

HARD DOSE OF REALITY - THE TOUGH TRUTHS ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF CRIME CAN TURN THE LIVES OF SOME YOUNG OFFENDERS AROUND

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Victor Lindsey made \$3,000 a week selling drugs -- good money for an 18-year-old with a GED.

But he got a look at his future and didn't like what he saw.

Lindsey and 30 others, mostly young men, toured the old Wayne County Jail Tuesday as part of the sheriff's Dose of Reality program. Many came under court order for first-time drug offenses, loitering, truancy, fighting, curfew violations or car theft. Some parents brought in kids they could no longer control.

The group listened to prisoners, talked to a mother who lost her son to a drunken driver, and watched a slide show of bullet-riddled bodies, bashed-in brains and burned-off faces, courtesy of the county morgue.

They heard the usual stories about getting beat down or raped in prison, but Dose of Reality isn't about scaring anyone straight. You can't really scare most kids today, anyway. This program just tries to get them to see themselves growing old behind bars, think about losing their freedom and families, and consider a hard-knock life with little dignity and no privacy, even when showering or using the toilet.

That's what Billy Adams, 30, a former leader of the **Latin Counts**, faces for the next 12-25 years. He killed a man as payback for helping to set a house fire that badly burned two of his children. His son lost a leg in the fire and Adams caught a second-degree murder case.

Adams has a linebacker's build, a drill sergeant's voice, and the icy eyes of an Original Gangster. He's been shot three times and made big paper selling drugs and robbing people.

"Look at me now," he told the group, grabbing his green jail shirt. "All I got to show for it is a set of greens, a white T-shirt and some f----- up flip-flops."

Keith Ross, 20, a former drug dealer who'll serve 12-25 years for second-degree murder, and Jason Jinks, also 20, who'll do seven months for receiving stolen property, also spoke to the group.

Ross' father was locked up when he was a kid; now he has to leave his two children the same way. His mother, whom he disrespected and disappointed, is his only regular visitor.

Don't **count** on any love from your so-called friends here, the three said. Your crew won't visit you or even go to your funeral; they probably snitched and set you up, anyway.

Most of the men in the old Wayne County jail will spend nearly the rest of their lives in prison. As the group walked past dingy, 5-foot-by-7-foot cells, inmates called out words to instruct and intimidate.

"Whatever you're thinking about doing, don't," one inmate said. "This ain't no life."

"Come on over, I got something for you," another inmate said to a boy.

"I ain't no punk," the boy said quietly.

"You will be when you get here," the inmate said, flipping a towel. "I'm going to tie you up with this and do you."

About 5,000 people a year go through Dose of Reality. That's a lot of people to touch for \$150,000, which is what the program costs. The county has run jail tours for 10 years, but Sheriff Warren Evans expanded the program this year to include talks by community groups like Save Our Sons and Daughters, Pioneers for Peace, True Life Crusaders, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving. They put young people next to victims of crime and violence.

Sometimes just realizing what the hell you're doing is enough to change.

One of the slides from the Wayne County morgue showed a newborn crack baby, shriveled and dead.

Investigator Joyce Pearson, who runs and cofounded the program, asked Lindsey if he ever sold crack to a pregnant woman; he admitted he had.

When I caught up with him later, he told me that the photo tore him up.

He also said the words of Adams, Ross and Jinks moved him; they came from young people who got caught up in the same things he did.

"The road that they were on, that's the one I'm on," he said. "If I don't stop, I'll be there with them."

Pearson is trying to raise money to expand the tours from three days a week to five, and to start weekend stays at the Wayne County Jail and trips to a state prison. But shortsighted budget cuts could eliminate the program.

Locking up someone for life costs more than \$1 million. Politicians always find enough money to build prisons but never enough to keep people from going there.

Some people, like Lindsey, will step off that road once they see what's coming. If Dose of Reality changes just a few lives -- even one a year -- it will more than pay its way.

For more information on the Dose of Reality tours call Investigator Joyce Pearson at 313-224-0667, anytime, or go online at waynecounty.com/sheriff.

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Caption: Photo HUGH GRANNUM/Detroit Free Press

From right, Terell Noel, 17, Larry Childs, 14, and Lo Braxton, 19, are taunted by an inmate behind bars at the Wayne County Jail. Officer Clarence Hill conducts the tour as part of the Dose of Reality program, which takes youthful offenders into the jail and courts to hear from inmates, judges and community activists about the consequences of crime. Standing at left, Cory Washington, 18, from Detroit, listens to Wayne County investigator Joyce Pearson and inmate Keith Ross, 20, from Detroit, serving 12 to 25 years for second-degree murder.

Joyce Pearson, the program's cofounder, shows toughness and tenderness in dealing with young offenders, lecturing about jail life at left, and hugging Renee Jones, 16, from Redford.

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