

America's Leaders

The Urban League: Helping Youth Achieve Success

(NAPSA)—Achievement matters: That's a message helping many of America's inner-city youth to redefine what "keepin' it real" means while attaining success in fields they may never have considered. Much of the credit for spreading the word belongs to the Urban League's Campaign for African-American Achievement, which works to transform black youth into an army of achievers.

Take Gerald Carroll, for example. Born in southeast San Diego, an area that outsiders consider an impoverished ghetto, Carroll says many folks think that being black means avoiding academics and attaining success through the sports or entertainment fields.

"People talk about 'keepin' it real,'" says Carroll. "You can't get any more real than living a life of achievement."

Carroll's achievements have exploded stereotypes. At 18, he's the youngest member ever elected to the Board of Trustees of the San Diego Urban League, a straight-A student and member of several honor societies. The Urban League's Campaign, he says, keeps him aware that white-collar careers and scholarship are his birthright.

"We want to create an achievement gang so that kids who now think gangs are cool will think school is cool; that kids who want to be sports stars will think of becoming world leaders and entrepreneurs," says Hugh Price, president of the National Urban League.

Begun in 1997, the Campaign is active in most of the 111 Urban



URBAN ACHIEVER: Seventh-grade Urban League scholar receives academic excellence medallion from youth leader at scholars luncheon held at the San Diego Convention Center.

League affiliates across the country. Its mission is especially crucial given that in 2001, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 63 percent of black students in the fourth grade read below standard.

The Campaign empowers parents and children and calls on the support of the entire community. "Our mantra is 'achievement matters,' but it takes the entire village to get that message through," says Dr. Velma Cobb, director of the League's Education, Youth Development and Policy department.

Every year, thousands of kids like Carroll are inducted into the League's National Achievers Society (NAS)—an honor society for youth in grades 3-12—with some 20,000 members.

Through the Campaign, League affiliates offer direct services such as SAT courses and after-school

programs, as well as partnering with educators, churches, parents and elected officials to transform failing schools. Annually, 200 youngsters are awarded scholarships of \$10,000 to attend colleges of their choice.

When 16 year-old Vincent Cox received his NAS award earlier this year, his mother, Kimberly Diggs, cried.

"On TV what you see is always the negative when it comes to black youth," Diggs says. "So the Urban League program is groundbreaking; people get to see that you don't have to live in La Jolla (a wealthy, primarily white San Diego community) to maintain a 3.0 or 4.0 GPA. You can live anywhere and still achieve if you've got the right support."

Cox is a 2001 inductee into the prestigious honor society "Who's Who in American High Schools" and an A student, enrolled in A.P. physics and math. He and his mom live in southeast San Diego.

The Campaign is supported by the Congress of National Black Churches and some 20 other organizations. A recent partnership with Scholastic Inc. created "Read and Rise: Preparing Our Children For a Lifetime of Success," a literacy guide.

For more information on the Campaign for African-American Achievement, visit www.nul.org/youth.html. The Urban League is the nation's oldest and largest community-based movement devoted to empowering African-Americans to enter the economic and social mainstream.