

YOUTH CHOICES PROGRAM Monroe Correctional Complex

January 1, 2006

The Monroe Correctional Complex (MCC) offers a Youth Choices Program that is designed to help deter teenagers from engaging in illegal activity and to help stop those already involved by utilizing positive alternatives. The goal of this program is to help teens understand the purpose of rules at home and in society, and the consequences when rules are broken.

The evening news and daily newspapers are overflowing with stories of youth violence and crime. This program focuses on the challenges teenagers' face. All teens are welcome to participate. Educators, parents and school counselors are also encouraged to attend. Adults will gain insight into the difficult world young people face today and how it is different from the one they grew up in.

The program is facilitated by an open forum with offenders, many of whom have been incarcerated since they were young. These offenders hope to help young people acknowledge that they are in control of their futures. Comparisons are drawn between everyday choices made by teens and the resulting consequences. Relating from their "real life" experiences, they discuss the hidden truth and pain of their decisions. This is not a "Scared Straight" program. Tactics of intimidation are not used as many of these teens live within their own war zone. Dialogue is encouraged and questions allowed at any time. Education on the dangers of drug use, the improprieties of gang affiliation, and teen sex are just some of the topics covered. A PowerPoint presentation shows the daily routine of offenders within the institution. In addition to a panel of 3 or more offenders, prison officials are present.

The MCC Youth Choices Program is held in the MCC-Washington State Reformatory Unit visiting room. Call it a field trip, an eye-opening journey into another world, or just a day away from "the hood". The goals of this program will be realized if just one young person benefits from this experience. Programs are run by appointment, Tuesdays and Wednesdays throughout the year from 10:00 a.m. till 12:30 p.m.. Space is limited to 20 students and 4 or 5 adults at a time.

If your organization is interested in scheduling into this program, please contact me for more information.

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