

## Teach Me 2 Tie

### The Gateway to Opportunities: Learning To Tie A Necktie

One of the biggest challenges young boys face today, says Grand Rapids resident Henry Sapp, is finding support from reliable adults outside of school.

“When I was a young boy, two members of the community poured into my life and I feel obligated to do that for the next generation of boys,” he says.

Henry explains that supporting a young boy is about planting seeds of encouragement and hope.

“We believe that if you see it – it gives you a different view of trying to obtain it,” he adds.

Henry says he likes to build on that world view by teaching young boys how to tie a necktie.

“Tying a necktie isn’t easy, but after practicing a few times the boys end up mastering the skill and seeing that end result teaches them a sense of accomplishment,” Henry says. “I think the most important thing is the joy that it gives me when a young boy says, “Wow, I never did that before!”.”

That joy and hope is what Henry tries to instill to the participants in the program especially he says after the last two years we’ve spent dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Trying to build that hope and foster that hope is very important especially in this season,” he adds.

The program Henry founded is called Teach Me 2 Tie and while the initial draw is about helping young boys in the community learn how to tie a necktie –the program incorporates the opportunity for learning about leadership skills, decision making principles and opportunities to receive tutoring and support.

“We build our network through social media by inviting parents to have their kids be a part of what we’re doing. Our project isn’t about quantity or quality,” he says.

In this latest iteration of the project, 15 boys from the southeast side of Grand Rapids participated in the six-week program. Henry says the most consistent feedback is having them come back.

“They might not tell me they enjoy it, but I can tell because week after week they come back to participate,” Henry adds. “So with us trying to do something, if we say we’re going to do it every two weeks then we stay consistent to that. That gives us that commitment, not just from us, but from them too.”

Henry's long-term vision for the program is sustainability to create more opportunities, and days for the boys to participate and to be exposed to different kinds of people and skills.

"We also want to position ourselves to be able to receive support not just financially but with partners and mentors who will come and help fulfill our mission of supporting the next generation of young boys," he adds. "I want to bring more speakers who reflect the diversity of our community."

Making a difference in the lives of the young boys Henry says is the one of the most important ways he's finding and creating meaning in others.