

## What are we teaching our kids?

Nashville is lauded as a great place to live and work for more than just its Music City reputation and the occasional Tim & Faith or Keith & Nicole sightings. Everyday people like you and me who truly care about others is why companies like Nissan continue to move their operations to our community. It is obviously in our best interest to do our best to ensure that the Middle Tennessee region retains the wonderful quality of life tomorrow which we currently enjoy today.

Every good business has a succession plan for its future. Why should a community be any different? It is our job to prepare the next generation of leaders. Our success at teaching young people the value of volunteerism and how being involved in one's community is important to our society's future will play a critical role in determining whether or not Greater Nashville will be the kind of place the next generation will be happy to inherit. However, if we don't model that behavior ourselves, how can we expect them to? What is our succession plan for this community?

Self indulgence and inflated sense of self importance seems to be all too prevalent in our world today. All too often that appears to be the message we send to kids when they constantly observe us surgically attached to a Blackberry or a cell phone 24/7 as if we have to be in constant contact with work! Or how about the dozens of people who illegally travel the HOV lane on I-65 in the morning so that they can get to work five minutes earlier than you or I? I've got news for you folks – you aren't as important as you think you are.

While we have been spending so much time trying to impress the world with how "cool" we are, serious youth violence continues to increase, and our kids are being left to fend for themselves. In Tennessee there is a 28% high school drop out rate, 11% of unwed teenage girls become pregnant, and our fair state ranks #46 out of 50 in taking care of its children according to KidsCount 2004, a national study conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

So instead of becoming productive citizens, too many of these "neglected" children are in danger of becoming the future predators in our society and consequently a drain on our economy because we have been too preoccupied with our quest for what we think defines success. My dad used to say "you make a living by what you earn, but you make a life by what you give."

Through a professionally supported one-to-one mentoring relationship facilitated by Big Brothers Big Sisters, people like you can transform a child whose environment places them at risk into a future leader, employee, consumer, or maybe the next Music City superstar. All it takes is one hour a week.

You can have a direct effect on what our community will look like in the future. Isn't a child's life worth one hour of your time? You probably waste that much time each week in line at Starbucks. So put down that Blackberry and turn off the cell phone long enough to let a kid know in no uncertain terms that they really matter. It is in your power to give them hope of a better life and a brighter future.