



Their Lives Brought Together By Tragedy, Miami Beach Detective Mentors Teen

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By Mike Cogno



MIAMI (CBSMiami) – Big Brothers Big Sisters “Bigs in Blue” program connects youth with police officers in communities throughout our nation, building strong, trusting, lasting relationships.

The BBBS Miami chapter this year received a \$25-thousand grant from the NFL’s “Inspire Change” initiative, thanks to an outstanding ‘big’ and ‘little’.

Tyrese Collet, 18, and Miami Beach Detective Christopher Mitchell may look like they’ve known each other their whole lives. In reality, they were brought

together through tragedy. In fact, this pairing might seem like an unlikely one all-together.

Mitchell, a 19 year veteran of the police department, lost his son three years ago.

“My son, two weeks prior to his high school graduation, went to spend the weekend with my mother and she had found him unresponsive in the bedroom that Saturday morning,” said Mitchell.

Mitchell’s son had a congenital heart disorder called Wolff Parkinson White which led to him having a heart attack.

“As a result, he sustained an anoxic brain injury,” explained Mitchell.

Less than a year after his son passed away, and reluctant to move on, a coworker suggested Mitchell join a mentor program called “Bigs in Blue” which teamed up with Big Brothers Big Sisters. That’s where Collet comes in.

“When I first walked in, I was sitting right there and then I seen Chris walk in. We took like a glance at each other, for like a good five minutes, and I was like ‘Watch that be my mentor’,” said Collet.

As fate would have it, he was right. Collet had recently moved to Miami from New York after losing his older cousin to a police-involved shooting while the two were walking home from school.

“The officer pulled us over and then, he was like ‘Oh, what y’all doing, what y’all doing.’ Us being disrespectful was like certain words to the officer and he was like ‘hey, hey, hey’,” recalled Collet. “So, the first thing he does was grab his gun and we started running and once they pulled my cousin down, my cousin was resisting the arrest, so they shot him by mistake.”

After that Collet had a hard time trusting police officers and had a hard time taking to his new big brother Mitchell.

“That’s when Chris was opening up to me about his son and that’s when I was like, ‘Oh’. That’s when I started opening up about the past with my cousin, with the police officers, and then that’s when he used to show me what police officers and their trainees used to do,” said Collet.

“I was like, it’s true, that’s their job, cause if they feel threatened, at the same time, they want to go home to their family and kids. It goes both ways,” Collet added.

Once these two were able to find common ground they were inseparable. They did more than just use each other as a support system. They started to act like a family.

“It wasn’t overnight, but after three months I could say, or close to three months, I started to see him opening up. I saw some positive results,” said Mitchell.

“I remember when I used to have bad grades and they was like ‘you know you can’t graduate with these grades’. I told Chris ‘Chris, I don’t think I’m going to finish high school’,” said Collet. “Chris was like, ‘you serious?’ I was like Chris I’m serious I can’t do it. That’s when he was like we got this and now look, I’m an honor roll student at my new school in Hialeah.”

Not only did Mitchell help Collet graduate, but he also helped him fulfill his dream of playing college football. This big kid with an even bigger personality will attend Ventura College in California next year on a football scholarship.

“We’ve been to Phoenix, Arizona together. We attended a two day NFL meeting with all 32 NFL owners and the NFL staff, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell. We were the guest speakers there,” said Mitchell.

Collet hopes those connections will one day help him get drafted. But until then Mitchell will continue teaching him about his job as a police officer

Mitchell also plans to visit him in California while he's at school. When he does, the connection he made with Collet has gone above and beyond the expectations of the program.

"It has been phenomenal. I look at Tyrese as not just a little brother, with the Big Brothers, Big Sisters. I look at him as a son," said Mitchell.

Collet said he has two goals. Buy his mom a house once he's in the NFL and to one day be a mentor to a little brother just like Mitchell.

Detective Mitchell was recognized in May as a "Local Hero" by the Wawa Foundation. He received the Miami Local Hero Award for his inspiring mentorship along with a five thousand dollar grant on behalf of Big Brothers Big Sisters.