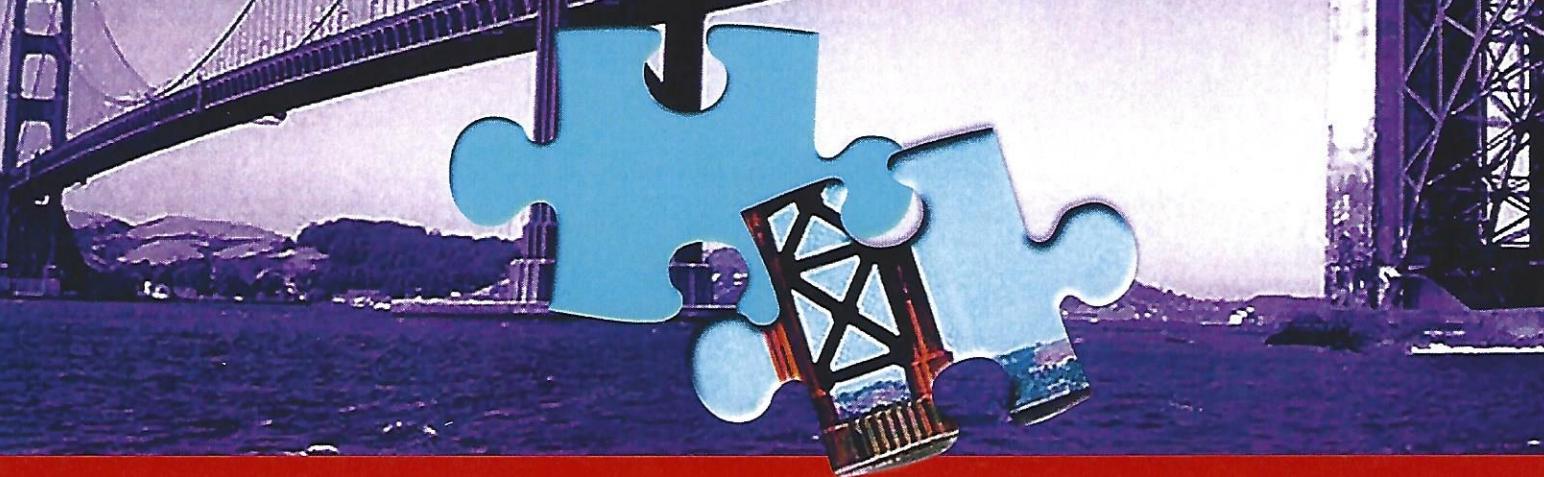


THE ANSWER

TO CRIME AND YOUTH CRIME IN AMERICA



Bridging The Relational Gap In At-Risk Youth Intervention

Just as true rehabilitation must begin within each offender,
THE ANSWER to solving the problem of crime
begins within the body of crime itself...

Written and Developed by Michael J. Curls

Recommendation Letter from Retired FDC Deputy Secretary

To Whom It May Concern:

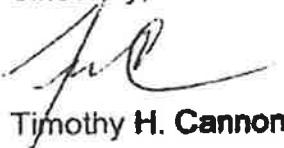
My name is Timothy H. Cannon; I was employed with the Florida Department of Corrections for 27 years. I retired as Deputy Secretary. During my employment I had the opportunity to meet many wonderful people. One such person was inmate Michael Curls.

I first met him early in my career while I was a Correctional Officer and our paths crossed throughout my career. I saw a true change in his character and was amazed at his transformation and his willingness to help others effect change in their lives.

I have seen his approach to changing lives and know that it gets results. In his work "The Answer," he mentions me in the acknowledgements, I am honored that he values our friendship to the point of this recognition and will assure you that I approve of this acknowledgement and support this project.

I thank God for allowing me to serve and meet men who truly want to help others. Michael Curls is one such man. I encourage anyone who reads this to support 'The Answer.'

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "THC".

Timothy H. Cannon

BOOK CONTENTS

THE ANSWER TO CRIME AND YOUTH CRIME IN AMERICA

The Overall Concept and Vision

--Part Two--

Relational Services Training and Certification Process:

Program One (Initial Screening and Qualifications)

Offenders **U**nderstanding **R**eality **R**elational **A**sistance **P**rogram

OUR RAP

FACILITATOR TRAINING INITIATIVE

RELATIONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICE TRAINING INITIATIVE

COUNSELOR SUPPORT PROGRAM

--Part Three--

THE ANSWER's Progressive Programs Manual

YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS UNDERSTANDING REALITY

Y O U R P R O G R A M

AND

PERSONAL REHABILITATION ALTERNATIVE FOR YOUTH

P R A Y PROGRAM

Secular and Faith Based Versions of the Relational Assistance Service

Program One:

Defeating the Enemy Within

Program Two:

CAPS TO CARS

Program Three:

Character Building

Program Four:

Direct Involvement Reduces the Effects of Criminal Thinking

DIRECT

Program Five:

Goal Setting and Goal Achieving

Developing an Action Plan

Program Six:

THE ANSWER TO CRIME AND YOUTH CRIME

Training in Leadership and Service

Part One

**THE ANSWER
TO CRIME AND YOUTH CRIME IN AMERICA**

OVERALL CONCEPT AND VISION

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, except by written permission by the author, publisher, or authorized administrator. Permission to copy this material is hereby granted for the purposes of promotion and/or review by those who wish to support and advocate for the development of the Relational Services presented herein.

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For more information visit our website at: www.TheAnswerToCrime.org

Editing and book design by David M. Reutter

Acknowledgements

I could not publish this book in good conscience without expressing my sincere appreciation to the many people who have helped to produce this important work. Their contributions have been essential to bringing this vision to fruition. Some have typed and offered insights; some provided much needed encouragement; many have prayed and supported me for many years. Words cannot express the thanks that these special people deserve: Annie Aragona, Ann Rogers, Rhetta Morales, Kim Kelley, Samuel Adams, Tracie Adams, Richard and Lois Dowd, Lee and Linda Gilpin, Ted Duncan (may he rest in peace), Nancy Hutchinson, Dianne Galster, Fran Phillips, Fred and Barbara Giffin, and Ron McAndrew. Without you this book this would not have been possible.

Special thanks to Timothy Cannon (retired Florida Department of Corrections Deputy Secretary), who knew me as a lost soul entering the prison system. Twenty years later, we crossed paths again and you recognized a man who had changed. You strongly supported my efforts to help others, and I count you as a friend. Tim, you inspired me to continue fighting the good fight and helped me along the way.

My thanks to Senator Dennis Baxley. You took the time and cared enough to visit me in prison; you listened to my story, heard the heart of *THE ANSWER*, and wanted to get it into the hands of those who could make it work. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Senator Keith Perry for the work you have done in criminal justice and transitional re-entry for prisoners returning to society.

The Lifers' Positive Transformation Group and SAGE Personal Development Program of Marion Correctional Institution provided the necessary platforms from which *THE ANSWER*'s initial training bases were built. SAGE Coordinator and Administrative Assistant Joseph Mueller, with fellow SAGE Coordinator Michael Minor, provided instrumental support during the implementation process. Doug DeRespiris, President of Narrow Road Challenge Ministry and School, joined forces with *THE ANSWER* and sponsored the program's development. Special Education Instructor Benjamin Potmesil provided invaluable administrative support and assistance.

Understanding that very few concepts are totally new, I want to acknowledge the people I have worked with over the years; many through whom I have learned much of what I know. One such person is John Massie, Jr., who is in a program development league of his own. John introduced me to the *CAPS* and *Total Person* concepts contained in the *Character Building* elements of the progressive programs network presented in Part Three of this book.

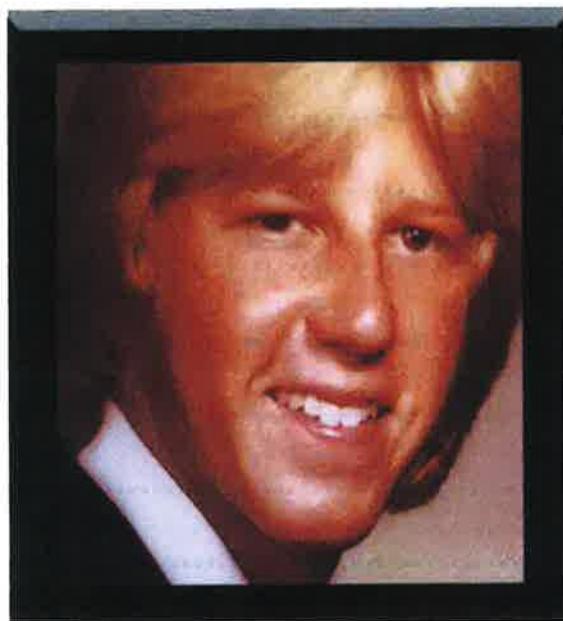
Finally, training instructors Lamar Hill and Stephin Jamison were essential in the development of the training process.

This work is dedicated to every youth who has fallen into crime and criminality; to every parent who has known the fears and shed the tears; and to every counselor who cares.

*The best way to prove that you are no longer part of the problem
is to become part of . . .*

THE ANSWER

About The Author



Michael J. Curls, 1979



Michael J. Curls, 2019

Michael J. Curls was a troubled youth. When he was sixteen and seventeen both his parents were killed, one year apart, in terrible automobile accidents. Michael was permitted to view their bodies and, as a result, suffered severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With virtually no coping skills he attempted to escape his demons through drugs, alcohol, and related destructive behaviors, which often led to encounters with the law.

In 1983, at twenty-two years of age, after receiving news of the death of another loved one, Michael violated his probation by "changing residency without permission of his probation officer" and was sentenced to serve the rest of his life in the Florida prison system. After five hard years, his life sentences were overturned as being illegal and he was released. Unfortunately, after being forced to survive in some of the most violent and predatory prison environments imaginable, his PTSD had only intensified, causing him to become worse instead of better.

Predictably, after being released Michael quickly reoffended, committing a string of robberies. The sentencing guidelines called for nine to twelve years in prison, but six consecutive life sentences were imposed. This time, however, Mr. Curls was determined to correct the problems he had; to heal and renew his mind, attain victory over all addictions, achieve permanent positive change -- from criminality to responsibility -- and to help others along the way.

Mr. Curls has now served nearly forty years in prison. Despite the daily difficulties and hardships of incarceration, Michael learned what he needed to know and did what he needed to do in order to face and conquer the challenge of change. He then dedicated his life to developing programs that actually work. Mr. Curls hereby presents THE ANSWER TO CRIME AND YOUTH CRIME IN AMERICA to all who wish to prevent school shootings and reduce crime and recidivism by reaching and saving this nation's at-risk youth before they become unreachable.

Table of Contents

Foreword

I. Conceptual Synopsis.....	1
II. The Relationship.....	8
III. The Process.....	10
A. Relational Phase.....	13
B. Motivational Phase.....	18
C. Instructional Phase.....	22
D. Directional Phase.....	23
IV. The Formula.....	25
A. Youth Awareness Prison Tour Program	
The Prison Experience	26
B. <u>Offenders</u> <u>Understanding</u> <u>Reality</u> <u>Relational</u> <u>Assistance</u> <u>Program</u>	
OUR RAP Facilitator Training Initiative	28
C. <u>Youthful</u> <u>Offenders</u> <u>Understanding</u> <u>Reality</u>	
YOUR Program	
And	
Personal <u>Rehabilitation</u> <u>Alternative</u> <u>for</u> <u>Youth</u>	
PRAY Program	31
D. <u>Post</u> <u>Release</u> <u>Opportunity</u> <u>Program</u>	
PROP	33
V. Conclusion.....	34

Foreword

"If we save just one, we've succeeded." Almost everyone has heard this old aphorism, and to this there is a certain truth: If we save one youthful offender, we have indeed succeeded - in saving one. Unfortunately, the problem of crime and youth crime in America has long outgrown this meager measure of success. Though each and every success is an important victory in the fight against crime, our best efforts have not been enough to win the war.

The question that must be answered is: Why? When so many parents, teachers, and counselors have invested their all, trying every conceivable method of rehabilitation, why are we losing so many of our youth to the criminal justice system or worse? Why is the problem still out of control? Are today's at-risk youth really that unreachable, or have we overlooked something? Is there another approach or resource that we have yet to recognize and utilize to its full potential? Is there a way to reach and save more than ever before?

These questions, to me, are not merely academic; they are personal. For I had to find *The Answers* first within myself. I then applied those answers to the overall problem of crime and youth crime, and I hereby present *The Answer* to all concerned. My own concern for at-risk youth is paramount. Because I've been there, and have traveled that road to its bitter end. I have also faced and conquered the difficult challenge of positive change and, therefore, know what it takes for others to do the same.

Another well-known maxim claims: "Experience is the best teacher." I contend, however, that where crime and consequences are concerned, the experience of others is by far the best teaching tool. For if our youth must learn, through their own mistakes and experiences, the many lessons that I myself have learned, they will pay a price that no one wishes to pay...

My sincere hope, through this work, is that we will now join forces, fight for right together, and win what we are fighting for: reaching and saving at-risk youths from the life-destroying results of criminality.

Table of Contents

Foreword

I.	Conceptual Synopsis.....	1
II.	The Relationship.....	8
III.	The Process.....	10
	A. Relational Phase.....	13
	B. Motivational Phase.....	18
	C. Instructional Phase.....	22
	D. Directional Phase.....	23
IV.	The Formula.....	25
	A. Youth Awareness Prison Tour Program	
	The Prison Experience.....	26
	B. Offenders <u>U</u> nderstanding <u>R</u> eality <u>R</u> elational <u>A</u> sistance <u>P</u> rogram	
	OUR RAP Facilitator Training Initiative.....	28
	C. <u>Y</u> outhful <u>O</u> ffenders <u>U</u> nderstanding <u>R</u> eality	
	YOUR Program	
	And	
	<u>P</u> ersonal <u>Rehabilitation <u>Alternative for <u>Y</u>outh</u></u>	
	PRAY Program.....	31
	D. <u>P</u> ost <u>Release <u>O</u>pportunity <u>P</u>rogram</u>	
	PROP	33
V.	Conclusion.....	34

I. Conceptual Synopsis

Crime and Youth Crime

The Problem

Crime has presented a perplexing problem for as long as laws have existed. However, over the past two decades the problem has brought this nation to a point of trepidation. Warning signs indicated that something was missing in our efforts toward rehabilitation. But when children began killing each other in our public schools, it sent our not-so-safe society into a desperate search for answers.

When we implemented a plan to “Take a Bite Out of Crime,” crime clenched its jaws and took two bites back. When we decided to “Get Tough on Crime,” crime retaliated by getting tougher on us. Drug abuse and alcoholism have reached epidemic (indeed, pandemic) proportions, and crime, violent crime, and **very violent** crime are still running rampant throughout our entire nation. Where catchy clichés and powerful statements are excellent tools for sales and political campaigns, they do nothing to solve the actual problems.

***School Shootings - Murders - Rapes - Robberies - Car Jackings
Kidnapping - Home Invasions - Burglaries - Thefts - Vandalism - Child
Abuse and Molestation - Drug Wars - Race Wars - Gang Wars***

Need we go on? With divorce rates rising, single-parenting, and functional family values in serious decline, our children are desperately seeking acceptance, love, and emotional fulfillment. Consequently, many young people are swept away by powerful undercurrents of peer pressure combined with a great number of unavoidable negative influences.

Sex and violence, for example, are actually promoted and glamorized by the music, television and movie industries, where financial profit is the primary concern. Even video games, once innocent enough, have joined the trend of violent lechery. Packaged and sold as entertainment, these videos have a directional impact on impressionable kids that has become clearly evident in many American youths. The youths respond accordingly, becoming byproducts of their environmental circumstances.

Consequently, for the above stated reasons and other factors as well, too many of our troubled youth turn to drugs, alcohol, sexual promiscuity, and crime. When various forms of rehabilitation attempts fail to produce satisfactory results, our justice system resorts to harsh punishment, incarcerating these young people in some of the most violent and demeaning environments possible.

This is where we begin to lose the opportunity to reach and save them. For this is where the large majority of young offenders, who have already been established as environmental followers, are forced to adapt to these increasingly dysfunctional conditions. They become even more angry, reactive, and bitter. They end up worse instead of better. This only serves to enhance the chance of repeated or escalated crime patterns.

For most, this is the point of no return. Youthful offenders return to society and become adult offenders who are promptly sentenced to long periods of incarceration within our nation’s crowded and costly prison systems. Once there, many fall victim to hopelessness, loneliness, and degradation; they lose much of their remaining humanity while being psychologically debased and classified as “inmates” rather than human beings. This form of ostracism and institutionalization to which many states subscribe actually promotes recidivism rather than rehabilitation.

By necessity, these offenders once again adapt to their environment in order to cope and survive these dehumanizing and often violent circumstances. Many of those who fall to this execrable level of life soon become irremediable products of the criminal justice system, with very little hope of ever becoming positive and productive members of society.

Parents, preachers, teachers and counselors have dedicated their lives to finding more effective methods of reaching and saving our young people - ***before they become unreachable!*** Unfortunately, we seem to have been fighting, thus far, a losing battle. We've been at a loss to discover a solution comparable to the problem. For every youth we are able to deter from criminal activity, today's society seems to be turning out, in ever increasing numbers, more to replace them. As the cycle continues to turn, the enormous body of crime grows. Taxpayers continue to pay, children continue to die, and parents continue to cry...for *The Answer*.

In the final analysis, it is clear that youths are being misled by environmental influences and circumstances that are often presented by society itself. This accentuates the fact that youthful offenders are not ultimately responsible for the problem of youth crime. Considering the terrible price they must pay for their wrongs, these young people are as much crime victims as the victims of crime themselves.

How many lives must be ruined and wasted before we mobilize our most powerful weapon in the war against crime? How many more billions of dollars must be poured into current methods of rehabilitation and crime prevention without properly addressing the problem? ***How many people must die...before we seriously seek The Answer?***

The Answer

The Answer to difficult and complex problems is rarely found in a simple solution. However, the correct answer can always be determined when the proper formula is applied. Of course, we cannot realistically hope to solve the problem of crime completely. Therefore, *The Answer* can only be found as a new alternative that simply works better than any approach thus far.

The following includes a concise, but detailed plan of action. Because it works in conjunction with every rehabilitation effort now in place, it is a combined program formula that works better than current methods of crime prevention. This synopsis contains an original concept that is uniquely designed to arm our nation's at-risk youth and rehabilitative community with the most effective reaching, teaching and deterring tool currently available.

Until now, this valuable asset has been a virtually untapped resource, kept under lock and key (literally). For there has never been a well-structured plan by which to properly introduce and demonstrate how this powerful resource can best be utilized. The agenda presented herein provides the means to develop a new and highly specialized service, thereby proffering the missing link in at-risk youth intervention.

The implementation of this concept will enable counselors and rehabilitative agencies to most effectively employ this important asset. Combining this resource with existing youth efforts and program structures will enable the counseling community to realize its maximum potential for success. Furthermore, our nation will finally enjoy the tremendous benefits of the most prolific reductions in crime, youth crime, and recidivism that we could ever hope to achieve.

In order to fully comprehend and appreciate the incredible impact of *The Answer*, one must first consider certain reasons why many counseling efforts fail to reach our youth. This requires cognizant understanding of various thought patterns that often propagate criminal thinking errors. For these thoughts manifest in strong belief systems through which major psychological defenses and barriers are established. Psychologists and psychiatrists

may define these defenses in terms such as: closed channel, denial, or victim stance. These obstacles represent the initial challenge. They must be properly addressed and overcome before the process of rehabilitation, or habilitation, can even begin. Unfortunately, those who predominantly provide counsel are often perceived by at-risk youth as opposing authority figures who attack certain behaviors that are considered necessary for some form of hope or happiness. Their negative behaviors are justified within, as they provide pleasure, fulfillment and/or emotional gratification. When certain types of discipline are administered, offenders often develop a tough us-against-them mentality. This attitude makes it very difficult for most counseling efforts to break through the initial barriers and overcome even the first psychological obstacle, which is absolutely essential in order to progress further in the rehabilitative process.

Many at-risk youths often express their false beliefs through excuses and justifications. As they defend their negative thinking and behaviors, their viewpoint often serves to discredit wise counsel. For example:

- * "It's my life." (which is true enough for them)
- * "But I do it because..." (followed by justification)
- * "That won't happen to me." (the consequence)
- * "You just don't understand." (their exact struggle)

The Answer presents a cost-efficient plan that enables us to more successfully deal with these issues, reaching more of our troubled youth than ever before. This process involves a well-structured program formula (various programs working hand-in-hand) specifically designed to create and provide a powerful new element in rehabilitative/habilitative counseling.

The plan includes a careful screening and selection process, intensive training, certification, placement, and the most effective deployment of those who do understand the exact struggles of at-risk youths. *The Answer* utilizes those who have actually *been there* and can best relate with the many social, psychological, emotional, and environmental issues that often lead to criminal behavior. These individuals have, themselves, experienced the temptations and payoffs, as well as the ultimate consequences of crime. Through this powerful outreach, well-trained and highly qualified ex-offenders provide the Relational Assistance Service that finally bridges the huge relational gap that often stands between youthful offenders and counseling efforts. ***This is the missing link!!***

Contrary to popular belief, there are many offenders who do learn from their mistakes and have faced and conquered the difficult challenge of positive change. They have turned their mistakes and negative experiences into valuable life lessons. They need only an open door of opportunity to offer themselves as teaching tools for the benefit of others and society as a whole.

Just as true rehabilitation must begin within each individual offender, *The Answer* to solving the problem of crime on a larger scale begins within the body of crime itself. This requires a strong relationship based and built on common bonds, shared experiences and hardships, likes and dislikes, trust, acceptance, understanding, friendship and support. It is not the relationship between offenders that contributes so much to the overall problem of crime, but the direction that relationship tends to take for lack of a positive directional opportunity.

The Answer is a combined program formula that culminates through the Youthful Offenders Understanding Reality Program (YOUR Program) and the Personal Rehabilitation Alternative for Youth Program (PRAY Program). Both YOUR Program and PRAY Program facilitators are in fact highly trained Relational Assistance Service providers who employ their unique skills for the positive purpose of bridging the relational gap and paving the way for more successful counseling. YOUR Program is the secular version of its faith-based PRAY Program counterpart.

There are none better able to assist counselors in overcoming the initial obstacles and relational barriers, which often hinder and even prevent rehabilitation, than those who have actually been there themselves. There are none more qualified to reach young offenders, right where they are, and teach them the true and hard realities that result from criminal behavior. Relational Assistance Service providers are the best at establishing and providing the relational bridge that enables the rehabilitative community to reach its highest potential for success.

The concept hereby presented as *The Answer* is actually the extension of an original four-phase teaching/facilitating process. First introduced in 1993, this newly-developed relational approach was implemented through an organization of men who have traveled the same paths as many youthful offenders. The Lifers' Group of Sumter Correctional Institution took these paths to their final destination, and they dedicated themselves to reaching out into the body of crime itself, touching the heart of the problem in its infancy - before it's too late. Through a Youth Awareness effort that firmly established the Lifers' Group as a positive force within the Florida Department of Corrections, the genesis of *The Answer* was conceived and developed.

As a charter member of the Lifers' Group, and founding chairman of Youth Awareness, I was afforded the opportunity to introduce and develop several offender-related program structures. While working with over two thousand youthful and adult offenders, the four-phase relational approach was established and proven most effective. Its powerful impact was employed through the following efforts:

The In-House Youth Awareness Program

This program was designed to reach and educate youths already in prison. Its aim was to assist them in positive and productive ways of serving their time before the negative influences of the prison environment took hold. The program involved education and job placement, personal tutoring, Life Skills classes, positive leadership and guidance. Through this effort, all participants became better prepared for re-entry into society and success in life.

The Boot Camp Counseling Program

Lifers' Group Youth Awareness facilitators were trained to utilize the four-phase relational approach during weekly program sessions with Boot Camp youths. Within the first three months of implementing the program, drop-out rates were reduced by approximately thirty-five percent. Boot Camp success rates increased considerably and the positive impact of this effort was astounding.

THE S.C.I. Lifers' Group Youth Awareness Prison Tour Program *The Prison Experience*

The incredible success of this newly developed relational process opened the door for the introduction of the above titled prison tour program. This program was specifically designed as a high-impact maximum learning experience. Coordinated and conducted by offenders employing the relational rather than confrontational *Scared Straight* approach, this effort became an immediate success.

Within the first six months, *The Prison Experience* received strong counselor support from fourteen rehabilitation agencies in eleven different communities. Endorsements claimed this concept to be the most effective criminal behavior deterrent ever witnessed by counselors and administrators. All employed its impact within their own program structures.

Within one year, the pilot program was approved for statewide expansion throughout the Florida Department of Corrections. It is this writer's studied opinion that the four-phase relational process works best for reaching most youths. *The Prison Experience* should be implemented nationwide, replacing the outdated and less effective *Scared Straight* approach.

The development of this relational teaching process and its employment within the above-mentioned programs marked the beginning of what is hereby presented as *The Answer*. Even the most effective prison tour program is merely a wake-up call; it's an eye-opening experience that teaches young offenders the true and impending realities that result from continued criminal behavior. As successful as the prison tour program proved itself to be, it was only a starting point; the point at which offenders decide they do not want to pay the price of crime. Something more was needed to continue the process and strengthen the counseling community.

After experiencing the impact of an effective criminal behavior deterrent, such as *The Prison Experience*, young offenders usually return to the same environments and circumstances from which their problems and issues originated. The initial impact of their experience can quickly grow vague, and even their best intentions can wane under the pressure of negative influences. A continuation of the rehabilitative process is absolutely essential. In response to this critical need, the following program combination introduces a resource that provides the most effective supplemental habitilitative and rehabilitative service available today.

Offenders Understanding Reality Relational Assistance Program

OUR RAP Facilitator Training Initiative

OUR RAP is a relational service training program established in prisons and other offender-related facilities. While producing highly skilled relational service providers, this training base extends into two distinct in-house youth awareness efforts: The In-House Youth Awareness Program, which provides leadership and positive direction to incarcerated youths, and the Offenders Understanding Reality Counsel Support Program, which assists local area youth counselors in teaching and deterring their clients from crime.

OUR RAP is specifically structured to carefully screen, select, and train qualified candidates for this specialized field of service. Upon graduation, qualified trainees will be tested through an in-depth certification exam, and they may return to society as YOUR Program or PRAY Program facilitators. With a strong commitment to providing their unique relational assistance to counselors and other Youth Awareness efforts, their services include:

- * Maximum impact presentations
- * Participation in group therapy sessions
- * One-on-one peer facilitation
- * Various Life Skills instruction

Their services may also include other involvement that can be coordinated within a particular program structure to help bridge the relational gap. This training is universal in that it may be applied to teaching or facilitating any program or class, for youths and adults alike.

Youthful Offenders Understanding Reality

YOUR Program

Past mistakes and criminal records invariably prove offenders to be part of the most serious problem in society today. This creates major obstacles that must be faced and overcome: Rejection. Alienation. Distrust. These are perhaps the most destructive of all consequences, and they often cause many doors of opportunity to be closed to offenders who merely claim that they have learned from their mistakes.

Therefore, before offenders can realistically hope to receive the opportunities necessary for success, they must first be willing to prove that they are no longer part of the problem. The very best way to prove that you are not part of the problem is to become part of *The Answer*.

YOUR program is a secular culmination of a well-coordinated effort that enables qualified ex-offenders to become positive leaders and valuable assets to society. Through this incredible outreach, YOUR Program facilitators provide the Relational Assistance Service that offers counselors and others the most powerful teaching and deterring tools available today. *Themselves!!*

Intensively trained (through the previously-described OUR RAP Facilitator Training Bases) to reach and teach youthful offenders the truth, these certified Relational Assistants can join our nation's war against crime, reinforcing and strengthening the front lines of rehabilitation. With this added resource, the following results can be expected:

- * Lower overall crime rates
- * Much lower youth crime rates
- * Lower rates of recidivism
- * Increased rehabilitative success rates
- * Increased value of participating prison systems
- * A noticeably safer society
- * Reunited families
- * More saved lives

Personal Rehabilitation Alternative for Youth

PRAY Program

OUR RAP trains Relational Assistants in the four-phase teaching process contained and later described herein. YOUR Program is the secular version of this specialized service. As the PRAY acronym implies, this is the faith-based version of the same service. PRAY Program facilitators are individuals whose experiences involve a God-based belief system. Their services may include the sharing of their faith, basic spiritual concepts, and encouraging at-risk youth to seek God in their quest for positive change.

Post-Release Opportunity Program

PROP

Established through the head offices of participating prison systems and other offender-related agencies, the Post-Release Opportunity Program (PROP) is the coordinating element of *The Answer*.

PROP will compile accurate records pertaining to OUR RAP trainees and certified Relational Assistants. Information will include: release dates, relational qualifications, areas where facilitator services are available, and other pertinent data. PROP will also coordinate initial interviews, track progress and productivity, and establish success rate statistics.

It is this writer's studied opinion that the above-described programs combination, properly coordinated with the rehabilitative counseling community, state- and nationwide, is the equivalent formula through which *The Answer* to crime will be achieved. The actual formula is constructed as follows:

Youth Awareness Prison Tour Program
The Prison Experience
-plus-
Offenders Understanding Reality Relational Assistance Program
OUR RAP
-and-
Youthful Offenders Understanding Reality
YOUR Program
-or-
Personal Rehabilitation Alternative for Youth
PRAY Program
-divided by-
Post-Release Opportunity Program
PROP
-multiplied by-
The Rehabilitative Community
-equals-

The Answer

After researching nearly one hundred (100) at-risk youth intervention concepts from all over the United States, psychologist Dr. Regan Wilson recommended *The Answer* for national implementation through the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Author's Note: This writer believes that a personal relationship with God is the essential key to achieving the most effective level of true and lasting positive change. It is only through God's work in my life that this work has been conceived. Realizing, however, that not everyone (counselors and offenders alike) shares my faith, I did not wish to exclude anyone from reaping the benefits of this concept. Therefore, as indicated in the above formula, *The Answer* culminates through two variations of the Relational Assistance Service: Where YOUR Program facilitators provide a secular version of the service, PRAY Program facilitators may also offer what God has done in their lives. ("He who has ears to hear; let him hear!")

II. The Relationship

The relationship between offenders is unlike any other and is often misunderstood. It is also the most powerful weapon we possess in the war against crime. Yet, until now there has been no readily available program opportunity that is specifically designed to mobilize and utilize this asset in such a meaningful way. There are, instead, many obstacles that actually hinder and prevent many ex-offenders from effective positive involvement with their younger counterparts. Fortunately, there are some ex-offenders who have managed to overcome the obstacles and make their way into the rehabilitative community. There can be no argument that they often prove themselves to be ranked among the most productive workers in the field. Why? Because of The Relationship.

*** Shared Experiences** - Offenders do things, and go through things, to which others cannot relate. They seek the same sort of adventures, danger and excitement. They rebel against authority and take similar risks, seeking various forms of self-fulfillment, pleasure and emotional gratification. They also suffer similar consequences for their negative behavior. Whether they experience these together, as friends, or with no prior connection to one another, whenever offenders do meet and come together these are still Shared Experiences. For these affairs set them apart from the rest of their peers. The rejection and alienation they experience as a result of their behavior is perhaps the most damaging of all possible consequences. It forces offenders to band together for virtually all social interaction. Certain forms of punishment sponsor huge authority issues and deeply seated resentments. These and many other elements often culminate in the dreaded us-against-them mentality. This attitude, multiplied by any number of other factors, can easily alter a young person's fun-and-fulfillment-seeking motivations into something much more sinister, or even deadly. With little or no respect for the law, "Together we stand! Together we fall!" often becomes their proud motto. *The Answer* rewrites their motto to read: "Together we stand! Together we learn to succeed!"

*** Likes and Dislikes** - It is not an overnight process, or a sudden decision, that causes offenders to become who they are. Behavior patterns are learned over a period of time. Criminal behavior can eventually become spontaneous reactions to certain circumstances and feelings; crimes can also be planned and considered with much prior thought. Regardless of the mental process or motivations through which criminal actions occur, once offenders attain the payoff (whatever it is they are seeking) their behavior seems justified. It gets good to them. They like it! They tend to dislike anything that opposes what they enjoy. Once again, offenders are drawn to each other for fellowship with those who like what they like and who dislike any opposition to their cause. *The Answer* utilizes ex-offenders to present a powerful means of attaining even higher rewards through positive change - rewards without risk of criminal consequences.

*** Acceptance** - Everyone has a need, or at the very least an inward desire, to feel accepted by others. Unfortunately, acceptance usually depends upon many variables. The bottom line, however, is that no one is ever going to be accepted by everyone. Therefore, people in general tend to gravitate toward those who seem to accept them as they are. Where youthful offenders are concerned, the real reasons why they are shown acceptance by their counterparts rarely matter much at all. These young people are often classified as the outcasts of society; the trouble-makers at school, the negative influence on other kids, the black sheep of the family, and the bad boys and girls at home. In order to fulfill their natural need to be accepted, by somebody, they are forced to seek out other like-minded people who will provide a certain amount of validation for who they are. *The Answer* utilizes ex-offenders to invalidate criminal and negative behavior, while leaving total acceptance of the person intact.

* **Support** - Who on earth would support youthful offenders in their decisions to commit crimes? Who would support their reasoning for making those decisions? Answer: Other offenders who share similar motivations. Though the cause may vary from child abuse to parental neglect to ostracism, alienation, or being ridiculed by their peers, the resulting issues are much the same: anger, resentments, loneliness, shame, guilt, depression; the list goes on. These issues create a serious need to seek self-fulfillment and emotional gratification. Those who believe their needs are met through criminal behavior do so for reasons that they justify within themselves. So, they seek the support of others who are usually seeking their own support from them. The popular phrase "Birds of a feather flock together" is a powerful truth with offenders. *The Answer* does not support the criminal behavior of any offender. It does, however, understand their reasoning and serves to redirect their motivations. It fully supports every at-risk youth in their struggle to find fulfillment in positive and productive ways.

* **Trust** - A solid trusting relationship is one of the most important elements in the powerful bond that exists between many offenders. Trust is not something that is freely given. It is earned in various ways: through shared experiences; taking risks; and enduring consequences without sacrificing others in order to save yourself (snitching), which is an alternative often offered by law enforcement agencies. Those who prove to be untrustworthy (those who will snitch), are usually dealt with accordingly and excluded from the group. Offenders who cannot be trusted by their counterparts quickly become the outcasts of the outcasts. Where authority figures are concerned, the us-against-them mentality concludes: "If you are not one of us, you are one of them. If you are one of them, you cannot be trusted. If you cannot be trusted, you obviously cannot offer any advice or direction which will be readily accepted for serious consideration." This is especially so when the advice is contrary to the offender's strongest inclinations, needs and desires. One of the problems in rehabilitation is that trust is also the essential beginning of successful counseling. *The Answer* breaks through this barrier and quickly establishes the most receptive connection possible: a relationship based on trust.

* **Friendship** - For offenders, friendship is usually based on a combination of all the above. *The Answer* is the essence of this powerful relationship, and it can most effectively be utilized to assist the counseling community in leading our young people away from crime-based lifestyles, drugs, and other negative behaviors. It sets the example for the true meaning of friendship.

True and lasting rehabilitation begins within each individual offender. It begins with a decision for positive change and an inward desire to achieve that change. In a similar sense, to find the best solution to the overall problem of crime and recidivism, one must look for *The Answer* within the body of crime itself. For this is where the relationship is strong and exploitable; where decisions and plans are made; where desires and motivations merge; where trust, loyalty and respect abound. Within the body of crime, The Relationship can be a determining factor above all else. However, it is not as much the bonds between offenders that lead them into crime, it is more the common factors that lead to crime that evoke the development of The Relationship. *The Answer* harnesses all of the key elements of this powerful relationship, then utilizes the common bonds to lead our nation's youth away from criminal-behavior-based lifestyles. It most effectively surmounts the psychological obstacles, defenses, and barriers that often prevent rehabilitation. It prompts the decision for positive change and promotes the willingness to do the necessary work. The us-against-them mentality is replaced by a solid trusting, listening and learning relationship. *The Answer* bridges the relational gap and better enables counselors, parents, and teachers to lead our youth towards positive and productive ways of thinking and living.

The Relationship between offenders is the most powerful weapon we possess in the war against crime, and one of the most plentiful resources available. Yet, it has also been the most neglected, and it is understandably so because today's media is primarily geared toward promoting only a negative depiction of prisoners and ex-offenders. This, of course, presents a distorted view of reality. Top stories often cover recently released prisoners who commit even more heinous crimes. Rarely, if ever, do we hear about the ex-con who has turned his mistakes into valuable lessons in life, then turns those lessons into powerful teaching tools for the ultimate benefit of others and society as a whole. Nevertheless, this does occur more often than one might imagine.

Contrary to the image most often portrayed, there are many ex-offenders who do learn from their mistakes and who conquer their past and move on to succeed in society. These are those who, given the opportunity, would do anything within their power to help prevent our young people from falling as far as they themselves have fallen. They possess the relational qualifications necessary to do the work that must be done in order to bridge the relational gap between at-risk youth and intervention efforts. The program formula proffered herein provides proper screening, training, placement and opportunity. The nationwide implementation of this concept provides *The Answer* to the problem of crime and youth crime in America.

III. The Process

The bottom-line goals of youthful (and adult) offender rehabilitation and at-risk youth intervention are clear and axiomatic: (1) to deter offenders from criminal and negative behaviors; and (2) to lead them toward a positive and productive manner of thinking and living. These goals are usually pursued through various forms of education, programs, and counseling. Over the years, many methods have been developed and utilized in our efforts to reach, teach, and deter young offenders from continued criminal behavior. Consequently, youth crime has remained one of our most egregious and prevalent problems. Therefore, in the interest of our youth and creating a safer society, even the most prolific counselors should welcome any resource that will help deliver more successful results.

When youthful offender rehabilitation is the primary long-term goal, it is absolutely essential to employ the appropriate goal-achieving process. *The Answer* is based on a four-phase process designed to relate, motivate, instruct, and provide positive directional opportunities. As previously mentioned in the Conceptual Synopsis, this process was developed and proven most effective while being employed in three (3) separate Youth Awareness programs. Each program was aimed at reaching, teaching and deterring youthful offenders at various levels of the juvenile justice system. From first-time offenders and probationers, to Boot Camp youths, to youthful offenders serving time in adult prisons, this relational approach worked best for most. Endorsed and utilized by every counselor who witnessed its positive impact, the concept was approved for statewide expansion. The process consists of the following four phases.

- * Relational Phase: the foundational beginning, establishing trust, respect, receptivity, and ears to hear the truth.
- * Motivational Phase: creates the desire to learn.
- * Instructional Phase: provides a solid knowledge base and tools for positive change.
- * Directional Phase: offers various directional opportunities through which the process continues to work long after program participation concludes.

These phases are the progressive steps that lead to true and lasting positive change. It is also The Process acclaimed to be most effective in reaching and teaching youthful offenders. While the process itself remains unchanged, the particulars of each phase may vary in light of individual client needs. Establishing these variables usually begins with an empathic understanding of inherent thought patterns most often associated with youth crime. It also involves, wherever possible, a comprehensive analysis of any personal information that may be gathered prior to meeting the clients.

Upon thorough deliberation of all pertinent data, a personal profile of the clients can be determined. This formulation of facts may then be assimilated to establish the most appropriate goal-achieving process for each individual client. It also enables program facilitators to prepare on-point relational introductions and maximum impact motivational presentations. Though originally designed as an offender-to-offender relational-based teaching method, the conceptual elements of this four-phase process are universal. The Process can be easily adapted and employed by any member of the counseling community, as well as by teachers and parents. It can

be applied to programs that require months of in-depth counseling and therapy, or condensed into a brief presentation that promotes receptivity and produces maximum potential for learning.

The logic supporting the process is simple: Before you can hope to successfully counsel any at-risk youth, they must first be willing to listen - this is accomplished through the Relational Phase. Before you can teach them the things they need to know in order face and conquer the challenge of positive change, they must have a desire to learn - Motivational Phase. Before they will have any real hope of experiencing true success in life, they must first learn how to succeed - Instructional Phase. Once we accomplish the first three (3) phases, rather than patting the youth on the back, wishing them "good luck" and sending them on their way, we must provide them with solid directional opportunities. They must have somewhere to go with the knowledge they have attained, and some direction to pursue in order to continue The Process long after program participation concludes - Directional Phase. With that in mind, let's take a look at the problem.

The Problem

There is a huge relational gap between at-risk youth and most counseling efforts.



On one side of the problem we have At-Risk Youth, who are beginning to display irresponsible and criminal behavior that, if continued, will progress and result in many unwanted consequences. On the other side, we have Responsibility, represented by parents, preachers, teachers, counselors and others who try everything they know to help turn these youth away from crime and irresponsibility, and steer them towards a right and responsible life path. Unfortunately, in far too many cases, nothing works well enough and we end up losing these troubled youth to the system, or worse. This is because many youths are socially, mentally and emotionally located way over on the far side of what they perceive to be a deep, dark and seemingly impossible process of positive change. Because certain thinking and behaviors provide some form of emotional fulfillment, the youths hear but do not listen to the authority figures trying to tell them how they should act, what they should and should not do, and that they cannot do the things they think they need to do in order to be happy. Responsible mature adults are constantly standing on the far side of this chasm calling for the youth to come to where they are and be more like them. The youth think: *But you don't understand, or You don't really care.* This is the only excuse young people need to disregard good advice, wise counsel, and the help they need.

Counselors and other authority figures cannot effectively stand on the far side of rehabilitation and expect at-risk youth and offenders to come to them, not when it involves a seemingly impossible journey that they do not want to make. In order to reach anyone, one must first be able to go to them, right where they are. Only then can you, symbolically, take them by the hand and lead them where they need to go.

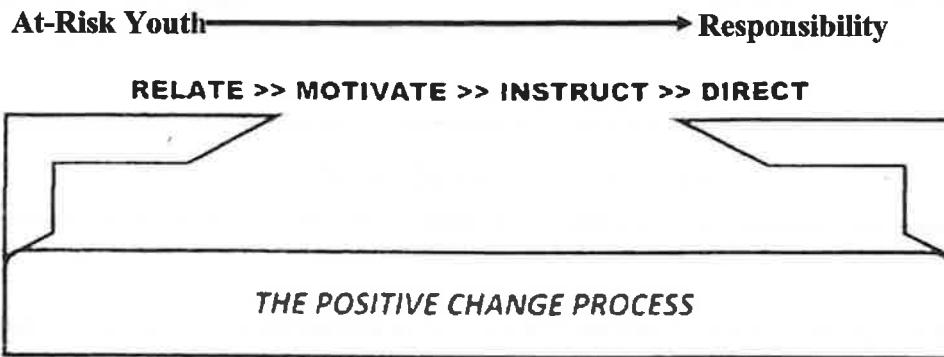
Until we somehow bridge the relational gap that stands between at-risk youth and most counseling efforts, the problem as illustrated above will continue to prevail. So how do we build this bridge? Good question.

The Answer

The actual answer to the problem is based and built upon the real relationship that ex-offenders have with their younger counterparts, who happen to be following them down the same road they have already traveled. When this relationship is properly used to bridge the relational gap between counselors and youth, it strengthens the front lines of at-risk youth intervention, and it is the most powerful weapon we can employ in the war against crime.

Unfortunately, ex-offenders are obviously rarely being used in this capacity, and when it does occur, it usually is not to their fullest potential. The power and effectiveness of this relationship is not some big secret that nobody knows about. For there have always been some, who have themselves been offenders and conquered the challenge of positive change, who then overcame the obstacles in order to get involved in youth intervention. It is a well-proven fact that these ex-offenders often become the most successful and prolific workers in the field. Why? Because of The Relationship, which gives them the unique ability to truly empathize with young offenders. However, there has never been a readily available program opportunity specifically designed to carefully screen, select, train, certify and place enough Relational Assistants in a position to do the work that must be done to provide a comparable solution to the problem.

Utilizing ex-offenders to reach and teach youth bridges the relational gap for counselors.



The following sections A through D provide detailed descriptions of each phase involved in The Process. With proper implementation and application through the described Program Formula, we can expect to achieve our highest possible rehabilitative success rates and our lowest numbers in crime, youth crime, and recidivism.

A. Relational Phase

Establishing the Relationship

Before the process of habilitation or rehabilitation can even begin, the client must first become receptive to the counsel of those who know the way. Establishing trust, receptivity, and the willingness to accept proper direction and guidance is the essential beginning. Unfortunately, this is also a major obstacle that many parents and counselors often find nearly impossible to overcome. Obviously, authority issues place youthful offenders among the most difficult to reach and save. Difficult, yes, but not impossible. *The Answer* is to mobilize and deploy a resource specifically designed to successfully surmount this crucial barrier.

The dilemma is primarily caused by considerable relational deficiencies that often prevail between at-risk youth and those who hope to help them. These deficiencies can range from age, race and/or cultural differences, dress codes, communication barriers, and other contradistinctions. The end result is a relational void that explains one of the reasons why far too many early intervention attempts fail to hit the mark. This relational chasm must be bridged and crossed in order to reach our troubled youth. Youthful offenders generally perceive counselors, parents, teachers and other authority figures who have not *been there* as being unable to truly relate with their problems and reasons for certain behavior. In short, whether it is stealing, drug dealing or abuse, teen sex or violence, when so-called authority figures confront the problem, they are usually perceived by the offender as threatening a behavior thought to be necessary for some form of hope or happiness. Offenders may present a repentant façade while their actual remorse is centered on the consequences of getting caught. “*You don't understand*” is just one excuse used to reject wise counsel. Of course, there are a number of other excuses and self-justifications that work for them to justify continuing their current course of thinking and behavior.

The excuses, justifications, and authority issues represent the initial psychological obstacles and hindrances to early intervention. These must be overcome in order to progress any further in the rehabilitative process. *The Answer* provides the ideal solution for this difficult challenge. The concept presented herein was specifically designed and developed to exploit those who have actually traveled the same paths as youthful offenders; those who have endured the same trials and tribulations, experienced the temptations, taken the risks and received the payoffs. They have also used the same excuses. These are the ones who can best relate with the many issues that revolve around and lead to criminal behavior. In essence, the Relational Assistant knows, experientially, what youthful offenders think and feel.

Moreover, Relational Assistants are actually aware of the true and hard realities that result from continued criminal behavior, for they have already traveled that path to its bitter end and have suffered the ultimate consequences of crime. Their experiential knowledge precipitates a deep abiding concern for their young counterparts, who are basically following them down the road that they themselves have learned to regret. It is this obvious concern, coupled with the facilitator's empathic understanding, which is the basis for Establishing the Relationship.

True concern and empathy work hand-in-hand. Both elements are essential in order to establish trust and receptivity. One is not effective without the other. If concern were sufficient to do the job, then most parents and counselors would have no problem reaching and deterring at-risk youth from crime and irresponsible behavior. If a client perceives concern, but senses a lack of understanding, the wisdom of positive counsel is easily rejected. If a counselor possesses the ability to empathize, but displays little or no concern, the clients may determine that they cannot be trying to help them, which also provides reason to disregard good advice and positive direction.

Of course, most counselors today are trained not to allow themselves to get emotionally involved with their clients. In essence, not to care too much. Maybe this is part of the problem. Kids are very perceptive to feelings and emotions generated around them, and they have a need to feel loved and cared for by those who claim to be

helping them. As a child, I cannot count the times I ran to my dog and cried, "Nobody loves me but you!" She was the only one who ever licked my tears away. Maybe it is time to rethink the position of not becoming emotionally involved with the work. Maybe we should be more willing to invest our whole heart into our lost and troubled youth, regardless of the pain and disappointment we may experience over the losses. I personally believe that our young people are well worth the price we may pay for caring much and saving more. For without love, we are merely making noise.

The combined program formula presented and later described herein provides a powerful plan of action through which ex-offenders are carefully screened, selected, and trained to serve society as highly-qualified Relational Assistants. These facilitators are then placed within the at-risk youth intervention community, working with counselors, helping them to overcome the initial obstacles and break through the psychological barriers that hinder successful intervention. For them it's personal. Let no one mistake how much ex-offenders care for their young counterparts, or how much they would risk to help them learn the truth.

The Relational Phase is the foundational beginning from which a successful rehabilitative process is built. In order to accomplish an effective Relational Phase, a certain relationship must be established, i.e., one that fosters trust, respect and receptivity. This relationship is usually based on a facilitator's proficient ability to relate well with the clients.

Where youthful offenders are the "clients," the most prolific relational proficiency usually requires an empathetic understanding, which is most often reserved for those who have *been there*. It also requires proper training in order to develop and polish specific relational skills that can be employed to bridge the gap between at-risk youth and counseling efforts.

Utilizing ex-offenders in this capacity is equivalent to providing counselors and parents with the key to a rehabilitative door that has thus far been locked. Looking at a larger view of this depiction, the door is virtually unbreakable; it is the only door to a room in which a child is trapped and cannot escape alone. Since youthful offenders are being addressed by one of their own, someone who can empathize and sympathize with their precise predicaments, most of their excuses for not listening are quickly invalidated. This becomes part of the bridge by which counselors, parents, and others may cross in order to reach and save our troubled youth.

The Answer strengthens early intervention by providing a service that assists the counseling community in reaching and saving the largest possible number of youths. The Relational Phase opens the door to the rehabilitative process. With this in mind, there are obviously many factors to be considered in order to conduct the most effective Relational Phase. For example, first impressions are very important. All Relational Assistance Service providers are trained to follow a certain format in developing various Relational Phase introductions. The facilitator's initial challenge is in developing introductions that directly relate with the clients' individual circumstances, behavior problems, and needs. This is easily accomplished by someone who is able to share personal experiences that are similar to those with which clients can closely identify. Of course, no single facilitator can be expected to relate well with each and every youth. There is, however, a method that enables most facilitators to establish a solid relational connection with the large majority of youthful offenders in today's society.

Relational service providers are encouraged to be themselves and to develop their own unique styles of facilitation based on their own abilities, strengths, knowledge and experience. However, all are trained to adhere to the process found most effective in developing various Relational Phase presentations. This process is designed to enable facilitators to best relate to those they are striving to reach. The following outlines the primary steps to conducting a successful Relational Phase.

*** Information Gathering** - The Relational Phase usually begins prior to facilitators ever having contact with the youths. It is important for Relational Assistants to know certain specifics concerning the clients with whom they will be dealing. This enables them to best relate, on a personal level, with any particular group or individual. Whenever possible, the following information should be gathered:

- * Individual personality and character traits
- * Beliefs and motivations
- * Family issues, ethnic and cultural persuasions
- * Social, psychological, emotional, and environmental issues
- * Education and areas of interest, limitations and potential
- * Obstacles to effective counseling (i.e., authority issues, denial, closed channel, etc.)
- * Criminal history, addictions, behavioral patterns

This information will arm facilitators with the knowledge necessary to aim their relational skills directly at the clients' personal needs and issues. It will also prepare them for the interaction phases of the process.

*** Initial Introduction** - Most ex-offenders turned Relational Assistants will be able to draw from a well of past experience. Their experiential reservoirs include many different situations, circumstances and criminal activities. Reinforced with the information above, facilitators are trained to customize and articulate various Relational Phase introductions, which enables them to most effectively reach the largest majority. Though all facilitators develop their own unique style of delivery and possess varying relational skills and qualifications, they are also trained to follow certain guidelines in preparing their introductions. It is important to remember that this concept was designed to reach even the most hard-core criminally-minded kids, by utilizing harder-core ex-offenders who have seen and done it all. With this in mind, these are the guidelines I have found to work best for reaching most youths.

*** Preparation and Delivery** - After assessing all available client data and formulating preliminary profiles, facilitators are trained to prepare introductions that directly relate to the clients' specific problems, needs and behavior patterns. Delivery of the Relational Phase presentations is based on a big-brother type approach. The old *Scared Straight* confrontational approach is not conducive to establishing a receptive relationship. However, a tough-love type delivery is often appropriate and sometimes necessary in order to establish respect. Respect is paramount in breaking through the defensive barriers that leave young offenders unreceptive. Dress code and mastery of the unique idiom of today's youth can also be strong relational tools.

*** Opening Statement** - Immediate positive impact is crucial. If the Relational Phase unlocks and opens the door to trust and receptivity, then the introduction places the key in the lock. Therefore, the opening statements must clear the way for easy access. It is important to understand the general mentality most often confronting Relational Assistants during their initial introduction: the defenses are up! Most clients are true believers in the most dangerous lie ever told, which is the up-side of crime. They have been caught in the trap and are being punished by the authorities. They may or may not appear remorseful and repentant, but are at least inwardly resentful and distrusting. They think they know it all, or at least enough to know what is right for them. Now comes the Relational Assistant, just another authority figure who is going to try and tell them all that lame stuff that they have already heard and did not heed before. The opening statements must grab their attention in a powerful way. It must create a crack in their barrier of beliefs. The opening begins with a cool but concerned greeting, then immediately establishes what the facilitator is and is NOT. An example dialogue follows:

How's it goin', fellas? You okay young brother? Check it out. My name is Michael. The people I'm cool with call me MC. I'll let you know from jump-street that I'm not a counselor, or preacher, or anything like that. I know that the last thing y'all want to hear is somebody trying to tell you what you should or shouldn't do, or how to live your own lives. So, I'm not here to do that, because when I was your age, nobody could tell me anything either. I'm not green to the game, and I know what time it is because I've been there.

The truth is I've been right here, right where you are at now. In other words, I understand exactly what you're going through. I'm here because I've been down that road - all the way down - and I care about what happens to you. So maybe I can give you a little knowledge and some solid information that you might be able to use. You know, put you up on some things that can help you - if you want it.

*** Youth Involvement** - Trained Relational Assistants will be able to sense when and with whom the barriers begin to break. It will become apparent in the clients' posture, nods, attentiveness, and the hopeful look that appears in their eyes. At this point, it is good to engage the youths in light conversation, let them know that this is about them, and that their thoughts are important. Facilitators might ask specific questions that relate directly to them, indicating that the facilitator can identify with these things, too. This will pave the way for the next part of the introduction.

*** Relational Qualifications** - One cannot stand on the far side of rehabilitation and expect youthful offenders to come to you. You must first go to them, right where they are, and gain their trust and respect. Only then can you lead them where they need to go. At this point in the introduction, a line has been cast, clients are nibbling at the bait, and it is time to set the hook. Criminals enjoy crime, and youthful offenders like a good war story about some exciting criminal adventure. (Don't worry, the story doesn't end there.) It is now time for the youths to see themselves in the facilitator. This begins with the personal issues: the abusive or neglected childhood; the death of a loved one; the divorce of parents; no father at all; being ridiculed by peers; wanting to be cool and feel accepted; personal experiences to which the facilitator knows the youths can well relate. The facilitator will follow this line right up to where the clients are now sitting, sharing brief stories that describe some of their own criminal activities. As shown from their own lives and of the youths' behavior patterns, *The Relationship* begins to take form. The facilitator's shared experiences represent a large portion of their relational qualifications, which represents empathy to their clients. Empathy is a powerful tool for establishing trust, respect and receptivity.

*** Brotherly Concern** - At this point Relational Assistants have shown their ability to experientially relate with their young counterparts' personal issues, behaviors, and problems. They are now prepared to provide the youths with one of their most essential needs: brotherly love and true concern. However, even the sincerest display of concern is incomplete without sharing the reasons why.

*** Truth and Reality** - Example dialogue: *They say that experience is the best teacher. Have y'all ever heard that? Well, young brothers, I have a news flash for you. If you have to learn the lessons I've learned, by going through the same experiences I have, you're going to pay a price that none of you want to pay. I'm here because you've been lied to. That's right, lied to! And you want to know who told you the lie? I did...and so did everybody else you saw in the game and decided to follow down that road. When you saw us hanging out and having a good time - into drugs, fast money, and crime - as soon as you thought, Yeah! That's what I want! I can do it like that and get away, at that very moment you became believers in the most dangerous lie ever told. It's a lie because it only tells you part of the deal, which is the up-side of crime. But there are some terrible truths that are hiding right behind the lie, and you don't even realize how close you might be to experiencing them for yourselves. I know I didn't. When people try to talk about that part of it, when they try to warn us about where we're heading if we don't tighten up, we don't listen because we think they don't understand what's really happening. Plus, we think we've got it all figured out anyway. The lie is so seductive that we don't even want to hear the truth. The reason guys like me represented the lie to you is because we believed it, too. It's so easy to get tricked, to think we have it all under control, and that we're slick enough to do whatever we want without getting caught. Then, when we do slip and get in trouble, nothing much happens to us - nothing we can't handle, anyway.*

Our parents scold us, punish us, put us on restrictions, or don't pay much attention at all. It's no big deal, right? Well, the punishment can get pretty crucial, but that usually pisses us off even more and causes us to try to be even slicker. The system slaps us on the wrist, puts us through some program, or on probation. Maybe we do a little time in a detention center or Boot Camp. They try to scare us with their warnings about where we're heading, but we don't think that will ever happen to us. Then one day, when you least expect it, you're standing in front of that judge again - it might even be for something real petty - and he gets tired of messing with you. Then it happens. He puts the hammer down and slams you!!!

All of a sudden you find yourself in a living hell, where you never thought you'd be, with more time than you know what to do with, and there's no way out. You're thinking, I could have, should have, wish I would have listened to somebody!!! That, my friends, is the truth that hides behind the lie. You can believe me because I've been there, too. (Dialogue continues with hard realities shared.)

*** Options** - *But it doesn't have to end up that way for you, because I don't think you brothers are dumb enough to believe that experience is always the best teacher. I think you're sharp enough to know that, sometimes, the experience of others is the best way to get up on something good. That's why I'm here. I'm not trying to scare you by running some stupid boo game, and I'm not here to try to tell you how to live, either. That's on you. It's your life and you're the ones who have to pay the full price for bad decisions - even though the people who care about you will pay, too. I'm just here to give you some solid information, to show you what's really happening, and to let you know how this thing really works. If you pay close attention, if you take in this info as if your life depends on it - because it just might - then I may be able to show you some pointers on how you might be able to turn this whole thing around.*

*** Other Points of Consideration** - Most young people have short attention spans. It is therefore best to make introductions fairly brief, but to be honest and complete. Keep it interesting for the youths and avoid redundancy. Include the feelings involved with the Shared Experiences to which clients can relate. Communicate on a level that will help establish a connection. Speak their language, understanding and utilizing the various idiomatic terms and phrases of their generation. Laughter is yet another barrier breaker. Causing youths to laugh is an excellent ice-breaking technique, one which promotes receptivity. Young people most readily partake in that which they enjoy. All youths want to have fun. Therefore, in order to promote enthusiasm and commitment, the work of positive change should be somewhat enjoyable, and it can be, especially if they like and enjoy listening to the people who are trying to help them through the process. Though some Relational Assistants are more adept than others, no single facilitator will be able to reach and relate with each and every youth. However, for virtually every young offender, there are facilitators who will be able to relate to their specific circumstances. Counselors, therefore, are able to request and screen available facilitators for specified relational qualifications that best assimilate with their clients' needs. It may also be beneficial to utilize more than one Relational Assistant at any given time. Where one is unable to relationally connect, another may be able to do so.

*** Creating the Bond** - Following the initial facilitator introduction, it is important to allow the youths to introduce themselves. This is done through a Relational Assistance Program (RAP) session, which is conducted by the facilitator. By providing an opportunity for them to share some of their own problems and experiences with someone who they now know can relate and empathize, a special bond begins to form. The bond solidifies when facilitators show their true concern for what the youths have experienced. In turn, The Relationship is quickly established. RAP sessions enable facilitators to gain a better insight as to the real issues and reasons for the clients' criminal and irresponsible behavior. They also reveal specific personal needs that can later be addressed. All Relational Assistants are trained to conduct RAP sessions in an appropriate manner most conducive to rehabilitation. At this point facilitators are now prepared to move into the next step of the Relational Phase.

*** Building the Bridge** - Once The Relationship has been established on a firm foundation of trust, respect and receptivity, it is time to begin the work of building the bridge between at-risk youth and intervention efforts. Counseling is obviously a primary key to successful early intervention. However, the role and responsibilities of those who counsel young offenders are not limited to certified professionals. With this in mind, the relational bridge must extend not only to licensed counselors, but also to parents, teachers, and all others who provide positive direction and guidance. Where counselors and caseworkers are concerned, authority issues often stem from the fact that they are presumed to be part of the offenders' punishment. These clients are usually forced into counseling by order of the Court, or by frustrated parents desperate to save their kids. Regardless of how the association originates, if youthful offenders have not chosen to be counseled, they usually remain unreceptive. They may act as though progress is being made, but statistics show that far too many are merely playing the game while looking forward to getting back to their friends and continuing the behaviors they have learned to enjoy. Relational Assistants are highly-qualified bridge builders. The bridges they build are strong enough to support counselors, parents, preachers and teachers in their best efforts to reach and save our nation's youth from the life-destroying trap of destructive behavior.

*** Relational Phase Alternatives** - Depending upon the various program structures and environments in which the clients are being counseled, there are many alternatives that may help to affect a successful Relational Phase. For example: If Relational Assistants find themselves working with youths in a halfway house, detention center, or other types of group facilities, they may be able to join the youths in playing sports or other enjoyable activities. Giving a good speech is important, but there is nothing better for establishing The Relationship than interaction with the clients. Facilitators are therefore encouraged to find out what the clients enjoy - other than crime - and, if possible, become involved.

For the trained facilitator, developing the kind of relationship that will help save their young counterparts is a matter of becoming a big brother, a confidant, and a true friend. Where some counselors and program structures may only provide time and opportunity for brief presentations, others may allow more in-depth involvement. One-on-one peer facilitation will make The Relationship personal.

The steps and guidelines described above, as well as the following three (3) phases of The Process, are flexible and can be expanded or condensed to accommodate the time, resources, or restrictions within the program structure. Obviously, the more time and involvement facilitators have with youths increases their effectiveness. Under any circumstances, facilitators are dedicated to providing the best possible service, for they are trained to make the most of any opportunity to reach and teach our youth the truth.

B. Motivational Phase ***Creating the Desire to Learn***

An effective Relational Phase will promote trust, respect and receptivity. It will begin to establish the bridge by which counselors may cross in order to reach and teach our troubled youth, and it creates the solid foundational relationship through which a successful rehabilitative process can be built. The Relational Phase does not, however, produce positive change, which is the most difficult challenge every offender must face in order to have hope for a better life.

Positive change requires great effort and hard work. It demands sacrifice of self, facing and fighting fears, painful issues, and deeply-suppressed emotional trauma; a willingness to reconsider beliefs, and a true desire for change. For most offenders (youths and adults) the challenge is so daunting that it often seems beyond reach. Consequently, many merely accept what appears to be their lot in life, allowing themselves to be carried along with the waves of circumstance and continue down the self-destructive path they seem destined to travel. Most of them simply know no other way.

One thing is certain: It is nearly impossible to teach anyone anything unless they *want* to learn. This is especially true when dealing with the rebellious mentalities typical of youthful offenders and at-risk youth. Therefore, with the Relational Phase complete, and prior to advancing into the Instructional Phase, the quintessential next step in a successful rehabilitative process is Creating the Desire to Learn. Hence, the Motivational Phase. To motivate is to provide motive, incentive, or reasons why at-risk youths should strive toward positive change.

There are two basic forms of motivation: negative and positive. Negative motivation presents a starkly vivid view of the many harsh and hurtful consequences that will be experienced through continued criminal behavior. Positive motivation presents and promotes the awesome rewards and blessings one can expect to receive by turning away from destructive behavior and pursuing positive and productive ways of thinking and living. *The Answer* employs both forms of motivation by training facilitators to utilize various tools to create maximum impact and instill a strong desire to succeed. The Motivational Phase may include any or all of the following methods of motivation.

Negative Motivation

Offenders generally commit crimes with no intention of getting caught. Therefore, before any presentation of the negative aspects of crime will have a meaningful effect, young offenders must first be made to understand and believe that continued criminal behavior can and will cause them to experience the consequences. The primary goal of negative motivation is to deter offenders from crime. Motivational tools may include any or all of the following:

* **Personal Testimony** - Relational Assistants are trained to deliver powerful testimonies, describing in detail the harsh and costly consequences that they themselves have experienced as a result of their own criminal behavior. Their stories may include not only their own experience, but also the pain and suffering they caused their families, friends, loved ones, and victims - something to which most offenders can well relate. An example dialogue follows:

Remember when I told you that you were lied to by guys like me who believed the lie ourselves? I told you that when you saw us in the game: into drugs, fast money, and crime; and you decided to do it like that, you became believers in the lie. The lie is the up-side of crime. But there is a down-side, too. Unfortunately for you, when we got busted and went away, you didn't get to see that part of it. That's the truth that hides behind the lie.

I'm here to tell you the truth, the whole truth, all of it. Because I've been where you are, and where you might be heading, and I care about what happens to you. That's why I'm gonna tell you how somebody lied by making you think it's all good, how we fool ourselves into thinking that prison or worse won't happen to us.

Here, let me show you what I mean. All of you have been in some trouble. Right? And somebody ordered you to go through this program and you'd probably rather be anywhere else than sitting here listening to a guy who messed up even worse than you. But I was seventeen when I first got put on probation so most of you got me beat on that tip. I got in trouble growing up - stealing and stuff - but I was really just partyin', hangin' out and having a good time. No big deal. Right? I definitely wasn't the kind of guy who goes to prison! None of you look like the prison type, either. I mean raise your hand if you actually believe you're gonna end up in prison within the next few years. Nobody? Well, I've got some good news and some bad news. The good news is that some of you might be right. The bad news is that statistics prove that most of you are wrong, that more than half of you will be in prison by the time you're twenty-one, or dead. Unless you can figure out how to turn some things around.

See, I thought the same way you're thinking: that that won't happen to me. I really didn't take the warnings seriously, didn't pay much attention when people tried to steer me in a different direction. Because I was doing things I really thought were right for me. And nobody could tell me how to live my life, or that I couldn't party and have a good time. So, I kept going the way I was going and doing the same things, even though I'd sometimes get into trouble.

Then my dad got killed when I was sixteen. A year later my mom was killed in a head-on collision. Now nobody could tell me anything. That's when I got off the chain for real. They put me in a juvenile program not long after my mom died. Put me on probation after that. No big deal. Right? I still wasn't the prison type.

Then I violated my probation. My fiancée got killed and I got drunk and took off from a restitution center. I was violated for changing residency without permission of my probation officer - just a technical violation, no new charges. No big deal. Right? At least it didn't seem so until that judge sent me to prison with more time than I could do!

That's how we get tricked. The system slaps our wrist a few times, gives us a couple of breaks, keeps telling us to bring our toothbrush the next time we get in trouble. But we really don't think we'll ever get sent to that terrible place called prison. And when we go back to doing the things we like to do; we're definitely not planning on getting caught again. But then we do get caught, because anything we do, good or bad, right or wrong, will always eventually catch up to us. The judge will eventually get tired of messing with you. BAM! You're suddenly trapped and there's no way out.

Now I'm going to tell you exactly what it's like in prison. I'm going to tell you the truth and give it to you straight. What you do with this information is on you. You can let it go in one ear and out the other, if you want. Or you can use it to prepare yourself, in case you end up in front of the judge just one more time and he gets tired of slapping your wrist and decides to SLAM you. At least you'll know what to expect when you get to prison, and what it takes to survive. Or, what I hope you'll do is pay close attention to everything I tell you, as if your life depends on it. Because it does! And because the information I give you is knowledge you can turn into wisdom and use to help you turn your life around.

The first thing you should know is that everybody who goes to prison gets tried and confronted with things you don't even want to think about. Some get tried harder than others. Some of you would catch pure hell, like I did. But everybody is tried and tested to see if you have enough heart, and a good enough fight game, to do time the way you choose to do it. If you don't have the courage to stand up and do what it takes to survive, you'll end up doing time the way somebody else tells you to. And that is not what any of you want to do. Believe that! Also, you'll be treated like something less than human, something called an "inmate", which makes you feel like the lowest form of life on earth. (This dialogue should include graphic depictions of the many difficulties, hardships, and feelings associated with incarceration.)

*** Informational Presentations** - By this point in The Process most clients will have reached their highest state of receptivity. This is, therefore, a good place to present information, views and opinions of people employed at various levels of the judicial system. Police officers can describe their responsibilities, their primary purpose to protect society from criminals, arrest and detention procedures, et cetera. They can offer true stories of tragic events caused and experienced by youthful offenders. Jailers, juvenile detention officials, Boot Camp officers, prison guards - all or any of these may be requested to present their own informational perspectives.

*** Video Presentations** - There are countless numbers of high-impact educational videos available for use in rehabilitation. Video presentations portraying the harsh and vile realities of drug abuse, alcoholism, and crime can be carefully selected to focus on specific problems and issues. They are also excellent motivational tools for at-risk youth.

* **Tour Programs** - Jail and prison tour programs, when well-coordinated with The Process described herein, can be the most powerful motivational deterrent of all. They can also prove to be detrimental to the learning process when they employ *Scared Straight* confrontational/terror tactics rather than the relational approach for reaching and teaching youth.

This writer has found a far more effective way to instill a healthy fear of prison, through an offender-related relational learning process, without terrorizing kids to the point of destroying The Relationship and teaching them nothing at all. (For further information refer to Chapter IV, A, Youth Awareness Prison Tour Program: *The Prison Experience*.)

Positive Motivation

After creating maximum negative impact, and instilling a healthy fear of the impending consequences resultant of continued criminal behavior, it is important to proffer the benefits and blessings attainable through positive endeavors. Negative motivation works to deter offenders from doing wrong. Subsequently, positive motivation inspires them to do right. Motivational tools may include:

* **Personal Testimony** - Once again, The Process utilizes Relational Assistants, who have been trained to provide powerful presentations as to the many rewards that may be reaped by accepting help and pursuing a new and positive way of life. Facilitators are able to show in themselves the hope that young offenders have of actually achieving the changes necessary to succeed. Through that hope, and the living example set by Relational Assistants, young people find the positive motivation they need to face the challenges of positive change. Since Relational Assistants have successfully completed The Process themselves, there is no one more qualified to show their young counterparts the way. An example dialogue follows:

Now for the good news! It doesn't have to end up that way for you. You don't have to fall as far as I fell, or experience the hell that I went through in order to learn what I have learned. Because you're a lot smarter than I was. You're smart enough to listen when you know that somebody's telling you the truth. And you're smart enough to use the things that I have learned through my mistakes so you don't have to make the same ones. Right?

Because you're smart, you realize that you don't want to experience the crash and burn you're heading for right around the next corner, and you know you don't want to face what's waiting at the end of the road you're on. So, you want to pay very close attention to everything we give you. Because we'll be giving you some of the keys you'll need to unlock and open the doors to a successful life. (Dialogue continues with rewards for change.)

* **Informational Presentations** - Opportunities for success and happiness are always available in countless ways to those who are willing to work hard, do whatever it takes to overcome the obstacles, and earn what they need to succeed. And there are people in all walks of life - education, business, computer technologies, sports, industry, service, entertainment, vocational trades, et cetera - who can present the opportunities available to clients who stay out of trouble and are willing to learn. Informational presentations help clients to develop areas of interest and assists them in the later goal-setting portion of The Process.

* **Video Presentations** - Just as movie and educational videos can be used to depict the serious consequences of drugs, crime, and other negative behaviors, there are also highly inspirational videos to help inspire positive action. Carefully selected video presentations, followed by on-point discussions, are excellent motivational tools.

The Motivational Phase is a maximum impact wake-up call that opens the eyes of at-risk youth to the actual realities and harsh consequences resultant of crime. It causes them to realize that they do not, under any circumstances, wish to experience these realities and consequences in their own lives, and teaches them that they will indeed suffer the total cost and pay the ultimate price should they continue in crime. The Motivational Phase also gives hope to those who are lost in hopelessness. It provides options, inspires and motivates. It offers help, direction and leadership to those who will one day become leaders themselves. It brings focus to areas of potential and builds confidence in the clients' own talents and abilities. It instills a willingness to work toward positive change and creates a desire to learn what at-risk youth need to know in order to achieve that change and succeed in life.

C. Instructional Phase ***Tools for Positive Change***

With a solid trusting relationship established, and a desire to learn instilled, it is now time to teach these young people what they need to know in order to pursue positive change. This is the Instructional Phase, through which the real work begins, where program facilitators can share the many valuable lessons they have learned from their own mistakes and experiences. This is also where counselors can now achieve their highest potential for habilitative or rehabilitative success.

For this phase, Relational Assistance Service providers are trained to assist counselors, or other youth workers, with effective participation in group therapy sessions, one-on-one peer facilitation, and other functions or duties appropriate to specific program structures. Some of the many advantages to having those who have been there assisting in these capacities are: they already know, experientially, the real issues involved; they recognize deception, or game, when they hear it, and they are highly-skilled truth seekers.

Far too often, when we are presented with our first opportunities to work with, reach, and save at-risk youth, we completely miss certain issues that can later grow into something very destructive, dangerous, and even deadly. Relational Assistants receive in-depth instruction on the criminal mentality, criminal thinking errors and correctives. In short, Relational Service providers know what to look for because they already have a solid grasp of cause and effect, and underlying issues. They know where to look and how to bring what is hidden in shadowy depths to light.

Group therapy is an excellent way to establish, or broaden, certain lines of communication and helps to identify specific issues that need to be addressed. One-on-one peer facilitation/counseling takes The Relationship to a deeper and more personal level of trust and disclosure. This enables Relational Assistants to discover problem areas that counselors might otherwise overlook (because the client keeps it hidden).

Both PRAY and YOUR Program facilitators are trained and certified through Offenders Understanding Reality Relational Assistance Program (OUR RAP), to instruct and educate in various areas of Life Skills. They may provide fundamental knowledge in areas carefully selected to address the particular issues and needs most prevalent to at-risk youth. Learning these Life Skills arms young people with powerful tools for positive change. All Relational Assistance Service providers receive in-depth Instructional Phase training and certification that qualifies them to assist with Life Skills instruction in the following areas:

- * Anger and Resentments - Defeating the Enemy Within
- * Negative and Positive Thinking - Consequences and Rewards
- * Character Building - Developing Responsibility
- * Peer Pressure - Acceptance Through Crime
- * Addictions - How to Overcome
- * Communication Skills - A Key to Success
- * Employability Skills - Earning a Job
- * Goal Setting and Goal Achieving - Short Term and Long Term

Learning these Life Skills helps at-risk youth to identify and properly address their own personal issues, false-beliefs, and criminal thinking errors. It also provides the fundamental knowledge necessary to overcome problem areas and pursue a positive manner of thinking and living.

Since Relational Assistants have, themselves, had to work through the same or similar issues as their young counterparts, and have also had to learn how to apply knowledge and instruction in their own lives, there is no one better or more qualified to teach our youth in these areas.

Instructional Phase Life Skills training, coupled with counseling, therapy, and one-on-one peer facilitation, is the most effective means to establishing a strong and sturdy foundation from which young offenders and at-risk youth can strive toward success.

D. Directional Phase

The Process Continues

One reason why rehabilitation programs so often fail to produce permanent positive change in youthful offenders is that they usually lack a truly effective aftercare conclusion to initial treatment. In fact, most programs offer only a certain amount of treatment and counseling, from which clients may show signs of progress, or at least the impression thereof. Treatment and counseling often produce seemingly impressive results that often prove to be short-term at best. Once the formal program participation has been completed, room must be made for the never-ending flow of new clients. Therefore, they pat the youth on the back and say, "Good luck and stay out of trouble." Then the youth are sent right back into the exact same family situations and environmental circumstances through which their problems and issues originated. Consequently, the lessons clients learn during treatment quickly grow vague and distant, and even the best of intentions wane under the powerful pressures and influences that led our youth astray to start with. *The Answer* calls for and provides one final phase to help ensure a continuation of the change process long after formal treatment concludes. The Directional Phase is specifically designed to keep the clients' new-found knowledge and direction tangibly present and actively working until the process of change is complete.

The Directional Phase is a follow-up aftercare plan that ties in perfectly with the final Instructional Phase lesson in Life Skills: Goal Setting and Goal Achieving – Short Term and Long Term. Through that lesson, clients help to establish their own aftercare plan of action. This plan will correlate with each individual's personal needs, interests, and desired direction in life. Goals may include: obeying court orders, paying restitution, community service, counselor suggestions for further treatment, making amends, educational pursuits, involvement in sports, music, or other activities. Some may even aspire to be Relational Assistants.

This Final Phase of The Process is actually an extension of the last lesson taught during the Instructional Phase, when clients set their own short term and long-term goals. The pursuit of these goals teaches youths how to turn their new knowledge into wisdom - wisdom is doing the right thing with the knowledge you have. The clients' goals will obviously vary, according to individual needs and interests; they may even alter, or be modified as

future circumstances dictate. However, the Directional Phase holds each client accountable for pursuing and achieving all goals set and established during the Instructional Phase.

Follow-up and aftercare procedures may also vary due to different program structures, counselor availability, resources, and other considerations. Truly effective aftercare requires continued care, concern, and involvement. Therefore, Relational Assistants are committed to helping counselors maintain forward momentum throughout the entire process of positive change.

It is this writer's studied opinion that criminal-behavior-based lifestyles are learned and developed over time. Therefore, it stands to reason that positive-behavior-based lifestyles can, and must, also be learned and practiced until finally habituated as youths pass through the test of time. As Relational Assistants are utilized to lead and guide and show at-risk youth the way to success, hope and happiness, it is my hope, my prayer, and my vision that *The Answer* will help to save thousands upon thousands of young souls who may otherwise be lost to the system.

The true power behind *The Answer* is manifested through the Directional Phase. For The Relationship between young offenders and ex-offenders, which has hereby been forged and shaped and turned into something good, is now being used to its fullest potential. As Relational Assistants encourage and teach our youth to turn away from crime and become leaders, role models, and productive members of society, we see why those who have *been there* are indeed the most powerful weapons we have in the war against crime. We are also glad that they have joined the fight for right.

IV. The Formula

As stated in the Conceptual Synopsis, *The Answer* to difficult and complex problems is rarely found in a simple solution. However, the correct answer can always be determined when the proper formula is applied. Since we know that we cannot realistically hope to solve the overall problem of crime completely, *The Answer* can only be found in a new resource that simply works more effectively than current methods alone.

Just as true change must begin within each individual offender, in order to find the best solution to crime and recidivism on a larger scale, one must look for *The Answer* within the body of crime itself. In Chapter Two we looked at The Relationship between offenders and gained a better understanding thereof. We considered various aspects and analyzed some of the elements involved. We saw positives and negatives, strengths and weaknesses, and we learned how it all could be used to strengthen the counseling community.

In Chapter Three, we covered The Process, through which those who have been there can be utilized most effectively to reach and teach at-risk youth the true and hard realities that result from committing crimes, and how they can help to lead and guide these troubled youths through the difficult process of positive change.

In the past, there have been men and women - quite a few, in fact - who have themselves traveled the same paths as youthful offenders; who have taken those paths to the bitter end and suffered the ultimate consequences of crime. Then, they did the work they needed to do to become the people they needed to be to overcome their past mistakes and move on to succeed in life. Some of these men and women have joined the rehabilitation effort, and there can be no doubt that they often become the most prolific workers in the field.

Unfortunately, the obstacles and hindrances to these powerful assets are such that there has never been enough relationally qualified involvement, nor has there ever been a well-structured and well-coordinated program designed to create and open a door of opportunity for this type of specialized training and participation. Until now. The Formula presents a carefully constructed programs network specifically designed to produce and create *The Answer*. The actual formula presented below is depicted in the context of a mathematical equation. Sub-chapters A through D contain detailed descriptions of each program and how they work together to create and bring forth this powerful new service that strengthens the front lines of youth intervention.

Youth Awareness Prison Tour Program
The Prison Experience
-plus-
Offenders Understanding Reality Relational Assistance Program
OUR RAP
-and-
Youthful Offenders Understanding Reality
YOUR Program
-or-
Personal Rehabilitation Alternative for Youth
PRAY Program
-divided by-
Post-Release Opportunity Program
PROP
-multiplied by-
The Rehabilitative Community
-equals-
The Answer

A. Youth Awareness Prison Tour Program

The Prison Experience

The four-phase relational teaching process, contained and explained in the previous chapters, was originally conceived and developed through two separate offender-to-offender related youth efforts. The In-House Youth Awareness Program assisted youths already incarcerated in prison, while the Boot Camp Counseling Program extended its efforts to youths in a Boot Camp environment.

The outstanding success and positive impact of these two programs were due to the relational teaching process employed and the true concern involved in the actual relationship. The concept was then adapted and applied to the Youth Awareness Prison Tour Program - then known as *The Prison Experience*. This program was endorsed by all participating rehabilitation agencies, counselors and probation officers as being the most effective teaching and deterring tool available to the counseling community. The four-phase relational approach was, in fact, so successful that within one year of its conception *The Prison Experience* was approved for statewide expansion through the Florida Department of Corrections.

While coordinating and developing these programs, I was afforded the rare opportunity to personally work with more than two thousand youthful and adult offenders. Through this extensive effort, I found that the four-phase relational process simply worked best to reach, teach and deter most of our clients from continued criminal behavior. I thought I had found *The Answer* in *The Prison Experience* because prisoners were finally turning away from *Scared Straight* confrontational terror tactics, and were instead tapping into the real relationship they have with young offenders. Program facilitators involved in these efforts were the first Relational Service providers to be trained. They were using their newly developed skills to reach and teach youths in prison and Boot Camp. Finally, through the Prison Tour Program, they were reaching out to society, into the body of crime itself, and touching the heart of the problem in its infancy. Thus, we seemed to be doing all we could possibly do, reaching, teaching, sharing, caring, and impacting the lives of every youth we could feasibly contact from the confines of incarceration. Therefore, I believed that the work we were doing was the best answer we could offer to the problem of crime.

Then the Columbine High School massacre occurred, and I realized our current work was only the beginning. As positive and powerful as the concept was, and as successful as *The Prison Experience* had become, I recognized that even the most effective prison tour program would only accomplish two things: (1) bring offenders to the certain knowledge and understanding that they can and will be sent to prison through continued criminal behavior; and (2) that they do not, under any circumstances, wish to experience that reality in their own life. This was not enough. It was only a starting point, a maximum impact wake-up call. More was needed. The relational process somehow had to be extended beyond the prison gate, and into the rehabilitation community, in order to continue its work through the entire process of positive change. Thus, *The Answer* was conceived, developed through various programs over the past twenty-seven (27) years, and is hereby presented.

As shown in the chapter on the Motivational Phase, prison tour programs can be an excellent tool to be used in the initial phases of counseling. Unfortunately, many prison systems have employed *Scared Straight* tactics for so long that most prisoners have been thoroughly programmed to "scare the kids when we bring them through." The average prisoner does not even realize that he is capable of doing anything else. It does not, however, take a rocket scientist to see how *Scared Straight* destroys the real relationship between youthful and adult offenders, which can and should always be used to its fullest potential. It does not take great insight to know that *Scared Straight* presents a highly distorted and completely negative image of prisoners, which only serves to support "lock- 'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key" campaigns.

The bottom line is that the *Scared Straight* confrontational tactics have no place in a truly successful rehabilitation process. They do more harm than good. Terrorizing and traumatizing kids, as is condoned by counselors and prison officials employing *Scared Straight*, should be against the law. Furthermore, it creates nearly impregnable psychological defensive barriers that are detrimental to rehabilitation.

Scared Straight also distorts, disrespects, and destroys the powerful connection between prisoners and their would-be counterparts, thereby rendering the relationship utterly useless. Statistics show that this confrontational approach has done nothing to reduce youth crime. It has not made a positive difference from its conception to the present, and will make no positive difference in the future. Therefore, the outdated and detrimental *Scared Straight* concept should be replaced, nationwide, with *The Prison Experience*, or a comparable program that employs the four-phase relational process.

The good news is that it takes only a little quality training and restructuring of existing prison tour programs to bring them in line with *The Prison Experience* and turn them into the most effective teaching and deterring tools that they can be. By replacing *Scared Straight* with *The Prison Experience*, we will be adding another relational weapon to our rehabilitative arsenal, a prison tour program that works in direct conjunction with *The Answer*. This is the first element of The Formula.

B. Offenders Understanding Reality Relational Assistance Program

OUR RAP Facilitator Training Initiative

Through many years of struggling and striving against my own addictions, crime and incarceration, I have seen and experienced immeasurable pain, loneliness, hopelessness, anger and resentments. I have also seen all sorts of negative behaviors flowing out of these feelings. However, over nearly forty (40) years of imprisonment, I have rarely met an offender who is unwilling to do whatever he can to help prevent young people from failing and falling to this execrable level of existence. For offenders to become the relational assets described herein, they lack only two things: training and opportunity.

The Offenders Understanding Reality Relational Assistance Program (OUR RAP) provides both training and opportunity. Of course, not every offender is qualified to do the serious work of a Relational Service provider. In fact, since the safety and protection of youth is paramount to *The Answer*, only a small percentage of all prisoners and ex-offenders will survive the extensive screening process and meet all requirements necessary to be eligible for OUR RAP training.

For example, certain crimes and sexual offenses automatically render offenders ineligible for participation. Other screening requirements include a careful analysis of criminal record, disciplinary history, treatment programs, education, and other considerations. In short, only those who have displayed evidence that they have, themselves, been habilitated or rehabilitated will qualify for OUR RAP training. Only those who have conquered the challenge of positive change will receive the opportunities this concept presents for them to help others do the same.

Though only an estimated five to ten percent of all offenders will actually qualify, receive training and certification, and become skilled Relational Assistants, these will be more than enough to make a significant positive difference. Just five percent of all offenders creates a huge and powerful force when it is raised up to strengthen and reinforce at-risk youth intervention efforts state- and nationwide.

OUR RAP training bases can be set up and structured in various ways to accommodate locations, resources, restrictions, and other pertinent factors. In a prison setting, OUR RAP serves the following purposes: (1) provide necessary screening, selection and training opportunities, whereby qualified ex-offenders are educated and taught to most effectively reach, teach and deter youthful offenders from continued criminal behavior; (2) provide relational assistance and support to local youth counselors; and (3) provide positive leadership, guidance and direction to incarcerated youths, teaching them important Life Skills and promoting true and lasting positive change. Program structures may vary, but the primary goals remain the same. OUR RAP is a Relational Assistance Service training initiative, which extends into the In-House Youth Awareness Program and the Offenders Understanding Reality Counselor Support Program. OUR RAP then reaches out to society through two distinct Relational Services designed to assist, support and strengthen community related youth efforts (see the following chapter for details). All programs and services are based on in-depth OUR RAP training and work together to provide *The Answer* to achieving the ultimate goal of saving as many of our nation's youth as possible. Initial training should be conducted in a classroom environment, though it can be accomplished in a dorm, in a cell, on a recreation yard, or wherever certified instructors and qualified trainees can meet. System related support ideally maximizes success. However, since offenders have proven themselves to be the problem, trained facilitators should be prepared to take the responsibilities upon themselves to be *The Answer* whenever possible.

All potential program facilitators will be intensively trained in all aspects of the four-phase relational teaching process, and in all areas pertaining to the Relational Assistance Service. OUR RAP training will include the following instruction:

- * Client information gathering and profiling procedures
- * Preparation and delivery of Relational and Motivational Phases
- * Intensive instruction on criminal thinking errors and correctives
- * Life Skills instructors training course
- * Effective group therapy participation - input and analysis
- * One-on-one peer facilitation and guidelines
- * Follow-up and aftercare goals and procedures
- * Development and preparation of detailed relational résumé
- * Preparing for interviews with counselors and agency administrators
- * Progress and productivity reports to Relational Service centers
- * Standard operating procedures, program guidelines, and mandated requirements

OUR RAP is dedicated to training and producing highly qualified Relational Assistants, and is as serious about saving lives as any other rehabilitative service. Maybe more so because, for OUR RAP instructors and trainees, the work is very personal. This training may be applied to teaching any class or program, for youths and adults.

Upon completion of training, all potential service providers are required to take an in-depth final exam. All exams, along with certification applications and instructor's comments, are forwarded to the head office, where final screening, grading, and verification of application information will be conducted prior to certification. Therefore, certified program facilitators should be recognized as trained professionals, well qualified and highly skilled in this specialized field of service.

OUR RAP training bases can be established anywhere offenders or ex-offenders may be located: prisons, transition programs, halfway houses, drug treatment centers, or any other offender related facility. Relational Service work is the perfect Directional Phase opportunity for qualified ex-offenders. The more focused they are on reaching and teaching at-risk youths, the more steadfast they will be in pursuing their own positive directions.

In prison, as mentioned above, OUR RAP can be expanded to include the In-House Youth Awareness Program and the Offenders Understanding Reality Counselor Support Program. These efforts enable trainees and facilitators to develop and utilize their skills to help the youths in prison, and also to assist counselors from local area communities in reaching, teaching and deterring even their most difficult clients from crime. The Counselor Support Program is easily arranged in much the same manner as when counselors or probation officers schedule their clients to participate in prison tour programs. In fact, this program is an excellent pre-tour experience for youths about to visit a jail or prison. The Counselor Support Program involves counselors, youths and Relational Assistants in Offenders Understanding Reality RAP Sessions. These RAP Sessions are specifically structured to perfectly match OUR RAP facilitators with the youths to whom they best relate. Establishing the strongest possible connection creates maximum receptivity and more on-point interaction, which better enables the facilitator to build the relational bridge that helps to establish the counselor/client relationship most conducive to real and lasting change. (For further information, inquire about the Offenders Understanding Reality Counselor Support Program.)

The In-House Youth Awareness Program can be structured for a classroom or dorm situation. These programs afford facilitators on-the-job training opportunities through which they practice and perfect their facilitation skills while assisting incarcerated youths in pursuing a well-proven change process. The following programs have been written and developed for implementation.

In-House Youth Awareness Program Network

Offenders Understanding Reality Relational Assistance Program OUR RAP

Facilitator Training Initiative

Developing Essential Skills for Facilitation and Mentoring

*** ***

Orientation Format and Commitment Agreement

*** ***

Defeating the Enemy Within

Conquering Anger and Resentments

*** ***

CAPS TO CARS

Initiating the Change Process

*** ***

Character Building

Essential Character Development

*** ***

Direct Involvement Reduces the Effects of Criminal Thinking DIRECT

Identifying, Deterring and Correcting Criminality

*** ***

Goal Setting and Goal Achieving

Developing an Action Plan

*** ***

The Answer

Training in Leadership and Service

OUR RAP training bases produce and provide two distinct versions of the same Relational Service: secular and non-secular. Since everyone does not share the same beliefs, some people (youths and counselors alike) are more receptive to faith-based programs than others. In a similar sense, not all qualified Relational Assistants are grounded in spirituality. This does not, however, negate their ability to provide positive leadership and direction. On the other hand, those who have put their faith in God will certainly convey that faith as an important part of who they are and why. Therefore, OUR RAP provides additional training in appropriate and effective ways to share basic spiritual principles as part of the non-secular service.

Some rehabilitative services do not employ faith-based instruction - some are actually prevented by law from doing so, while others prefer the inclusion of faith-based testimonies and encouragement. Therefore, since *The Answer* requires that no one be excluded from receiving the positive benefits of this concept, OUR RAP brings forth two separate versions of the Relational Assistance Service. YOUR Program and PRAY Program facilitators are certified graduates of the OUR RAP Facilitator Training Initiative, providing both secular and faith-based services. All facilitators are perfectly qualified to build the relational bridge that enables all existing rehabilitative efforts to reach and save more than ever before. In this way, *The Answer* solves the problem by serving all, but utilizes OUR RAP as the screening, training, and certification element of The Formula.

C. Youthful Offenders Understanding Reality YOUR Program **and** **Personal Rehabilitation Alternative for Youth** **PRAY Program**

The Answer (to the problem of crime and youth crime in America) culminates through Youthful Offenders Understanding Reality (YOUR Program) and Personal Rehabilitation Alternative for Youth (the PRAY Program). This two-pronged Relational Assistance Service bridges the relational gap and fills the relational voids that often hinder youth-related rehabilitative efforts. These services also enable ex-offenders - once crime participants - to play an important role in crime prevention, thereby establishing themselves as valuable assets to their communities, as opposed to being considered threats and liabilities.

Over the years I have addressed thousands of prisoners in order to educate, motivate, and inspire active participation in the youth effort. In addition to programs development, I have delivered numerous speeches and produced plays to promote the concept contained herein. In an effort to create awareness and enlist qualified involvement I have often presented the following message to my fellow prisoners:

*Many men have come this way, through a river valley dark and grey.
But one man crossed in the night so dim, and the darkness held no fear for him.
When safe and sound on the other side, he built a bridge to span the tide.
"You there!" said a fellow near. "Why waste your strength with building here?
Your journey and work are done for the day. Never again will you pass this way.
You've crossed this valley dark and wide. Why build this bridge at evening tide?"
The builder paused and lifted his head. "Well, friend, on this path I've traveled," he said.
"There follows after me today, some youth whose feet must pass this way.
In this valley I've crossed in victory, to someone's child a fall may be.
They, too, must cross in the night so dim. My friend, I build the bridge for them."*

Adapted from The Bridge Builder, by William Dromgool.

This poem represents a message, and a truth, that I am presenting here today. But wisdom calls all thinking men to search for and to seek, the knowledge and the truth beyond this bridge of which I speak. So, join me now, as I show you how this applies to me and you. Not because you're black or white, but because we're all in blue.

For those of you who plan to be free men once again, those of you have no intention of ever coming back, guess what? This place is full of men like that, whose intentions were the best, who showed no fear of returning here and therefore failed the test. Why?

Because getting out of prison doesn't solve our problems. In fact, for most, freedom brings a whole world of new problems and difficulties, seemingly designed to make us fail and fall, for right or wrong, to keep us in this living hell, where many believe we all belong.

That's right. As ex-cons, even after we've settled our debt to society by paying the ultimate price for our wrongs, even after we've matured through our mistakes and learned our lessons well, by facing and conquering the difficult challenge of positive change, when and if we leave this place, we're forced to face many major obstacles.

Rejection...Alienation...And a well-earned distrust that may cause many doors of opportunity to be slammed in our faces time and time again. What we need to understand is that these obstacles, right or wrong, are there for a good reason. And that reason is this: Our criminal records PROVE us to be part of the most serious problem in society today. Therefore, in the eyes of society, our DC numbers are as condemning as the mark of the beast in the eyes of God.

So, these are some obstacles that we will face, if and when we leave this place. I'm not even going to talk about the way we might respond to this kind of perceived disrespect, when we're out there trying our best to make it without crime, after paying the price by doing the time. Because this is a reason why many of us fall, feeling forced to say, "To hell with it all!"

The question is: Do you want it to be like that? Or...do you want The Answer?

If you really want to break free from a system that survives on human lives; if you want to succeed in a society that's been programmed not to welcome you back, no matter how one strives, then it's time to stop getting stuck on the problem. It's time to stop complaining about what's wrong and start doing what's right! That's the only way to win this fight.

You don't believe me? Well check this out.

What if, this time, you really do learn from your mistakes? And what if you turned all that you learned into valuable lessons in life, then turned those lessons into powerful teaching tools for the benefit of others and society as a whole? What if you got out of prison and made it your business to visit juvenile homes, detention centers, halfway houses, or Boys Clubs, in order to reach and teach our youth the truth? And what if you were the only one who could make them see the true and hard realities that result from crime, the only one they will hear when they aren't listening to parents, preachers, teachers, or counselors? Because they don't understand! But you understand because you've been there. You've been right where they are, and you've been where they might be heading without your help.

What do you think would happen if you quit talking about, "I've learned from my mistakes, just hoping for a break," and actually did this sort of work? Picture it! This important, powerful, much-needed work that no one else is better qualified to do than you.

What if you were the one to reach and save a business owner's son, by leading him and others away from crime? What kind of men would you then become in the eyes of society? I'll tell you what kind of men you would be. You'd be the kind of men who are deserving of opportunity rather than alienation; men who have earned a place of trust and who have proven yourselves worthy of respect rather than rejection!

Men of change, listen to me! Too many of our young brothers have chosen to follow us down the life-destroying road that we have traveled! When they saw us out there in the game, into drugs, fast money, and crime, as soon as they thought, Yeah! That's what I want! And I can do it like that and get away with it, at that very moment they became believers in the most dangerous lie ever told. It's the upside of crime, and it's a lie because it's only part of the truth, the part that tricks and traps and kills our youth.

Too many will die, believing the lie, the lie that we have told. Too many, it seems, have bought our dreams, the dreams that we have sold. I challenge you, now, to make a vow to go out and tell the truth! It's on us, you see, to set them free. Be a leader for our youth! God will bless you greatly.

The truth has a way of finding its mark and doing what it is meant to do. As a result of presenting the above message to prisoners, I have found that there is no shortage of those who are ready, willing and perfectly capable of doing the work of Relational Service providers. In fact, these assets are a virtually untapped resource, which can and should become one of our most prolific weapons in the war against crime.

Through proper implementation and coordination of the program formula hereby presented, we will create and open a well-structured door of opportunity to train highly-skilled Relational Assistants who will join forces with other rehabilitative services, law enforcement, and criminal justice, to produce the greatest reduction in crime, youth crime, and recidivism this nation can ever hope to achieve.

Some will become YOUR Program facilitators. Others will also introduce our youth to God through PRAY. All of them will be highly motivated habituators and extremely effective at assisting the counseling community in reaching, teaching, and deterring America's youth from crime.

D. Post-Release Opportunity and Program PROP

Part of the current problem is that there are many pre-release and transitional programs designed to assist offenders in somewhat preparing for re-entry into society, but not enough is available beyond that. Society's general mistrust and aversion to ex-offenders typically creates more obstacles than opportunities for success. *The Answer* to this problem benefits society as a whole.

PROP headquarters are established at the head offices of participating prison systems, other offender related agencies, or regional relational services centers. Those who wish to utilize PRAY or YOUR Program facilitator services may contact PROP Headquarters for information regarding available Relational Assistance providers. PROP performs the following functions:

- * Compile accurate records and information pertaining to all OUR RAP trainees and certified service providers. Accessible information will include: release dates, relational qualifications, background, criminal histories, rehabilitative achievements, areas where Relational Assistants are available to provide their unique services, and other pertinent data.
- * Coordinate interviews and meetings between Relational Service providers and rehabilitative agencies, counselors, and other youth intervention efforts.
- * Track and monitor the progress and productivity of all facilitators within that particular PROP Headquarters' range of responsibility.
- * Compile statistical data, provide public information, and any other function necessary for operating an effective Relational Assistance Service.

All information is entered into a database, with complete records on all OUR RAP trainees and Relational Service providers. When a youth worker or agency wishes to employ a PRAY or YOUR Program facilitator within their own program structure, they need only contact the PROP Headquarters in their area. After describing the types of youth with whom they work, PROP can enter various quarries. Starting with the general location of the requesting party, then screening that list down to optimal relational qualifications, PROP can quickly establish the best qualified Relational Assistant available in that particular area and for that particular group of youths. PROP then coordinates initial interviews and monitors progress and productivity. All efforts are coordinated jointly between the rehabilitation community, Relational Service providers, PROP Headquarters, as well as the relational service centers' regional offices.

One of most significant considerations of this entire concept is that there will not be enough Relational Assistants to meet the demand once youth workers become aware of the effectiveness of this powerful resource. PROP will schedule interviews and placement for facilitators months ahead of their release dates from prison. The moment these ex-offenders return to society, they will have somewhere to go to become involved in positive and productive service for their communities. Their work will help to heal families, create a safer society, and save lives. This in turn will help establish them as valued assets deserving of opportunities that are often unavailable to convicted felons.

Relational Service providers are the most likely persons to succeed in not returning to prison, unless it is to show others the way. As for the prisoners who feel so beaten down by crime and its consequences that change seems futile, when they see the tangible benefits of this concept, many will be compelled to strive towards change and seek to achieve a turn-around that will enable them to become a part of *The Answer*.

PROP is the key coordinating and accountability element of The Formula. It brings *The Answer* to the counseling community and the nation.

V. Conclusion

It seems that every time we watch the news, or read a newspaper, we see heart-wrenching reports of heinous crimes being committed by offenders who were once in custody. Murders, rapes, child abductions, and molestations are constantly occurring throughout our entire nation. Whenever a convicted felon is released and commits another terrible crime, society rightfully screams, "Why did you ever let him out?" The end result is that all offenders pay the price of condemnation.

However, not all offenders can rightfully be stereotyped and placed in the same report with those who continue to commit such heinous acts of violence. For there are those of us who have learned from our mistakes, and have done the work necessary to become the men (and women) we need to be in order to succeed in society. Furthermore, we (who were once members of the body of crime, but have fought the good fight of positive change) now stand out and stand up as a powerful force against those who continue to promote and participate in crime. We stand against sexual predators who prey on women and children; we stand against violent abuse and crime in every form; and we are fully prepared to stand strong and fight for right against such things!

As I consider the conclusion of this written work, I think it is important for us to remember that the issues and thoughts that lead to even the most despicable crimes usually begin at an early age. Everyone can be reached by someone, in some way, at some point in time. The key is in finding the right person, who uses the right approach, in the right way. While developing this concept, I first asked God to give me wisdom, understanding, and discernment. I then asked myself, "What could have gotten my attention and steered me in the right direction before I ruined my life?" From these questions and my prayerful request of God, *The Answer* was conceived. I have now invested more than twenty-seven (27) years in the development of all elements and programs hereby presented.

In conclusion, please permit me to mention the tragic event that inspired this work. It need not have occurred and could have been prevented with the help of a skilled Relational Assistance Service provider. I speak of this tragedy because of the impact it had upon our entire nation, and because it sent our not-so-safe society on a desperate search for *something* that might prevent such things from ever happening again. It sent me on my own search for *The Answer*.

You may or may not know that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris had been in trouble with the law long before the Columbine High School massacre. In fact, it was reported that after being arrested for breaking into a commercial van and stealing electronic equipment, both boys were placed in a juvenile diversion program. They paid weekly visits to a “diversion officer” and were subjected to a range of reform programs. They participated in anger management classes, did community service work, and were prohibited from owning weapons or explosives.

The program facilitators for both boys marked their prognosis as “good.” Klebold’s case officer wrote, “Dylan is a bright young man who has a great deal of potential.” Harris’ prognosis similarly stated, “Eric is a very bright young man who is likely to succeed in life. He is intelligent enough to achieve lofty goals as long as he stays on task and remains motivated.”

It was not the counselors’ fault that they missed the mark and failed to discover the lethal truth that raged within these youths. Without The Relationship previously described, and the sort of insight that *The Answer* is based upon, counselors often see only an ostensible compliance as young offenders perform what they think is expected of them.

However, if a trained Relational Assistant had been working with Eric and Dylan alongside and in conjunction with their diversion officer, I can almost guarantee that the true and deadly issues that these youths were struggling with would have surfaced, or at least would have become apparent to the Relational Assistant before they manifested through such a horrible tragedy.

On the five-year anniversary of Columbine, NBC news reported on the long-lasting effects of that sad day. Twelve students, one teacher, two teenage killers...*all dead!* Sean Graves, a survivor who was shot five times and crippled by his injuries, said, “We should move on and find out what we can do to prevent it from happening again.” I’m sure most of us concur with Sean’s statement. Unfortunately, the report went on to say that forty-three student deaths had occurred that year, the largest number since Columbine! Now, school shootings have become a regular event. Hiring gun-toting guards and arming teachers will not address the root problem of youth crime in America.

“Get Tough on Crime” policies have had their chance to make a positive difference. All they have accomplished is the spending of billions of dollars on prisons, resulting in America suffering the highest per capita incarceration rate in the world. These tough sounding policies have done very little to solve the core issues. Now is the time to address crime at its infancy, which is where we can best solve the problem. Too many people are dying. Too many families are being torn apart and victimized by crime and the consequences thereof. It is long past time we start winning the war. It is time to mobilize and utilize the resource that habilitates, rehabilitates, and helps create a safer society.

PRAY and YOUR Program Relational Services, working in conjunction with the counseling community, is *The Answer* to crime and youth crime in America.

Appendix

-- Part Two --

Relational Services Training and Certification Process:

OFFENDERS UNDERSTANDING REALITY RELATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

OUR RAP

***FACILITATOR TRAINING INITIATIVE
RELATIONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICE TRAINING INITIATIVE
AND THE
COUNSELOR SUPPORT PROGRAM
THE PRISON EXPERIENCE***

-- Part Three --

THE ANSWER's Progressive Programs Manual:

**YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS UNDERSTANDING REALITY
YOUR PROGRAM
AND
PERSONAL REHABILITATION ALTERNATIVE FOR YOUTH
PRAY PROGRAM**

Secular and Faith Based Versions of the Relational Assistance Service

Program One:
Defeating the Enemy Within

Program Two:
CAPS TO CARS

Program Three:
Character Building

Program Four:
***Direct Involvement Reduces the Effects of Criminal Thinking
DIRECT***

Program Five:
Goal Setting and Goal Achieving

Program Six:
The Answer to Crime and Youth Crime
Training in Leadership and Service

Part Two

Relational Services Training and Certification Process:

**OFFENDERS UNDERSTANDING REALITY RELATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
OUR RAP**

**FACILITATOR TRAINING INITIATIVE
RELATIONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICE TRAINING INITIATIVE
AND THE
COUNSELOR SUPPORT PROGRAM
THE PRISON EXPERIENCE**

With institutional support and strong outside sponsorship, the Lifers' Group and Marion Correctional Institution provided the long-awaited opportunity for the implementation of the training bases for THE ANSWER TO CRIME AND YOUTH CRIME IN AMERICA. After more than 27 years of diligent pursuit, Michael's vision for THE ANSWER is finally manifesting.

Even before THE ANSWER's first phase of training was complete through the Lifers' Group sponsored Facilitator Training Initiative, Mr. Curls was asked to also provide this innovative opportunity to the SAGE programs network as well. With the first-class graduates progressing to the Relational Assistance Service Training Initiative, to earn their professional certification, THE ANSWER's relational services for at-risk youth intervention now has 3 training bases producing highly skilled mentors and service providers. The following photos were taken during the graduation ceremony for the first graduating class of 2022.



THE ANSWER's Facilitator Training Initiative first graduating class, with lead facilitator Michael Curls (bottom left), sponsor Bob Law (bottom center), Lamar Hill, Stephin Jamison, and Lifers' Group coordinator Kris Helton (bottom right).



Sponsor Bob Law (right) presenting THE ANSWER's originator Michael Curls (center) the Lead Facilitator Certificate of Achievement, with Co-Coordinator, Lamar Hill, Trainer Stephin Jamison and Lifers' Group Coordinator Kris Helton looking on.



A very surprised Michael Curls also receiving the Lasting Impact Award for nearly 30 years of diligently pursuing his vision of THE ANSWER TO CRIME AND YOUTH CRIME IN AMERICA, with Master of Ceremonies Michael Minor looking on.