with at least one faith-based organization
- 24% use the Amachi faith-based mentoring model

Children Served by MCP (2008)

- 52.3% are girls
- 46.7% are boys
- 11 years old on average

and collect the resources they need to make the biggest difference. To continue their work in neighboring communities, some grantees have even applied for, and received, additional funding.

Continued on page 10

New Roads of Possibility

When BBBS of Metro Milwaukee needed energetic volunteer mentors, they revved up a great partnership with Harley-Davidson, whose headquarters are located right in Milwaukee. Through this partnership, volunteers from the company spend about an hour a week with the young people there. For every hour employees volunteer, Harley-Davidson also makes a monetary contribution to BBBS.

"Big Brothers Big Sisters is grateful to the many H-D employees who volunteer. Through simple acts of friendship, these employees are helping children discover their positive potential. The power of these mentors and the generosity of the Harley-Davidson Foundation are critical to creating better opportunities for our youth," says Amy Chionchio, President and Chief Executive Officer of BBBS of Metro Milwaukee.

Harley-Davidson and other BBBS partners have found that employee mentoring programs improve team unity and company loyalty while injecting a big dose of fun.





BBBS of Utah, which matched Chris and Tylor, received its first grant in September 2007 and has already surpassed its first-year match goal.

“Chris is such a great guy. He comes to every soccer game that he can and cheers Tylor on. Tylor calls him ‘my biggest fan!’ Tylor is always so excited to see Chris and talk with him on the phone. They do fun things together, and when Tylor comes home he talks and talks about everything they did together – whether it’s kicking around a soccer ball, baking cookies, carving a pumpkin, or going to a movie. Chris is always positive – emphasizing the possibilities in life. He’s a college graduate, and Tylor thinks he’s the ‘coolest.’

Sometimes he asks Chris what he’s going to wear and when Chris shows up in long shorts and flip-flops, Tylor is dressed in long shorts and flips-flops! The one-on-one time Chris spends with Tylor has really made a difference in Tylor’s attitude and behavior. He’s a much happier child and is also doing better in school. Our entire family has noticed what a tremendous impact Chris has had on Tylor since he started as his ‘Big Brother.’” –Frankie, Tylor’s great aunt and guardian

Nicole was only in kindergarten but she already hated going to school so much she even detested the bus. Lessons were washing over her: she didn’t know her colors, her numbers, and couldn’t even write her own name.

Then, through the Children’s Home Society of West Virginia, Nicole met Yvonne. At first, the pair got together nearly every day. Yvonne helped Nicole in school, encouraged her, and made her feel like part of her family.

Two and a half years later, Yvonne and Nicole continue to do spelling and reading and multiplication. But that is not all they do. They walk the dogs, practice yoga, watch movies, ride bikes, play board games, and cook.

The pair is virtually inseparable, often spending 80 hours a month together. Among other things, Yvonne has taught Nicole to be a giving person, to help those in need. Over the summer, Nicole gladly agreed to have her hair cut so that her long blonde locks could be woven into a wig for kids with cancer.

Thanks to Yvonne, Nicole has even learned to love the bus.



Children’s Home Society of West Virginia, which brought together Yvonne and Nicole, also has three successful sister programs in Florida.

Some of the most seasoned organizations have made more than 3,000 matches since the program began. Others are methodically building efforts from scratch. And the children and youth are indicating that their

mentoring relationships are having positive results. In 2007, 90% of children and youth surveyed reported being “very happy” with their mentoring relationship.³

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“The Administration for Children and Families has worked hard to implement President Bush’s goal of 100,000 mentoring children of prisoners matches by the end of this year. I am honored to be able to report this outstanding milestone that will help strengthen the well-being of children and youth with incarcerated parents. This is an investment that will yield many benefits for years to come.” –Daniel Schneider, Acting Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, Administration for Children and Families



Being Close From Far Away

Lyrics by Danny and Jeff

“You could not survive my struggle,
mom’s been gone for 9 years just for
getting in trouble,
I should of won an honor, just being
without my momma, like goin’ to war
and back with no armor.”

BBBS of Colorado, which matched Jeff and Danny, has multiple MCP grants and runs programs in Denver and Pike’s Peak.

Even though it was more than three years ago, Jeff recalls his initial meeting with 11-year-old Danny at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Colorado (BBBSC) as if it were yesterday.

“He came out to greet me, sat next to me on the couch, and propped his elbow on my shoulder,” Jeff says. “This was my first glimmer into Danny’s courage, outgoing and loving spirit.”

Early on, Jeff was the one who called Danny to plan activities and set up meetings. But in a matter of only a few months, it was Danny who was leaving three-minute, freestyle raps on Jeff’s answering machine, sometimes more than once a day.

Since then, the pair have been furiously writing lyrics and recording original hip-hop on Jeff’s home recording equipment, which Danny calls “the studio.” Jeff has taught Danny how to use editing software, and their goal is to record an entire CD to give away to friends.

Recently, BBBSC took several mentor matches to a movie premiere, and Jeff and Danny were asked to join. Halfway through the movie, Danny again propped up his elbow on Jeff’s shoulder and left it for a while.

“This was such a profound moment for me,” Jeff says. “With such a small gesture of affection, Danny showed trust and brotherhood.”

FEDERAL EFFORT CONTINUES

Though the tide is turning for these young people, the work of the federal government continues. In 2006, representatives from the more than 120 different federal programs that support mentoring activities came together to form the Federal Mentoring Council in an effort to streamline services and maximize resources. And then on November 1, 2007, Mrs. Bush announced a three-year voucher demonstration



White House photo by Shealah Craighead.

project that will serve 24,000 children of prisoners nationwide, particularly in underserved areas and tribal regions, to take advantage of the mentoring organizations closest to their homes.

With the help of caring and supportive adults across the nation, the mantle of mentoring continues to draw more tightly around America's neediest young people.

Mrs. Laura Bush visits with students at the Good Shepherd Nativity Mission School, Thursday, Nov. 1, 2007, in New Orleans, a Helping America's Youth visit with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southeast Louisiana. Mrs. Bush thanked the group, saying, "We know that positive role models are essential to young people's success."

"Millions of children have one or both parents in prison. In addition to the difficulties of being separated from mom or dad, these kids also struggle with the economic, social, and emotional burdens of their parents' incarceration. Studies show that children with an incarcerated parent are more likely to commit crimes themselves. So one of the best ways to help these young people avoid dangerous behaviors is to pair them with mentors—caring adults who can step in with the guidance and personal attention that they miss from their own parents."
 –First Lady Laura Bush, November 1, 2007

¹Dubois, D. L., Holloway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Harris, C. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. [Special Issue]. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2), 157-197.

²Tierney, J.P., Grossman, J.B. & Resch, N.L. (1995). *Making a difference: An impact study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

³Relationship quality instrument, administered annually to children at least nine years of age in relationships at least nine months in duration at time of survey.

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