

A life changed

By Francesca Donlan



I wanted to share excerpts from an English paper written by Byron Vazquez, a 10th-grader at Riverdale High School.

A few years ago, he was drifting - poor grades and a bad attitude. He and his friends got arrested for breaking into an abandoned house. He was sentenced to probation and forced to serve volunteer hours. Those volunteer hours at Schandler Hall Community Center, a division of Lee County Parks and Recreation changed the course of his life — all for the good.

Pretty soon he loved going so much it became the favorite part of his day.

"The next thing I knew the school year had flown by and it was almost summer. I was not looking forward to the summer break. The staff were like my parents. They held me accountable for my actions and they rewarded me for my successes. They had also helped me improve my grades and build better relationships with my teachers."

Last summer he became a counselor in training and spent those months in the park.

"I became certified in CPR, and learned many new skills. I learned how to plan activities for campers, fix minor things around the park, how to set up for an event and most of all how do be patient and understanding with others. I also cleaned a lot of toilets and mopped many floors, but I didn't mind, actually I loved it all. The staff at the center made me feel important, like they needed me to be a part of summer camp.

Finally, here I am, it is already February I have all A's and 3 B's on my most recent report card ... I am helping the staff plan for summer camp. I am so thankful for Schandler Hall Community Center.

The staff there are very caring and understanding. They love all of the kids in the park, young and old, good and bad. Schandler Hall is a great place to go after school. They have helped me create goals for my future too. You know what I want to do? I want to become a paid summer camp counselor when I am 17 and then when I am 18 I hope to get a full-time job with Lee County Parks and Recreation. Then I will be able to help other children the way they helped me."