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Please meet Gregory L. Williams

Jenel Few (912) 652-0325
jenel.few@savannahnow.com

Anyone between the ages of 9 and 19 who hasn't already met Gregory L. Williams needs to get to know him.

"He is passionate about being a positive influence in people's lives," said Warren Pippen, who worked with Williams to create The Males Advocating Change Collectively, a program designed to prepare students for college and prevent their involvement in crime and sex.

Williams, the program's president and CEO, is like a counselor, coach, motivational speaker, drill sergeant and your favorite uncle all rolled up and packed into a tall slender frame.

For 10 years his programs, Females Advocating Change Together and Males Advocating Change Collectively, have been inspiring area youth to become better people, students, employees, leaders and citizens. The nonprofit youth organization operates in connection with the Tracy McGrady Foundation.

But Williams will be the first to tell you that it is not his charm, charisma or promises of nonstop good times that draw young people to his very structured, academically focused, character-building programs - it is his total devotion to their development and success.

"Too many people try to be down with the kids when they need to be a role model," he said. "If you set high standards for them and then live by them yourself the kids will buy into that. It's a 24-hour job."

Williams doesn't just provide guidance and daily lessons in good behavior, work ethic, leadership, discipline, etiquette and healthy social skills. He offers himself as a living example.

"He backs up what he says and he's always there for you 100 percent," said Quintin Judson, an 18-year-old MACC member and 2006 Groves High graduate. "You know you have someone who believes in you and believes in the same things you believe in."

Since Williams began working with small groups of local students through his program in 1995, not one has gotten pregnant out of wedlock or developed criminal records. All who are of age have graduated from high school and gone on to college.



For 10 years Gregory L. Williams' nonprofit organizations, The Males Advocating Change Collectively and Females Advocating Change Together, have been inspiring area youth to become better people, students, employees, leaders and citizens. Stephen Berend Savannah Morning News

Williams' commitment to improving the lives of young people in his community was inspired by a generation of civil rights activism in his family.

His father is State Rep. Al Williams, D-Midway, the first African American from his home county to be elected state representative since Reconstruction and only the second to hold a legislative seat from the tri-county area of Glynn, Liberty and McIntosh since that time.

His great-grandfather, the late Rev. W. C. Shipman, was the first black registered voter and first member of the NAACP in Liberty County. "I guess it's in my blood," he said. "I wanted to pick up the torch."

And Williams' passion is helping to light the path for future leaders.

"He's a father figure to all of us," said Lesha Brigham, an 18-year-old member of FACT.

She graduated from Savannah High School this spring and credits the guidance and encouragement she received from Williams with preparing her to pursue a degree from Shaw University in August.

"He helped me get away from negative people and go ahead and do what I was supposed to do," Brigham said.