



BRADLEY SLADE

CHANGING LIVES, ONE INTERNSHIP AT A TIME

BY ANDRES VEGA

During my internship with the Alpine School District, I met many students who were struggling with mental health, poverty, abuse, and behavioral issues.

In one particular case, I worked with a young man who had brought marijuana to school. Administrators were threatening to expel him if he did not seek treatment. In our initial meeting, it was obvious that he assumed I was another adult waiting to discipline him for his actions. To his surprise, I told him that I was not as concerned with his troubles in school—I just wanted to talk about whatever he wanted to talk about.

So we spoke about sports, video games, television shows, and many other topics. After our discussion, I told him that if he wanted to come back in two days, I would meet with him again. To my surprise, this young man did come back, and this time he was ready to speak to me about his problems and concerns. He spoke for an entire hour, telling me that he didn't actually want to smoke marijuana; instead, he used it to alleviate some

of the pain he was feeling. From talking with him, I learned why he acted the way he did. As we continued to talk, he shared with me how he had been struggling with depression for a long time and had even tried to take his life multiple times.

Over a period of three months, I continued to meet with him. As we worked together, I was able to give him the skills to manage and eventually overcome his depression. When my internship ended, this young man came into my office and told me that I had literally saved his life. I was humbled and felt an enormous amount of joy knowing I had helped this student and made an impact in his life.

I met with many other students during my internship, and despite the many challenges they faced, I quickly learned that each student has the potential to grow and become better if given the opportunity. As these students were given a voice and the proper tools to succeed, they became empowered to overcome their individual challenges.



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