

We kicked off the New Year with a two-day leadership summit for all of the middle school and high school students down at Branches. We traveled to a nearby church, listened to a guest speaker, ate tons of pizza, played hide and seek in the dark, sang worship songs around a campfire, and discussed everything from character, to leadership, to the Bible, to who was going to be in the Super Bowl. It was a great time.

*“The only thing that walks back from the tomb with the mourners and refuses to be buried is the character of a man. What a man is, survives him. It can’t be burned.”* We tried to teach the kids about character and integrity, and show them that you can’t be one person at church, and another completely different person at school with your friends. What you do when no one is watching, is who you truly are. It doesn’t matter what other people think of you. You don’t have to sell drugs or go to jail to get respect. Stand up for what is right, and you will get plenty of respect.



Branches Youth at the Leadership Summit

The kids behaved and listened so well; we were sure they understood. But, last Friday at our youth night, we had a bunch of new faces, many from the Florida City Family, a local gang, come for the first time. It was incredible to see so many new teenagers come to hear us talk about God, but what was even more incredible was the influence these kids had on our core group of teenagers. Our regular kids wanted to impress these cool teenagers, who have been in fights and jail and have money and cars, so badly that they misbehaved the whole night. It was so frustrating to see our kids, who acted so well the week before, act up just to impress their peers. It seemed our teaching didn’t make any impression at all.

I talked to my boss later about the whole night and how discouraged I felt. She told me to not give up. She said, “Jesus was with the disciples for more than three years before they began to change their way of thinking. And you’re not Jesus.”

Two days later, Check, a neighborhood kid who has never wanted anything to do with God, came to church for the first time. It’s been almost five months. Please pray that I will make a difference.