

Be the Change 2015



Executive Summary

According to the revised 2015 Black Boys Report, in Wisconsin, 59% of Black boys graduated and 73% of Latino boys from high school in comparison to 94% of their white male counterparts. Nearly every social expert contends that obtaining a good education carries a strong correlation to an increased quality of life. However, educational institutions do not have the capacity to counter the rapidly growing variety of social issues that negatively impact academic performance. In Milwaukee, young men of color are often at greatest risk for falling behind early. By the time they enter high school they exhibit significant disparities in school discipline and academic achievement. Without intervention, many young men of color fall victim to a cycle of hopelessness and despair that make high school completion difficult and exposure to the criminal justice system likely. The long-term impact of academic failure has a significant impact on the life outcomes of young men of color and the health of our families and communities.



The challenge is to restore hope through the provision of effective interventions that provide young men with the skills to reach their potential in both academic performance and social interactions. Be the Change (BTC) is specifically designed to address the unique reality of young men who need additional support navigating the challenges they face on a daily basis inside and outside of the classroom.

It is our belief that young men of color who have experienced academic and social struggles, with the proper support system and guidance, will see the potential that exists within them, understand the obstacles they face and make an active decision to change their behavior and life trajectory. Be the Change is the intervention that will help them to make these changes.

History

In 2010, The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel published a report highlighting Wisconsin's racial achievement gap in math and literacy. Be The Change (BTC) was developed as a cross sector response led by The City of Milwaukee, Running Rebels and the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative in partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) to address the formidable challenges that many young males of color face as they navigate social and academic challenges during adolescence.

The five-week intensive summer program platform utilizes an integrated service structure using culturally relevant literacy instruction (ID Literacy Curriculum, Dr. Alfred Tatum of Chicago, IL) combined with a rigorous cultural rites of passage component led by trained community facilitators and MPS instructors. The Be the Change summer program serves to provide an outlet for young men of color, youth mentors and older adult role models to share concerns, exchange ideas, develop and offer solutions and act on priorities addressing conditions that lead to academic and social disparities.



Purpose

The goal of BTC is to implement a comprehensive program that supports the development, success and achievement of Milwaukee's young males of color. BTC uses an integrated service structure and an intergenerational approach to connecting young men of color with young adult and older male role models of color. BTC will employ a cohort of seasoned mentors that have experience working with our scholars. In addition, all mentors will be given on-going instruction and support to ensure that they are equipped to be successful. The goals of the program are:

- Increasing reading comprehension and literacy skills
- Improving student confidence and attitude toward learning
- Improving school attendance rates among participants
- Lowering disciplinary referral, detention, and suspension rates
- Establishing, promoting, and enforcing positive social norms and behavior habits
- Providing opportunities for community exposure, life-skills and character development
- Increasing community service and civic engagement

Program

For implementation of the 2015 summer program, the partnership Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), Universal Companies (UC) and the Center for Youth Engagement (CYE) partnered to implement the program. With generous support from the City of Milwaukee, Be the Change was able to engage 23 young men in a comprehensive five week credit recovery and life skills development program. Young men were recruited from the following MPS partnership high schools:

- Assata High School,
- Northwest Opportunities Vocational Academy (NOVA),
- Grandview High School
- Shalom High School

BTC utilizes Dr. Alfred Tatum's ID literacy and The Brotherhood/ Sister Sol rites of passage curricula. Both are designed especially to meet the needs of young men of color who need support in reaching their full academic potential. These curricula were adapted to be implemented throughout the five-week summer program.

Dr. Tatum's ID curriculum is designed to improve literacy development by exposing young men to literary works that speak to the reality of their lives inside and outside of schools. The curriculum is built on four platforms:

- Define self
- Become resilient
- Engage others
- Build capacity

The Brotherhood/Sister Sol rites of passage curriculum serves as the foundational leadership, cultural, and life-skills content of the program. It is a compilation of over 50 workshops and an extensive appendix of activities and resources that have been tested with Black and Latino youth since 1995. It brings to life issues that are linked to personal and social transformation. The process is designed for members to define their own vision of liberation. It may be about freeing themselves from negative pressures of the streets, redefining constructive gender roles within their significant relationships or organizing against harmful forces in their community. Games and role-play, reflective writing and discussion, visual and oral expression help them choose brotherhood over violence, passion over rage, and hope over despair. The curriculum is built on the 10 focus areas of:

- Mind, Body and Spirit
- Leadership Development
- Pan African and Latino/a History
- Sexism and Misogyny
- Sexual Education and Responsibility
- Drug and Substance Abuse

- Conflict Resolution and Bias Reduction
- Political Education and Social Justice
- Educational Achievement
- Community Service and Responsibility

The partnership intentionally created a space for community building among the staff as a model for the scholars. Although each position has a targeted area of expertise, program staff combined efforts to provide cohesion throughout program components. The program manager was responsible for overseeing daily operations, handling disciplinary issues and the oversight of the chapter leaders. MPS provided teachers who were responsible for guiding scholars through math and English credit recovery curriculum or the ID literacy curriculum. Universal Companies provided five community mentors to support MPS teachers during academic enrichment activities and lead the social/cultural leadership development adapted from the Brotherhood/Sister Sol rites of passage curriculum.

In order to create the environment necessary for scholar success, all staff participated in a two-day training preparing 1) teachers to provide instruction for credit recovery activities in reading and math 2) the implementation of the ID literacy curriculum. 3) Mentors to facilitate social/cultural activities from the Brotherhood/Sister Sol rites of passage curriculum. MPS and CYE facilitated these training with both MPS teachers and community mentors. Teachers and community mentors were also given time to establish relationships with one another and align academic and social/cultural activities.

Initially, 34 students signed up to participate in the program. On Monday, June 22, 2015, community mentors led an optional all-day team-building retreat in the city consisting of interactive trust building and social emotional learning activities. That evening, the partnership hosted a mandatory parent orientation and dinner to provide additional information to parents and collect necessary forms.

From that point forward the program operated June 22-July 23rd, Monday-Thursday from 8:00am-12:30pm. Fridays consisted of voluntary field trips and other educational experiences. The program ran on-site at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Life-long Learning located on the corner of 12th and Highland. The daily schedule included:

7:30-8:00am	Breakfast
8:00-8:30am	Opening Circle and Physical activity
8:30-10:00am	Math/English Credit Recovery or Alfred Tatum ID Literacy Curriculum
10:00-10:15am	Break, Open Gym, and Transition
10:15-12:00pm	Leadership, Life Skills, and Culture workshop- Brotherhood Sister Sol curriculum
12:00-12:30pm	Lunch and Release Break and Snack

In addition to daily activities described above, the summer program included team building and personal growth exercises, physical and sports activity, and individualized one-on-one mentoring. Universal Companies pushed to improve the quality of the lunch served to ensure the meal was nutritious and enjoyable. There was also a series of organized field trips throughout the summer to expand the experiential base of the scholars. The program concluded with a program celebration on Thursday, July 23, 2015.

Evaluation

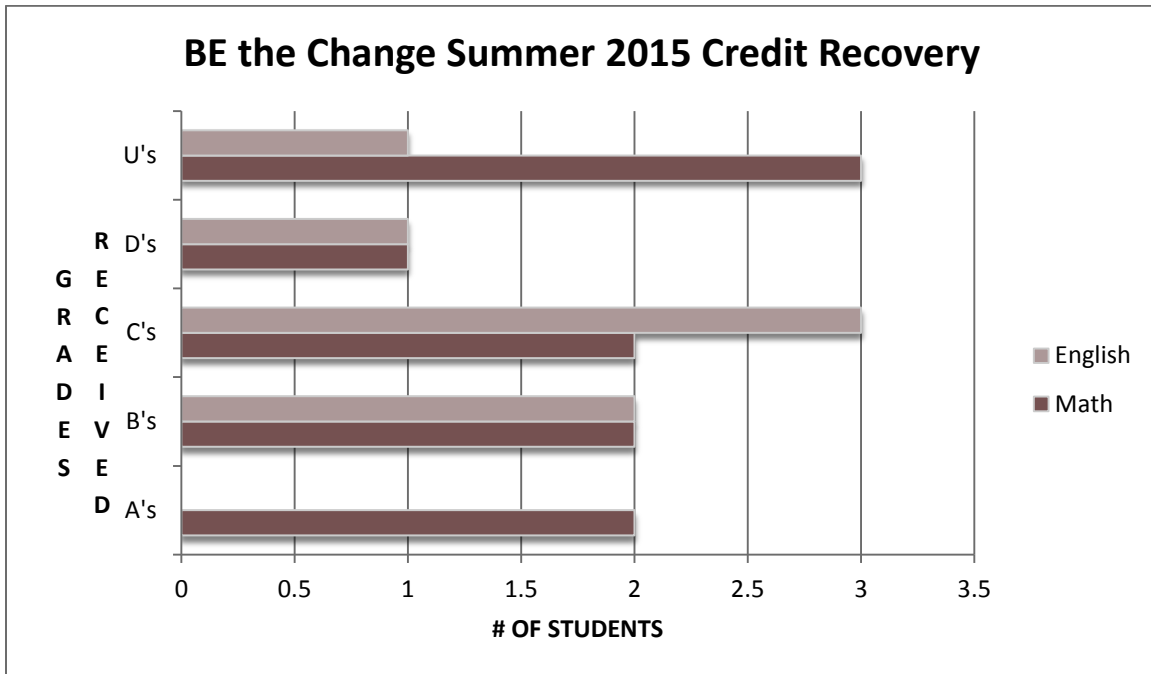
Evaluation of the BTC program was designed to measure growth of program participants across a number of social and academic indicators and analyze the extent to which their involvement in BTC activities and supports foster academic and social growth, resilience, efficacy, self-determination, and affirmed sense of dignity. The long-term goal of BTC is expansion into a citywide program for young black males and national replication as an evidence-based best model for improving life outcomes for male students of color.

A survey was given to scholars during the first and last week of the program. We received 37 unique surveys and were able to match 12 pre/post surveys. The data collected was collated by Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (UWM)

Impact

Seventeen scholars were enrolled in credit recovery courses over the summer, 10 in math and 7 in English. MPS teachers helped to teach the required online content. Thirteen out of the seventeen scholars received passing grades. A full breakdown of scholar grades from the summer can be found below:

Grade Received	Math	English
A	2	0
B	2	2
C	2	3
D	1	1
U	3	1



Each scholar received a quarter elective credit for program participation. This was an important aspect of getting young men who are struggling academically the opportunity to get back on track.

In addition to the credit recovery Based on the matched pre/post surveys administered to measure the impact of the leadership component on decision-making, goal setting values, and interpersonal relationships, there were key areas where attitudinal change was evident for those who completed both the pre and post survey. They are:

- 88% of youths in the program indicated they were able to “share my thoughts and ideas openly and confidently” at post-test, an increase from 69% at pre-test
- 94% of youths in the program stated, “I can change my surroundings” at post-test, an increase from 54% at pre-test

According to attendance, academic and disciplinary data collected by MPS, approximately 70% of BTC participants improved their GPA in the first semester of the 2015-2016 academic year. Unfortunately, we did not see significant improvement in other indicator areas.

Mentor Testimonies

“This summer was an amazing experience for the young men and the chapter leaders. Seeing the transformation happen each day is evidence of the strength and power associated with coordinated efforts, black male unity, and high impact interventions. The young men willingly participated and took wise risks to grow in character,

knowledge of self, and academic skills. I'm looking forward to the continued growth of everyone involved."

- **Sam Coleman**, Program Manager

"My experience with BTC was unmatched by any educational experience I've encountered. The positive relationships that were established through dialogue about life skills and self-awareness were amazing. It was evident from the response of the young men that this type of program is the missing ingredient in public education for our young black boys to be equipped for success. "

- **Reggie Riley**, Chapter Leader

"My time with the BTC Program last summer was very positive and rewarding. The time spent with that group of young men as a chapter leader was both a teaching and learning experience for me - being a positive Black Male figure and also building unity amongst our Black Male youth. Realizing and understanding our power in togetherness and the effects we have on our community. I am looking forward to working and continuing to grow and build positive relationships in the BTC program."

- **Garry Levy**, Chapter Leader

"My experience with working the youth from Be The Change was a wonderful experience. It helped me, as an adult, to understand how to listen and talk to our youth."

- **Walter Gilmore**, Chapter Leader

When I look back and reflect on my experience with 'Be The change' program, I begin to immediately think about the young men that impacted my life with their stories and personalities. It was a pleasure working with a group of intelligent, vibrant, and charismatic young men that challenged my abilities to reach them, but also helped resurface some of the challenges that I experienced through my own life or close family and friends. I knew that dealing with these young men that their was a tone that needed to be set from day one, a tone that is steadfast, consistent, and came from a true, loving place. This process took time for the young men to accept, but was impactful in the end. In my group, I had a different age ranging from 14yrs-20yrs old which made the classroom discussions very interesting with the different perspectives amongst their own peers. That allowed the older teens to help the younger teens with their maturity and seeing how their mindset can change even with the difference of a year or two, which gave them insight on how easy change can be if you allow yourself to put in the work. This experience was inspirational to them and myself, one that will always stay with me and the great team that I was blessed to work with. I look forward to another year, and more growth this coming year.

- **Mr. Banks**, Chapter Leader

Scholar testimonies can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9JjE-xOeFc>

Keys to Success

To maximize the efficacy of BTC, carrying the positive gains made during the summer program into the traditional classroom, there has to be a collective investment in the sustainability and expansion of the program. A structure to support the academic and social progress of the scholars must extend beyond a summer intervention. The BTC partnership has to act as a centralized source of resources, content, events and support for localized implementation of BTC throughout the academic year. Schools must commit to continued scholar recruitment and engagement and dedicated staff. Each school with BTC students will designate a point person to coordinate activities at the school to provide academic support, advocacy and accountability in the school.

Community building among the BTC students is another essential component for success. Regular gatherings of BTC mentors and scholars outside of the traditional classroom provide the opportunity to create and uphold positive social norms developed during the summer program, communicate expectations and process life events in a safe supportive environment. BTC scholars will also be connected to community events to expand their experience, network and support.

The BTC partnership is committed to building capacity, both inside and outside educational institutions. With continued support, BTC scholars will be positioned to grow academically and reach their full potential.

