

Future forward

ARMAH SHIANCOE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GIVE N GO, SEES IMMEASURABLE RETURN IN INVESTING IN AREA YOUTH.
BY MICHAEL J. SOLENDER

A shiny silver bracelet rests on Armah Shiancoe's right hand, the word *IMPACT* in all caps etched on its exterior. A cherished gift from a former student, the band also has an interior inscription reading, "The connection between your life and the lives you can choose." Ever since he immigrated to America from ethnic conflicts and bloody clashes in his native Liberia at age 9, Shiancoe, 38, has chosen education as his key to positively impacting his own life and the lives of others.

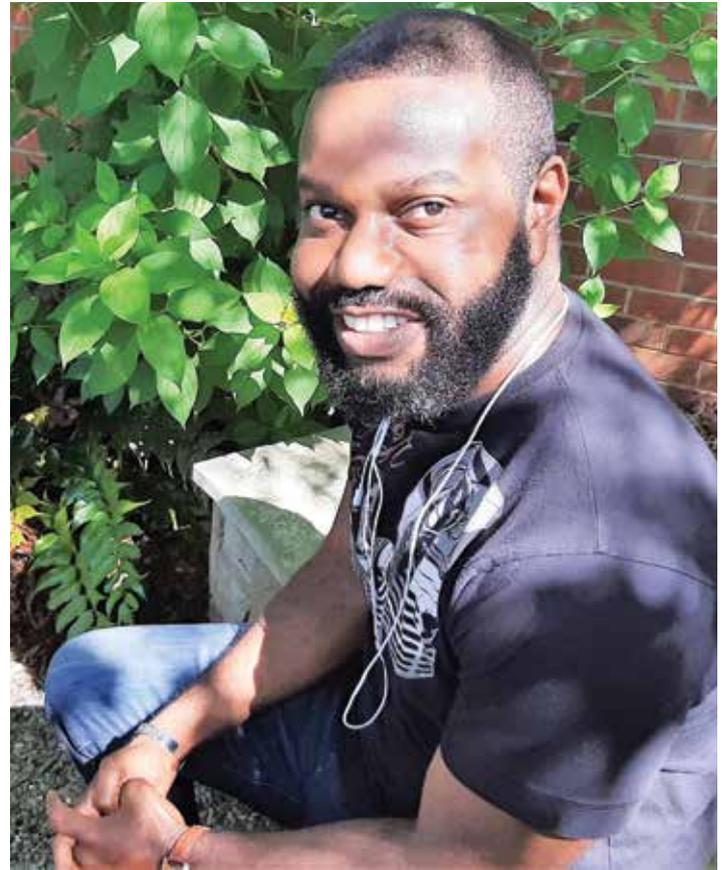
Shiancoe is a passionate youth advocate, serving for years as a college recruiter at Central Piedmont Community College, where he mentored dozens of students. For the past three years, he's taught business education at Indian Land High School in Lancaster County, S.C. Shiancoe also serves as the executive director of Give N Go, a nonprofit workforce-development organization providing disadvantaged and minority youth with job-skills training, exposure and experience. Formed in 2009, Give N Go works with community partners such as the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, CPCC, Aisymmetry and Red Ventures' Road to Hire initiative.

SouthPark spoke with Shiancoe about the value of education, mentoring and how community members can make a difference for youth who lack opportunities.

Former CPPC president and community leader Tony Zeiss was an important mentor to you. What did you learn from him?

He saw something in me and encouraged [that] we meet regularly. One important lesson and value I learned was something he repeatedly stressed: If you help enough people achieve their goals, this will help you in achieving *your* goals. That has always proven true for me and reinforces my interest in helping others.

What value was placed on education in the West African culture in which you grew up?



When you speak to any African, you quickly learn that education is everything. From the moment we are born, our parents and elders all emphasize its importance. Education is not free in most African nations. It's a privilege — it's the ticket to greater opportunity.

What is the origin of Give N Go?

It's a double entendre of the basketball play where the player with the ball gives it to a teammate, then goes to an open position on the court where they are now free to receive back the ball and are in better position to score. This also embodies my approach to working with others. When we share experiences and help, the nature of giving to others opens the giver up to receiving so much more in terms of additional learning, experience and the joys of helping others. Many former Give N Go program participants come back as facilitators and trainers in our programs, perpetuating a cycle of helping others.

People with privilege aren't always certain how they can help make an impact with others less fortunate. How can they support efforts like yours?

Reach out. So many community-based organizations need support. Of course, financial support is lifeblood, but folks can open up with volunteering their time, experience, connections, internships, jobs, etc. There are many ways to help. The first step is reaching out. **SP**