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Pictured L-R: James McNeil, Otu Obot and Daytaun Antonetti (Photo by Iris M Kirkwood)

## BROTHA'S SERVING OTHERS

There's an old adage that says, People don't care what you know until they know that you care. And sure enough, we have three young men of different ethnicity and different roads in life... but the same heart. They Care! Otu Obot, Daytaun Antonetti and James McNeil have dedicated their lives as young men to caring about the youth of Buffalo. Working at the Belle Center allows them to show that love in a profound way. Let's meet them.

**Otu Obot** is a God fearing man. He is a native of Buffalo but of Nigerian & White descent. He is a graduate of Baldwin Wallace College with a B.S. in Education. Public service is his calling. This is something he learned at the feet of his parents who are heavily involved in missions and public service. He has seen his parents work tirelessly in the correctional field where his father taught English and his mother served as a counselor.

Taking that same mantle, Otu serves as the Portal Program Coordinator at the Belle Center. He is a former volunteer basketball coach for Holy Cross church, volunteer for the City Mission with food prep and clothing distribution. He is an active missionary in the Island of St. Vincent and has gone on several missionary trips around the country. Otu is passionate about ministry and serving the holistic needs of people in mind, body and spirit. He describes it like this... "I help people become better people. I challenge & help them accomplish whatever they put their mind to. I show them my heart by treating everyone as God would treat them no matter who they are or how they look. In terms of soul and spirit, I seek God in how I should respond to them and I'm very transparent. My walk with God has to be renewed every day. There are areas where I need to be purified and make sure I'm on point so God gets all the glory."

Otu understands that he used to be one of those young people that come to him now for help. That is why it is a dream of his to, one day, operate his own ministry. He would like it to be a boys' home where they can receive education and spiritual guidance. Otu remembers when he needed help. He was out of a job and it was a friend of his that was instrumental in getting him the job at the Belle Center.

That friend was **MR. DAYTAUN ANTONETTI**

Daytaun thrives on serving the community. He has tremendous love and compassion for people. He serves as the Buffalo AmeriCorps Program Director and is a native of Rochester, NY and graduate of Monroe Community College with an A.S. in Business Administration and B.A. in Communication from the University at Buffalo. He is a former AmeriCorps member and completed 2 years of service. He has a calling to serve the community and helping to empower and encourage youth.

When you speak with Daytaun, his passion for giving back is quite evident. Born to a 15 year old mother, he found himself missing out on the quality time and love that so many young people desire. But at a young age, God introduced him to the Wegmans scholarship/mentoring program which led to his first job. There he met his manager, Mr. Russo, who became a mentor, big brother and father figure in his life. From the invitations to dine with his family, buying him his first pair of cleats, attending his baseball games and other displays of love in action, Mr. Russo taught Daytaun the value of giving back. Now, Daytaun knows, "our youth really want people to just spend quality time and show that you love them.

"As the program director of AmeriCorps, I look for an array of men who want to do better just to let them know they can make it! I learned from Mr. Russo that sacrifice and time are most important in service to others. I have a deeper level of patience & understanding. I've also learned that lifestyle & consistency are very important."

Who would know that better than our third person in this trio of giants? Already a biological father to two, **JAMES MCNEIL**, says without reservation that he wants to be the "best father possible and a positive male role model for the youth in all our communities." He has always been really passionate for kids. "Kids always flocked to me. I have two children but I'm a father to hundreds," says James. So appropriately, he serves as the School Age Child Care Program Director. James spent 4 years in the military but shortly thereafter found himself living a life that only pleased self. With his priorities out of line, his life too got interrupted by a person who showed he cared.

Facing jail time for the distribution of drugs, his lawyer spoke words that reminded James about all the things that God had placed in his heart. Rather than sugar-coat it, he spoke harshly and truthfully to James and opened up his eyes to his calling in life. That's where his epiphany began. After avoiding jail time and receiving a second chance, he promised God that he would make a difference in the community that he helped pollute. James enrolled in Erie Community college of Buffalo and now has an A.S. in Physical Education. He has been coaching little league football for two years with plans to become a high school and college coach in the future. He also looks forward to building a replica of the Belle Center. He believes it is God's work and there are young people in other areas of Buffalo that can benefit from what they are doing and teaching.

So there it is... three examples of service that is so badly needed across this country. Many times, we fail to realize that when we sing songs like William McDowell's "I Give Myself Away," God is looking for those who will deny self for the benefit of others. We thank Otu, Daytaun and James for being obedient to the call of God upon their life.