

Y.E.A.G.A.

Youth Empowerment and Goals Association

INFORMATIONAL SHEET

Youth Empowerment and Goals Association (Y.E.A.G.A.) is a voluntary community service program operated by ex-felons, retired Correctional Staff, representatives of the Armed Forces and members of the community. This unique group of individuals is very aware of the existing problems among our youth in today's society. The members of this program are dedicated men and women who have a genuine concern and wish to help our youth. The membership of Y.E.A.G.A. consists of different races, age and crimes ranging from auto theft to murder. Some members have served over 20 consecutive years in prison. As such our members can be considered "experts" on all aspects of prison and on living a criminal or gang lifestyle prior to incarceration.

All members are successful off parole and are living productive lifestyles. Other members of Y.E.A.G.A. bring additional resources for juvenile issues (i.e.: Alcoholic's Anonymous / Narcotic's Anonymous, and the Inside Circle Men's Support Group).

The program will educate the juveniles on the negativity of a lifestyle which can lead to incarceration. Using the members as living examples of what can happen along the path of anti-social behavior. We attempt to convince juveniles that a life of crime is non productive and has long term consequences. We explore the present day to day challenges each juvenile faces. We guide the juvenile to look at his/her life and help them identify solutions to critical issues in their lives.

The program offers an immeasurable learning experience for the juvenile. The juvenile receives first hand knowledge from the members of Y.E.A.G.A., instead of experiencing incarceration themselves. The program utilizes all resources available to help our youth. Our primary approach is a one day session, on Saturdays, from 8 am to 3 pm. This "rap session" consists of 6 to 8 juveniles with the same amount of Y.E.A.G.A. members. The group sits in a circle which ensures that all juveniles will participate in the session. Harsh language and graphic photos may be used during this session.

The discussion does not take an analytical or diagnostic approach. Y.E.A.G.A. members are direct, to the point and truthful. The same is expected from the juvenile participants. We do not believe in "sugar coating" a response or beating around the bush. The program is unique because of its members. They are individuals who have "been there, seen it, did it and lived it". They openly share their pitfalls and knowledge with the juvenile.

This program is definitely not a text book approach as we feel the average juvenile involved in our program has already learned how to "play the game". For the most part, a juvenile is never ready for these sessions because the members "see right through them". Important issues such as education, integrity, respect, and positive self-esteem are always addressed at length. The goal is simple but important: We educate the juvenile and attempt to expose the realities of making poor choices in their lives.

Our secondary approach, usually a 90 minute presentation, is designed to reach a large audience. The presentation attempts to shed light on the pitfalls and consequences of anti-social and criminal behavior, using speakers who are members of Y.E.A.G.A.

We stress the following:

1. The importance of communication with family, peers, school, community and others in a positive self-motivating way.
2. Taking responsibility for one's own actions and life.
3. Goal setting techniques which can ultimately lead to living a positive and productive lifestyle.

Y.E.A.G.A. will follow up with each juvenile to not only gather statistics but to consistently stress the issues which were discussed in the "rap session". The message from the follow up is "we are not giving up on you because you matter". The message is simple but profound. For many youth the feeling that society has given up on them is real and it becomes evident by their actions. Y.E.A.G.A. attempts to provide these youth with a connection to those who have "walked" in their shoes. All the while, allowing Y.E.A.G.A. members to continue to give back to society in a positive manner.

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