

“I was a hot mess.”



Every now and then, if we're very lucky, we meet someone who makes us realize we're on the right track -- someone who deeply touches our heart.

I had this experience today and I want to share it with you because without you I would never have met Jonah.

Jonah Barley is a sixth grader at School 16 in the Quad A for Kids after-school program. He is charming, handsome, eloquent and mature – with a smile that seems to reflect his good place in life. He is musical and artistic with aspirations of becoming a fashion designer. He's also a member of the Step team and a class leader. And, he was just named School 16's "Terrific Kid of the Month."

I asked him how he got to be such a good kid and he told me "Quad A for Kids changed my life." According to Jonah, PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) and Quad A program director, Vincent Alexander, have given him the tools he needed to become the motivated kid he is today.

"Last year, I didn't get a lot of work done; I was being bad in Quad A and spent a lot of time in Ms. Cooksey's (the school principal's) office. I didn't have a positive attitude and I fought with my friends. *I was a hot mess.*"

This year, the PATHS program gives students the opportunity to write in their journals. Teachers who then read the journals at home come back and describe life scenarios based on journal entries without betraying the privacy of any one student. The children in the program then role-play and give advice on how they would handle these situations. This runs the gamut from problems with parents, friends, and studies to the assorted challenges of being a sixth grader. The assured confidentiality lets students talk about things they wouldn't otherwise discuss.

"This has given me a positive attitude," says Jonah. "I can trust the teachers and I can trust Mr. Alexander. Anytime I need to talk I know Mr. A. is there and will listen. I know what's said in this room, stays in this room."

According to Jonah's mom Anita Barley, the after-school staff has worked with her personally. "I like the concern of the teachers and staff. They've helped improve Jonah's attitude. They've shown him the need to succeed in life."

Jonah says of his mom, "I get along better with her now. I'm not shy with her anymore. I'm not afraid to talk to her."

Jonah's sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Franzeze says, "He ignores friends who make bad choices. He accepts help from his teachers and friends. When he faces a challenge he tries to keep a positive attitude. He is definitely on the right track."

Jonah has been in the same classroom with three other boys in School 16 since kindergarten. Recently they weren't getting along. They weren't talking. Jonah talked to Mr. Alexander about this. Mr. Alexander took all four boys out to dinner and after spending time together they are now "Broodies." (brothers/buddies).

Jonah says many of his friends have changed because of Quad A. It has fostered relationships.

On the down-side – and there must be one, right – I asked Jonah if all this positive stuff has made him feel more prepared for middle school next year and his answer was, "NO – I don't want to leave Quad A and Mr. Alexander!"

I thanked him for his time and for sharing with me and he went to shake my hand and thought better of it and gave me a big hug.

Are we succeeding? You bet! And we hope to continue.

While we've applied for a major grant, Quad A may have to close the after-school program at School 16 despite the tremendous progress we've witnessed there. We need your support. Please help us foster many more Jonahs and turn all the "Hot Messes" into "Cool Successes."

Thank you.

Sandy Skiles
Quad A for Kids Donor Services



Mr. Alexander and Jonah