



VISTA HIGH SCHOOL

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December 10, 2009

Kevin Keyes
Prevention Specialist-Project 180
Office of Christine Lizardi Frazier
Kern County Superintendent of Schools
School-Community Partnerships Department
1300 17th Street
Bakersfield, CA 93301-4533

Dear Mr. Keyes:

I wanted to thank you for giving me and 3 of my students the opportunity to visit Kern Valley State Prison on December 2, 2009. I am still digesting layers of all that happened that day as we were introduced to the prisoners of the E.D.G.E. program and allowed to hear their stories. To say that our day in prison made an impact would be an understatement.

The 3 young men, James G., Ruben M. and Carlos R. spoke to me in the car as I took them home. Ruben and Carlos, the older 17 year olds, told me quite openly that they did not want to ever go back there, that they did not want to "live like that" and they did not want to keep making the mistakes that could eventually lead them there. James, the 15 year old, was the last one I had to drop off. He waited until the others were gone to share with me that his father had just been released from Kern Valley State Prison a couple months ago. He was quiet and serious when he told me that he never wants to end up like his father while confiding that he has been "doing some things" that he knows he needs to stop.

As for myself, I am still working out all that occurred that day. I saw men who had made horrendous choices in their lives that are now paying the ultimate price by spending the rest of their lives behind bars. But what had the most impact on me was that they are not just "spending time." Through the E.D.G.E. program, they have been allowed to share their stories in an attempt to warn others not to make the same mistakes. At the same time, they are bringing deep meaning and humanity back into their own lives. I remember thinking, as I drove the rest of the way home by myself, how on that December day, these men reminded me of the ghosts in Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" - essentially dead to the world as we know it, but trying desperately to divert others from doing irrevocable harm.

They shared that, although a common symptom leading to a criminal lifestyle was "ditching school" - the ultimate irony was that once they got locked up, they were required to continue working on their education. The message was clear: Stay in school now, get educated now, so that you don't have to do it behind bars. There were other, deeper messages that were woven throughout every story: Don't sacrifice your life. Wake up. Think before you act. Learn to ask for help. And the list goes on.

I believe that the E.D.G.E. program is a valuable tool of diversion. I truly believe that it could make a major difference for young people who need to take a hard honest look at the choices they are currently making in their lives. If you ever need someone to speak on behalf of this powerful program, you've got me in your corner. Again, Mr. Keyes, thank you.

Sincerely,

Kimberly A. Prewett
Counselor
Vista High School