



The Men of Action Network

An Interview with Willie Robinson, Rochester, NY

PTA: Why did you start the Men of Action Network?

WR: M.A.N. started out of the brainchild of three men. We came together when my daughter was in high school and we saw a safety need for our kids. That “protective father” spirit began to rise in us as we heard what our kids were experiencing. I saw that we needed to be in the building to help curb some of the foolishness happening in the halls. We started this program at a small scale and called it, “Wilson’s Fathers United.” And when I was blessed to get my current position, I saw how successful this program was, and I decided to build upon it and take it district-wide. We extended the ideas to other fathers, involving men across the Rochester City School District.

PTA: How did you get the ball rolling?

WR: I scheduled a “Call to Action” meeting for all men in the Rochester City School District (RCSD). The purpose was for all men in our district to attend a planning meeting to brainstorm ideas they would like to see in a fathers’ program for the RCSD, and specifically at the school their child/children attend. *Note: I provided food at all meetings, and kept all meetings to an hour maximum.*

The core group of men met for a few weeks and established the framework around the four core areas of my fatherhood program entitled, Operation M.A.N. (Men of Action Network). These core areas were:

1. Visibility in the schools
2. Support parent groups and activities at the school
3. Training (vocational skills training, GED, and fatherhood training)
4. Mentorship

PTA: What was the selling point?

WR: The selling points were twofold. I challenged the men of the district to show their kids, teachers, and administrators that men really care and were willing to volunteer at the school and asked them to demonstrate they cared for their kids by volunteering 5.0 hours per month for the program.

PTA: What were some of your first steps?

WR: Target schools were identified to pilot the program. A core group of 3-4 men were identified at the target schools and they were charged to recruit other men at the school. These recruitment efforts took place by organizing father/child events at the schools to get the men to come out to support their children, while at the same time recruiting other men. Rotational schedules were developed, and we started to volunteer at the beginning and end of the school day. Some of the men volunteered to help out at the various parent group activities, etc.

They would be allowed to come and actively help shape the direction of the fathers’ program for the district as well as their child’s school, with support for the RCSD Main Office.

The group started with about 45 men, and dwindled down to a core group of about 16 men that developed the program. However, in order for the program to work and sustain itself, it needs support from the school principals for the school level fatherhood program, and the superintendent for the district-wide program.