

# Green Bay Press-Gazette

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### Programs aim to help boys make good choices

My Brother's Keeper, Boys & Girls Club offer mentors

BY PATTI ZARLING

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A few social service providers are working to help keep boys out of trouble, which at least one says will help them grow into responsible men and benefit the entire community.

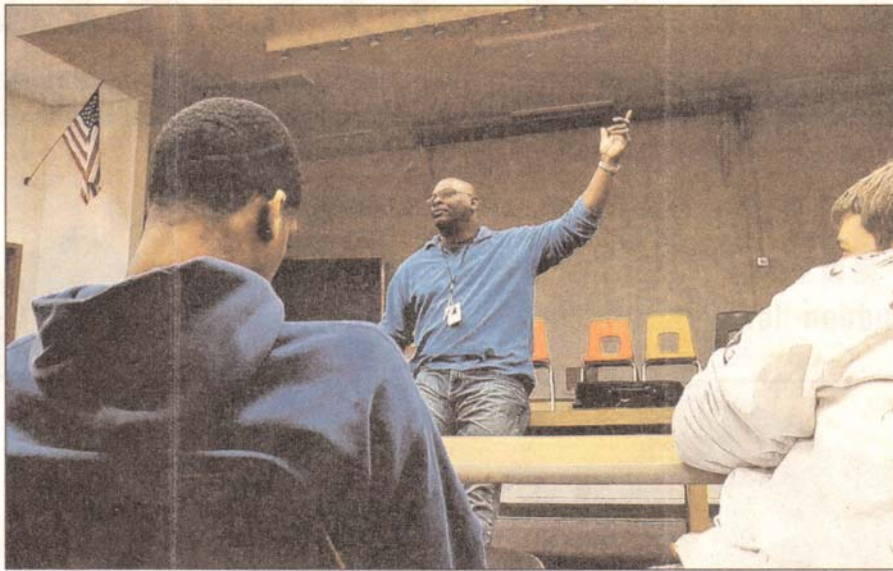
As the number of homes headed by single mothers grows, some social service providers say boys need mentors to point them in the right direction.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 22.8 percent of families were headed by single moms in 2007 and 3.5 percent by single dads. That's up from about 5 percent in 1970, according to the census.

Harry Sydney, a former Green Bay Packers player and running backs coach, who runs the mentoring program My Brother's Keeper Inc., aims to be a role model.

"I teach them to stop and think," he said. "To slow down and think about consequences."

Bobby Nelson, 11, gets along well with his mom, Betsy, but sometimes he needs a guy to talk sports with. He meets with Syd-



Harry Sydney meets with a group of boys during the lunch period Thursday at Green Bay West High School. Sydney, who runs My Brother's Keeper, works with the boys to help them make good decisions and become responsible adults. **H. Marc Larson/Press-Gazette**

ney once a week and said it's making a difference.

"We talk about things that are going on in school, respecting people," said Bobby, who lives with his mom in Howard. "You can connect with him. He always knows what to say."

Bobby's parents are divorced, and his dad remarried and moved to Michigan in August.

"Before he'd get Bobby every other weekend and other times," Betsy Nelson said. "Now he sees him once a month. So it's different."

Lisa Engels' oldest son,

now in his 20s, got involved in gangs in his teens and wasn't going to school.

"I tried counselors, psychologists, I was pretty much at my wits' end," she said. She read about My Brother's Keeper and decided to give it a shot.

"I asked Harry, 'What makes you think you can help when no one else has?'" Engels said. "He said, because he's lived it."

Sydney, who graduated from the University of Kansas with a degree in juvenile justice, said he's walked the walk.

"I'm the product of divorce," he said. "My mom was an alcoholic. I grew up with a lot of fighting in the house."

Sports and football were his outlets, and his goal is to help boys and men find something they can feel good about, too.

"And sometimes they just have to learn to stand up and be a man," he said.

The Boys & Girls Club also is reaching out to boys.

Following in the footsteps of the national Boys & Girls Club, the local club offers a 14-

#### To learn more

■ **My Brother's Keeper Inc.:**  
(920) 884-1150, [www.mybrotherskeeperinc.net](http://www.mybrotherskeeperinc.net).

■ **The Green Bay Boys & Girls Club:** (920) 494-7090

week session for boys between ages 10 and 15.

It's a series of roundtable discussions that touch on topics from physical hygiene to peer pressure.

The discussions provide a safe place for kids to talk, leaders said.

"Even if they come from a two-parent household, they might want to talk to someone who's not mom or dad," said Jason Schraufnagel, director of club operations for the Boys & Girls Club of Green Bay.

"At the end of the program they form a bond with the other boys and the person leading the program.

"We talk about responding to authority and having respect," Schraufnagel said.

"How do you respond when teachers or parents tell you what you should do?"

By the end of the session, boys usually are comfortable talking about issues they may feel they can't share anywhere else, he said.

"We've opened the door," Schraufnagel said.