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# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay Launches 'Think Big for Kids' *New Initiative Aims to Help 2,000 Underprivileged Teens become Workforce-ready by 2022***

**TAMPA – (JUNE 8, 2018)** – Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay has announced the formal launch of Think Big for Kids, an initiative designed to introduce underprivileged students ages 12-18 to career opportunities and assist them in achieving post-graduation goals for employment. Think Big for Kids is partnering with area businesses representing high-growth industries to provide structured education, mentorship and career path development, with the goal of preparing 2,000 teens served through Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay for the workforce by 2022.

Think Big for Kids was developed in 2016 as a pilot program by Tony DiBenedetto, tech entrepreneur and former CEO of Tribridge, after visiting high school students at several Boys & Girls Clubs and observing a general lack of awareness of potential careers available to them post-graduation. He and a team of volunteers created a programmatic roadmap that engages Boys & Girls Clubs kids from sixth to 12th grade through the completion of on-the-job training, trade school certification, a two-year or four-year degree, depending on their chosen career track. DiBenedetto recruited other businesses to join the program with a commitment to providing mentorship, internships, scholarships and ultimately job offers.

"Think Big for Kids is the convergence of two major areas of need in our community. I met with approximately 80 high school students and only three raised a hand when I asked if they had plans for continuing education after graduation. These kids haven't been given the time and resources to really think about their future," said DiBenedetto. "At the same time, I met with several CEOs and their single biggest challenge is finding and retaining good talent. This is a unique opportunity to help deserving kids realize their untapped potential and break out of the poverty cycle while fueling our economy with future workers to fill high-demand positions in growing industries."

Following the two-year pilot, existing Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay teen programming will be rolled under the Think Big for Kids initiative to provide support and infrastructure to serve 2,000 teens at each of the 18 club sites throughout Hillsborough and Pasco Counties. Current programs, such as the Youth Employment Services (Y.E.S.) Academy, offers an intensive skilled trade track and internships for select students aged 16-18. Other third-party and nationally-sponsored Boys & Girls Clubs programs will be incorporated into Think Big for Kids to drive a more sustainable impact.

"Our clubs have a 98 percent high school graduation rate compared to less than 70 percent of their peers from low-income households, but our challenge is keeping all of our 5,400 kids engaged past elementary school when they become most susceptible to societal and peer pressure," said Chris Letsos, president and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay. "Think Big for Kids will grant us the ability to not only retain our teens throughout middle and high school but provide them each with access to immersive programming that will give them hope and a solid path for future success."

Think Big for Kids volunteers meet with Boys & Girls Clubs teens on a regular basis to build trust and administer high-level assessments identifying potential career interest. In addition to field trips that bring kids onsite, partner companies deliver interactive monthly showcases at the clubs designed to expose teens to a variety of professions, from electrical contracting and nursing to cyber security and technical design. Once teens reach high school, they

are paired with a mentor to help them select the right courses, stay on track and make an education and career plan for post-graduation. Partner companies offer internships and will commit to providing job opportunities.

“This initiative is a long-term commitment on behalf of our partner companies who want to see these kids succeed while building their own talent pipeline,” said DiBenedetto. “There are numerous types of exciting careers available in our area, all of which require varying levels of educational preparation. We want to expose kids to all of their options.”

According to Letsos, Boys & Girls Clubs kids are eager to belong to something that will give them support and much-needed individualized attention. “We recently surveyed our teens, and 76 percent want an adult mentor, peer-to-peer counseling, assistance with applying to college and entry-level job opportunities, and 85 percent committed to staying with our clubs between two and five days per week if we offer interest-based job readiness career opportunities. Our kids want to excel.”

Current Think Big for Kids partners and volunteers represent the following Tampa Bay organizations:

- Bank of America
- Haneke Design
- Hillsborough County Sherriff's Office
- JDP Electric
- Painters on Demand
- ReliaQuest
- Tampa General Hospital
- Tribridge, a DXC Technology Company

For more information on Think Big for Kids company partner and volunteer opportunities, please email [tony.dibenedetto@outlook.com](mailto:tony.dibenedetto@outlook.com).

#### **About the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay**

Since 1926, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay has been a positive force in the community; enabling young people to become productive, responsible and caring citizens through structured programming, safe learning environments and dedicated staff. With a focus on three core priority outcomes – Academic Success, Healthy Lifestyles, and Improving Character & Leadership, Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay provides opportunities to build new skills that raise a Club Member’s belief that he or she can succeed and receive recognition for personal, social and academic accomplishments. With multiple Clubs and Middle School sites throughout Hillsborough and Pasco County, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay makes futures great for more than 19,000 young people each year.

#### **About Think Big for Kids**

Think Big for Kids helps underprivileged youth discover their untapped potential by bringing them highly structured education, mentorship and career path development. The premier teen initiative of Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay, our aim is to introduce students ages 12-18 to exciting career opportunities and assist them in achieving post-graduation goals for employment. Think Big for Kids partners with like-minded organizations representing diverse industries to reduce systemic poverty and prepare kids to excel in high-demand professions of the future workforce.

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