

# Living



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## From flawed pasts to brighter futures

### Mentoring program empowers black men

The young black men who enroll in the Priority Male Institute come from all walks of life, some with a criminal history, some without.

Lawrence Moore, 24, came with one but there was nothing about the way he looked or acted that hinted he had served five years in prison for strong-arm robbery.

"When he spoke to you he said 'yes sir, no sir,'" said his mentor, Anthony Seals of Ellenwood. "You never



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would've guessed his background."

Thing is, backgrounds don't matter for the men who seek help through the Community Council of Metropolitan Atlanta, because it doesn't matter to the people who run the nonprofit, or to those like the 56-year-old Seals who volunteers with

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## Men: Troubled lives get turned around

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the agency.

It is their mission to develop, coordinate and utilize programs and resources that not only improve the quality of these young men's lives, but also empower them to do so.

The idea was conceived by the CCMA's founder Norma Barnes, and to a lesser extent her son, Reginald Arnold, a Fulton County criminal investigator, who had grown tired of seeing young black men fill the county's courtrooms.

"I'd vent about the frustration to my mom," he said, "and she'd tell me about her vision to change it."

In April 2008, Barnes formed the community council and began conducting free workshops for men ages 18 to 28 who were unemployed and underpaid, and who wanted more edu-

cation and a better life.

She then went a step further and created Man to Man, a mentoring program.

Moore, who recently completed the 26-week Priority Male Institute, is one of 10 men participating in the mentoring program.

Although he has yet to find a job, he said his life has already changed.

The way the program is designed, Seals said, it encourages young men to take control of their own destiny.

"Lawrence took hold of that," he said.

Not only did he complete the program, he enrolled in Morris Brown College, where he is majoring in business management.

Seals, Moore said, has been like a big brother and father figure in one.

"I'm doing good now," he said. "Everybody is proud of me."