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David Spencer Sanchez: Job-Link Racine

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David Spencer Sanchez, Job-Link Racine

Picture credit: Alix Sanchez.

Recently I had the honor of interviewing one of the winners of the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, David Spencer Sanchez. He founded Job-Link Racine. Continue to read on an learn more about David and about Job-Link Racine.

R: Tell us a little bit about yourself?

D: I am 19 years old and I grew up in Racine, Wisconsin, although I was born in Illinois.

My parents are immigrants to the US and have instilled a strong work ethic in me and

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a real appreciation for the opportunities in this country. My dad is Colombian and my mom is Australian. In high school, I was extremely active in sports, Key Club, theater, and was Student Government President. After graduating May (2010), I went to college at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and am now a freshman there, double-majoring in Political Science and Film Studies.

R: Tell us about Job-Link Racine.

D: I founded Job-Link Racine to link homeless (and later low-income) teenagers in my school district with part-time job opportunities to teach them important life skills, give them a sense of personal pride, and help their families become self-sufficient. It was several years in the making and evolved from a brief encounter with a homeless man and my study of the homeless issue through a grant I received in eighth grade. It was surprising to learn that there are over 1,000 documented homeless students in my hometown. I met with dozens of employers, community leaders, and business groups to present the project and locate jobs for students. I enlisted the help of high school counselors to identify qualified students for the program, interviewed students for placement, worked with them on their job applications, and arranged training workshops. Through an online competition, I was awarded a grant of \$10,000 to fund the project and help with clothing, training, and transportation for the students. In the summer of 2009, Job-Link partnered with the Racine

Workforce Development

Center which received funding through federal stimulus dollars for “green jobs.”

Together, we offered 800 students interviews, placed, and trained 220 youth in summer jobs, including many Job-Link students.

R: How did you come up with the idea?

D: It didn’t overnight. As I said, Job-Link Racine was several years in the making.

Seeing the homeless man on the corner opened my eyes to an issue. Receiving a grant from WCATY (Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth) and volunteering at homeless shelters led me to understand the issue. I wanted to somehow be part of finding a solution, and creating Job-Link Racine seemed to be the logical “next step.” I’d also

had a part-time job as a busboy in a restaurant since I turned 14, and I knew how much pride I felt doing my job and being paid for it.

R: What did your mom think about your handing over your tips to the homeless man?

D: I don’t think she minded at all, since she suggested leaving the tips in the car in case we ran into the man in the future.



David Spencer Sanchez, Job-Link Racine

Picture credit: Alix Sanchez

R: What did your family think when you told them about your idea?

D: My brother and sister did amazing service projects in high school, so it was probably no surprise to my family that I wanted to follow in their footsteps. I think my parents had a much better handle on the challenges ahead than I did. In hindsight, I thought it sounded simple: find jobs for teenage kids who could really use a break in life. Of course, I was not counting on the economic downturn.

R: What can people do if they are interested in helping out with the Job-Link Racine?



D: Job-Link Racine is no longer operational.

R: How did you get nominated for the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes?

D: My high school counselor nominated me and other members of the community provided letters of recommendation.

R: How did you find out that you were one of the winners?

D: The Barron Prize notified me by phone, and then I received the official package of information. It was a wonderful honor and a great surprise since the nomination had been submitted many months before.

R: How does it feel to make a difference in the world?

D: Many people focus on the numbers...how many teenagers did we help? How many interviews did we set up or how many jobs did we find. More important than the numbers is the impact on individual teenagers. We have shown hard-to-place students with less than ideal high school records, that someone is willing to take a chance on them. It's hard to put a value on something like that.

R: What are your future goals?

D: Certainly, my medium-term goal is to get through college and learn as much as I can.

From there, I may go to law school and practice law or go into politics. I am also a Film

Studies major....so who knows, I might find a spot in

Hollywood. In the short-term, I am planning to spend the summer in South America volunteering for 8 weeks with 2 different organizations to create a marketing video to help them recruit volunteers.

R: What is the best advice you have ever gotten and by who?

D: My older brother, Tyler, likes to say, “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” It reminds me that sometimes you just have to go for it. Sometimes that means traveling outside your comfort zone. Sometimes it means failure, but in the end, all your experiences add up to something worthwhile.



David Spencer Sanchez, Job-Link Racine

Picture credit: Alix Sanchez

R: What advice would you give someone who wanted to help out the environment or help out the world in some way?

D: Go for it! Focus on what interests you and what you can do, rather than being paralyzed by what you think you can't do. Sometimes a small action can lead to a bigger action. You'll be surprised at what you can do and the impact you can have. Above all, you will be surprised at how good it makes you feel to get involved in your community.

R: Does Job-Link Racine have a website? What is the address? Is it on any social networking sites? If so, what is the address?

D: I am no longer running Job-Link Racine as it would need real hands-on care. Right now, since I am in a new city, I am trying to figure out whether I can recreate Job-Link Racine in Nashville, or if I can serve the community in another way.

R: Is there anything else you would like to add?

D: I often think back to the night this all began when my mother was driving me to my first job. That solitary man standing on the street corner really "spoke" to me. I was unable to do anything for him, but he called me to action. He showed me the enormous disparities in our communities and the importance for each of us to find solutions, rather than look uncomfortably at the problems and head in the opposite direction.

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