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## Reaching Out to Youth

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# Reaching out to youth

You might say that Gabriel Del Rayo '08 is straddling two different worlds.

Whether he's encouraging players on the soccer field or dispensing advice, counsel and sometimes punishment through the juvenile justice system, Del Rayo is serving local youth.

Sandwiched between classes to complete his business major and Spanish minor at Linfield and his work as an assistant soccer coach at McMinnville High School, Del Rayo also finds time to work as a juvenile probation assistant in the Yamhill County Juvenile Department.

He began as a translator assisting with local Latino youths who found themselves on the wrong side of the law. As his responsibilities increased, the job evolved into an internship for credit at Linfield. He spent last summer working full time under the supervision of Dana Carelle, probation officer.

Del Rayo's duties include talking to parents, filing paperwork, conducting probation visits, taking young people to court and treatment programs, and administering drug tests. He's even learned how to present in court, which he calls "nerve-wracking." In some cases, he has had to help cuff kids and take them back to detention. The crimes range from misdemeanors to felonies and may include criminal mischief, harassment and sex abuse; the majority are drug related.

The work has been both rewarding and eye-opening.

"The interesting thing is that there is nothing normal about this work," said Del Rayo, whose own strong family and parental support kept him out of trouble. "You can make a difference with some of these kids. You have to have patience. Sometimes it takes a couple of years to see any progress. But it's rewarding when you hear about a kid who is going to college, playing sports or getting good grades."

He may be the perfect role model for young people who have few examples to emulate, said Carelle, his supervisor at the juvenile department.

"Gabi is a young Hispanic male in college and that's a good role model," she said. "He has a genuine compassion for people, and I think he wants the best for these kids. He's learned a little bit about life and the struggles that some people face. He's learned how to draw a line and hold kids accountable for their behav-



Gabriel Del Rayo '08 instructs soccer players in his job as an assistant soccer coach at McMinnville High School. Del Rayo mentors local young people not only on the soccer field but also in his work as a juvenile probation assistant in the Yamhill County Juvenile Department.

ior and accountable for the court's expectation."

Playing and coaching soccer – at McMinnville High or in Joe Dancer Park – gives Del Rayo the opportunity to interact with young people in the community, some of whom are at risk to make poor choices.

"I can be a role model for them and I want them to see that it is possible to go to college," he said. "I tell them if I can play soccer and I can go to college, so can they."

The toughest part of the job is not the young people, but their parents, Del Rayo said.

"The parents are the most frustrating to work with, either because they are in trouble themselves or because they haven't raised their kids right," he said. "Some of these kids are really needy and all they want is someone normal."

Although he's not sure of his plans after he graduates in May, Del Rayo is considering working in the juvenile corrections field, at least for a while. But he also wants to pursue the opportunities his business degree will offer.

"They have given me a great opportunity in the juvenile department and I'm grateful for that," Del Rayo said. "Even if I don't go into this field long term, I'm getting some good training at how to deal with difficult people."

– Mardi Mileham