



He hated his probation officer at first sight. Now he's working for him.

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The first time he met Rod Salinas, Manny was an angry 17-year-old in a Marion County juvenile courtroom.

He wasn't doing well on county probation, and a judge had just placed him in Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) custody so he could go to a residential program in Portland. Manny viewed Salinas, his new OYA juvenile parole and probation officer (JPPO), with suspicion.

"At first, I didn't like Rod because I thought it was his fault, that he was the one putting me there," Manny remembers.

"Manny didn't make eye contact with me, and you could tell he was upset," Salinas says. "Already out of the gate I was thinking, 'This kid's gonna be a handful.'"

Neither of them could have predicted where they'd end up five years later: working together in OYA's Marion County parole and probation office, Manny a protégé of the man he now calls a mentor.

The two laughed as they reflected on their relationship recently, at the end of Manny's months-long internship in Salinas's office. They may not have gotten along at first, but that day in court ended up being the start of a new path for Manny — one where he turned his life around and found a new goal of becoming a JPPO himself.

As Salinas tells it, "I was there to help him out, but Manny pretty much did this on his own." Manny, though, says Salinas's balance of support and accountability was integral to helping him get back on track.



OYA juvenile parole and probation officer Rod Salinas (left) with Manny, a former OYA youth who came back to work for the agency as an intern.

"I realized he wasn't the devil out there trying to get me," Manny says. "The way he was talking to me, it was like, 'I'm here to help you. I want to see you succeed.' Getting that vibe from him, it changed my mind from what I thought he'd be."

Finding a New Focus

When Manny went to the residential program, it was his first time living away from home — and that was part of what made him realize he had to change.

"I met people at the program who would tell me how they had a broken home. Their mom was gone, or their dad was a drug addict," Manny says. "My parents were married, we didn't have to worry about food, we always had what we needed. I was like, 'My family is taking care of me, so how did I end up here?'"

The angry teen who had been skipping school, hanging out with peers who were a negative influence, and not taking his county probation seriously quickly refocused. "After his first two weeks at the program, I got a call from his counselor saying he's adjusting well, he's making friends with other kids, and he's really into school," Salinas says.

Manny finished the program in just four months, and even found a part-time job. He told Salinas he wanted to return home to the family who loved and supported him. He also had a new goal: to graduate from his old public high school along with his original class.

Salinas was skeptical — he had watched many youth do well at programs only to return to old habits once they got out — but he saw Manny’s dedication to his family and agreed to let him move back.

“At first when you go back, your old friends are like, ‘We’ve gotta hang out again,’” Manny says. “When you start turning them down, those friendships start going away. Then I built other friendships that were more inclined to help me succeed.”

Not only did Manny graduate with his class, he went on to earn an associate’s degree from Chemeketa Community College while working two jobs. His successes led a judge to terminate his OYA probation.

Although he was done with OYA, he kept updating Salinas on his progress. One of his supervisors promoted him to manager. He enrolled at Portland State University. In June 2017, he earned a bachelor’s degree with honors in criminology and criminal justice.

The support he’d received from Salinas had inspired him to follow a similar career path.

“I thought, ‘Rod was pretty good — what if I can do that for other kids?’” Manny says. “In my town, I saw a lot of kids get caught up in the system. What if I can go out and help keep those kids from going to jail?”

Back at OYA — as an Employee

The day the judge terminated Manny’s probation was also the first day he met Mike Runyon, the supervisor for OYA’s Marion County office.

Runyon remembers shaking Manny’s hand and being impressed by his confidence. “He told me he was interested in working in our office,” Runyon says. “I said, ‘When you graduate from Portland State, you give me a call.’”

“I hear that from kids a lot, that they want to be a PO, but this is the first time in my career that a young man actually followed through on it.”



Manny (left) and Rod Salinas working together in OYA’s Marion County office.

To finish his bachelor’s program, Manny needed an internship. He lobbied Runyon and Salinas for a position in their office. They worked out the details, and Manny spent this past summer working alongside Salinas and the other Marion County JPPOs.

He learned that he has a knack for connecting with other youth. Salinas took Manny along on a visit to a residential program to meet a youth on his caseload. Manny quickly found a common interest with the other youth — boxing — and they had a long conversation about it. Later, Salinas says, the youth asked “when that other guy was gonna come back and see him.”

“They made mistakes, but we all make mistakes,” Manny says. “I want to be able to let these youth know that I’m here to help, just like Rod did for me.”