

# **Buckner Family Hope Center builds Men of Honor**

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DALLAS - Lester O'Garro has made mistakes in life. He's learned lessons the hard way. If he can help it, others won't repeat his errors.

As a volunteer mentor through the Buckner Family Hope Center at Wynnewood's Men of Honor program, O'Garro has become a force among men in their 20s and 30s within the Wynnewood community of South Dallas. With each conversation, he seeks to be a positive influence in their lives.

## **Learning opportunities**

He uses his life experiences with family, marriage, children and work as learning opportunities. The young men cling to every word the charismatic Brooklyn native says, asking questions and learning lessons. As they learn, they begin to make changes in their lives.

"Men in poverty need groups where they can come together and find out where they are lost. The road goes a certain way, but we fall off the road," O'Garro said.

"In the community, guys are looking for the right direction. If you don't have a father who's on you like this, then you've got to find the right guy."

## **Helping young men become positive role models**

Through the Men of Honor program, Buckner serves men in the Wynnewood area. By bringing together a group of men to discuss issues they face and providing tools to overcome those issues, organizers empower men to get jobs and live positive lifestyles.

“In our neighborhood and this area, we’re missing positive role models,” said Spencer Watkins, the Buckner community resource coordinator who started the group. “There’s a lot of guys out there, but they’re doing the wrong things. We want them to become positive role models. That will in turn affect families. People will get out of drugs. They’ll get involved in their children’s lives.”

The program was made possible by a grant from Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, which helps launch initiatives that provide holistic ministry.

### **‘A real eye opener’**

Newlywed Tori Gulley found the group an ideal sounding board. He routinely asked questions about married life and gleaned wisdom from men who have been married much longer than he.

Mentors encouraged Gulley to keep God “in the center” of his marriage. As a result, he and his wife regularly stop and pray when they are in a disagreement. The advice has made a tremendous difference in his union.

“It’s been a real eye opener for me,” Gulley said.

### **Importance of mentors**

Marcus Freeman, who also mentored the young men, was excited and encouraged as he saw lives change.

“Words cannot really explain it. You’re excited to see people decide they need to change friends, they need to stop drinking, they need to stop smoking,” Freeman said.

Mentors will continue their relationships with the men in the group, and the Hope Center is looking to focus on helping fathers in the area. Many of the men are attempting to be fathers even though they lacked a strong father figure.

“You learn from your fathers and grandfathers,” Watkins said. “But a lot of these guys didn’t have that. That’s why mentors are so important.”