



# GROWING KINGS

For Immediate Release:  
January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

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## **Be a Mentor, Our Youth Need You** Growing Kings Celebrates National Mentoring Month

I still have vivid memories of my childhood, and what seems to be pivotal moments of my life. Many of those moments involve conversations I've had and decisions I made - both good and bad - with my friends. I remember my friends and I being asked what we wanted to be when we grew up, and almost in unison, we all said either a professional football player or basketball player. We were also asked who we considered our heroes. But while they were naming professional athletes and rappers, I said, "my dad and granddad."

Most of the guys that I went to school with and played little league sports with, didn't grow up with their father in the house - but I did. My heroes were the men that I had in my life on a regular basis, my dad, granddad, and uncles. They were like Supermen to me. My dad used to say that he could beat up Mike Tyson, and for some very strange reason I believed that until I was at least 16.

I grew up in Titusville, a neighborhood on the Southwest side of Birmingham, and as a youth I never recognized the privileges that I had, or that my life outcomes would differ from many of my friends. We were all inner-city knuckleheads, but the consistent, and at times relentless, inputs from the men in my life were the differentiating factor. I went off to college on scholarship, received an MBA, and worked in finance making more money than my parents at only 23. And I attribute it all to the inputs in my life along the way.

Unfortunately, many young people continue to grow up without active and positive male influences in their life, and although the reasons vary, a solution in the form of consistent and intentional mentors does exist. We can all think about where we are in our lives, and the role that someone else played to support our journey. You can be that input and a part of the needed support system for today's male youth.

Research shows that mentors play a powerful role in providing young people with the tools to strive and thrive, to attend and engage in school, and to reduce or avoid risky behavior like drug use and gun violence. In turn, these youth are:

- 55% more likely to be enrolled in college
- 81% more likely to report participating regularly in sports or extracurricular activities
- More than twice as likely to say they held a leadership position in a club or sports team

Yet, the same research shows that one in three young people in our country will grow up without a mentor. During National Mentoring Month, it's important that each of us realize the impact that we can make in the lives of just one youth, and the role that intentional mentoring can play as a violence reduction strategy. Our youth need you; our city needs you.

"Show me a successful individual and I'll show you someone who had real positive influences in his or her life. I don't care what you do for a living—if you do it well I'm sure there was someone cheering you on or showing the way. A mentor." — Denzel Washington

If you are interested in being a mentor with Growing Kings, please visit: [www.growingkings.org/mentor](http://www.growingkings.org/mentor).

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Marcus D. Carson is the founder and executive director of Growing Kings – a Birmingham-based non-profit organization that operates with a mission to encourage and facilitate the critical thinking and positive attitudes of underserved male youth through systemic and targeted enrichment, research, and advocacy. You can learn more about Growing Kings by visiting their website: [www.growingkings.org](http://www.growingkings.org).