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News

Mentoring program builds boys into men

Published Wednesday, December 12, 2012
by [Taylor Shaw](#)

DURHAM – With an absentee father, 13-year-old Darrenta Haley is raised by his mother and grandparents. The Thomas Mentor Leadership Academy fills the male void in Darrenta’s life.

“There is something about your own dad not being there,” said (Ret.) U.S. Army First Sergeant Larry E. Thomas, founder and CEO of the academy. Thomas, like the boys in the program, was raised by his mother and grandparents. “I do believe that at a certain point, a woman has to turn her son over to a positive man. A woman can not raise a man.”

The TMLA teaches, trains and mentors young males between the ages of 10-15 who are raised by a single parent or grandparents.

Established in February 2011, the program is different than others. Instead of one-on-one sessions, a group mentoring approach is taken.

“We are not the military, but we use a lot of their models,” Thomas said.

The program runs off three pillars: discipline, respect and

commitment. Education, decision-making, conflict resolution, respect for self and others and service to the community are the main components.

“This is my chance to get him into a structured program,” said Sha’ Torria Torian, Darrenta’s mother. “If you are going to enroll your son into the TMLA, not only is your son going to change, but you will change as well.”



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Everything in the program is a teaching moment – from uniforms to bringing out pride and self-esteem to drills to building discipline. The TMLA encourages alternative methods to at-risk behaviors through field trips, tutoring, community service projects, communication, conflict resolution, critical thinking and life skills.

Outside of attending sessions every first and third Saturday, mentors play an active role in the young men – or cadets’ – academic life as well. They attend meetings with teachers and administrators or make random appearances at the cadets’ school.

Quoting Chick-fil-A Founder S. Truett Cathy, Thomas said “It’s better to build boys than mend men.”

“It’s not the greatest place to be on a Saturday – waking up at 7:30 in the morning and coming to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (building) – but it has helped all of us to become leaders now. When we didn't have a male in our lives, we were followers,” Darrenta said.

Added Thomas: “I can’t be your dad, but I can be a positive male to walk through your processes with you.”

The TMLA stays in contact with participants through high school and college. The Veterans of Foreign Wars Henry Seeman Post 2740 is at 3707 Dearborn Drive. For more information, visit www.tmlacademy.org or send an inquiry to info@tmlacademy.org.



Comments

It is great to read about positive programs for our males.
Posted on December 14, 2012

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