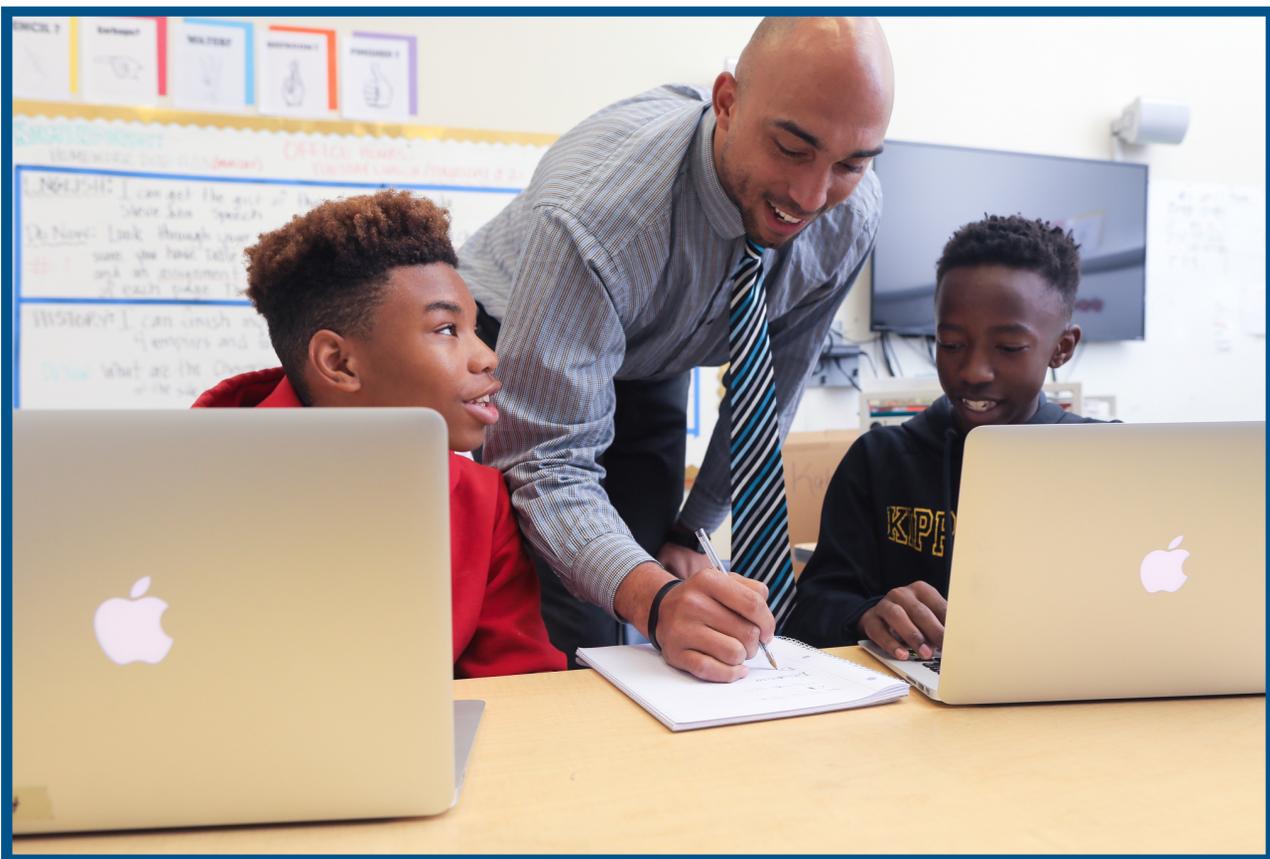


The Hidden Genius Project: Forging Equality for Black Male Youth through Business, Technology, and Brotherhood

“I am because we are. Hence, we are because I am...” The African philosophy of Ubuntu is at the heart of The Hidden Genius Project. It stems from the Zulu phrase “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, meaning common humanity and oneness.

In 2012, five tech entrepreneurs found something unsettling. Despite being located in perhaps the world’s premier tech hub, there is an often overlooked pool of Black male talent and potential. In a city filled with promising young minds and numerous career opportunities, too many of these young people were not included in the innovation and technological growth these founders had found success in. From this challenge, an idea took shape. What if they could mentor and train Black male high school students, and cultivate their talents into something great?



Founding Executive Director Brandon Nicholson, Ph.D.

The Hidden Genius Project is an Oakland based non-profit, dedicated to molding young Black men into entrepreneurs, technologists, and innovators. The organization achieves this by providing a nurturing infrastructure to provide aptly-named Hidden Geniuses (or Geniuses for short) with exposure to a world filled with vast opportunities, that is in many cases, right outside their doors.



The Hidden Genius Project Intensive Immersion Program

3 Locations 

Oakland, Richmond & Los Angeles, CA

4 Courses 

Intro to JavaScript, Intro to Python 3, Intro to SQL, Creative Computing

7,600+ Students 

Served through their Immersion, Catalyst, and Community Partner Programs

Program Benefits 

Stipends, Devices, College Advising (powered by UC Berkeley), Mentorship, Volunteerism, Job Opportunities, Career Preparation and Internships

Eugene Lemon, Senior Innovation Educator, is affectionately known as the “Baba” of the group (highly respected “father” or “elder” in many African languages). “Our holistic 15-month Intensive Immersion Program provides computer science, software development, entrepreneurship, and leadership training. Following an application, interview and acceptance into the program, our students receive more than 800 hours of mentorship and training. The students are introduced to technological concepts and processes that give them skills that will enhance their abilities to use computation to solve problems. The Geniuses are prompted to think about ideas they can implement to improve conditions within their communities.”

The Hidden Genius Project employs a community of passionate individuals, dedicated to carrying out the stated mission. Their long-term goal is for Hidden Geniuses to use these skills to transform their lives and communities. The program has been wildly successful, expanding its reach from Oakland, California to Richmond and Los Angeles. Cohorts Oakland 9 Black (OAK9Black), Oakland 9 Gold (OAK9Gold), Richmond 5 (RICH5) and Los Angeles 2 (LA2) are taking form this year.

Christopher Wilson, LA Innovation Educator, joined The Hidden Genius Project in 2020 after working with one of their partner organizations, [The Brotherhood of Elders Network](#).



Eugene Lemon, Senior Innovation Educator

“I graduated from San Francisco State University with a BA in Africana Studies. I have been a community organizer, working with Black youth since 2011. Prior to working at The Hidden Genius Project, I worked for an organization where I managed and trained young adults who provided academic support, and resources to underserved youth in Watts and Inglewood in the Los Angeles area. My first teaching opportunity was with The Hidden Genius Project. The experience of working for The Hidden Genius Project has been one of the most fun and rewarding opportunities I’ve ever had.”

Christopher teaches front-end web development using JavaScript, CSS, and HTML. He uses the CodeHS JavaScript course to set a strong foundation of programming concepts.

“ I think having multiple modalities is the most helpful thing that CodeHS does for myself and the Geniuses. There are hands-on activities, resources you can physically print out, videos, rubrics, etc. It’s all there! As an instructor, having a fully built curriculum keeps me and the Geniuses engaged and motivated. ”

- Christopher Wilson, LA Innovation Educator

Eugene added context to their objectives, “Our goal is to expose our Geniuses to as many areas of computer science and engineering as possible during their 15 months. The Geniuses like the CodeHS platform. It makes it much easier for us to transition back and forth, teaching them a variety of programming languages”.

A large number of Geniuses continue studying computer science in college. Ian Trawick (OAK6 Hidden Genius Alum) is currently enrolled in the Computer Science Program at California State University's East Bay campus.

"I began to learn HTML and Java in CodeHS. I've always seen computer science as a unique subject and enjoyed being able to type out code and see its output. The Hidden Genius Project's Intensive Immersion Program provided me with opportunities to cultivate my future career path. I plan to work for a company that emphasizes computer science and then to later have one of my own."



Perry Irving (left), Genius Fellow Educator

Alumni of the Intensive Immersion Program are eligible to become Youth Educators, working with external programs that teach middle and high school youth coding skills. They also give back to the very program they were once a part of. Perry Irving (OAK3 Hidden Genius Alum) is a junior majoring in computer science at San Francisco State University. He has returned to work as a Genius Fellow Educator, teaching young people how to become programmers and entrepreneurs.



The Hidden Genius Project alumni continue to use their acquired skills to do impactful work. [Neranti Gary](#) (OAK6 Hidden Genius Alum) is the creative mastermind behind their commemorative [Limited Release Juneteenth Apparel Collection](#). All proceeds from this collection directly benefit the organization and its programs.

Last year, the organization launched their Alumni Venture Seed Fund, a dynamic \$150,000 program designed to support Hidden Genius Alumni through the five phases of startup development. The funds are used to empower them with the resources, networks, and capital needed to advance their entrepreneurial ambitions.

Looking ahead, Geniuses and staff alike are optimistic about what can be accomplished. Christopher Wilson feels the opportunities are limitless.

"The sky's the limit as far as where I see this organization going. I think everyone has personal goals, but as an organization, our main purpose is to foster environments where youth are able to thrive. We are able to accomplish this by creating spaces for youth to be themselves and meeting them where they are at. The Hidden Genius Project is one big family - the brotherhood and camaraderie between Geniuses as well as between staff is very real."

The Hidden Genius Project is led by Founding Executive Director Brandon Nicholson, Ph.D. You can learn more about The Hidden Genius Project, its partners and recent accomplishments in their [2020 Annual Report](#).