

PROGRAM SUCCESS STORIES—EDUCATION

BOY SCOUTING

One Monday afternoon, Julian was taking a test in his high school Spanish class when his teacher, Ms. Byrd began to choke. Ms. Byrd tried many times to swallow but was unable to swallow the food she had been eating and was unable to breathe. She tried to push back from her desk and get out of her chair and leave the classroom in order not to disturb the class taking their test.

Almost instinctively, Julian rose from his seat and took control of the situation, going to his choking teacher and performing the Heimlich maneuver on her. As his teacher began to lose consciousness, Julian's fifth abdominal thrust dislodged the food and opened Ms. Byrd's airway. Because of Julian's determination and concentration in a difficult situation, and through the use of emergency first aid learned as a Boy Scout, Spanish teacher Rosa Byrd's life was saved.

YOUTH MENTORING

David and Quentin have been matched in the Bigs in Schools program for more than five years. When they first met, Quentin was not doing very well in school and had a hard time completing his homework. He was even a bit resistant doing his homework during the after school meetings. Quentin got into some scuffles with other children as well. During the course of their relationship, Quentin and David have had many discussions about how to handle tough problems and frustrating situations. They have come a long way! Over the course of their match, Quentin has repeatedly made the honor roll at school, no longer gets into fights, and is active in the county's football league. He has matured into a responsible young man who definitely believes in the importance of education and gets good grades. Quentin used to be difficult to talk with, withdrawn, and much closed off. He is now a pleasure to talk with—he smiles when he speaks, his vocabulary has expanded, and his demeanor is respectful and open. When asked about his relationship with David, he replies, "It's great!"

Nadine is a grandmother raising one of the young men in the youth mentoring program. She shares: "I would like to thank you for finding the best Big Brother for my grandson, Nathan. First of all, let me explain that I am a fifty-something year-old grandma, trying to raise my two grandkids without much help. I also have some health issues I must address. When I first was awarded the kids, Nathan had a lot of trust issues. Thankfully, you all found the perfect match for my Nathan. Lucas is a

very kind man, with a gentleness that my Nathan needed. Lucas is a very good listener and an even better teacher. He has befriended my grandson and helped him become a very fine young man. Lucas takes time out of his days to call Nathan and find out how his day was. He also goes to Nathan's school to check on school work and other projects. Lucas has also made Nathan understand that there is more to life than snacks and video games, like hiking, cycling, and just talking. To us, Lucas is more than a Big Brother; he is a friend and a mentor for Nathan. He is what every other Big Brother should be modeled after. Lucas helps Nathan academically, emotionally, physically and most of all spiritually. Lucas and his wife both love Nathan, and they show it every day. I thank God every day for coming into Nathan's life. Thank you, Youth Mentors, for sending me the perfect match for my grandson."

Nathan speaks about his mentor, Lucas: "Lucas is a very good person. He gives me advice when I need it, and he is very dependable. He calls me the day before we do whatever we do. We do stuff every weekend. It's always fun. One time, he asked me if it was okay to talk to my teachers and I said, 'Yeah, sure,' because I know that I can trust him to do what's best for me. We have developed a relationship where we can share secrets with each other. There's nothing we can't talk about. Lucas also teaches me things like Backgammon and sometimes I beat him. Also, we were doing yard work, and it was my first time doing it. It was fun. He taught me things about nature, like living things, like Sycamores and how some leaves are bigger than others. We learned about Great Blue Herons, and I said, 'Don't they look grey to you?' and Lucas said, 'Actually, they do.' We also were about 50 feet away from the Heron, and it was hunting for food so we didn't want to bother it.

He took me to historical places, museums, and music programs. We were biking one time, and we saw the Sunken Road. We also bike the battlefield, which is historical. We've also been to the Marine Corps Museum in Quantico. We've been to programs at church, where he sings with a bunch of other people and they are separated by how low or how high they can sing. We also like to exercise. We hike, we bike, and we swim. We recycle, too. We recycle magazines, plastic, beer bottles and milk jugs. We pick up anything recyclable on the ground. I learned from Lucas trust, obedience, and friendship which are very important things. Because of this relationship, I see a very different future for myself. I'm doing better in school, and I hope one day I get all A's. I want to become one of two things: an FBI agent or a Crypto zoologist. This is the stuff me and my mentor have discussed."

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Brian's teacher shared his progress after entering the AI's Pals program, a program that teaches young children in participating classrooms to express feelings appropriately; use kind words; care about others; use self-control; think flexibly; accept difference; make friends; solve problems peacefully; cope in positive ways; make safe and healthy choices; and understand that tobacco, illegal drugs and alcohol are not for children.

Brian, a four year-old boy in her class had been in therapy for anger issues because his father had to be absent due to his job. Brian's mother thanked the teacher for the program and said that it had done more for the child than months of therapy. She told the teacher that Brian had drawn pictures of all three puppets, put them on the wall of his closet and placed a pillow on the floor to create an AI's Pals place of his own at home. His mother said that every time he begins to feel angry, he goes into his own AI's Pals place to settle himself down. She said this program was so beneficial to her son that he is now teaching the strategies to his younger sister!

PARENTING CLASSES

Melissa shares her success story with the Parenting Classes program. "My growing up was not the best. Both of my parents were addicted to drugs and alcohol, and I was involved in the social service system for as long as I could remember. My earliest memory of being taken away from my parents was at age 3. My parents didn't know how to take care of me or my brother. I was born into a family cycle of poor parenting. I remember waking up to a glass and everything on the floor from my parents partying. I remember being homeless and sleeping in my car. There was a lot of physical abuse in our family.

As a teenager, both my brother and I were taken out of our home and split up. The foster families always said they couldn't take both of us. I remember being so bitter and resentful to the foster care system. I just wanted someone to hear me and believe in me. I was placed in a locked facility because I kept running away from the foster homes.

At the age of 17, I had run away again but this time my new worker told me that if I got my diploma, I could get out of the foster care system. I got my diploma but this freedom from the system was short-lived. My boyfriend at the time, husband now, and I got pregnant. I remember being so scared. I wanted to do everything perfectly because I was afraid of the social services department. I didn't want to be involved in any program. I didn't want to give anyone a way into my family again. But

unfortunately my plan didn't work; the thing that I was scared of the most was about to happen.

I remember the day like it was yesterday; we had no idea how much this day would change our lives. Peter was getting our son Joel situated. We lived in an old home in downtown Fredericksburg. The steps in this home were so narrow. My own mother slipped down these steps just days earlier. As Peter was bringing Joel down the stairs in his arms, he slipped and fell. Joel fell out of his arms. I heard the thud and my heart dropped. Joel didn't make a sound. He was only 2 months old. We called the ambulance instantly and rushed Joel to the hospital. At first the doctors looked Joel over and said he looked just fine, but I insisted they give him more extensive examinations. I just wanted to make sure my baby was okay.

Our nightmare began. The hospital called Child Protective Services and for the next 8 months, Peter and I would have to prove ourselves to a system that didn't believe in me in the first place. At 2 1/2 months my baby boy, the one that I wouldn't even let people touch unless their hands were clean, was taken away from me. The same worker that was involved in my life as a child was now overseeing my case. I had no idea that I was going to be punished for the actions of my parents. I had no idea that I was labeled a "bad" parent because my parents were.

The worker stood in front of the judge and told the judge that she didn't believe that I was capable of being a good parent and that I needed to be involved in counseling and parenting classes. The one condition of Joel coming home was that I get involved in Parenting Classes. To be honest, I didn't trust any of the programs offered out in the community. I mean all of my life, I had been let down by the system. My plan was to drop out of the program I was instructed to be in as soon as the courts gave me my son back.

From the first day until now, the program has believed in me. I laugh because I remember not wanting to be in any program and now I fight my workers about moving up levels in the program. This program has helped me to understand my child and helped me to break the cycle of abuse in my family. I have learned how to play with and correct my children a more positive way. I have learned how to understand what to expect and how to understand how he is developing in a normal way for his age. My worker helped me in setting goals for myself and for my family. I have finished my goals of becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant and am getting ready to start school again.

Joel is now 2 years old. My husband and I have just had our second child, a beautiful baby girl. I am in a better place now. We are married and have a nice home. I am safe now and I know that I love my children more than life itself. I know that you can't change your past but you can change your future. My children will know what it feels like to have a healthy family."