



### **John and Rico's Story - A Relationship Built on Trust**

If you ask Rico and John how they found each other, they will say it was fate, a blessing, pure luck. But it was United Way that made it possible.

While John's job took him to faraway places, he was looking for an opportunity to volunteer at home. A United Way youth mentoring program was just the ticket.

John met Rico when he was 12. Rico's mother saw the need for a strong, male influence to help guide her son through adolescence.

Rico was reluctant about the idea, and his first meeting with John didn't quite quell his fears. "We shook hands and that was about the only thing we said to each other the whole time," Rico recalls.

After four years together, Rico and John have no problem finding things to talk about. They have come to appreciate their differences as well. "We've really opened those things up," John says. "It's taught us both how our differences are really cool and we embrace them."

Rico and John do everything together, from playing football and talking to traveling and trying new foods. Rico has even become close to John's family, especially his teenage son. "It's not uncommon for them to ditch me and go do something sixteen-year-olds like to do," John laughs. Rico and John appreciate the good times together because they've been through rough spots, too.

When Rico's mother suffered a stroke, John was there to comfort and support him. "That was the hardest thing," Rico says. "But, he's someone who can understand me on my level. I can say things to him that I wouldn't normally tell other people." That's the kind of trust Rico and John's relationship is built on.

With John's encouragement, Rico has become more focused on school and his future. John is quick to point out though, that Rico has done all the work himself. "You're capable of reaching the next rung on the ladder," John tells him. "You just have to stretch."

There is no doubt Rico will continue climbing life's ladder with John cheering him on. What started as a mentoring relationship has become much more. "I know that I've made a lifelong friend here," John says. "I think of Rico as family now."

Rico plans to follow in John's footsteps and become a youth mentor as well. "John's been a good friend to me and I want to do that for someone, too," he says. "I like being looked up to."

Last year, more than 46,000 young people benefited from United Way mentoring programs like the one that matched Rico and John. Developing children and youth to their full potential is one way we're *doing something about it* in Houston.

For more information, visit our Web site at [www.unitedwayhouston.org](http://www.unitedwayhouston.org).