



Victor Williams, center, plays basketball with his brother, Joseph, left, and Greg Smucker during physical education class June 5 at Dominion High School in Sterling.

Times-Mirror Staff Photo/Heather Terwilliger

Student beats the odds, one by one

By [Leila Shipsey](#)

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Victor Williams had the odds against him growing up in today's society as the oldest boy of four children with an absentee father. His family has faced many financial issues and moved more than 30 times since his birth.

"Most high school kids worry about what movie they want to go see," said Michael Dougherty, Williams' football coach at Dominion High School, where Williams just graduated. "He has to worry about groceries and laundry. He had to grow up fast."

Despite the constant flux of his life, Williams, of Sterling, is helping keep his family together and succeeding both at school and on the football field. Last month, his efforts were recognized when he won the Beat the Odds Scholarship for Loudoun County and was presented a \$5,000 check at a ceremony at the Old Courthouse in Leesburg.

The scholarship is designed to award at-risk youth nationwide who have shown the ability to overcome significant life obstacles and rise above issues such as poverty, abuse, family breakup or substance abuse.

Williams' parents separated when he was younger, and he has moved 33 times to various shelters, trailer parks, relatives' homes and churches. Without his dad at home, as the oldest boy of four siblings -- with one older sister and three younger brothers -- 18-year-old Williams became the household's mediator and a major cohesive factor in the family.

During his sophomore year, Williams moved to a different county to live with relatives and finish high school, but he saw the toll his absence was taking on his family.

"My brothers started to do whatever they wanted," Williams said.

His brother, Joseph, was getting suspended from school for fighting and landed in a juvenile detention center.

"He is really smart. He's skipped a grade," Williams said, beaming with brotherly pride. Joseph just lacked a strong positive correcting influence, Williams added.

Unwilling to watch his brother become a statistic, Williams came back home to Sterling to finish his last two years of high school.

"At first we fought," Williams said. "But things started to get better after awhile."

Today, they play basketball together and share many of the same friends.

"[Joseph] was just hanging around with the wrong people," Williams said.

Williams leads not only in his home and among his family but also in school and on the football field, where he was Dominion's two-year standing first-team All-District defensive back.

"It's like having another coach on the field. ... I know that when I have something I need my [football] team to do, I just tell Vic and I'll have 60 guys follow him," said Dougherty, who also teaches physical education and driver's education at Dominion.

Williams' said his goal on the field is the same as it is off the field.

"I just try to lead by example," he said. "The goal is to get the big hit and do the right thing out there. And I don't try to belittle people."

Williams' friends call him one of the best leaders they know.

"He convinces us to do right and encourages us to make wise decisions," said Benjamin Dickerson, also a recent graduate from Dominion.

When asked what his defining characteristics are, Williams sat silently in his chair.

"He's showing you – it's humility," coach Dougherty answered for him.

It is his humility that has helped him lead his family and friends, and will help him get further in life, according to friends.

"[Victor winning the scholarship] shows you don't always have to be the coolest kid," said Cazava Eaststerling, a friend of Williams' and recent graduate of Dominion. "Being humble gets you far too."

Williams also volunteers through his church; helps with inter-religious volunteer projects in Service for Peace; takes part in community cleanups; and helps clean up public schools Washington, D.C.

He follows the lead of his mother, an active volunteer in the community who has taught her children the importance of giving.

"You never lose by giving," Williams said. That's something he said his mother has always told him.

Dougherty nominated Williams for the scholarship the week Williams found out he had been accepted to Bridgewater College for fall 2008. He had received about \$25,500 in financial aid and scholarships and was still \$4,500 short of the \$30,000 he needed to attend.

"I told him to 'hold on -- there might be one more thing,'" Dougherty said.

That "one more thing" has made it possible for Williams to go to college and play football at Bridgewater this fall, an opportunity he may not have had otherwise.

"A lot of kids would have folded in his situation," Dougherty said. "For Vic to achieve what he has based on the factors of his life, he is already successful -- but his best is yet to come."