

NYSEG EMPLOYEE WILLIAMS PROVIDES GUIDING HAND TODAY FOR TOMORROW'S MEN

Many people throw up their hands in exasperation at today's youth. But others, such as Roger Williams, Lead Analyst - Marketing & Sales, NYSEG, reach out a hand to guide anxious youth into becoming tomorrow's men.

As a member of the African American Men's Association of Geneva, New York, Williams is assisting middle and high school boys through the Association's *Young Champions Mentoring Program* (YCMP). Williams is also a member of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization. The Iberdrola USA Foundation is a YCMP supporter.

The program, which Williams helped develop, began two years ago. Its goal is to provide mentors focused on assisting local youth in building positive, healthy relationships at school, home and in their community. Through the mentoring relationship, youths develop a sense of unity, empowerment, self-determination, purpose, respect and self-esteem. This program strives to foster positive decision-making skills, age-appropriate independent living skills and a focus on the importance of education.

Originally, YCMP was a one-on-one program matching the eight students with a mentor. It has evolved into a group session. This year there are 12 participants, recommended to the program by school or community organizations or their parents.

"The one-on-one worked pretty good," said Williams. "But we found with a group session, the boys open up more and share their stories, ideas and dreams. They are good students and they want to be good citizens. They just need someone to talk with about their concerns."

Some of the topics are typical teenager concerns, while others are a surprise. Some boys have to take on parenting roles for siblings. Others worry about doing the right thing and not following the wrong leader. "We asked them to define a 'friend.' One boy said 'a friend is someone who doesn't squash your dreams.' They're pretty amazing and thoughtful," said Williams. The boys keep a life-skills journal where they write down their feelings during the meetings or at home for use in future discussions.

Through YCMP, the mentors emphasize three phases of life:

1. Earn a high school diploma. "Without that," Williams said, "we tell them you can't go to college, join the military or get a job that will allow them to pursue a better lifestyle."
2. Go to college or a trade school, join the military, get a job. "They understand not everyone can be a professional athlete. We tell them there are many other honorable opportunities available."
3. Working, raising a family and being a contributing member to your community. "Everyone who does this is a success."

The YCMP is a program in conjunction with the Association's College Life Skills program, a partnership with nearby Hobart and William Smith Colleges. This program is primarily for high school students and introduces them to the opportunities for attending college and the challenging associated with college life. The Association also offers two other programs: College Scholarship (a \$500 scholarship) and Community Involvement.

All these programs sum up the Association's mantra: "Together we accomplish more for our community."