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Sent: Fri, 15 Feb 2013 20:49:51 -0500
From: "Jarrett, Valerie" <valerie_jarrett@who.eop.gov>
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fw: The Root: Obama's Sit-Down With Chicago's Young Black Men

From: Lewis, Kevin S.
Sent: Friday, February 15, 2013 07:44 PM
To: Jarrett, Valerie; Strautmanis, Michael; Foster, Heather
Subject: The Root: Obama's Sit-Down With Chicago's Young Black Men

(I don't want to flood everyone's inbox but I will send over a few examples of the stories produced from yesterday's roundtable)

Obama's Sit-Down With Chicago's Young Black Men

By: Jenée Desmond-Harris | The Root

(The Root) -- Before his public remarks touting the newly announced "Ladders to Opportunity" initiative at Chicago's Hyde Park Academy on Friday, the president had another, more intimate event planned: a private roundtable with 16 students enrolled in an anti-youth-violence program called Becoming a Man, or "B.A.M."

In Obama's hometown, whose reputation for gun violence was recently underscored by 15-year-old majorette Hadiya Pendleton's shooting death, B.A.M offers school-based counseling, mentoring and enrichment to young men deemed "at risk."

One University of Chicago study has found that those risks decrease for the program's participants when it comes to being arrested for violent crime or for weapons crime and vandalism, or ending up in the juvenile-justice system. (Those rates go down by 44 percent, 36 percent and 53 percent respectively for the kids who are enrolled, researchers say.)

Those are the kinds of proven results that the Obama administration will focus on in implementing the Ladders of Opportunity initiative, according to Senior Adviser Valerie Jarrett. That set of proposals, unveiled in this week's State of the Union address -- which include a push to raise the minimum wage and make high-quality preschool available to every child, and a plan to create "promise zones" in 20 high-poverty communities -- was inspired in part by the president's experience as a community organizer, Jarrett told The Root.

"Part of his frustration," she said, "was seeing that ... state, local and federal government had a wide range of programs that were administered in a very disparate way as opposed to focusing. Resources were spread like peanut butter instead of targeted where they could actually have an impact."

So, says Jarrett, who is traveling with Obama today, "when we think about reducing violence in our communities, what's important is to highlight programs that are actually working." For BAM, founded by the nonprofit Youth Guidance, that effectiveness comes from a curriculum based on six core values: integrity, accountability, self-determination, positive anger expression, visionary goal setting and respect for women.

But the purpose of today's meeting was simple. Jarrett told The Root that she hoped it would "give the president an opportunity to really just talk to them about the challenges they're facing.

"For these young men to have a chance to meet with the president of the United States and talk about the challenges that they face in life, and look to him as probably one of the best role models they'll ever meet, we think is a great opportunity for them," she said, adding, "And it's a great opportunity for the president."

Jenée Desmond-Harris is The Root's staff writer and White House correspondent.

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