

MENTOR INTERVIEW - AL GANNON 7-6-2012

-(Mentee Jettie) – Boys & Girls Club, Sulpher Springs, Tampa, Florida

JEFF—“How does this program compare to any other behavior or character programs that you are familiar with?”

AL - “Well, I am only involved in one other program, so I have to say that other than mentoring young boys through Grace Family Church, this is the 2nd program I’ve been into as far as mentoring, but I have to believe that this is probably a program that anyone who has the opportunity to take time to get involved with this program should absolutely get involved with it.”

JEFF—“You mentioned that the kids were really enjoying the program. What do you think makes the program enjoyable? You sat in on a class and the graduation. What do you think made the kids feel like they were enjoying while they were learning?”

AL - “I believe that they felt good because they were learning. I felt that just the way the program was delivered to the children, to where they weren’t pushed to learn, this wasn’t a hard, “Oh geez, I’ve got to go to a math class or I’ve got to go to a history class. I’m going to something that I feel good and I enjoy doing when I go there because I walk away and I say, “Wow that was great! I really learned.” And the instructors, the way they present the program, and they get the children involved in the program, it is a remarkable program.”

JEFF—“Would you recommend the Character GPS program to parents and schools and if so why?”

AL - “I would recommend this program to schools, to parents because anything you can do for your child to bring strength to them and keep away from the environment and the things that are going on in this world now, with the Internet. Just things you can do to minimize the outside influences. This is a program that you should strongly, strongly get involved with.”

JEFF—“Mary Jane has noticed that both Jenny and the other girls have blossomed. They have come out of their shell. They seem to be confident and they know who they are and they are interacting with the other kids. She said they are smiling. Jenny didn’t used to smile a lot. He is smiling.”

AL - “Correct, he didn’t.”

JEFF—“And so she is seeing that there is this joy because of who he is now. You know, he has goals and he is working towards them. It is because they are not lost, they are not wandering, they have focus and obviously your coaching and mentoring was a big part of that process. I want to thank you.”

JEFF—“What was most satisfying for you in your mentoring?”

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AL - "What was satisfying for me in the program was the fact that I walked away feeling, I believe, just as good as the child. They gave me strength as much as the strength that I gave back to them. They made it exciting for me. Made me want to be there every week at 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock just to see how my mentee was progressing. They just . . . what I gave them, they gave back to me and the pats on the back and the experience of what they were going through in every day life made me feel that I was giving something back to them—I was making a difference.

JEFF—So you begin to see your mentee at graduation. How did you see him?"

AL - "Seeing my mentee at graduation. I could see from day 1 to week 8, he opened up. He smiled, he was not in his shell, he was not as reserved and he wasn't cautious about wanting to open up. He blossomed, more or less. He wanted to a part of everything that was going on. And I think we, all the men and women that mentored the boys and girls, took away some of the fears. A lot of the fears that these children have in life and whatever we gave to them, they gave back to us 110%."

JEFF—"So would you recommend this program to parents and schools and if so why?"

AL - "I would recommend this program to parents, to schools, any organization that is involved in character building of children. These children are the future of our country and anything an adult can do to mentor young boys and girls. To keep them on the right path, to keep them from straying and going the wrong way—to keep them going down the straight path is our obligation and I feel the schools should get involved and absolutely the parents should get involved in it because as an example of what we've done with this group of children on the first go-round I think that the parents would also recommend this program to their teachers because I believe they have shown a huge difference in their character and their self-esteem and they opened up and they weren't afraid to tell the truth. I know for a fact that in the beginning my boy would say, "Yes, I would tell tales and I wouldn't tell the truth all the time but through this I've learned that it's easier to tell the truth than suffer the consequences for telling a lie because now I am able to open up and tell the truth.""

JEFF—"Is there anything else that you want to say about the program?"

AL - "I believe this is a program that is well worth its weight and I believe that it should be a program that is continued. I believe not continuing it with the children that were involved in it, where they go into another segment of the program or we continue with other children, I believe it should be an ongoing process to keep them in balance and keep them out of harm's way and keep educating them because they always have questions and, hopefully, we always have answers. And yes, this is a program we should continue on an ongoing basis. As long as we continue to have volunteers and God is able to send these people to help these boys and girls, I definitely will be there."