

HELPINGATRISKYOUTH.ORG PRESENTS

THE GAME PLAN

A GUIDE TO SUCCESS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

BY MIKE WERTH & TONY CHRISTIAN

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *The Game Plan: A Guide to Success for At-Risk Youth*. This program is designed to not only make you aware of the dangers and consequences you face if you make a poor decision, but it will also show you how to make proper decisions and help you come up with a plan for success – *your* Game Plan!

By participating in this program, you are taking the first step on a journey that will challenge you, empower you, and ultimately transform you. This course is your guide, your ally as you navigate the twists and turns of your unique path to redemption and a successful future.

Now look, my partner Tony and I, we've been where you are. In fact, we've been places much worse. We've each spent decades of our lives in a prison cell, where we are serving Life sentences, all because of choices we made when we were your age. So believe me, we understand your situation.

You may be feeling a bunch of emotions right now. You may be feeling uncertain, or even a little afraid. You may even be feeling a bit of hope, because you understand that all you've ever needed was some guidance from someone who understands you. Well, that's what we're here for – to give you that guidance.

Look, change is never easy. Especially when you feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. But trust me when I tell you this: You have the power to rewrite your story. Why? Because you are strong! You have the strength within you to rise above the challenges you face, no matter what they are, and create the future you want for yourself.

So, what does Redemption mean to you? For some of you, it just means breaking free from the chains of your past mistakes. For some of you, it's about finding purpose in a world that can often feel chaotic, overwhelming, or even confusing and hostile. Whatever it means to you, just know that Redemption is not a destination – it's a journey of self-discovery, growth, and resilience.

And what about success? What does that mean to you? For some of you, it might mean happiness and freedom. For others, it might mean driving a nice car or owning your own business.

As we take this ride together, I want you to remember one thing: You are worthy. You are worthy of love. You are worthy of forgiveness. You are worthy of second chances. You are worthy of success. You are worthy of happiness. No matter what mistakes you have made in the past, you have value and you have potential. Your past does not define you. It's what you do in this moment, right here, right now, that matters most.

Throughout this course, we're gonna explore many topics – things like gangs, drug and alcohol use, anger management, and more. Those are the hard topics we're going to deal with head on, and we're going to talk about tools and strategies for dealing with them. We're also going to help you discover your true goals – goals that will get you to where you truly want to be in life – and we're going to help you create a path to reach those goals.

So, what do we hope to achieve with this course? Well, let me break it down for you:

1. Self-discovery. First and foremost, this course is all about getting to know yourself better. This is critical. We'll figure out things like your beliefs and values, your strengths and weaknesses. By understanding who you are and what makes you tick, you'll be better equipped to make informed decisions and create a life that aligns with your true self and gets you where you want to be.

2. Skill building. Life is a game of chess. It requires strategy, the ability to think ahead, and a whole lot of practice. In this course, we're gonna give you the game you need to succeed.

3. Positive coping skills. Look, life can be tough sometimes, so it's critical to have healthy ways of coping with stress, anger, and other difficult situations and emotions. This course is gonna help with all of that.

4. Finding your purpose. At the end of the day, life is about much more than just surviving – it's about finding meaning and purpose, and becoming who you're meant to be.

5. Understanding the consequences of your actions. Look, it's critical to understand that real life has real consequences. This ain't a video game, where you can make a mistake and just turn the game off, or reset and start over. Certain mistakes will impact the rest of your life, and it is critical that you don't make them.

6. Setting goals for the future. No matter where you are right now, or what you've been through in life, it's never too late to start dreaming big and setting goals for yourself. Whether it's starting a business, buying a nice car, or even going to college, it can be done! And this course will help you identify what it is you want to do and come up with a realistic plan to do it!

7. Empowerment. Above all else, this course is about empowering you to take control of your life and shape your own destiny. I don't care what any hater has told you before, you are the author of your own story and the master of your own fate! Who you become in life will be based on the decisions YOU make. Yes, your future is in YOUR hands.

Now, being successful is not easy. For example, you wanna be rich? Well, the money will just magically appear, right? Naw, bro, you gotta work for it! You gotta work hard! You gotta hustle! You gotta *want* it! Right? Well, it's the same with the lessons – the “money” – we are about to give you. You will have to do some work. And part of that work is participating when it comes to the exercises in this course.

In this course, there are going to be questions and exercises. I need you to really think and reflect on these questions. Think critically about the concepts, how they relate to you, and how you can apply the information you receive from this course to shape your future. This is how you learn and grow in ways you never thought possible. This is how you *win*.

So, are you ready to get started? To get on the path of redemption and success? Well, let's get to it then!

THE GAME PLAN PRESENTS

GANG & CRIMINAL AWARENESS

A GUIDE TO SUCCESS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

MODULE 1: GANG & CRIMINAL AWARENESS

"We all fought, and some of us died, for a city or street that would never be ours."

– Alfred Sandoval, serving LWOP and did 32 years in the SHU

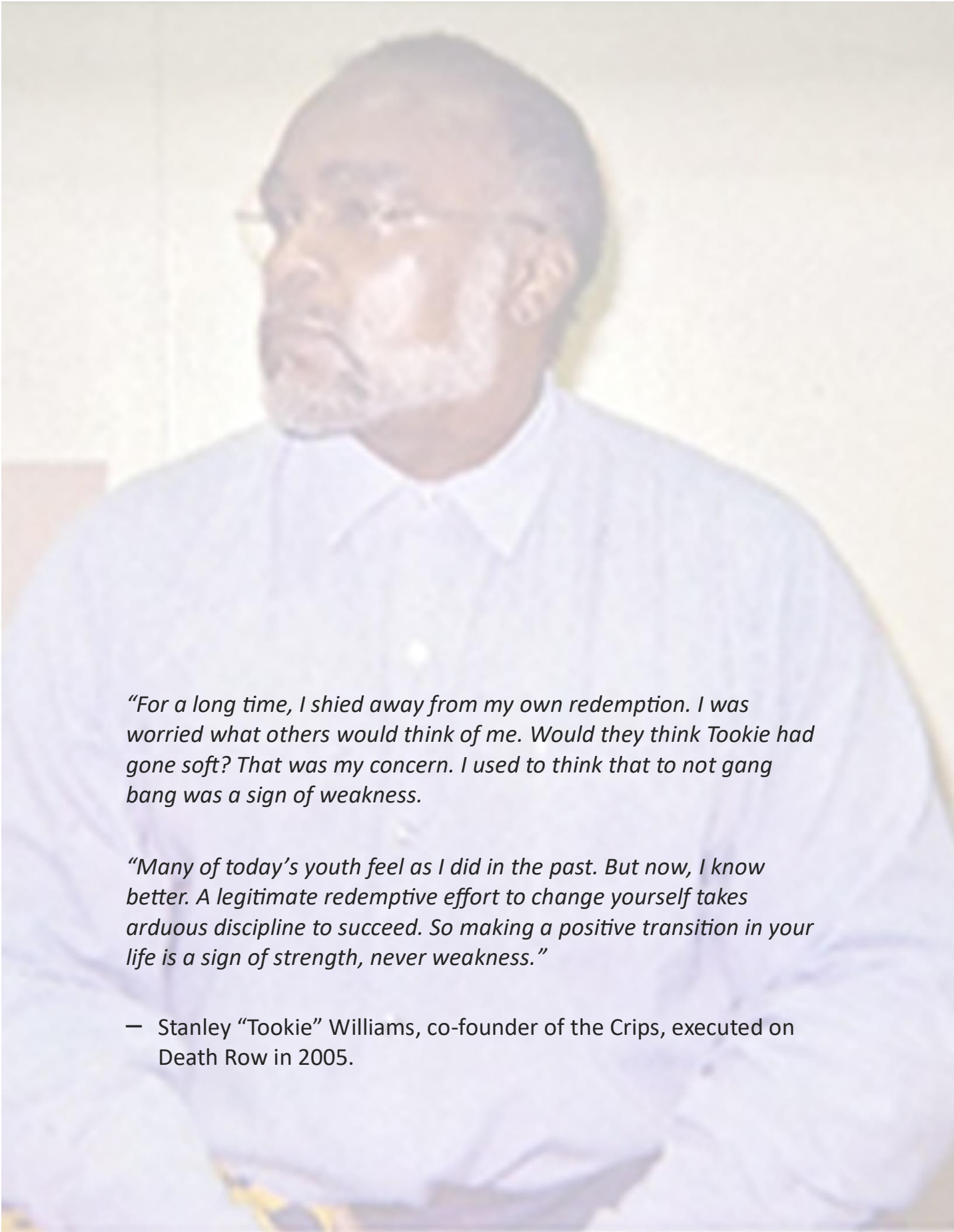
INTRODUCTION

By Mike Werth

If you're doing this course, odds are you're in a gang, or you've at least thought about joining one. Well, we're here to tell you firsthand that if you are in a gang, remove yourself from the gang immediately, and if you're not in a gang, do NOT join one. Being in a gang and dedicating yourself to a gang is one of the worst mistakes you will ever make in your life. It is basically equal to killing your own future.

I understand you may be growing up in a tough neighborhood, and you feel like you need to be in a gang for protection – so someone has your back. I also understand you may be trying to find your identity – who you're supposed to be in life, and what you should stand for. You may also be seeking acceptance, because maybe you're not sure you have it elsewhere. All of this is understandable. My partner and I have felt all of these things. But being in a gang to fix these problems is the wrong path to take. In fact, being in a gang will actually make these things worse. Being in a gang to fix these problems, or any problem for that matter, is like smoking cigarettes to fix lung cancer. Makes no sense, right?

So in this module, we are going to break down the reasons why gangs will bring no good to you, only misery, and what you should do to get out of a gang if you're in one. Let's get started.



"For a long time, I shied away from my own redemption. I was worried what others would think of me. Would they think Tookie had gone soft? That was my concern. I used to think that to not gang bang was a sign of weakness.

"Many of today's youth feel as I did in the past. But now, I know better. A legitimate redemptive effort to change yourself takes arduous discipline to succeed. So making a positive transition in your life is a sign of strength, never weakness."

— Stanley "Tookie" Williams, co-founder of the Crips, executed on Death Row in 2005.

GLAMORIZATION OF GANGS – ALL THAT GLITTERS AIN'T GOLD

By Mike Werth

Being in a gang is often glamorized in movies, and even more so in rap music. These rappers often represent their gang in their songs, brag about crimes they did on behalf of their gang, and even taunt rival gang members when a member of the rival gang is murdered. And because these rappers flash a lot of money, drive the nicest cars, and have the finest models on Instagram, we begin to think that to get those things, we need to be in a gang and commit crimes, too. I know, because I was one of those people when I was your age. I glorified what rappers rapped about in their music, such as gang banging, selling drugs, and shooting people. These rappers essentially became my mentors. And you see where I'm sitting at, right? ... In prison, serving Life Without the Possibility of Parole, where I've rotted away since February 23, 1999, which is longer than you have even been alive. It's the same thing for my partner Tony.

And guess what? It was all a lie. Absolutely nothing good came from being in a gang. Zero. Only bad things have happened in my life as a result of running with gang members. Those rappers I looked up to? They are still on the streets, living their lives, with money, nice cars, and women, while I'm rotting away in prison, sick to death over where my life has ended up. Nothing glamorous about that ...

When you engage in gang and criminal activity, you create mass destruction. You don't only hurt the rival gang, you hurt their family members, and also your community. And guess who else you hurt? You hurt your own family, too. When you kill someone, and you spend the rest of your life in prison, do you know how painful that's going to be for your mother, or even your child if you have one? You are going to destroy them. They are going to feel pain every single day because you are in prison instead of being home with them. And guess what? They are actually lucky if you *only* go to prison. At least then they can visit you and still talk to you. What happens if you are *killed*? Then they can never talk to you again ... They will be forced to visit you graveside.

The game is not a game. This is the real thing.

All that money, all those girls promised and flaunted by the gang life? You think those girls are going to stay around when – yeah, not “if,” but *when* – you come to prison? I guarantee they won’t. You think you’re going to have money in prison? Some people in prison are happy to have \$5 for a few Ramen noodles. Most guys resort to begging. Don’t be fooled by movies and rap videos. That’s entertainment. It’s not real. Their money, and the girls they get, come from selling entertainment to people like you, not because they are in a gang.

And look, there are rappers who *are* in gangs. This is true. What I’m saying is, that’s not why they are getting money. And remember, there are also a lot of rappers in prison or a grave ...

TEARS OF A CLOWN (A CAUTIONARY TALE)

By Mike Werth

The other day I was walking on the yard and I saw a prisoner named “Paya” (short for “Payaso,” which is “Clown” in Spanish) walking toward me. Paya is what we’d call a triple O.G. He’s been in prison since 1981 (yeah, that’s not a typo), because of a crime he committed when he was just 17 years old. I immediately wanted to get Paya’s story to share with you. Here’s what he said ...

“When I was growing up, my parents were chasing the American Dream. They were never home. They would pay other people, like girls in the neighborhood, to babysit me. Because of this, I began to think my parents didn’t like me. When they were home, all they did was sleep. I was too young to understand that they were working so hard because all they wanted to do was give me a better future.

“Because my parents didn’t spend much time with me, I began to feel neglected and abandoned. Bored and alone, I eventually started leaving the house, looking for other kids in the neighborhood to play with. I began to meet other children who were of all colors and ages. The little kids I met, who were my age, all they wanted to do was play. But the older kids, they were into doing bad things, like breaking windows and painting on walls. Well, when I was 11, I had a major growth spurt. This made me look older than I was, so now the older kids wanted me to hang with them.

“One day, the older kids asked me to join their gang. They told me I’d never be alone and that they’d always have my back. Believing them, I made the choice to join their gang, and that choice has led me to spending decades of my life in prison.

“Once I joined the gang, the kids in the gang who were a few years older expected me to commit crimes with them, such as stealing, buying, and selling drugs, and hurting other kids from other gangs all around the city. I didn’t know it was going to be like this, but by the time I saw the truth, it was too late. I was eventually arrested for a murder–robbery and sentenced to Life in prison.

“Once I made it to the maximum-security prison, at the age of 18, I was once again alone, with no friends, no partners from my gang, or any people I knew.

Now, over 40 years later, I'm still in prison, trying to get home, and fighting for my freedom. And just like when I was a kid, my parents won't be home, but not because they're working to provide for me, but because they have died while I've been in prison.

"All of this is because of that one choice I made when I was a kid – I joined a gang. So before you make a decision you will regret, talk to others about it. Speak to others who you trust, and who you know care about you. Do not make the decision I made."

You see that? The O.G. been down over 40 years! Can you imagine that? This is not a movie. This is not a video game. This is not a rap song. This is real life. When Paya made the decision to join a gang and begin committing crimes, he never imagined he'd spend his entire life in a prison cell. He *thought* he'd get what he was looking for from the gang, and he *thought* he'd get away with the crimes he was committing. Just like you do. Just like we all did.

The game is not a game.

QUESTIONS:

1. First, I want you to think about the three people in your life who you care about the most. They could be family members, friends, or whoever you want. Write their names on the lines below.

2. Now, if I said there is a bag of poisonous snakes on the table in front of you, would you put your hand in the bag?

Yes ____

No ____

3. What if all your favorite rappers said they put their hands in the bag of poisonous snakes every single day? Would you believe it and do the same? Or, would you think to yourself, “Them fools is lyin’”? Keep that shit real, my boy.

Yes ____

No ____

4. Now, hold up. What if someone said all the kids in your school and in your neighborhood would respect you if you put your hand in the bag of poisonous snakes? would you do it then?

Yes ____

No ____

5. OK, so let me ask you this, then: Why in the world would you hang around with gangs or join a gang after Tony, Mike, and everyone you love keeps telling you it’s going to get you hurt, killed, or Life in prison? We ain’t lyin’ to you, brody!

6. Now for a harder question ... Look back at question number 1 above, and look at those three people you care about the most. Imagine that one, two, or all three of them saw you trying to be cool by sticking your hand in a bag of deadly snakes. How would you feel if they tried to stop you, and in doing so, they got bit by a deadly snake, and now they might die because of it?

7. The whole purpose of these questions is to make you think before it gets to that point. In case you don’t understand, snakes kill and gangs kill. Families and loved ones protect! So who do you love more, your family and loved ones or a bag of snakes?

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Do you know what a “cycle of violence” is? A cycle of violence is violence that never ends. It keeps repeating itself over and over. It starts with one act of violence – maybe a fistfight or a shooting that happens in a neighborhood. But instead of stopping there, the violence keeps going, spreading like wildfire and destroying everything in its path.

Know this: The neighborhood that your neighborhood doesn’t get along with? The one you may be fighting with? That beef is probably because of something that happened 10, maybe 20 years ago – likely before you were even alive – between some guys you probably never even met. And you’re still fighting over that incident today, risking your life and the lives of others, including your own family members, who could get caught in the middle of it.

Yeah, imagine that ...

Because violence doesn’t just affect the people directly involved. It also affects everyone around them.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF GANG VIOLENCE

What do direct and indirect effects of gang violence mean? Well, let us break it down for you.

First off, direct effects of gang involvement refer to the immediate consequences that come from being involved in a gang. This could include things like getting arrested for criminal activity, or being hurt or killed in gang-related violence. These are the kinds of consequences that are easy to see and understand – they’re the things that happen right in front of you.

But here’s what you need to understand: The effects of gang involvement don’t stop there. In fact, they often have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences that impact not just the individuals involved, but their families, communities, and society as a whole. These are what we call the indirect effects of gang involvement. It’s called the “ripple effect.” Do you know what the ripple effect is? Here, peek ...

Imagine you’re standing by a calm lake, and you toss a pebble into the water. What happens? Exactly – you create a ripple that spreads out from where the pebble landed. Those ripples keep spreading and spreading, touching everything in their path.

Now, here’s the thing: Our actions are a lot like that pebble in the water. Every choice we make, every word we say, and every action we take sends out ripples into the world around us. And just like those ripples in the water, those actions have a big impact – not just on us, but on everyone around us.

Now imagine how many different ripple effects are caused by the cycle of violence, with each act of violence creating its own ripple effect. Now how many people are affected?

Think about that ...

Here are some examples of the indirect effects of gang involvement:

1. Family impacts. When you get involved in a gang, it doesn't just affect you, it affects your entire family. Your parents will worry about your safety and well-being. Your brothers and sisters may feel scared, and your extended family, like your grandmother, cousins, etc., may feel scared, helpless, or frustrated. The stress and strain of having a loved one involved in a gang can take a toll on family relationships, leading to feelings of fear, anger, and resentment. And imagine if a rival gang member shoots up your house, putting those who live with you in danger? How will you feel if your mother is killed in a drive-by on your house? How will your mother feel if you are shot and placed in a wheelchair for the rest of your life? Or into a grave for the rest of *her* life?

2. Community impacts. Gang activity doesn't just affect the actual members – it affects the entire community, which means the 'hood you claim to love. Neighborhoods plagued by gang violence often experience a sense of fear and insecurity, with residents living in constant fear of becoming victims of violence. Businesses may suffer because customers stay away for fear of their safety, and property values may decline as neighborhoods become associated with crime and violence. The social fabric of the community can be torn apart, as trust and unity are replaced by suspicion and division.

3. Educational impacts. Gang involvement will have a negative impact on your academic success and educational goals. As a gang member, you will be more likely to skip school, engage in behaviors that lead to disciplinary action, or just drop out altogether. This will set you on a path of limited opportunities and economic hardship, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

4. Financial impacts. Gang activity takes a toll on the economy in many different ways. From the costs of law enforcement and criminal justice system involvement to lost productivity and earnings potential, the economic consequences of gang involvement are significant. Businesses will suffer as a result of decreased consumer confidence and increased crime rates, and communities may struggle to attract new investment and development as a result of their association with gang activity.

5. Societal impacts. Gang involvement, as we discussed earlier, perpetuates cycles of violence, trauma, and inequality that affect society as a whole. It erodes trust and social cohesion, undermines community safety and well-being, and perpetuates stereotypes and stigmas that harm individuals and communities. Addressing the root causes of gang involvement is essential for creating a more just, equitable, and peaceful society for all.

So, why does recognizing the direct and indirect effects of gang involvement matter? Well, because it reminds us that, with gang activity, we don't just hurt ourselves – we hurt everyone. We tear families apart, destroy our community, and perpetuate cycles of violence that harm us all.

“You say you love your ‘hood, so why are you destroying it?”

BLINDED BY BETRAYAL

I know, I know, your homies got your back and they “love” you, right? Yeah, it sounds good. If you fall for that, well, I got some ocean-front property in Idaho I’d like to sell you.

Man, gangs operate on deception. And not just deceiving people outside the gang, but people within the gang, too. If you’re in a gang, well, that means YOU.

Gangs present themselves as family, offering a sense of belonging and brotherhood to those they see as looking for acceptance. They prey on vulnerable individuals, promising protection, respect, and power in exchange for blind loyalty and obedience. But it’s all a scam. Your loyalty and obedience will soon be misused and taken advantage of by the gang leaders. Gang leaders manipulate their followers into believing they are part of a noble cause, fighting for their “family” and protecting their turf (a turf that not they nor you actually own, of course). This is just a strategy that the leader uses to control the members, but it is all driven by the leader’s personal desire for greed, power, and control.

You will be used until you are no longer needed, then you will be discarded like trash and replaced with the next fool who is willing to fall for their scam. And if you are in prison, and the gang is done with you, guess how you will be taken out? You won’t be told to leave, or that you are no longer part of the gang. You will be violently removed. This means killed; or, if you’re lucky, merely stabbed and beaten mercilessly by several members of your “family.”

But you can avoid all of this very easily. How? By not joining a gang in the first place.

COLD GAME

Gunner paroled from California's notorious Pelican Bay State Prison, also known as "Gangland Headquarters," with the "keys" to not only his city, but the surrounding cities, given to him by a major gang boss. He was just 23 years old.

Because Gunner had the keys to his city, he was tasked with not only relaying orders from the gang boss but also to collect "taxes" from the various neighborhoods on the money they generated from crimes like selling drugs.

Gunner had everything he ever wanted in life as a gang member and he felt on top of the world. He had money, dope, guns, a car he collected from a local drug dealer as payment, and power.

Now, given that Gunner was young, even though he had power and authority that was given to him by the gang boss in Pelican Bay, he was still inexperienced. Because of this, he wanted guidance from his older homeboy from his neighborhood, who he trusted. He put this older homeboy in position by utilizing him to help drop collections off to the boss's wife.

Things seemed to be going as planned.

Or so he thought ...

It wasn't long before the gang boss in Pelican Bay began inquiring about some money that was missing. Gunner didn't worry about it, though. It had to be some type of mistake. But then Gunner got a call from the gang boss's "brother," a fellow gang boss, who had taken a liking to Gunner, and believed in him, who confirmed that the gang boss in Pelican Bay did indeed want to know about some missing money. The gang boss in Pelican Bay was angry and things did not look good for Gunner.

Soon after, Gunner caught a parole violation. And when he got to the Reception Center, he learned that the members of his gang there had it out for him because of the gang boss's missing money. Gunner tried to plead his case, but even if they

wanted to believe him, there was nothing they could do. They couldn't overrule the boss in Pelican Bay.

Luckily for Gunner, he was released from his parole violation before his former homeboys could kill him. Only now, the neighborhood he grew up in and once controlled with so much pride, wanted him dead. Gunner was devastated. He loved his neighborhood more than anything. Soon, he figured out what happened: His older homeboy, who he looked to for guidance, and who he trusted to deliver the boss's money, had been stealing from what Gunner had given him, keeping it for himself. He was jealous that Gunner, his "little homie," had been given the keys to the city, as he felt they should have been given to him! And he knew he could take the money and get away with it, because no matter what, Gunner had been put in charge, so Gunner was responsible. Now Gunner was a wanted man, on the gang's hitlist, and at war with his neighborhood.

Cold game, right?

Well, it's not over ...

One day, Gunner was sitting on his girlfriend's porch, smoking a blunt. His girlfriend, her little sister, and his girlfriend's homegirl were inside, doing what girls do.

Gunner hit the blunt, when all of a sudden three gang members appeared across the street and began shooting at him. Gunner, with nowhere to go, ran inside the house for cover and escaped out the back. He was hit in the foot, but other than that, he was OK.

Unfortunately, however, the same couldn't be said for everyone in the house. Eight-year-old Jessica Flores, who had been laying in the living room, coloring in her coloring book, had been hit in the head with a bullet. She lay dead on top of her coloring book in a puddle of blood.

Jessica had nothing to do with it, yet here she was, a victim who would never be able to live out the life she had been given.

This type of thing happens all the time, in every gang-infested city across America.

Now, there are several lessons here. For one, your gang is only loyal to you while they need you. Then they will turn on you in an instant, whether you deserve it or not. This is just how gangs work. Especially the higher up you go. Gang bosses are driven by money, power, and greed. Your closest friends will turn on you. And when the gang wants you dead, they will send your closest homeboys, the ones you trust the most, because they are the ones who can get next to you, and get you to let your guard down. If you think your homeboys aren't like this, well, you are going to be an easy target. They already got you beat!

Another lesson is that innocent people, including children, get hurt, or worse, murdered. Eight-year-old Jessica Flores didn't do anything to anybody. All she wanted to do was be a kid, dream, and color in her coloring book.

But Jessica can't do that anymore.

Because Jessica's dead.

How would you feel if Jessica was your baby sister? And how would you feel if you had shot the bullet that killed Jessica? Because this type of thing happens all the time. As they say, "Bullets have no names." Once you pull that trigger, there's no taking it back.

The kids who did this crime were arrested. They are now labeled "Baby Killers." The one who pulled the trigger got Life Without the Possibility of Parole for a gang-related murder. The other two took a deal for 25-to-Life, but they had to rat on the one who pulled the trigger.

In the end, nobody won.

True story.

Go on, say it with me: The game is not a game.

GANG RECRUITMENT TACTICS – BEWARE!

Gangs use a number of strategies to manipulate and recruit individuals. Here is what you need to look out for.

1. Exploiting vulnerability. Gangs target individuals who feel vulnerable or unimportant, such as those experiencing poverty, discrimination, or family instability. They prey on these vulnerabilities, offering a sense of belonging and community that may be lacking in their lives. By providing the illusion of a support system and a sense of identity, gangs draw individuals into their ranks, making them feel valued and accepted.

2. Luring with false promises. Gangs often entice individuals with false promises of protection, wealth, and power. They capitalize on the desire for a better life, offering opportunities for quick money and material possessions. The allure of financial gain can be difficult to resist, especially if your family is not well-off. This lure makes it easy to overlook the risks and consequences of gang involvement.

3. Manipulating emotions. Gangs manipulate emotions to recruit vulnerable individuals, exploiting their fears, insecurities, and desires. They will prey on your feelings of loneliness, anger, and resentment, offering a sense of purpose and empowerment. By appealing to these emotions, gangs will try to persuade you and manipulate you – to join their ranks, promising that they are the solution to your problems.

4. Using peer pressure and influence. Gangs use peer pressure and social influence to recruit new members, leveraging existing relationships and networks within the community. They may target you if you have friends or family members already in the gang, using their influence to draw you into the mix. Peer pressure can be a powerful motivator, pushing you to conform to the gang's norms and expectations.

5. Exploiting personal trauma. Gangs will exploit your personal trauma and adversities to recruit you, offering you a sense of belonging and empowerment. They will prey on you if you have experienced abuse, neglect, or other forms of

trauma, promising you protection and revenge against your enemies. By tapping into these emotions, gangs will try to manipulate you into seeking validation and retribution by joining their gang.

6. Glamorizing gang culture. Gangs glamorize their lifestyle through media, music, and popular culture, portraying it as exciting and glamorous. They create an image of gang life that appeals to the desires and aspirations of vulnerable individuals, making it seem attractive and desirable. By glamorizing gang culture, gangs draw individuals into their ranks, enticing them with the fake promise of adventure and excitement.

7. Exploiting the lack of a support system. Gangs often target individuals who lack strong support systems or positive influences in their lives. They prey on individuals who feel disconnected from their families, communities, or social networks, offering them a sense of belonging and purpose. By filling the void left by absent support systems, gangs draw individuals into their ranks, providing them with a sense of identity and belonging.

These tactics highlight the manipulative and predatory nature of gangs. It is essential that you recognize these tactics and seek support and guidance from someone you trust if you feel you are being targeted.

It will help to remember why they REALLY want you, and it has absolutely nothing to do with *your* needs and wants. Only theirs. You are nothing.

FALSE PROMISES & OTHER MANIPULATION TACTICS

Gangs are notorious for using fake promises of loyalty and protection, and other manipulation tactics, to lure individuals into their gang. Beware!

Here are a few types of the promises they make, and the consequences for falling for them.

1. Promise of loyalty. Gangs present themselves as a tight-knit family, offering unconditional love and loyalty. They create a sense of brotherhood and belonging, promising you a sense of identity and purpose if you join. Gang leaders will emphasize the importance of loyalty, portraying it as the central value that binds members together.

Consequence: Once you join the gang, you will learn that the loyalty is one-sided. Gang leaders demand unwavering obedience and allegiance from their members, but they will not reciprocate the loyalty. Gangs are known for their internal conflicts and betrayals, where members are often pitted against each other for power and control. Individuals who fail to meet the gang's expectations of loyalty may face severe consequences, including violence or removal from the group.

2. Promise of protection. Gangs offer protection to their members, promising to shield them from harm and provide a sense of security in dangerous environments. They prey on individuals who feel unsafe or threatened in their neighborhoods, offering them a place of safety. Gang leaders often act like they're the guardians of their territory, vowing to defend their members at all costs.

Consequence: The promise of protection will have strings attached. You will be required to participate in criminal activities and acts of violence to prove your loyalty and contribute to the gang's power and influence. Instead of providing safety, being in a gang will actually put you in greater risk and danger as you become involved in crime and violence. Soon you will rely on the gang for protection and be trapped, unable to escape the grip of the gang's control.

3. Manipulation of trust. Gangs will manipulate your trust, exploiting your desire for acceptance and belonging. They will use manipulation tactics to try to convince you to join the gang, appealing to your emotions and vulnerabilities.

Consequence: Once you join the gang, you will realize that the trust you placed in the gang was misused. Gang leaders will exploit you for their personal gain, using you to further their own agendas to maintain power and control. When you are no longer useful, you will be betrayed and abandoned.

4. Exploitation of vulnerabilities. Gangs will exploit your vulnerabilities to manipulate you into believing their false promises of loyalty and protection.

Consequence: If you fall for the false promises of the gang, you may find yourself trapped in a cycle of dependency and exploitation. Gang leaders will use your vulnerabilities against you, manipulating you to commit criminal and violent acts on their behalf under the guise of loyalty and protection.

5. Fear and intimidation. Gangs use fear and intimidation tactics to maintain control over their members in order to keep them loyal to the gang, as well as keep them from leaving the gang. They instill a sense of fear in their members, convincing them that leaving the gang or betraying its members will result in severe consequences, such as violence, retaliation, or even death. Gang leaders exploit this fear to keep their members in line and prevent them from questioning the false promises made by the gang.

Consequence: Individuals who are gripped by fear may feel powerless to question the false promises of loyalty and protection by the gang. They may remain in the gang out of fear or retaliation, even if they recognize the deception and manipulation at play. This kicks off a vicious cycle of violence and coercion, where individuals feel trapped and unable to escape the gang's control.

6. Isolation and dependency. Gangs isolate individuals from their support networks and communities, making them dependent on the gang for acceptance and protection. They will try to get you to sever ties with friends and family

members, convincing you that they are your only true source of support and security. Gang leaders exploit this to exert greater influence and control.

Consequence: Once you become isolated and dependent on the gang, you may struggle to break free from its control. You may feel trapped, unable to seek help from outside support. This isolation will reinforce your reliance on the false promises of the gang, making it difficult to envision a life without it.

DOPE BOY DREAMS

By Mike Werth

A lot of us have dopeboy dreams growing up. I know I did. Whether influenced by rap music, the movie *Scarface*, or the neighborhood dopeboys, it's easy to be enticed by what *seems* to be quick, easy money.

But things are not always what they seem. Most dopeboys don't make that much at all, especially when you factor in the risks they are taking. Check this out ...

Two authors, Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, wrote a book titled *Freakonomics*. In this book, they wondered: If drug dealing is so profitable, then why do so many dopeboys live with their mothers?

So one guy, a student at the University of Chicago, set out to answer this question. The student befriended a gang leader and the gang leader allowed the student to live with him for six years so he could conduct a study. The gang leader gave the student access to all the financial records, the books, etc., that he needed for the study. This was in the early 2000s.

His study concluded that gang operations are similar to many businesses, but mostly McDonald's – yeah, the place you think you're too good to work at.

This particular gang had about a hundred branches from the main organization. Depending on the season, each branch had 25-to-75-foot soldiers, and they had about 200 associates who weren't actually members, but were working with the gang, hoping to one day gain membership. And the leader of each branch would report to a board of directors, which was about 20 men.

Each branch had a total revenue of about 32k a month. Not counting wages, it cost each branch 14k a month to operate, including 5k a month for the wholesale purchase of drugs, plus another 5k a month in taxes that went to the board of directors.

The leader of each branch paid himself \$8,500 a month and paid his two lieutenants about \$7 an hour or about \$1220 a month. Now that number might sound solid to you, especially at this age, but you could get that legally. Trust me.

And we're going to come up with some plans to do that later, toward the end of this course. Yeah, this leader was getting that, but under the constant threat of getting locked up or worse, killed by a member of a rival gang, or even a hater within his own gang. You're smarter than that. And like I said, at the end of this course, we're going to come up with a plan for you to get that kind of money, legally, so you don't get 'moked or go to jail.

Back to the story ...

So the 100 or so gang leaders raked in \$8,500 a month each, which is 100 stacks a year. And the 20 or so board members each made 500k a year. This means, the top 120 big homies made decent money. But how long was that going to last before the feds came and snatched them up after someone rats them out? Because you know that's coming, right?

So, how well did all the foot soldiers and associates make out?

Well, after the board, the branch leader and the lieutenants, whatever was left went to the 5300-foot soldiers working for the branch leaders. They averaged somewhere around \$3.30 an hour. And the associates? There were about 20,000 of them, and they got nuthin', except the hope of impressing enough to move up.

Do you want to put your future and life on the line for \$3.30 or even \$7.00 an hour?

This is a big, big gang. More than likely, the one you're in, or thinking of joining, isn't going to be this big – or this organized. Which means, even if you make it to the top in 25–30 years, you'll never have this many people working for you. So you'll never make this kind of paper.

If you haven't figured it out by now, it don't work. That math ain't mathin'. And it's not that it just ain't gonna work for you, it don't work for nobody. For example, who's the best that ever did it? Pablo? He was murdered in his 30s. Chapo? Shit, he's buried *under* the prison. There ain't no way to win.

The game ain't a game.

GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION

By Mike Werth

You may feel like not being in a gang or not being super active in a gang is enough to keep you safe. But this isn't true. It's not enough to just not be in a gang or not be super active. You must stay away from gang members completely. Because even hanging around them could get you caught up.

"Money" is a guy I know who grew up in a 'hood, but he never actually got put in the gang. So he was one of the fellas, but he wasn't a banger. He just kept it player and liked getting his paper, which is why we call him "Money."

One day, however, Money was driving to his girl's house. On the way there he saw two guys from his 'hood, Demon and Evil, who *were* bangers, walking down the street. Demon and Evil waved him to pull over. When Money pulled over, they asked him for a ride to the store. Since the store was on the way to his girl's house, Money saw no harm in giving his boys a ride. So his boys jumped in his car, Evil in the passenger seat, Demon in the back.

A little bit down the road, they came to a stop at a light. While stopped, another car pulled up alongside them, and when they looked over, they noticed it was some guys from a different 'hood – the opps. Money wasn't trippin', of course. He was tryna get to his girl's house to smash. But then the guys in the other car banged on them with a gang sign, so Demon, who was in the backseat of Money's car, pulled out the blammy and started dumpin' – Blocka! Blocka! Blocka! Blocka! Blocka! He dumped as the car with the opps sped off, trying to get away. In the end, Demon ended up missing the opps entirely, but he shot a kid in a car that was on the other side of the car the opps were in, killing him dead.

So now you have an innocent kid who's dead even though he had nothing to do with any of it. Demon went away for Life, Evil, who was in the passenger seat was sentenced to Life, and Money, the driver, who was just tryna get to his girl's house? Yup, he's doing Life, too.

Now, where did Money mess up? He pulled over and picked his boys up, *knowing* they were gang members and stayed heated. That's where he made a terrible, terrible mistake. All because of that one "small," impulsive decision, he's doing Life in prison. Hey, this is how it works.

Remember what I told you: The game is not a game ...

MURDERED BY ASSOCIATION

By Tony Christian

This is a cool story about a youngster named Daniel Gonzalez, a.k.a. “Danny.” Danny, his little brother Albert (a.k.a. “Chop-Chop”) and their mother, Sandra, moved to Moreno Valley, California, from Washington.

Danny was a good kid and his mother taught him right from wrong at a young age. Her teachings would prove helpful, because both Danny and Albert made choices daily to stay out of gangs and away from drugs. This came especially easy for Danny, because he had a bigger reason to say “no” to drugs and gangs. That reason was Danny’s passion for boxing, which he has been practicing since he was just 8 years old. Danny and Chop-Chop both went to school in Moreno Valley. Some of the school kids Danny made friends with would later end up becoming members of the local street gang, but he chose to stay focused on his passion for boxing.

Danny’s boxing career started to pay off. Not only did he win the “Golden Gloves” award, but he also won a silver medal in the 2020 Olympic Games. This advanced his amateur record to 96-13. His newfound success would soon gain Danny the attention of the professional fighter and promoter Floyd Mayweather. After signing a contract under Mayweather’s TMT (“The Money Team”), Danny’s professional record reached 7 wins and 0 losses!

One afternoon, in front of his mother’s home, Danny, Chop-Chop, and Danny’s school friends (who had joined a gang), were all barbecuing to celebrate his seventh consecutive win under Mayweather and TMT. Out of nowhere, a car full of gang members drove up and shot at Danny’s gangbanger friends, killing only Danny.

Yes, Danny’s life came to a tragic end just because of who he chose to be friends with.

Danny had all the ingredients for success, but his amazing light was put out without warning. Albert, Sandra, and yes, even Danny, want all of you readers to know this story, so you can learn about the devastating consequences that even hanging around gang members can have. Danny didn’t wake up one day thinking

his existence would come to an early end, simply by chilling with friends who have gang ties (and thus enemies). However, one thing about gang members: They don't take time to ask if you claim the gang your friends do before they start shooting.

As you can see in **the above pictures**, Danny's eyes were full of happiness, hope and dreams. I'm sure you can understand the immense pain and heartbreak his family must have felt, seeing him in a coffin. So please, honor yourselves, your family and Danny by making the right choices. Even if you've already made some poor choices, always remember: it's not too late to change. This is why a car has a tiny rearview mirror and a huge front windshield – so you can focus more on what's ahead of you than what lies behind!

"Bullets have no names." – Unknown

QUESTIONS:

1. 'Influences' are people, places, and things that motivate us to do something. Are there any influences that have caused you to hang around gang members, either currently or in the past? If so, please write down three, and next to each, explain why you think they influenced you.

2. In what ways are you concerned about gangs living around your family, home, or school? List three.

3. Think back to a time you received unwanted attention due to chillin' with gang members. How did it make you feel? Keep it real, fool! How are some ways you could have avoided that unwanted attention? Write the answers below.

4. Would you stop hanging around your friends who gang bang if their enemies hurt someone you care about like your mom, dad, or loved one, because they were trying to kill you?

Yes _____

No _____

5. If you answered "Yes," that you would stop associating with gangsters if it caused your mom, dad, or loved one to get hurt, why wait for it to happen?

6. If you answered "No," and said you would not stop chillin' with those fools if their enemies tried to clap you and instead hit your fam, then my next question is: How many family members, loved ones and friends will you keep sacrificing over your own stupidity? Don't you love your family and loved ones?

7. Danny Gonzalez (R.I.P.) had a big reason to say "No" to gangbanging and drugs, which was that he loved the sport of boxing! What hobbies, sports, or other

activities do you like to do that can help you say “No” to joining a gang and hanging around gang members? Write them below.

8. What kind of people can you get to know and what kind of places do you need to go to so that doing those things can become possible?

9. Have you spoken to your parents, caregivers, family or friends about your passions and interests? If not, tell them you want to stay away from gangs and drugs by getting involved in things you are passionate about and interested in, then tell them exactly what it is you’d love to do instead. Ask them for help to get involved in those things. Don’t give up on yourself! Do it now!

SHIT HAPPENS

By Carlos Espinoza

How many of you personally know somebody who's been to prison? How many of those people you know who were in prison say it was easy, even fun? What if I told you, you could be seriously hurt in prison, or even lose your life? Would you believe me? Maybe your loved ones will tell you not to believe everything we say when we describe this lifestyle, because they lived it themselves and they never got hurt doing a term, or if they did, they got nothing but a mere scratch, and they always came home. The reality is, that's not always the case. Believe me when I tell you this: It's not guaranteed you'll make it home because shit happens!

Some people come to prison with a release date and end up catching a Life term a few months, weeks, or even days to the house, all because of some shit they did for their gang, or their so-called "cause." Even worse, some end up never coming home because they were killed in prison.

I met a youngster, 15 years old, who told me he wasn't planning on committing any type of crimes that would lead to doing a Life sentence in prison. He claimed he was only stealing shit. According to him, he had it all figured out: He was only going to commit crimes that resulted in short terms in the pen. After a few terms, he'd have enough street cred built up to become a rapper. He'd become rich and famous this way. If he, "by chance," ended up doing a longer term, he'd drop a mixtape from the pen, which would only enhance his image and reputation. He'd be the shit, according to him. SMH ... So young and naive.

Let me tell you a true story about a gangster we'll call "Lucky." Lucky was in the county jail waiting to get transferred to a Reception Center prison to begin his 3-year prison term after getting sentenced and convicted of an armed robbery. He took a deal for "3 years with halftime." He had already been in the county jail for three months, so all he had left to do was a year and some change. Not too bad, right?

Well, Lucky belonged to a gang, but this gang was divided into different subsets (different 'hoods) that didn't all get along. However, in prison, that shit don't fly; those from your gang you beef with on the streets have to be your allies in prison, like it or not. That's how the politics work.

One day, Lucky was playing pinochle and one of his “homies” (I quote homies because even they were from the same gang, they were from different hoods, that didn’t get along) disrespected his set out of anger for losing the game. They both began arguing. Pride got in the way: He couldn’t just let this fool play him like a punk, right? So Lucky threw one punch, caught him in the bottom, and slept him – literally. When Lucky dropped this man, the man struck his head on the back of the stool, killing him.

Lucky caught a Life sentence in prison over a pinochle game! He didn’t plan it, but shit happens. One single punch. One moment, one decision, changed the rest of his life. At the snap of a finger, it all came crashing down. And get this; because he had unjustifiably killed a “homie,” he wouldn’t be able to walk the mainline with the rest of his homies without facing the music – and it was going to be loud! It was very likely that the consequence could be life for life. So Lucky was forced to “lock up” if he wanted to spare his own life, even though he was going to spend the remainder of it in a prison cell. His homies from his ’hood disapproved of this choice and shunned him for making it. Now, Lucky is a Lifer who is considered “no good” by the members of his own ’hood.

THE TRUTH

By Mike Werth

For those of us who came up in the streets and in gangs, prison is glorified. To us, you ain't fully a man unless you've been to prison and got some prison ink. In other words, prison is a rite of passage into manhood. That's what the streets and gang culture tricks us into believing. But I'm here to tell you that it's not true, that it's just another one of the many scams we're told in this game.

Don't worry, I fell for it too. I always thought I'd hit prison one day. I welcomed it because of the respect I thought it would earn me. But what I didn't think is that one day I'd be sentenced to prison with Life Without the Possibility of Parole.

Man ... I can't believe I fell for that shit. I'm embarrassed to say that I was bamboozled by this scam.

Prison ain't for winners, prison is for losers. Losers just try to make it seem like something respectable and cool and of value, so they don't have to admit they're losers. So they trick themselves and others that prison's something important and cool. But it's not important or cool. It's lame as fuck. It's not cool or respectable like the movies or rap music tries to make it seem. Ask anyone who's been here. Especially anyone who's done any real amount of time.

Prison is lonely, dirty, and depressing. Prison is degrading. They give you dirty-ass shit to wear and throw you in a dirty-ass cell to live. When they search you, they strip you down naked, make you bend over, spread your butt cheeks as wide as you can, and make you cough three times. Some officers even flash a flashlight on your asshole when you do it.

In prison, you're always hungry. They never give you enough food. And the food they do give you is hardly edible. Your friends forget about you, your girl runs off with someone else (probably one of your friends who forgot about you), and your family eventually becomes too busy for you. You're on your own, bro, dealing with a bunch of angry and hopeless people who use violence to deal with their

problems. So in addition to being lonely, dirty, depressing, and degrading, it's a dangerous place to be, too.

I've been rotting away in here for decades. Since February 23, 1999, to be exact. And that's just this time. I did two-and-a-half years before that. Because I was a fool, I didn't learn my lesson.

My back hurts, and at this point, it's literally getting hard to breathe. My parents have aged. I'm not sure how much longer I'm going to have them. Every day I worry about this. And I guess you can say I'm lucky to be able to worry about this, because it means that I still have them. Some guys don't have their parents anymore.

I'm not tryna preach, but this isn't what you want to do. This isn't the life you want to live. You want to get money, be successful, happy, and live an enjoyable life. In order to do this, you must not do anything that can get you in prison, because prison will prevent all of that. You can't cut corners. You can't do crime to get money. I tried that. I tried to rob someone for 50 to 100 stacks of high-grade weed, and by the time I was done, I didn't rob the weed, I robbed someone of their life. That was never a part of the plan. I thought I was about to hit a lick and be up. But things don't always go according to plan. In fact, they rarely do.

I'm doing everything I can to be blessed with another shot at freedom. But I don't make the ultimate decision on that. First, because I have Life Without the Possibility of Parole, I don't even go to the Parole Board. So for me to get out, the Governor would first have to commute my sentence to 25-to-Life so I can even go to the Parole Board. Then, if that happens, I have to be able to convince two Board Commissioners that I'm fit for society, even though I've killed someone in the past. These are major, major, major hurdles I have in front of me. The odds are definitely not in my favor. Think about this: Bro, there's a good chance, probably more likely than not, that I will die in here ...

Is this the life you want to live? I hope not. And it shouldn't be. Right now you might not give a fuck. You might be angry. But you are not seeing the big picture, just as I didn't. Whatever you're going through now is temporary. That means it's not going to last forever. And if you still have your freedom, or you'll have it soon,

or you can have it again someday, it means you can change the direction you are headed. You can decide to make better decisions, ones that will get you where you truly want to be in life. You can get respect without being a gang member. You can get paper without committing crimes. All you need is the blueprint. That's why I'm giving you the game. Free of charge. Maybe I'll die in prison, but you don't have to.

Brody, not being in a gang and not committing crimes doesn't make you a lame or a square. It makes you smart. You can win. You can! You take the game I'm giving you, and that my folks from around the country are giving you, and you use it to your advantage. Don't expect overnight results. It doesn't work that way. You gotta stick to it. And if you do, you *will* win.

And when you do, send me an email, stuntin' on me.

True lessons of the game ...

Mike

QUESTIONS

1. Let's start off with an easy one. Do you like warmth, love, girls, friendship, and happiness?

Yes _____

No _____

2. Do you like the cold, hate, fighting, pain, and loneliness? It's not hard to figure out that prison is where you find these things, and freedom is where you find the things listed in question number 1.

3. What poor choices and decisions do you think can land you in prison? Write a few things below.

4. Does anger, pain, and abuse cause us to act out in a bad way? How so? Write a few answers below.

5. Which people played a role in some of your poor decision-making? Were they friends from school? Friends around the neighborhood? Family members? Write down some of their names.

6. Think of something very bad that has happened to you or in front of you. How did this ugly event cause you to feel? Write down three emotions.

7. Now, what did those feelings cause you to believe regarding what happened to you or in front of you? Write down three things.

8. Has having this new belief caused you to do something you hadn't done before when faced with a similar situation?

Yes _____

No _____

9. If so, and this was the cause of your poor decision-making, are you willing to try doing the opposite and start correcting bad behaviors and decisions?

Yes _____

No _____

10. After reading this story, is there anything you find to be fun about prison that you can't do out there?

Yes _____

No _____

11. If you know people who have been to prison and they say they were happier, healthier, and safer than they were in the free world, you may want to stay far away from them. They are lying to you, and for whatever reason they're doing it, it ain't good! They may want something from you, whether your loyalty, time, or to drag you down with them!

Misery loves company ...

SAY, HOMIE, WHERE ARE *YOU* GOIN’?

By Tony Christian

Imagine you’re in a car driving down the street when the road you’re on ends and branches into different directions. How will you know which way to go? Well, just like an intersection has a number of ways to turn, you too have a number of choices to pick from when faced when making decisions, both big and small.

We designed *The Game Plan* with exercises to help you answer these questions and more. We have been in your shoes and know all too well how life can sometimes feel like uncharted territory. It’s easy to get lost, and quick!

The trick is: Always know where you are going. More importantly, knowing what you want to do will help you decide where you want to go in life. Later in the course modules you will learn about what you value, and setting goals that are in line with what you like. This will definitely provide you with direction and set you on your way to a successful future.

To better show you what we mean, here are three examples, of three separate paths, taken by three kids, based on the choices they made when they were your age and reached their own crossroads.

ANTHONY

Anthony grew up in a nice area with divorced parents who loved him. Anthony got good grades; but school was so easy he grew bored quickly. Hanging around older kids in his apartments, he began to steal car stereos not only for excitement, but to fit in with what he saw them do. His parents, family, friends, and even neighbors kept telling Anthony, “You are smart. Don’t be hanging around negative people and doing what you shouldn’t be doing!” But Anthony didn’t listen.

Instead, he started experimenting with drugs. Loved ones stayed on his bumper, but he continued to ignore their advice. Finally, Anthony joined a local street gang and is now doing 64 years to Life for a gang-related attempted murder. Anthony has been in prison for 26 years straight and not one time has he received a visit or a care package from his gang “brothers.”

GEOFFREY

Geoffrey grew up with both parents in his home. They lived in a gang-infested, poor side of town, but Geoffrey did not allow that or anything else to discourage him. When kids bullied him about not having fresh gear, he let it motivate him to do something about it! Geoffrey applied himself in school so much, he was skipped ahead two grades. When Geoffrey's road led him to gangs and drugs, he made the choice to take another route, because he was not going to let anything stop him from getting himself and his family out of the ghetto. Because of his hard work, a college university granted Geoffrey a full scholarship with all expenses paid, straight out of high school. People noticed he had the grades and a sense of direction. Today Geoffrey is the CEO of his own online business, a homeowner, wears all designer clothes and smashes around town in a Bentley with his model girlfriend!

EDDIE

Eddie grew up in a home where both his parents struggled with alcoholism. Eddie's parents were also from a gang, and so were his older siblings and uncles. Eddie loved to color when he was a toddler and later began drawing and painting in school. Since he had curly hair, his older brothers and sister would say that someday he would be from the 'hood, and they'd call him "Curly." In his teen years, Eddie constantly had teachers telling him how talented an artist he was. Being pressured by his family and peers, Eddie ultimately gave in to getting jumped into a gang. Teachers, neighbors, and even his girlfriend would often say, "Eddie, why don't you step away from the gang stuff and focus on your artwork?" One day, Eddie came home from school to learn from a neighbor that his whole family was at the local hospital. Eddie's older brother and sister were killed in a drive-by shooting in front of their home! Eddie made a grown-man decision and walked away from everything having to do with the gang lifestyle. He leaned into what he loved (art), and now owns a chain of tattoo parlors where they also do airbrush paintings on t-shirts and towels. Eddie now owns a home, has two kids, and is a prime example that it's never too late to make the right choices and get your life back on the path of success and happiness.

CONCLUSION

Each one of these kids is grown up now, but the measure of their happiness stems back to the road they chose to take when life's crossroad split into different directions. You're reading this because you're now facing your own life's crossroad. Where you end up in 20 years will depend on the decisions you make next. Which way will you go?

There's an old saying: "It's natural for youngsters to sometimes be afraid of the dark, but it's a serious problem when they become afraid of the light." Light means love, goodness, and all things empowering. If your mom, dad, family, or friends start giving you advice because they are worried about some of your choices, hug them, embrace them tight, and don't let go! That is love. That is light. Do not be afraid of someone trying to help you. Don't be like Anthony and ignore all the light, just to make friends in the dark. Those friends won't last. It's fake love!

I hope you pick up game in these stories, because there is unseen power in your choices! Many decisions you make now will determine your future success and happiness. Also, do not be discouraged if you have already joined a gang or tried drugs. As seen by Eddie's story, you can rise above anything! There's a whole lot you can't control in the world, but you were given the biggest, most powerful blessing of all: Free Will! This means you possess the ability to make your own choices and decisions. Between Free Will and that guiding light called Love that shines all around you in the form of family and loved ones, there is no way you can lose ... Unless you choose to!

QUESTIONS:

1. The first question we have for you is, what do you want to do in life? Think long before answering and make sure it's something you really enjoy doing, OK? Write your answer below.

2. Do you relate to one or more of the kids in this story? If so, ask yourself which one and why? Write the answer below.

3. Think honestly about the path you are on right now. If you keep going on this route, where do you see yourself in five, ten, and twenty years? Write your answers below.

5 years:

10 years:

20 years:

4. In the “Conclusion” portion of this story, the second paragraph discusses real love and fake love. First, we want you to ask yourself what the differences are between the two. Then, we want you to go ask two adults that you trust to tell you what the difference is between real love and fake love is to them. Write your definition on the first line, write theirs on the second line.

Yours:

Theirs:

5. As a reader, what do you believe the author of this story meant when he said, “It’s natural for youngsters to be afraid of the dark, but it is a real problem when they become afraid of the light”? Write your answer below.

6. By now you've answered question number 1 above, so what are some of the steps you can take now to make that dream a reality in the next two, five, or ten years? Write your answers below.

7. Write down two people in your life who could probably help you create a plan to take those steps toward fulfilling your dream, a little at a time. Then, go ask them to help you! If they cannot help you for some reason, like maybe they don't know how, that's OK! But if they can't help you, or they just won't help you for whatever reason, then go ask two more people! Never be afraid to ask for help!
