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Brian,

I hope all is well in this heightened news cycle lately. Maybe SEC Media Day may take some pressure away. But you will probably find a good peg to tie into with that!

Please let me know if you have any concerns, comments or suggestions.

Tks.

-Patrick

Below is the story from today's Lexington Chronicle from the "Second" Front Page. Nice inspirational story of three of our juveniles doing well. Also please notice the last line of the story.

I cannot properly express my gratitude for the access to these juveniles and the dedicated staff at DJJ so willing to show SC that change is possible.

We have the Post and Courier here today as well to observe and report our story. (Deanna Pan-Education Reporter)

Thank you Dr. Jones, Dr. Quinn, Mr. Tanner and of course the juveniles willing to speak for themselves and to show DJJ in good light.

<http://lexingtonchronicle.com/djj-students-learn-life-work-skills-from-instructors-p38619-550.htm>

DJJ students learn life, work skills from instructors

Rob Cottingham•

Thu, Jul 14, 2016

Success starts with believing in yourself.

This philosophy inspired three teenagers from S.C. Department of Juvenile Justice's Birchwood school to come back from a national competition with gold medals.

Zion, Isaac and Chris are in the school's automotive body repair program.

The skills they learned — welding, plexiglass molding, etc. — helped them create a display and presentation that won first place at this year's SkillsUSA competition.

But the spirit of their instructors, more so than the skills, is what inspired these kids to pull off such an incredible feat from the beginning.

Don't give up on us

From the time they're charged with a crime, juveniles face a flurry of prejudices every day. It can follow them for the rest their lives.

The world remains cold to them even after they finish their rehabilitation. They're often viewed as degenerates who won't amount to anything.

No one gives them a chance.

"We're normal people," Chris said. "We could be that kid in church, or hanging with your son or daughter every

day. We just got caught. We're still human."

"Maybe your son or the kid he hangs around — they're doing the same stuff as us. But because we're behind the fence, you want to put labels on us," Isaac said. "And that doesn't define us."

According to the three young men, their instructors Phil Tanner and Dr. Greg Jones instilled self-worth and humility in them.

"We're here for the kids," Tanner said of Birchwood teachers. "A lot of us teachers here strive to make these kids' lives better by the time they leave (DJJ)."

Tanner is a retired teacher who taught at Irmo High for 30 years. He's been teaching auto collision repair at Birchwood four years.

"When I came here, I wanted to start a program that pushed success, self-progress," he said.

Tanner's concept became a pipeline of opportunity.

If auto collision repair students complete their GEDs, maintain good behavioral reports and prove their competency in the skills he teaches, Tanner sets them up for employment.

"I've got at least 25 former student's working at Dick Smith (Paint & Body Shop)," Tanner said. "I established that relationship with Dick Smith when I was teaching at Irmo High. When I started this program, that's what I wanted for Birchwood. I know what these kids are capable of when I line up these jobs for them."

Chris, Zion and Isaac all work at Dick Smith Paint & Body. Zion and Isaac currently work on detailing and other minor repairs. Chris has worked himself up to an apprenticeship in damage assessment.

Seeing the impact

Zion, who competed at SkillsUSA for the first time this year, will be the first to brag about Tanner.

"All I could do was hug him," Zion said, recalling his reaction at the awards ceremony. "If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be doing half of the things I'm doing."

In addition to bringing gold home for Birchwood, Zion recently earned his GED. He's also the commander of Birchwood's JROTC program.

He said Tanner is the reason he succeeds.

"He's always helping me and never puts me down," Zion said. "He tells me 'you can do it' all the time.

"If someone tells you that you can do it enough times, then you start to believe. Mr. Tanner is one of the most helpful men I know."

Zion's belief turned into a philosophy he preaches.

Zion said the first step to progress in believing is that the thickest (jail) bars are "in your head."

"You have to be determined to be successful," said Zion, who earned his GED recently. "Before the awards ceremony even happened, I kept saying, 'You know, we won first place at nationals,' and when someone asked me how I knew, I said, 'I don't, but I do.' You have to believe in yourself. Speak it into existence."

Dr. Gregory Jones, Birchwood Director of Career and Technical Education, said the work ethic these students exhibit far exceeds what privileged students of other districts demonstrate.

"Those kids do not work like these kids," Jones said. "These kids come in here, they roll up their sleeves, and they realize, 'I've got an opportunity, right now, to do something special, to show the world that I am somebody.' And they showed them."

"It's amazing what these kids can do if they believe in themselves," Tanner said.

The Tanner legacy

Dr. Jones spoke highly of Zion and the relationships of students and their instructors at Birchwood. Perhaps the best example lies in Zion's thirst for knowledge and helping others succeed.

"He and Isaac are part of what started this momentum that we have now with students aspiring to achieve their high school diplomas or GEDs," Jones said. "That wasn't going on eight, nine months ago. Once Zion and Isaac earned theirs, the momentum began, and the kids caught on. They wanted to follow these guys and began looking up to them."

Jones said the school was lucky to have one or two GEDs completed for the school each year. Currently, there are 12 students working on their GEDs, Jones estimates there could be as many as 40 GEDs awarded by the end of the year.

"They've actually changed the culture, and it's a wonderful thing," Jones said.

"Five minutes before I walked in (to the auto body shop), there was a lot of anger; I felt like I was on my own,"

Chris said. "I was by myself. It didn't feel like anyone was on my side.

"When we started that program with Mr. Tanner ... he starts teaching you what you need to know. He's there for us. He made me realize again that I can do whatever I want to do. That's what changed me the most; knowing someone cared."

"All you have to do with Mr. Tanner is be cool and he shows you love," Isaac said. "He teaches us that we can do it."

In speaking with 16-year-old Zion, it's apparent that "Mr. Tanner" will have a lifelong impact on the young man's mind. Zion's words are a testament to Tanner's dedication and compassion.

"If I get out, I know I can go check on him and see how he's doing," Zion said. "I look at him as another person in my family. I have love for him. I respect him. I wouldn't let anybody hurt him. That's the impact he's had on me."

Tanner said the kids' love for him comes from his compassion, something the public at large should consider.

"Don't give up on them, don't throw them away. They're good kids, and they deserve a second chance," he said. "That's what Cid Hoss at Dick Smith does, and it works out beautifully."

Chris, Isaac, Zion and "Mr. Tanner" also expressed thanks to SCDJJ Director Sylvia Murray and Superintendent Dr. James Quinn for their support and compassion.

Very Respectfully,

Patrick Montgomery

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