

*Three things our youth must have to make it successfully “in and beyond the gates” of TYC.*

1. the **want** to; 2. the **how** to; and 3. the **means** to live a positive life style:

**I. Must first have the “Want to”.** *A closed hand cannot receive anything.*

- Our youth come to us with fist clinched tightly around their anger, unforgiveness, guilt and pain. Something specific must happen to get them to have “**the want to**” open up and receive the help needed for change. Our own treatment manual teaches that a physically and emotionally **safe** environment must exist for them to take the risk of opening their hand (heart, mind) to accept the many programs we have to offer.
- *We must first “get in”, in order to “put in”.* They will never let anyone “in” that they don’t trust. **Internalization** only happens when we get “in” their walls of defense. Resocialization states that in order for someone to receive therapeutic help, there must be an atmosphere or a **perception of “genuine care and concern”**. If this is missing, nothing else matters much. In spite of the odds against us, we must be diligent to train our staff and hold them accountable for displaying respect and modeling empathy.
- Our kids will not open up or **take anything from someone they consider their enemy**. The youth come into TYC with a “them against us” mentality. They view the staff as the bad guys especially if they are treated disrespectfully. They will never receive all the wonderful things TYC has to offer unless they feel like they are truly cared about. If not, they do their best to fake their way through four phases. I’ve watched them throw all their resources in the trash as they walked out the gate (supposedly as a phase 4). In reality they hadn’t internalized much of anything.
- It was my experience **that the one staff most all the youth usually perceive as being “safe” and “on their side” is the chaplain**. The Chaplain has a unique place on a campus. They are not the “kept” and not the “keeper”. They walk a thin line, serving in a pastoral role to both sides- staff and student. Chaplains know the value of adding a spiritual foundation to the four cornerstones of Resocialization and have the expertise to assure the agency does it right. They sit in executive meetings every week and help the agency protect the religious rights of the youth and advocate for the religious volunteers and programs they offer. **Without a chaplain on staff, the spiritual side of the student is not represented at the agency tables of decision.** Volunteer chaplains can’t do this.
- Students will confide in a chaplain that they see as **trustworthy**. The students confess and confide things with the chaplain that they will not tell other staff. They were willing to tell me what staff was bringing in contraband, who was supposedly having sex with who, etc. I gave many anonymous tips to catch negative staff based on what the boys confided to me. They could also share many other things that gave me the opportunity to not only give them direction. For example; he may not tell his case manager how bad things really are at home because he fears that his home will not be approved for release. He will not tell the psychologist how he really feels or is thinking because he knows it will be written in his file and what he has confided may hold him back from release. He knows that his master file is reviewed by the Special Services committee who decides things like what programs he is accepted into and if he is ready for release. I’ve tried to block-out disturbing memories of the many injustices I saw done to kids and their families in this weekly meeting. The kids catch on pretty quick how they must work the system and what they have to say to get to go home.
- The other people they automatically accept as “being on their side” are the volunteers. They are seen as caring ‘without getting paid to do so’. They give a glimpse of goodness that many kids have never seen before. “Why do you care so much that you drive so far just to visit with me?” These special people are able to fill in the gaps for what staff are not able to do. They represent the “free world” and many times supply the “care therapy” glue that helps hold the youth together. TYC could never afford to supply the programs and resources that these “go the distance” people give. I could tell hours of success stories based upon what volunteers provide on both sides of the fence. **Those a youth considers “on his side” have**

**better odds at convincing him that it is to his benefit to open up and take what is being offered.**

Volunteers give an un-measurable service so many times they don't get the credit, but they roam our campuses each week making a HUGE difference - **just ask the kids.**

**II. "HOW TO"** Once we get their hands open and they empty out the pain in their "life story" we can work to fill their now empty hands with tools of success – give them **"the how to"**.

- I believe that the Resocialization program has **a lot of great points that doesn't need to be discarded.** We don't need to throw out the four cornerstones it promotes. What we need is for the staff to actually live by the principles themselves. No one can give what they have not first received- kids or staff. They both need to be given respect and empathy in order to give it. I have developed an outline for a staff training called PHASE APPROPRIATE STAFF (PAS) that I would like to discuss with someone. To stop abuse, staff must be aware of their own "buttons" and thinking errors. They must be trained and rewarded in giving positive reinforcement instead of focusing on only punishing their negative.
- Our local management must have a hopeful attitude and positive belief towards changing the lives of kids. Abuse has a trickle down effect. It starts with administration (especially on the local campus). We can no longer tolerate the presence of cynical, pessimistic, sarcastic, attitudes that breed hopelessness in the minds of the kids. Our treatment manual says that **"All staff must support the philosophy that the youth in custody are capable of being rehabilitated and that harsh or abusive punishment is not acceptable."** (*Resocialization page 1.16*). **If the staff doesn't support the philosophy, abuse is unavoidable.** I have seen the existence of an underlying belief that the youth will never change and that Resocialization doesn't really work. This creates a sense of hopelessness for staff and student. We must find ways to constantly remind of staff that they are working for more than a paycheck - they are making a difference in generations of lives - not only for the youth but in the lives of possible future victims.
- The kids can tell if they are being viewed as a failure, another number, a "nobody". I heard this complaint constantly. They need someone that believes in them, this is VERY empowering! They must have the **"HOPE** to change along with the WANT to change. I do believe in being very fair, firm and consistent but it being done so in an atmosphere of care and concern. They want to be the best at something. I developed some a simple reward programs such as the "Coming up Club" and "On Track" group. Our kids don't need more luxuries; **they need more inspiration and love with their discipline.** If the staff can't give it, **then the chaplains and volunteers can.**
- Many students leave the chapel each week with a desire to do right and to sincerely accept help. Conviction makes a person want a better life and testimonies of those who have "overcome" offer hope that it can be done. Forgiveness and repentance helps them confess and clean out the junk in their hands. "God" things deal with things of the heart which leads the youth to open up and dump the anger, guilt and pain they hold on to so tightly that nothing else seems to fit in. I have seen kids get tearful relief in my office and go forth determined to take of hold of the resources TYC offers so they can "be somebody".

**III. But, we have still failed unless we provide **"the means to" make it on the outside.****

- This is the area the agency fails miserably at. We all know that no matter how much a kid wants to make it in society and no matter how much education and job skills we give him, **if he doesn't have a positive support system beyond the gate, then he has a high probably of failure.** We know that our parole officers are overworked and the youth see them as part of the punishment instead of as an ally or resource...so true aftercare is pretty much non-existent.
- There is good news - **there is huge resource available to our youth and their families that have basically gone untapped.** The same type of people that drive thousands of miles and spend hundreds of hours each year coming into our facilities are just waiting to love and care for our youth and their families in the community. It is the church. It is not the local social club that is coming inside the gate to help our kids; it is the local church folks. They have unlimited resources to help outside the gate – jobs, support groups for families of offenders, counseling, transportation, food, clothes, etc.

- **The problem is, there is no one hired to bridge the gap between our kids that are leaving and the open arms in the faith community.** The chaplain is swamped trying to meet the needs of hundreds of youth inside the gate, the volunteer coordinators don't seem to have the time to work outside the gate and on the large part have no idea how to speak the language of the church world. The case managers and the placement worker have their hands full already. Most people know that there is help out there, but it's no ones designated job to make it happen. I found that it rarely works for the connection to be made at the parole level because for the youth to accept the help of an "outsider" there must first be a trusting relationship built. This happens best inside the fence while the student is open and hungry for love and attention. Once a bond is built inside the fence, the youth will accept the resources offered by the person when he returns home. We must put someone's hand inside of theirs (a higher Power, a volunteer, a mentor, a role model) to walk with them "beyond the gate". Most weeks I watched the kids that left TYC a few months ago (with a hand-full of tools) come back through the gates. Their disillusioned eyes avoided me. They left with "the want to" and "the how to", but without "the means to" make it on the outside. This atrocity is one thing that prompted me to give up a job that I loved, and go "beyond the gate" myself to see if there is something I can do to motivate the community to provide the means for the kids to life free.

## **SUMMARY**

### **For the "Want To" to happen more frequently:**

- There must be "safe people" (Chaplains, volunteers) readily available to the youth who are perceived as "on their side" to help them to open up to what is being offered.
- That there is **no tolerance** regarding staff that abuse kids in any manner, starting with verbal and emotional abuse. Violation of a youth's religious rights must be enforced (kids aren't kept from meals, school, etc. but they commonly refused religious services)
- For campus administrators to be more "volunteer friendly" and see the **value of what they do** in the larger scheme of rehabilitation. They aren't there to make life easy for criminals; they are there to change them.

### **For the How to:**

- Expectations must be raised for staff. They must be affirmed and recognized for role-modeling good character and empathy. They must be offered training in this area and held responsible for not following the expectations.
- That the chaplain and Volunteer religious programs (such as Epiphany, Weekend ministry crusades, and other religious programs) are valued and sought after because it is recognized that they play an important role in the Resocialization treatment program (which at the current time does not address the spiritual aspect of man).
- More programs like the Faith Based Dorm are made available.

### **For TYC to offer and provide the FUNDING necessary for the youth to have the "Means To" stay changed beyond the gates of incarceration:**

- The faith community needs to be tapped as an important resource for our agency in the same manner we would a secular resource. We must be willing to contract with and **fund services they offer**. Kids will better accept their help. They are not viewed as being a part of the "system that incarcerated them" so their help is more readily accepted. Parole, as necessary as it is, is considered as "doing time on paper" not as an aid for their success. It is not seen as aftercare resource for them but rather further punishment.
- Re-entry and community support aftercare programs **must be valued and be funded**. I believe that if a fraction of the money we will save from releasing those that are 18-21 is utilized for community support; we will see the number of our success stories rise tremendously. My husband and I have continued to work in the community with former students so we know by experience where the needs lie and ideas on how to get the youth to accept the help.
- **Money is designated for someone to be hired to work as a bridge, a liaison, between TYC and the community** (especially the Faith community). This person would be responsible to supply an updated list of resources to the institutions. At each institution, someone is designated to work closely with individual students before they are released to better facilitate transition to the community.