

Nothing but Net

'Big Assist' made a difference in North Carolina

BY DEBBIE GIBBS

Editor's note: UNOS staff liaison to the OPTN/UNOS minority affairs committee, Deanna Parker, first brought to my attention the JACS article summarized on the opposite page. Then, around the same time, Debbie Gibbs, public information manager at LifeShare Of The Carolinas, submitted a note about the Big Assist, which she intended for Across the Country. The timing was felicitous, as the Big Assist perfectly illustrated the kind of local, culturally sensitive programs the JACS article describes. Thanks to Gibbs for her willingness to expand the write-up into a full Update article.

Don't sit on the sidelines. Play. Cheer. Assist. Follow the tournament and register to be a donor online—all in one easy shot.

Those were the messages that LifeShare Of The Carolinas communicated at its first basketball tournament to increase donor designations among African Americans in the Charlotte, N.C., area.

The tournament—"The Big Assist"—brought together barbers from eight black barbershops and their customers in a five-on-five single elimination tournament. Drawing patrons as well as family and friends, the event was held last fall in the gymnasium of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, one of the Charlotte's largest black churches.

Why barbershops? In the African American community, barbershops are one place where black men can be comfortable discussing everything from politics to religion to health-related topics.

The message that LifeShare Of The Carolinas emphasized at the Big Assist appears to have gotten through. African American donation rates increased in the fourth quarter and for the year overall. LifeShare reported a total of 21 African American donors in 2009, up from only 12 in 2008, an increase of more than 57 percent.

Statistics from the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles reveal that—in the Charlotte ZIP codes with the highest number of African American residents—donor designations increased in the months immediately following the tournament.

From August, the month before the event, through December, 89 African American men living in one ZIP Code registered as a donor, increasing the total number registered from 7,139 to 7,218. Meanwhile, sign-ups on the N.C. online registry increased by 17 percent. Hits on a special LifeShare URL for African Americans more than doubled.

While LifeShare can't attribute all of these increases to one event involving barbers and basketball, the Big Assist appears to be a contributing factor—and plans are to sponsor a second event, perhaps within the next year. [U](#)

ONLINE For more information about LifeShare Of The Carolinas, visit lifeshareofthecarolinas.org, and for more about the Big Assist, including photos, bigassistnc.com or [facebook.com/pages/charlotte-NC/LifeShare-of-the-Carolinas/52646442236](https://www.facebook.com/pages/charlotte-NC/LifeShare-of-the-Carolinas/52646442236). A photo from the tournament is included on the Contents page.

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