

Kenwood Academy Brotherhood: a School-Based Male-Mentoring Organization



“Doc, I’m about to do something! I’m about to do something!” exclaimed “Terrance” as he stood in my doorway, obviously in crisis mode. “Terrance” was struggling with “doing something” or telling an adult that he was feeling anxious and possibly suicidal. “Terrance”, a member of my school-based male-mentoring group, was participating in an overnight college campus tour when he began having suicidal ideations. A rule within my school district is that faculty and students are not to be in the same hotel rooms. He and I hesitated about the next step. Should I let him in and possibly threaten my job as a professional school counselor or follow the rules and contribute to the stress of a child? I made the decision to let “Terrance” in, keep the door ajar, allow him to express his anxiety, and initiate some counseling techniques to deescalate the situation.

This is just one of the many scenarios that I experience as a professional school counselor and the coordinator of the Kenwood Academy Brotherhood (KAB), a school-based male mentoring organization. I created the Brotherhood ten years ago with the sole purpose of encouraging adolescent African American and Latino American males to choose education as the catalyst for success. As time has passed, over 500 young men have volunteered to participate in the school-based male-mentoring program. I discovered that some were having a difficult time “*balancing the various dimensions of their wellness.*” The inability to balance psychological, intellectual, environmental, physical, financial, social, and spiritual challenges was being manifested as depression, low self-esteem, identity struggles, frustration, irritability, and poor academic progress. The priority to attain a quality education had been replaced with the need for clinical attention, coping strategies, and skill development.

The Brotherhood began with ten seniors providing peer mentoring to twenty-five freshmen. At one point, over the course of ten years, the Brotherhood’s total membership grew to 105 students, while I served as the sole adult coordinator for the entire group. It was then that I realized the need for additional professional assistance to aid in developing these male students

from boys into men. I reached out to the postsecondary community to request help to implement the Brotherhood curriculum and to provide opportunities for scholarly research. Several universities' education and counseling departments responded to my requests by referring volunteers/interns to provide mental health checkups and counseling for the Brotherhood.

In the most recent five year history of the Brotherhood several wonderful graduate students with a passion for helping adolescent minority males have provided mental health checkups for the KAB. Since their involvement with KAB, they continue to use their knowledge and skills to positively influence the organization through a multidisciplinary approach. The approach affords comprehensive supports to KAB through the use of interns from the helping professions. Some of the interns who provide supports to the Brotherhood study in the field of social work, school counseling, and community mental health counseling. It is the continuing collaborative work of these interns that strengthens the support circle that surrounds the KAB male students. They have worked diligently to establish trust, promote intimacy, develop creative activities, conduct assessments, and collect/interpret data while implementing a structured-thirty-week curriculum.

Brittany Sims, MSW, spent three years as an intern with the Brotherhood, using ethnographic analysis to research issues of intimacy and trust among them as they came to experience the "safe haven" environment of the Brotherhood.

Ashley Ward, BS, began her internship with the Kenwood Academy Brotherhood in January of 2013, and has come to see the dire need for mental health services for these young men and the inadequacy of the school system in providing both individual and group counseling. She comments, "What I have learned now, more than anything, is how precious the provision of consistent emotional support is to adolescent African American males."

Aja Humphreys, MS, was a school counselor intern with the Kenwood Brotherhood in the fall of 2012. She worked with the 14 boys on her caseload to help them learn both academic and social skills, and concludes: "A comprehensive male-mentoring program, such as KAB, certainly gives young men an outlet to express themselves freely and receive therapeutic healing in a non-threatening environment."

Fredrick Kendricks, Jr., BA, mentored eleven students in the KAB program, seeing them individually during their lunch periods and using the Solution Focused Brief Therapy Approach. He also organized group sessions designed to engage the students while improving their behavioral, cognitive and emotional development.

Need for Continued Work

While collectively serving the Brotherhood and utilizing the multidisciplinary approach among other interventions, techniques and skills, we noted that the extra attention and services proved effective. Attendance increased, academic success improved, and active plans were established to resolve personal-social issues. Accordingly, the Brotherhood members developed a stronger sense of fraternity and an increased amount of self-sufficiency for developing solutions to issues among themselves. We noted an increase in their level of comfort with (non-sexual) intimacy

among their same-sex peers. This reinforced their brotherly bond and the effectiveness of this student-based male-mentoring program, built on a creed of Fraternity, Responsibility, and Creativity. The work associated with 'Balancing the Dimensions of Wellness' within the individuals of the Brotherhood, required passion, a plan and a dedicated support team.

However, we are aware that support teams like KAB are rarely present within the learning institutions that serve young male minority students. It is likely that the paucity of mental health services in secondary schools correlates with the increasing numbers of school shootings, gang affiliations, suicides, depression, and failure. The research conducted by our group is a small fraction of the work that needs to be done with this population. The possibilities for helping are endless. Fundamentally, it requires 'out-of-the-box' strategic planning and a passion to make a difference. These were but a few of the ingredients that initiated the Brotherhood and contributed to its ten year success. So the question then becomes, *in what ways, can you contribute to the evolutionary work with minority male youth?*

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