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30 August 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an employee of the Macon Youth Development Campus. I have had the pleasure of teaching Family and Consumer Science for over eighteen years at this location. During those years, I have had the opportunity to meet many professionals and see many projects make efforts to improve or rehabilitate the incarcerated youth on this campus. Some projects failed, some worked awhile and fell by the wayside, and others succeeded to some extent.

One day our teaching staff was called together and informed that a man would be coming to work with groups of girls to explain what his life has been like and to show similarities that our girls could identify with. His nameRon Brashear. His book.....Bouncing Back...Living Life the Right Way. As I heard the explanation of his topic and plan, I thought...here we go again—probably another waste of state monies!

Well, boy was I wrong! To me, this man's story and means of presentation are unbelievable. Ron Brashear is such a personable man with such a story to tell! Mr. Brashear has been through so much in his life—from smoking OPB's (other people's butts), coming from a single parent home, to shoplifting, to skipping school, to selling drugs, to being put in a juvenile detention center, to card hustling, to being court-martialed in the military, to serving time in prison, to being a very successful family man with a wonderful career! This is a person our girls could definitely identify with. He stresses to the girls that they have made mistakes in their behavior, but they can grow through them, instead of just going through them. He says their incarceration can be a bend in the road. It is not the end of the road.

In his program, the girls are given an autographed copy of his book and a workbook with open-ended question for the girls to complete concerning their own experiences. Mr. Brashear exposes the "demons" of his life which encourages the girls through discussions and writings to expose their own demons. He discusses so many valuable topics that the girls understand. The "it" factor, making quick money, who you choose as friends, "haters", wearing too much "honey", hip-hop lyrics and their degradation of women, looking at their windshield and only glancing in their rear-view mirror, importance of education, growing through things, and putting change in the soda machine and their expectations of what they will get.

In the discussions, I take pictures of the girls as they listen, watch, laugh, cry, discuss and identify with his story. I then glue the photos in their book around the section in which they will write their own story of their life.

In summary, I want to say this has been the most meaningful and positive project that the girls at the Macon Y.D.C. have been exposed to in my 18 years on the campus. In the discussion groups, I've seen tears, laughter, "oh, that happened to me too" moments, compassion, deep concern, and respect exchanged. Working with Mr. Brashear has been such a pleasure for me. He is also the nephew of Carl Brashear who was in the movie Men of Honor. You can see that determination for great accomplishments runs in his family! I will always value what I have learned from working with him and the girls. I know he and his book, program, empathy and love have touched and helped many girls here.

Elizabeth White
FACS Teacher

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