Letter to Probation Officer

Lianne Hughes

The following letter is a mock letter to Judge Harris. The objective of this assignment is to develop significant advocating skills so that as a professional, working in the field of Juvenile Justice, you are able to advocate properly for a juvenile. Furthermore, in the following letter you will see me explaining who I am, my role, and how long I’ve been working with the juvenile, as well as my mission and what I hope to accomplish.

To: Judge Leslie Harris
Suffolk County Juvenile Court
24 New Chardon Street
Boston MA, 02114

Dear Judge Harris,

My name is Lianne Hughes and I am 21 years of age. I am a junior at Wheelock College and I am majoring in American Studies and concentrating in Juvenile Justice and Youth Advocacy. I am a 2nd degree black belt in the style of Go Tan Ryu and serve as a mentor to two young ladies at Wheelock College Upward Bound Program and Boston’s East Coast School of Combined Martial Arts. In addition to being a mentor, I am also a mentee and have been a part of the Big Sister Association since I was 8 years old. Throughout my freshman and sophomore year of college I have done developmental work with minority children from the Ellis Memorial and The Curley Elementary School. I have also worked with obese children at Body By Brandy’s 4 Kidzs. Personally, I consider myself to be a professional African-American female who is multi-dimensional, diligent, and has a passion for working with children and families. Throughout my career I have worked with many adolescents with different gifts, exceptional needs, passions and talents. However, I never worked with a 13 year old teen that had such a strong sense of principles, values, and beliefs as José Ramos.

José Ramos is a mentee of mine, as well as a client. I have been working with him and his family for the last 2 years. Together we plan bi-weekly trips that have different objectives. For example, last week’s goal was to find a local afterschool program that offered basketball lessons as well as private tutoring in the subject of mathematics. For months, José has been seeking and expressing interest in this sport as well as the subject. So we took a tour around the Roxbury community and ended up touring the Roxbury YMCA, were he was highly interested in the afterschool program as well the activities offered.

To the point, I am writing to you because Joes has brought to my attention that he and his probation officer have a dreadful relationship. He expressed that she patronizes him at every visit. He feels as if her only objective is to lock him back up. Let me illustrate his perspective.
He states, “She hates me, she treats me like shit. I look at her and I feel hatred so I react angrily not understanding why she’s not giving me a second chance. Ms. Hughes I try I really do but she objectifies me as if I’m an object. Honestly Ms, I learned my lesson, I’m just a law abiding citizen with the whole criminal justice system on my shoulders. But I guess that’s life, with no liberty and happiness….“ First and foremost, your probation officer states in her report that my client comes into her office with a serious attitude. Yet she dismisses the fact that for every action there is a reaction. Studies show that people don’t react just because; there is a reason that justifies their thoughts, moods, and ideas and Jose’s reaction is triggered by the hatred he feels for his probation officer. So who wouldn’t come into a place where they feel unwanted with an attitude? She also states in her report, “When confronted he becomes angry, sits stubbornly in silence, and cuts her mean looks.” Jose is dealing with his problems internally, which is unhealthy and should be addressed. He is institutionally oppressed, and it shows through his actions as well as his words.

I am writing to you because this needs to be addressed if we want to seek change in Jose, yet on a larger scale, any child! In addition, it has also been brought to my attention that José has missed a week of school. However, I thought I would highlight the fact that he has been reporting to school for the last 2 months “regularly,” which the school report states! Sometimes we lose sight of a child’s success and are quick to ridicule and punish him or her when failure is presented. Jose is human, and not to justify his actions, but Jose’s mother has been out of town for the last week and he has taking full responsibly for his three younger siblings: this may explain his whereabouts!

Jose is a good kid and is seeking to better his life and it is clear through his excitement and passion in joining an afterschool program that he wants to become embedded in his community. He just needs to be understood; and in order for this to work, a healthier relationship between Jose and his probation officer needs to come as a result, or their isn’t going to be any progress. If this occurs, WE fail, OUR system fails, and OUR job isn’t done!

Thank You,

Lianne Hughes