Lonnie’s Story – Acclusinc.org

Antonio Black, known by his friends as Lonnie, grew up as an only child with an absent father and a mother who did the best she could. “I really didn’t have any guidance, except for my mom. She didn’t do badly, but it’s only so far that a woman can take a young man,” he said. As time went on, he was raised by the streets, which engaged him in gang activity and drug selling as a teenager. “I made those decisions. I don’t really call them dumb, because it made me the person that I am now,” he admitted.

By age 17 Lonnie was convicted of a crime for the first time. Unwilling to turn in a friend on a gun possession, he was accused instead. “I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, being around individuals that were negative,” he recalls. He was sentenced with probation, which he would soon violate when he was caught smoking marijuana. At the time, Lonnie says, he really wanted to do something better for himself. “My main thing was that I wanted to work. I didn’t want to sell the drugs,” he said. However, like many inner city children, he was led to believe that this is what he had to do to survive. “I thought I had to do this to eat,” he said.

When his mother fell ill, Lonnie’s only option was to have her hospitalized. With his father being incarcerated, he was now forced to take care of himself. “Now that leaves me out there by myself. That’s when I started selling drugs again,” he said. At age 18, he became a father, and continued to sell drugs to support his child. This resulted in him eventually getting caught with drugs and going to jail at age 19. By the time Lonnie was 24, he had worked several jobs unsuccessfully. He decided to go back to drug dealing. This time, the attraction of fast money began to consume his life. “It was more like greed actually. You want to spend money as quick as it’s coming,” he said. “It’s almost like an addiction.”

Lonnie’s next bid in jail was for a complete year, the longest time he had spent locked up. He was sent to maximum security with a cellmate who had been sentenced to 55 years. “I looked at it like God was showing me these things. This is how people were living their lives,” he said. He didn’t want to live his life that way anymore. When he was released, Lonnie changed his ways. He started helping with community organizations like Lillydale Outreach and M.A.G.I.C., and began to show the neighborhood children a better example. “I tell them, “Look, I’m not even dealing drugs no more. You used to see me do these things,”” he said. In one instance, he stopped a group of children from panhandling and called their parents to come and get them off the streets. “They thought I was the police. I told them, ‘Look, I just don’t like this. You’re going to have to come down here and get your kids right now,’” he said.

Now, 30 year old Lonnie helps keep the children he works with involved in activities, and rewards them with football and basketball games, and trips to the zoo and circus. “They’re doing things that they have never done before,” he said. He’s gainfully employed as a construction worker, and is currently enrolled in a barber college with plans of owning a barber shop. “Everything that I asked God for, He has given to me,” he said.

Lonnie admits that he lives better by earning money honestly, and encourages his friends who are still hustling to try something different. “You could have all the money in the world, but what could you do
with it if you’re selling drugs? They want to know where it comes from. You have to be legitimate to do anything,” he concluded.