



NEWS

A friendship gave Fullerton teen Carlos Samoya some direction, hope

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By BRIAN WHITEHEAD / STAFF WRITER

Daniel Khalili is an Orange County kid. Grew up in the upper middle class with both parents and boundless opportunities.

Carlos Samoya also is an Orange County kid. Grew up in a lower-income neighborhood, raised by a single mom.

“We both grew up in Orange County,” Khalili said, “but we grew up in different worlds.”

Those worlds collided in 2009, when the two met through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire.

Khalili, 23 at the time and pursuing his fire tech degree, sought community service hours for his resume. Samoya, a Fullerton preteen who at times fell in with bad crowds, sought stability in a father figure.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters personality match process brought Khalili and Samoya together. Both loved sports, the outdoors and practical jokes.

A friendship blossomed.

“He’s a genuine kid,” said Khalili, an Esperanza High and UC Irvine grad who’s now a Corona firefighter. “He wears his heart on his sleeve a bit, he’s easy to read. He’s a kid with a lot of talent and potential, but he didn’t have that right guy, that mentor in his life, to utilize all of that.”

At the outset, Khalili and Samoya bonded at Angels and Ducks games. They body surfed at the beach and rode bikes and skateboards.

Regular conversation kept Samoya up on down days. Khalili, himself a brother, offered him a shoulder to lean on.

“Dan always answered his phone when I called,” Samoya said in an email. “He was the only one I could turn to. ... I knew he wasn’t going anywhere.”

Befriending a college student also offered Samoya direction, hope.

“Coming from a low-income family and being raised by a single mom, college didn’t seem like an option,” he said. “I didn’t really have dreams for the future. I thought I would do what everyone in my neighborhood did – maybe finish high school and keep working at a job to get by.”

“Dan changed that for me.”

Samoya returned the favor at El Dorado High, becoming a peer mentor his senior year. He and Khalili began touring colleges on behalf of Big Brothers Big Sisters, sharing their story with the masses.

“Me and Carlos, in a lot of ways, we’re the same person,” Khalili said. “We just grew up differently.”

Samoya is a first-year Fullerton College student. His two jobs help pay for school and bills.

“I see a kid who’s got his priorities straight,” Khalili said. “He’s got a lot more direction, a lot more purpose. He’s matured a lot. I see a mature guy who is respectful and has a good set of values under his belt.”

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