

Mentoring Matters: Miami-Dade Police Director Juan Perez Giving Back Through Big Brothers Big Sisters

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By Elio Rodriguez



MIAMI (CBSMiami) – Addel Jean, 16, is a bit nervous on this day.

He's getting ready for his first television interview. Right by his side, his big brother and mentor Miami-Dade Police Director, Juan Perez.

Jean is excited to share his story. For two years now he's been working with the director as part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters School to Work Program.

Once a month, Jean and his classmates from Miami Northwestern Senior High School meet with Director Perez and members of his team to talk about their lives, and future goals all while being exposed to different careers around South Florida

“He’s like a second father to me, he keeps me focused on my goals, he’s funny, he’s fast, I’m fast too, he knows how to dance, I dance too,” said Jean as he described some of the things he has in common with Perez. Jean is a big fan of Perez. He says he even remembers admiring him before becoming his mentor.

He says he was excited to watch Perez’s promoted to Director of the Police Department in 2016.

“They are in this critical stage of their lives so this is a great opportunity for us as a police department and me personally to spend just four hours a month on mentoring our youth,” said Perez.

Director Perez and members of his staff host the students at the Miami-Dade County Police Training Facility.

“It’s an opportunity for me to educate and train and just give them knowledge of what I’ve experienced in the past as I was growing up and have the conversations with them,” said Perez.

On the day CBS4 visited, the students were learning about nutrition and how to make better food choices. They also took part in an agility course used by officers in training.

Perez and his team make sure to impress on the teens that the decision they make today can impact them for the rest of their lives.

They make sure that they focus on school especially now that they are in their junior year of high school, which is a critical time to have a high GPA.

The team also makes sure to take the students on field trips in hopes of expanding their horizons and helping them realize the different opportunities that are available to them.

They have visited Miami International Airport, the police crime lab, and communications bureau just to name a few. Perez says the field trips are key so they can step out of their neighborhoods and witness the diversity in the community for themselves.

And it appears their connection is working. Jean recalls making a quick decision recently and said he could hear Perez's voice in his head.

"One day I remember a friend of mine got a car and he was like come here man, we are going to ride around. And I swear I heard his voice, he was like don't get in the car Addel, stay away.

I was like never mind, do your thing and I just walked away," said Jean.

Addel credits his parents and the school to work program for keeping him focused and on track.

"We've exposed them to resume building. We've cautioned them about interviews and how to go into interviews, and counseled them on keeping their social media platforms clean," said Perez.

"So, if you have an organization or company consider partnering up with Big Brothers Big Sisters. It's a great way to give back to future leaders," said Perez. "It gives you time to manage your profession and in that four hours you can change somebody's future."

For information on how you can learn about big brothers big sisters and become a mentor at <http://www.bbbsmiami.org/get-involved/be-a-big/>