

making a difference

# Connecting College Mentors with MIDDLE SCHOOLERS IN NEED

An Interview with Claremont Court resident, **Bill Godwin**  
Founder and president, *The Student Mentor Project*



*Bill Godwin has a good idea—make a dent in homelessness by connecting mentors with at-risk kids to greatly increase their odds of completing high school and going on to find success in life.*



Bill Godwin's new nonprofit organization, *The Student Mentor Project* (TSMP), is a program that will give scholarships to college students (currently UC-Berkeley) who commit to and perform up to three-years of mentoring at any number of TSMP approved fourth- through eighth-grade mentoring programs in Oakland/Berkeley and other areas of need. Bill is passionate about his cause and shared his story in hopes of inspiring others in the community to help as well.

### What inspired you to start The Student Mentor Project?

First, while visiting San Francisco and the Bay Area many times from 2007 until our move from Salt Lake in 2013, the homeless issue became immediately obvious to me. Also obvious was the huge and growing amount of money that was being spent on this issue, costing California and its citizens billions of dollars every year, with no long-term solution in sight. I wanted to understand why so many are homeless, and while the reasons of course are varied, including mental illness and financial loss, my discussions with many seemed to lead to one common denominator—they never really had anyone, during their middle school lives, who encouraged them to do well in school and many of them ultimately dropped out of high school. Clearly, my "research" was simply anecdotal but has been since backed up by legitimate research done on homelessness.

Around this same time, I was approached at an Oakland street fair by someone who was recruiting mentors for a local after-school mentoring program. I asked them how many mentors they needed, and the response was, "You send them; we'll use them." So I went to orientation at this program and learned that their program alone was short 150-200 mentors every school year. I also learned that at-risk youth in the fourth through eighth grade who had a mentor, had a 78 percent higher high school graduation



Partnering with UC-Berkeley, Bill Godwin, left, with Sam Mchombo, associate professor, African American Studies, UC-Berkeley, and a donor at a recent mentor event.

rate, higher self-esteem, and more benefits compared to a other at-risk students.

After our move to Berkeley, while driving, walking, and biking through UC-Berkeley for various reasons, I realized that I was staring at a very large pool of intelligent, motivated, successful, available, potential mentors. In addition, it didn't take long to learn that most of them were receiving some sort of scholarship and/or loan. After discussing with friends, family, and some local UC resources and mentoring organizations, I decided to develop what has become *The Student Mentor Project*, with the ultimate goal of putting an end to solvable homelessness at the source . . . at-risk youth!

### How will you choose the participating students?

The college students will be selected from applications returned through the UC-Berkeley scholarship office. They

will be chosen based on need and willingness to sign on with the program. Once selected, they will then select a mentoring organization from a pre-approved list of organizations. They will go through the organization's orientation and qualification process. Once the mentor candidate has been assigned a mentee, the mentoring organization will let TSMP know that that person has qualified, and the student will get the first scholarship payment for the first semester of commitment. The fourth- through eighth-grade mentees are selected by the mentoring organizations.

### How will the students benefit from the program?

The college students will benefit from receiving up to \$10,500 in scholarship money for their education expenses. The fourth-through eighth-grade at-risk students will get the immediate benefit of having a consistent, long-term mentor. Based on the studies, this relationship will most likely lead to life-changing benefits for the mentee.

### How can people from the neighborhood help?

Donations from residents of the Claremont neighborhood and beyond will help support the scholarships that drive the project. No less than 95 percent of the donations received will go toward scholarships. I have kicked things off with contributions for the first five scholarships. Connections would also be very helpful—to potential corporate and foundation sponsors. If a neighbor can open the door to one or more of these connections, I will do the rest to sell the importance of this project.

### WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP?

**Please visit [www.studentmentorproject.org](http://www.studentmentorproject.org) to learn more about this program or call me (Bill Godwin) directly at 510-833-9552. Thank you in advance.**



**Pamela Strike Fullerton** (on left) is a member of and volunteers for GiveBackHomes. The nonprofit funds homes for Habitat for Humanity and others.

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