

Aspen Elks and Basalt Rec Can Make a Difference

It is always a good feeling to know that we have the ability to assist people with scholarships with the help of the Aspen Elks Lodge, but a lot of time we really don't see the effects of our help. It was this winter when I finally had a chance to witness a second chance and make a difference in someone's life. This is the story of Cristian.

We had a young coach come to us wanting to put together a special 6th grade, hand-picked, travel basketball team to attend youth tournaments in Colorado. We had the team picked of some of our best players, but prior to the team finalizing, Cristian got mixed up with the wrong people and was caught, actually by me, getting into the elementary school and swiping an ipod from the music teacher's desk. I was extremely disappointed in Cristian. His chance on the team vaporized. In a short time it seemed his world was spiraling downward. He was in trouble in school, bullying a teammate, not allowed in the elementary school and his school work was failing. Whenever I saw Cristian, he had a sad look on his face and his walk lacked any confidence. He has many friends on the travel team and his actions had stripped him of the opportunity to play.

I had a call from the mom of the young boy Cristian was bullying and she ended up call him a very undesirable name. It was then I made the decision to give Cristian a chance. I called the coach of the team and said, "Put Cristian on the team. He has zero chances, he messes up and he is off the team." We gave him a journal to be signed off by teachers that he is keeping up in school, he was instructed to write a letter of apology to the young boy he was bullying, and he is required to do one nice thing a day and note it in his journal. I wrote in his journal, "Many people think you will fail, but I believe you will succeed!" There were teachers who could not believe we would put him on the team and would call him lazy.

Cristian is a different boy from who he was mid February. I woke up every morning when we started this and prayed to God that Cristian would not mess up. Teachers who thought he would fail are seeing a new boy in their classrooms. He keeps up at school and plays hard on the court. He even was a part of taking home a first place championship in a Glenwood Springs youth basketball tournament. Recently I saw him walking home from school and he has a confidence in his step and a big smile on his face as he waves energetically to me. He high fives the kid he was bullying and tells him, "Good job!" at basketball games. The vice principal at the middle school thanked me the other day saying the change in Cristian has made a big difference some important dynamics in the school because he and his friends are a big influence in the school. Now they are looked up to and making good decisions.

I can only hope that Cristian continues with his dreams and goals and, as he moves through his life whether it is with the NBA or getting his MBA, he remembers that someone gave him a chance to make a better life for himself. I am so proud of him.

I want to thank the Aspen Elks Lodge for giving me the opportunity to make this big difference in a boy's life.