

December 2, 2008

Deanna Fortson  
Riverview, FL

Mr. Lincoln Tamayo  
Academy Prep Center of Tampa  
1407 E. Columbus Drive  
Tampa, FL 33605

Dear Mr. Tamayo,

I recently had the pleasure of volunteering at the Metropolitan Ministries' Holiday Center on Saturday, November 22, 2008, for the 7:45am shift. During this time, I worked alongside some of your wonderful students. I would like to share this experience with you.

My 11 year old son and I were assisting in The Clubhouse, the play area for children. There were four other teenage girls there with us: Destiny, Anaya, Ageis and Nandi (I believe). They were all very nice young ladies (they even called me Ms. Dee, although my name tag just said Dee). Why I would expect differently? You see, I was initially worried my son would be around a bunch of foolish acting teens that were only there to "fulfill their service hours," but I was pleased to see that was not the case. I knew the girls were a part of the group of kids I saw earlier that seemed pretty orderly, with a mellow-looking chaperone name Mr. Kelley. I remember thinking he was one of the kids but then noticed he was respected as an authoritative figure and I then realized his role. I was hesitant to ask where they were from.

Well, I did not have to wait long. One volunteer's jacket had opened a bit and I could make out a piece of logo that looked like a tree branch with yellow behind it. Academy Prep, I would know that logo anywhere! I became familiar with your school through my employer and was excited to actually be there with the students. I knew without a doubt I was surrounded by a responsible, smart group of young ladies and they proved me right. Once The Clubhouse was operational, I did not have to worry about how the students were handling things. They had it all under control assisting with crafts, playing and comforting children, and monitoring the area. The children and parents kept us on our toes, and your students were right there every step of the way.

By the end of the shift, it was obvious the atmosphere had touched a few hearts. I had the opportunity to witness teenagers show concern for their fellow classmates and provide comfort when they saw it was needed. Where do you see a public display like this nowadays, even with adults? I was blown away by all I had witnessed in the previous three hours, not only with those I worked with, but even the rest of the group that stopped by. But, then again, these are Academy Prep students. They realize the impact of giving back to the community, hard work, leadership, and commitment. They understand how it feels to want and receive genuine support and respect. They represented the school very well, but most importantly, showed me and everyone else that they are not your "average" teenagers and certainly not foolish. The students were great examples for my son and the other children.

I look forward to serving our community alongside Academy Prep in the future, and plan to explore volunteering directly with the school. I would appreciate it if you could identify the four young ladies I worked with that day and tell them that I truly thank them and to continue being leaders. Please also share this letter with your faculty, students, and their families. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Deanna Fortson