

Inmates help **GANG MEMBERS** take the right road

By **DEBORAH A. MILES**

In most cases, crime doesn't pay. But some crime stories when shared, make a difference.

The stories are from inmates who want to help gang members including those from the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation.

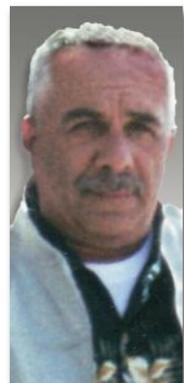
The gang formed in Chicago in the 1940s and is still growing. It has a large tribe in the Bronx. Their criminal activities range from racketeering, arms and drug trafficking to murder.

One Latin King lord, a 17-year old dubbed Emilio, meaning "rival," rules the gang based at a Bronx high school. He had failing grades in every subject.

Recently, Emilio's life changed. He decided to relinquish his black and gold bandana (known as the gang's flag) and is now earning very high grades. He has the desire to go to college and have a career in law enforcement.

The turning point in his young life came just at the right time. Emilio met a PEF member who is devoted to helping at-risk kids, whether they are ghetto-poor gang members or from affluent families with the attitude that money will always bail them out.

Youth Assistance Program



FLAURAUD

Eugene Flauraud, an offender rehabilitation coordinator at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, heads the Youth Assistance Program (YAP) which allows certain inmates to meet with teens who are on the brink of breaking the law.

"The program is a team effort," Flauraud said. "We have 13

inmates, myself and an officer involved.



Latin King gang member showing his gang tattoo, a lion with a crown, and signifying the 5-point star with his hands.

I speak to social workers, counselors and police officers before the kids are brought in for their day at Sing Sing. Everyone is aware of the type of circumstances these kids come from, and we tailor the program accordingly."

Flauraud said the inmates make the program a success. To become a part of it, they must be screened and never have been convicted of arson, a sexual offense or kidnapping.

"Every one of my YAP guys has committed murder or manslaughter. They rehabilitated themselves and many have earned a master's degree while incarcerated. They know realistically they can't change what they did, and they live with that. And they share that with the kids.

"One guy talked about how his brother was killed selling drugs for him. When he told his story, there wasn't a dry eye in the house, myself included. The way he told it was so moving. He's out on parole and I heard he is doing well. It is guys like him who make this program a success," Flauraud said.

A current inmate in YAP, Ramon

Torres, said the program has helped further his education and has allowed him to grow spiritually and emotionally.

"YAP has been an awesome opportunity for me to give back to my community in a positive way," Torres said. "I can never change my crime, but I am now a better member of society and a better human being because of my participation. Now, I want to contribute to making the world a better place. I wish YAP had been there for me."

Beyond 'scared straight'

Dennis Proctor, a Ramapo police officer in Rockland County, said some of the teens who meet with the inmates are very tough and using the "scared straight" technique doesn't work anymore.

Proctor is one of the police officers who brings the kids to Sing Sing in a police van. He said on the way there the kids are rowdy, mouthy and sometimes violent. If the teens are gang members, it may take up to five police officers to separate them.

"In my seven years of bringing groups of all different economic backgrounds to the facility, I find the YAP to be a powerful tool in helping law enforcement deal with kids who are on the border of getting involved in the penal system. It's a tremendous program.

"It's like the Ghost of Christmas Future. These kids get to see where their life is headed and hopefully they will rewind it and take a different path," Proctor said.

Full prison experience

The teens arrive at the barbed wire gates of Sing Sing around 8:45 a.m. and go through security. They have to be dressed appropriately, have a picture identification card, and

no cell phones or contraband such as lipstick, Chapstick or gum.

"We tell them this is the real deal. We don't play games with gangs. If you get caught flashing signs or exchanging anything with an inmate, you will be arrested by the state police," Flauraud said.

The teens are escorted to the prison's chapel, to an area behind a long curtain where they sit in a circle and meet the inmates in the program. One chair is turned backward, reserved for an inmate. He introduces himself and says something such as "I got 20-to-life for murder." Or, "I'm a lifer and will never get out of here."

"It's very effective and definitely gets their attention," Flauraud said.

The program allows male and female teens a one-time opportunity to visit the all-male maximum-security prison. When it's time for the inmates to go into their 6-by-8-foot cells for the noon count, the teens are escorted down cell blocks A and B.

Inside cell block A

In cell block A, the teens walk along the concrete floor that extends to almost the length of two football fields. It is drafty, sweltering in summer, and bone chilling in winter. Among the 1,700 inmates who reside at Sing Sing, the ones in cell block A are aware of the visiting group.

When the kids pass the cells, inmates scream, and shout remarks such as "stay in (expletive) school." Looking up, you see endless rows of cells and birds circling near the ceiling. Sunlight streams through a windowed wall, reflecting the regret on some of the inmates' faces.

The teens shuffle to the mess hall for lunch. They eat the same chow as the inmates and have 10 minutes to finish their meal.

A corrections officer bangs his side-handled baton on the end of the table when the time is up.

They talk again to the 13 YAP inmates. When they leave, hugging is not allowed. But they can shake hands. The trip back to their school is in the same police van, but very different than the morning ride. The teens are quiet, impressed by the words of inmates who were once like them, and who now want to help the kids in their former communities.

"We encourage them to tell their friends and family what they have seen behind locked doors," Flauraud said.

A positive difference

Toni Campopiano is a social worker with Good Shepherd Services and works at Dewitt Clinton High School in the Bronx with Dr. Richie Jimenez. They have sent countless groups to Sing Sing for the program, which is conducted about three times a month. There are 20 correctional facilities in New York that offer the YAP, and Sing Sing provides

the program for groups from the tip of Long Island to as far north as Monticello.

"This program makes a difference," Campopiano said. "The inmates leave their egos at the door. If we send a teen who is a Trinitario gang member, Eugene will get an inmate who was a part of that gang to relate with the kids."

"The Trinitarios are a very prominent Dominican gang known for drugs and prostitution. One leader who went to YAP at first tried to debunk what we do on these trips. Once he experienced Sing Sing, he refused to initiate new members into his organization and allowed those who wanted to leave to do so without being beaten," Jimenez said.

"We can't measure what happens to all these kids," Flauraud said. "We hear very positive stories. YAP gives me a great deal of satisfaction. This is the one thing the state does for at-risk kids that works."

