

Upon being hired by the department, My first year was difficult as I entered a new school during the height of COVID Mandates and News Media portraying police in a bad light. However I never took it personally and simply honed my years of service to relate better with the students. In the months that followed, the students saw me and not the uniform. I was someone they could talk to and funny enough, the staff as well. I found myself helping everyone through their tough moments. The months would move along and one student took a liking to me and now wanted to graduate so he could join the Marine Corp and then be a cop. This was after several talks in different classrooms sharing a PowerPoint of my life and incorporating the goals of the department, State, and County schools rules, regulations, and goals. This student, I would mentor and assist throughout his 11th year of high school. A Zoom meeting set up by Ret: Chief Enos with the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Sarasota and Sgt. Daniel Gale, knowing I was mentoring this student convinced me to join. Since joining, my new little improved his grades, albeit he will not be valedictorian yet, he has completed graduation requirements and will walk the stage, earning his diploma.

We enjoyed our outings set up by the organization as well as having him spend time with my family and me. The Booker High School staff would come to learn of this and next thing I knew, I have several students I formally mentor at Booker High School. The rewards have led to fewer fights and distractions that would disrupt school activities to name a few. I work hand in hand with our counselors, teachers, and Admin. as well. The students I mentored, I would sit with them during their lunch period and assist with their schoolwork. As a result, I was asked by several teachers at times if I would join the classroom, helping when time allowed the students that requested me outside of those I mentored.

The publicity was not something I or my little/mentee was looking for when the BBBS organization was suffering a shortage of volunteers and asked me this, "Once your little graduates, would you consider another little/mentee?" I was also asked why I joined and how was my relationship with my little? After learning the details of our relationship and my mentoring other students, I was asked to be their ambassador. Of course, I agreed, and that opened up a great opportunity to other children in need of mentors by promoting the cause via newspaper ads, a Spanish TV News interview, and a commercial featuring me and my little. The local students and staff viewing this saw an opportunity we could expand upon and as a result, we formally started a mentoring group with 20 students. My outside connections along with staff, etc. will provide a new path for many students challenged by the life that currently surrounds them, that make life difficult to live and learn.

As my little/mentee graduates in a week's time, I am assigned a new little and he will transfer from SMA to Booker come the new season. His mother is a staff member and requested via BBBS if I would connect with him. We are now paired and this summer will be a fun summer with a new little.

My years as a homicide detective and hostage negotiator blessed me with a skillset that helps students and, at times, staff. I have truly found a home at Booker and I work closely with Dr. Shelley and AP Greg Rumph with our new mentorship program. In this email, I included one of three letters sent to NASRO on my behalf.

As humbling as it was to be recognized, the letters from students moved me more even if I was never nominated for anything, I love what I do and would not change a thing!

I made a promise long ago to pay it forward and if this helps one kid, I've done my job.

Safety First, Children always. SCSPD ♥

Sincerely,

Jose