

Henry Bouma
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Urban Youth Program

Fifteen years ago I began the adventure of being a Big Brother to five inner city boys from the Potters House urban school. Little did I know that it would radically transform my life. My wife and I would sell our dream home in the suburbs and move into the inner city neighborhood where some of the boys lived. Sixty percent of the families in our neighborhood live below the poverty level, with a high school graduation rate of only 39%.

With the help of friends and volunteers, we built a house on the empty lot next door to our 'new' home. We call this house our ministry center. The main floor and basement are a wide-open design filled with a foosball table, air hockey, pinball, skeetball, pool table, and—of course the most important entertainment device—a large-screen TV with the latest video game system! Kids of all ages come to do homework or hang out after school in a safe environment.

We have young men who live on the second floor of the ministry center who are studying to work in youth ministry and who help us impact youth in our city. One of the first kids I worked with fifteen years ago not only lives at the house and works with the kids, he is also finishing up a degree in youth ministry and also works part time at Lumbermen's.

We focus on three things: mentoring, leadership development, and helping the kids get connected to God. We do this by being involved in their lives through tutoring, coaching basketball, driving them around, going to their sports games, and helping them get jobs.

In the last seven years, approximately 1,000 kids have been at the ministry center either to hang out, be mentored, or participate in our Grand Rapids Initiative for leaders youth program. In the past few years, we have seen 15 of our former teens come back to help us work with the kids, which is exciting for us as it realizes our goal to develop leaders who will impact Grand Rapids and the communities in which they live.