

“Prenel, you’re going to be my protégé for the next year.”

Prenel, a 15 year-old Haitian kid with whom I have a good rapport, beamed. “What’s a protégé?”

I laughed. “If you want to be one, you have to find out what it is.”

He turned to my boss, Kim, and repeated, “What’s a protégé?”

“Nope. You have to find that out on your own” she retorted.

Prenel ran into Branches, the building where I work. He came back a few minutes later with a dictionary propped open. “Protégé: a child with tremendous potential generally in music or the arts.”

I chuckled again. “That’s a child protégée. That’s not it, but you’re very close.”

“How do you spell it?”

“Nope. You have to find that out on your own.”

Two days later he came back with the real definition of a protégé. He was grinning from ear to ear.

Prenel is one of my favorite kids at Branches probably because he is in the best shape of all of the kids and therefore really enjoys the weight lifting that we do (I’m a little partial to kids who like Arnold Schwarzenegger, too). I have only known Prenel for a couple months, but I have already seen him mature spiritually and behaviorally. He is really seeking God, which is evidenced by his desire to read the Bible everyday and his attendance at every Bible study. During our times of weight lifting and youth night, he disrupts much less often than before and has shown real sportsmanship when we play football (i.e. he doesn’t argue after every play like most of the kids do).

Although I’m sure not all of these changes have to do with me, I do hope that I have helped a little in his growth. Since we have a fairly close relationship, I frequently pull him aside when he does something inappropriate and tell him that I expect more. I also ask the tough questions that his mom and step dad may not be asking him at home: What did you do on Saturday night? Where did you go with Alberto last night church? What did you do after the high school football game? Yes, I ask those annoying questions that every teenager hates to have to answer. I view this as a little parenting training ☺. It is through relationships such as this one that I hope to make a difference. Please pray that Prenel will continue to seek the Lord and make positive choices.

I am still thoroughly enjoying my time here in Florida. The temperature is still in the 80’s. I’ve been riding my bike to work almost everyday since my car and scooter are on the fritz. Yo aprendo mas español cada dia (I am learning more Spanish every day). I speak in public at least twice a week (which is hopefully improving those skills). I am being challenged in every area of my life from finances, to politics, to my belief in God. Most importantly, though, my faith is growing each and everyday.

I am so glad that I have this opportunity to volunteer for a year. Thank you to everyone who is supporting me with money, prayers, and cards!

Tony

P.S. I will be home for Thanksgiving from Nov. 21-27! Yeeeeeeaaaaaahhhhhhhh