

SEEDS OF CHANGE FOR YOUNG BLACK MEN

Ernest Strong knew that something had to give. As a child, he had seen his family shattered by drug use, and now, at 16, he was facing the justice system for the first time. "Friends I grew up with were going to prison for 15 or 20 years," Ernest said. "I knew there had to be something else."

From Baltimore and Ferguson to Los Angeles, the promise of young Black men like Ernest is being lost at an alarming rate. Only one in 10 graduates from a four-year college. While they represent 10 percent of L.A. County's young people, Black youth comprise more than 30 percent of youth under probation. And once in the system, it is hard to get out, with more than 80 percent facing re-arrest within three years.

But with access to caring mentors and positive options, there's no limit to what these young men can achieve. That's why the California Community Foundation launched **BLOOM (Building a Lifetime of Options and Opportunities for Men)**, which seeks to create positive and productive futures for young Black men in South L.A. Since 2012, BLOOM has granted more than \$2 million to serve more than 530 youth who are or have been on probation, developing the skills they need to excel in the classroom, on the job and in life. The program, which provides youth with mentorship and individually-tailored services from a network of partners to increase college and employment readiness and alter life trajectories, has been hailed across the country as a model for successful intervention.

When Black males succeed in school and the workforce, everyone benefits. In this report, you will learn about the ways BLOOM is transforming the lives of young men like Ernest. Now a student at Mount San Antonio College in Walnut, he says BLOOM altered both his future and the way he sees himself. "Being around people who cared about me and showed me support changed my whole perspective on life."



*BLOOMer Torey Broughten holds a new future in his hands.
(Photo credit: Social Justice Learning Institute)*

Help Our Young Men BLOOM

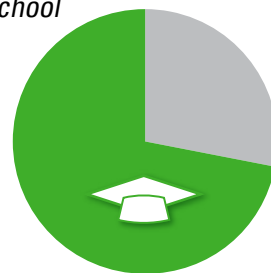
We invite you to contribute to BLOOM and help transform the futures of young Black men in South L.A. Our goal is to raise \$250,000 to serve an additional 100 BLOOM participants, or \$2,500 per youth. We welcome gifts of any size to help continue this important work. For more information, please contact Terri Mosqueda at tmosqueda@calfund.org or (213) 413-4130 ext. 298, or visit calfund.org/BLOOM.

BLOOM IMPACT

By the close of BLOOM's
second year:

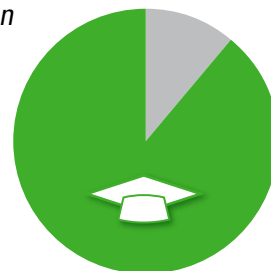
72%

of BLOOM youth
attended school
regularly



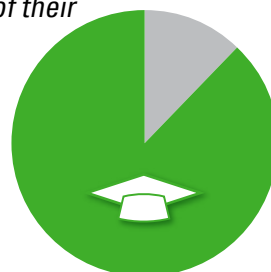
89%

avoided school suspension
or expulsion



88%

successfully upheld
the terms of their
probation



BREAKING THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

For young Black men in California who drop out of high school, the outlook can be bleak. Studies show that by age 35, close to 75 percent will experience incarceration. Our state spent close to \$10 billion on prisons last year, enough to pay the full CSU tuition for every graduating senior in California. BLOOM's focus on high school completion and higher education is aimed at limiting our young men's interactions with law enforcement and the judicial system.

BLOOM allows the California Community Foundation (CCF) to create systemic change by working directly with the L.A. County Probation Department—the largest probation system in the nation. BLOOM partners work with probation officers to close the gap in services and keep young men from re-entering the system. The result is a lower-cost, more restorative alternative for young men whose lives could be easily consumed by incarceration. The initiative was recognized as one of the top five funders in the nation supporting Black men and boys in 2012.

President Obama has recognized the urgency of this issue, and, in February 2014, he announced the **My Brother's Keeper** initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps. The White House lauded BLOOM's approach and pointed to the initiative as a model for the nation in realizing the



*Mentorship and education are the keys to BLOOM's success.
(Photo Credit: Reintegration Academy)*

incredible potential these young men have to offer. In May 2014, it commissioned CCF to co-host a state-wide listening tour for My Brother's Keeper.

CCF is committed to partnering with national and statewide funders to coordinate advocacy and share best practices, allowing the Foundation to make a greater impact on the lives of Black men and boys in South Los Angeles and beyond.

SEMAJ CLARK: SURROUNDED BY SUCCESS

Meeting with President Barack Obama in 2014, BLOOMer Semaj Clark couldn't believe how much his life had changed in a few short years.

Semaj was born in a Watts housing project to a teenage mother who was addicted to drugs. He grew up in a foster home with a man who beat him and spent years cycling through detention centers for petty crimes.

"I felt abandoned and neglected, like nobody was there for me," he said.

At age 16, Semaj's probation officer referred him to **Brotherhood Crusade**, a BLOOM partner. His Brotherhood Crusade counselor, Mykol Lewis, said at first Semaj was wary. "We had to gain his trust. And he had to believe that we saw greatness in him."

Brotherhood Crusade was acknowledged by President Obama, who met with participants in 2014. Semaj was inspired by the president's own journey and upbringing and credits the organization with keeping him on track.

"There was this whole list of people who kept calling my home, wondering what I'm doing, am I OK, did I have

money in my pocket, was I hungry, did I go to school today. Nobody had ever kept up with me like that," he said.

Now, Semaj is enrolled in college and works as a violence prevention counselor. The things that matter most to him are persistence, encouragement and opportunity. He also found better role models.

"They put you around successful Black men who make you want to be that kind of person," said Semaj.



*BLOOMer Semaj Clark meets with President Obama.
(Photo Credit: Pete Souza, White House)*

**"They put you around successful Black men who make you want to be that kind of person."
– Semaj Clark, BLOOM Participant**

NEW FUTURES GROW ON CAMPUS

"If we ask ourselves, 'Am I my brother's or sister's keeper?' The answer should be yes."

Renford Reese, Ph.D., political science professor at Cal Poly Pomona, says that's the philosophy of BLOOM partner organization **Reintegration Academy** (RA).

Through a two-week program at Cal Poly Pomona and Mount San Antonio College, RA participants are immersed in a culture of education that allows them to experience firsthand the benefits of college and to understand that it is within their reach.

CCF donor Leeba Lessin says she is motivated to support RA because "there's no human alive who wants to be defined for the rest of his life by his worst moment." She sees RA as a way for men and women to take responsibility for their actions and get a second chance.

In the latest cohort, 15 BLOOMers have applied to community college and completed their financial aid paperwork. Seven have started attending school full-time and live on Cal Poly Pomona's campus.



*BLOOM prepares young men to succeed in college and beyond.
(Photo Credit: Reintegration Academy)*

**"...there's no human alive who wants to be defined for the rest of his life by his worst moment."
– Leeba Lessin, CCF Donor**

SHAYQUAN BALDWIN: MOVING FORWARD, GIVING BACK

BLOOMer Shayquan Baldwin grew up in difficult neighborhoods in East and South Los Angeles. His father was in and out of jail, leaving Shayquan to become the man of the house. At just 10 years old, he was cooking, cleaning and changing his little brother's diapers while his mother was at work. Daily stresses took their toll. In 10th grade, Shayquan was involved in an altercation with a classmate that resulted in a misdemeanor.

He remembers thinking, "This needs to stop, or I'm going to find myself in jail."

Shayquan was connected with the Black Male Youth Academy at the **Social Justice Learning Institute** (SJLI), a BLOOM partner organization. At the academy's first retreat, there was a transformation. "No one had ever heard my voice until that retreat. I felt like someone just reached out and gave me a big hug. This program is helping me heal a lot."

D'Artagnan Scorza, Ph.D., a BLOOM mentor and the founder and executive director of SJLI, emphasizes that success lies in reaching "one Black man at a time. BLOOM represents a second chance, another opportunity for kids to be who they're meant to be," he said.

Shayquan is now enrolled in college. He hopes to give back as a volunteer football coach at his South L.A. high school and hear what students have to say.

"I want people to remember me as the kid who never looked

back," he said. "I'm not going to just stop because I got to college. I'm always going to keep moving forward."



*BLOOMer Shayquan Baldwin has seen his life transform.
(Photo credit: Juan Alaniz)*

**"No one had ever heard my voice until that retreat. I felt like someone just reached out and gave me a big hug. This program is helping me heal a lot."
– Shayquan Baldwin, BLOOM Participant**

"BLOOM is making a positive impact on young Black men at life's crossroads, helping change their direction and transform their aspirations and lives."

– Virgil Roberts,
BLOOM Advisory Committee



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WHEN YOUNG MEN THRIVE, LOS ANGELES BLOSSOMS

Incarceration costs so much more than education. The amount of money spent on imprisoning a single prisoner for one year would pay for 16 students to earn an associate's degree from a Los Angeles community college. When a bachelor's degree leads to a seven-figure increase in lifetime earnings over those with no degree, helping even one young man graduate from a four-year college makes a million-dollar impact on L.A. County.



This fall, BLOOMer Jibreel Stokes will see his college dreams come true.
(Photo credit: Social Justice Learning Institute)

Through BLOOM, organizations like Brotherhood Crusade, the Social Justice Learning Institute and Reintegration Academy, to name a few, are making that impact. Every day, hundreds of young men like Ernest, Shayquan and Semaj are taking control of their own lives and futures.

The California Community Foundation, our BLOOM partners and donors agree that mentorship, education and employment opportunity have the power to produce healthy, happy and successful young men who can transform their communities. To Ernest Strong, that ability to give back is what he values most. "They showed you that bridge, and now it's your turn," Ernest said. "First, you find your mentor, then you become one."

To learn more about how you can support BLOOM in transforming the futures of young Black men in Los Angeles County, contact Terri Mosqueda at tmosqueda@calfund.org or (213) 413-4130 ext. 298, or visit calfund.org/BLOOM.

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