

THE MORGANS' SAFETY NET FOR DROPOUTS

By Kerry M. King ('85)

The Winston-Salem Street School isn't just a second chance for teenagers who have been kicked out or have dropped out of traditional high schools; it's probably their last chance, too.

David Morgan ('80), a former minister who founded the small, private school seven years ago, is committed to offering at-risk youth hope for a better future. "My faith teaches me that every person is valuable," he says. "Education is the key. We're not giving them a handout; we're giving them a tool that will be valuable the rest of their life."

Housed in a handful of classrooms on the second floor of Rosemont Baptist Church, the school has about 35 students, most of them from poor, single-parent households with a history of substance abuse or abuse and neglect.

There's a narrow window of opportunity to break the cycle of poverty, homelessness and hopelessness that marks many of the students' lives, Morgan says. But that takes changing attitudes, breaking down barriers and, above all, showing that someone believes in them.

The school may be small in numbers, but for every young person whose life has been changed, "we're making a difference to that one," he says.

Ivonne Lopez, 19, is one of them. She dropped out of high school after she became pregnant but made her way later to the Street School. "What I was doing was getting me nowhere, just setting me up for failure. Something happened in my life; I was going through a lot, and I realized I wanted to finish my education," she says.

She received her high school diploma from the Street School in June and now attends Forsyth Technical Community College. (Many of the school's graduates continue their education at Forsyth Tech.) "Mr. Morgan has a passion for helping every single one of us," she says. "He never gave up on us."

Morgan modeled the school on the Denver Street School, where he volunteered in the 1990s while attending Denver Seminary. The Denver Street School has served as the prototype for 40 similar schools around the country.

After receiving his master's in divinity degree, Morgan moved back to North Carolina to be closer to family, worked in pastoral care in a Greensboro church and



'Brothers' in education: David Morgan ('80), at left, and Guy Morgan ('82).

taught history at The Children's Home in Winston-Salem. The high-school dropout problem in Forsyth County sparked a new calling for him. With support from church groups and volunteers, he opened the Street School in 2004.

In addition to a small teaching staff, the school depends on volunteer tutors and community leaders such as Guy Morgan ('82), a founding partner of Morgan Smalls Sports Consultants in Winston-Salem, who joined the school's board three years ago. A former basketball star at Wake Forest, Guy Morgan (no relation to the school founder) has reached out to help students learn about sports marketing; several students worked with him last spring at the MEAC Basketball Tournament at Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

"I was moved by the impact the school is having on students," says Morgan. "The school provides an environment for at-risk youth that gives them the foundation and direction to go forward and make a positive impact in the community."

Creating that environment takes about equal parts education, patience, compassion and some tough love when needed, says David Morgan. It can mean driving to apartments to find out why students have missed school, or taking students to Forsyth Tech to show them how they can learn a trade.

Although the school is "faith-based," it is not a religious school. Foundations, businesses, churches and individuals provide most of the school's budget, although students are expected to pay tuition of at least \$25 a month. "We're not giving them something free; we want them to invest in their education," Morgan says.