



Listening to Our Youth

D.E., age 20 and once a disconnected youth, has made some important decisions. He's working now and has made the decision to go back to school. Most importantly, D.E. knows the kind of father he wants to be, one that's there for his little girl.

These decisions have been coming for a while in spite of a number of obstacles. Some of these obstacles were triggered by life circumstances; others by choices that were made; and others partially the result of an incomplete understanding of available options. As you listen to D.E., you also realize that some obstacles probably evolved through a combination of factors - all contributing to the "tyranny of the moment."

Through D.E.'s journey there were people who wanted to help. He can name them. He shares that these people came to work early, stayed late and came to his home to offer support. D.E. believes that reaching out is important. One of these caring individuals is Jarius Gilliam, Director at the Boys & Girls Club Fort Pierce Teen Center at Percy Peak. Mr. Gilliam connected D.E. to Kaila Moses, Career Coach at Eckerd Connects, and Eleanor Eberhart-Chin, Garden City Manager at CareerSource Research Coast, which is how we met him. Connections not only matter, they can make all the difference.

D.E. also stressed that it's important that youth "find what fits them." For him right now it's drawing, photography, and auto mechanics. He wouldn't know this if he didn't get to have these experiences, finding those positive things that he is passionate about and can build around. He is already thinking like an entrepreneur and designing tattoos that friends can take to licensed tattoo professionals. His "always learning" mode has caused him to ask questions, seek opportunity for developing these passions, while maintaining his employment and helping his family.

Yes, D.E. has made some important decisions that can change the trajectory of his life. The first step in doing anything is deciding to do it. He has taken that step. He has goals and is moving forward in achieving them.

The goal of the Economic Sufficiency Network is to listen to youth like D.E. Our challenge then is to use what we learn to develop a plan that will include supports for youth trying to reconnect.

Join Us:

The B2P network meets monthly on the third Wednesday of the month from 12-1:30 at the FL Dept. of Health SLC at 5150 NW Milner Dr. Please contact *Wydee'a Wilson* at wydeea.wilson@djj.state.fl.us for more information.

