



Community Building Step 1: Big-Littles at St. Andrew's

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Thanks to the Big-Little tradition, community building starts not long after new Saints are accepted.

The transition to boarding school can be daunting. There are new faces, new rules, new traditions, new buildings, new roommates, new *everything*. But Elijah Adewunmi '29, who hails from Queens, has found his way at St. Andrew's with a little help from his "big brother," Widalvis Burgos '26. "It's been really fun acclimating to school," Adewunmi says.

"I've made a lot of relationships, connecting with new friends across every grade. My big brother has made that easy for me. It's nice to know that any issue I'll ever have, I can go to him." (Even when that issue is simply a strong desire for a slice on Pizza Tuesday.) "I *do* go to him when I'm hungry," Adewunmi admits, laughing.

The Big-Little tradition is a foundational part of residential-life onboarding at St. Andrew's. Seniors are paired with incoming new students, no matter what grade the new Saint is entering. The community-building with new students begins not long after they're accepted: one of the junior class's last official acts before leveling up to senior status is to write their "little" a welcome letter, which each new student receives in July.

When Burgos sat down to write his letter last spring, he reflected on his own experience as a new freshman. "I was arrogant and ignorant because I didn't know who I was," he says. "I thought I knew everything about myself, but I didn't. There was so much I had to learn, and during that growth process, it was clear how important a Big Brother was. That's who I want to be to my little."

Burgos and Adewunmi share a home town, and each is a graduate of Prep 9, an educational program that helps prepare high-achieving, motivated students from the New York City region for success at boarding schools. Pairings like these are intentional: St. Andrew's partners new Saints with someone with whom they share some common ground. "Since Elijah and I came from Prep, I understand part of his

experience in coming [to St. Andrew's]," he says. "Everything that's 'normal' here can feel a little strange at first, but I can walk him through that."

The duo prioritizes connecting. They shoot in the gym to get locked-in for basketball, they share breakfast, they check in on academics, they have a standing Friday meet-up, and Burgos often visits Adewunmi on dorm at night. "He's in a triple, so when I check on him, I'm checking on all three of them," Burgos says. "The senior class is in this together. We understand the mission. The whole point of senior year is to help shape the experiences of the underclassmen. We don't have our own [senior] dorms for a reason."

Adewunmi says he was hesitant about St. Andrew's at first. "One of the first things I asked Widalvis was, 'Is this school *really* going to be for me?' And he said, 'At this school, if you put your heart into it, the place is for you. You got here, and you deserve to be here,'" Adewunmi remembers. "I hope to be the kind of big brother he is when it's my turn."