

Man 2 Man: A Male Youth Development Perspective

Segun Aje has been with the Y for 10 years; he started working at the age of 19 with youth in low-income high crime neighborhoods in Montgomery County, Maryland. In early 2013, he decided to make a [film](#) to show people the potential impact afterschool programs have in challenging neighborhoods.

Even though I spent the early parts of my childhood in fairly unpleasant neighborhoods, my time spent was not as sustained as many of the



youth in the neighborhoods YFS serves. Many of these youth live in these neighborhoods from K-12. The impact of living in these neighborhoods varies. A 2004 report written by staff at the University of California, Berkley looked at the negative impacts on families living in low-income neighborhoods. According to the report, negative impacts included, "high rates of unemployment, crime, adolescent delinquency, teenage childbearing, social and physical disorder, single-parent households, child maltreatment, high levels of mobility, poor child and adult health and mental health, and poor developmental outcomes for children and adolescents."

Despite these findings, I believe that the environment people are born into does not always lead to a predetermined path. I am not naive though. The reality is that many youth who are raised in "rougher" neighborhoods do often times fail to meet the academic requirements to graduate high school, or get into a four year college. This grim reality can be improved with the aid of community resources- whether through nonprofits, churches, local business, government, a strong school system, or other such entities.

Around 2007, I became the YFS Man 2 Man Program Leader. My hope was to make a measurable impact on a neighborhood that by all accounts was a low-income high crime neighborhood. In 2008, the local government partnered with the Y, local police, and the school system to provide youth development services to youth in the neighborhood. Over the course of six years, Man 2 Man provided academic support, job readiness training, college tour opportunities, recreational field trips, health and wellness activities, and mentoring for 10-12 youth each school year.

One of the goals of the program is to recruit youth in middle school and provide them with youth development opportunities all the way through high school graduation. Youth enter the program in middle school as mentees and then became mentors in the 10th grade. This model allows YFS to really nurture program participants.

The first couple years were rough. Some students dropped out and some were determined not be a good fit for the program due to the available program resources. In due time, things did improve after much support from branch management. We started to see improvement in many of the youth's academic performance. We also saw many of the youth return to the program year after year.

In early 2013, I decided to make a [film](#) in order to show people the potential impact of afterschool programs in challenging neighborhoods. With collaborative networks that included numerous Y staff, school teachers, guidance counselors, school administration, police department, local colleges, local business, and community volunteers; we were able to see two of our original participants get accepted into college and also attend college. Mitchell, who this video features, is a great example of how caring adults can make a measureable impact in the development of youth. Also, worth mentioning is the fact the video was co-produced by a former Man 2 Man participant- and current YFS staff- Axel Kabundji.

Although the reality is that youth who live in low-income high crime neighborhoods generally have greater academic challenges, well run afterschool programs can play a critical role in helping youth successfully navigate these challenges. The YFS Man 2 Man program is just one of example of such a program. There are many more. I hope you find this video inspiring.

-Segun Aje, Former YMCA Youth & Family Services Staff Member