

Nominee: Nikki Wilkerson
Organization: Abraxas Youth Center
Years Employed: 1
Current Position: Teacher Aide

I am privileged to have the opportunity to nominate Nikki Wilkerson for consideration as JDCAP's 2018 Rookie of the Year. Nikki started her career with Abraxas as a Youth Development Specialist, was quickly promoted to a Youth Development Team Leader, and has recently been promoted to Teacher Aide on our Detention Unit.

From day one of employment, Nikki has demonstrated a passion for kids, their growth, and their journey. I use the term journey rather than success because Nikki emulates the idea of “we’re in this together, it’s a journey”, rather than “you’re on your own and responsible for your own success”. Her approach is unique and genuine and the kids respond!

As a Teacher Aide on a detention unit the challenges are many: transient population, disenfranchised kids, high incidence of trauma/mental health, and just overall poor attitudes toward a future. She remains with the same group of students throughout the entire school day and is responsible to provide safety and structure. Some may be overwhelmed with the routine and responsibility while Nikki is consistently looking for new ways to engage kids academically and therapeutically.

Within what could be considered a short amount of time, Nikki has transformed the classroom into a welcoming environment where every student is given the opportunity to thrive in all areas of life. She supports them academically daily but has also recognized specific programming needs of that population and developed a program called H.O.P.E (Helping Others Persevere Everyday). This programming which she facilitates, happens after school and provides a safe place for kids to talk about “life on the streets” and gain knowledge, support, and resources to break unhealthy, unsafe lifestyles.

Further demonstrating her passion, Nikki also displays significant investment and initiative in her own professional development and the professional development of her team. As a “rookie”, it’s not often you find someone willing to take professional risks and think outside the box. Nikki has done just that preparing proposals for training opportunities bringing in guest speakers and pertinent topics related to the students we serve.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying “A mind that opens to a new idea never returns to its original size.” Nikki challenges us all, staff and student alike, to remain open minded, take healthy risks, and enjoy the journey. Her creativity, positive attitude, and passion for the work she does make her a role model for all she comes in contact with and extraordinary candidate for JDCAP’s 2018 Rookie of the Year.

Name of person submitting: Melissa Kennedy; 717-749-2615

Position: Education Director