

You and This Book

I started getting into trouble when I was 11 or 12, hanging out with the older crowd on the corner. I sold weed and coke and did things that would make me fit in with those guys. My mom was never around and my father was not present in my life. My family didn't show up for me or make me feel like I belong in this world.

I was angry and hurt because my parents weren't there. I thought I could run from the hurt of not feeling any love. To me it felt like they didn't care about me. So why should I care about myself? Behaving negatively and acting out my anger by harming others made

me feel powerful. It made me feel like no one could ever hurt me again. I felt like I was in control of my anger, but I wasn't. I wanted someone to tell me to stop. But my actions fell on deaf ears. No one noticed so I started to get into street life deeper and deeper until it got a real good hold on me.

The more trouble I got into, the worse I felt. My anger grew and I got more mad at myself for doin' stupid shit over and over.

James, 18 years old



Who Is This Book For?

When we wrote this book, we wanted it to be for young men and women who struggle every day with hard choices, tough family situations, and big questions about their futures. It is filled with the voices of teenagers facing the same challenges that you might be dealing with right now—drugs, anger, violence, gangs, and questions about who you really are. And while this book doesn't have all the answers, it can definitely help you uncover *the power, strength, and wisdom that already exist inside of you*. The power might be hiding or out of sight. But make no mistake. . . it is there.

This book is for anyone who is tired of getting into trouble or making decisions that cause them to lose their freedom. It's for anyone who wants to have a better life, but isn't sure how to make that happen. This book will help you discover *who you really are and where you want to go*. By helping you figure out some of these things, the book can be a source of power. But this book is based on a simple truth: *Only you have the power to decide where you'll end up. You are the real power source.*

No matter what has happened in the past, no matter what you believe your future might be like, no matter what anyone has told you about the kind of life you will lead, your life is just beginning, even if you feel like it's over. In the back of your mind, you might believe that the story of your life has already been written. Think again.

How to Use This Book

There are many ways to use this book. And you don't have to read or write. Many people have a hard time reading. Maybe there is a group of people who can read it together. Be creative. There's no right or wrong way to get something from this book.

Sometimes the topics in the book can bring up feelings that make you feel uncomfortable, turn you off, or upset you. **Don't Let This Stop You.** If you start to feel overwhelmed, let someone know. This could be a trusted adult. There are always people who can help,

even if it means calling a number provided at the back of this book. When you are ready, return to the book again.

Because it is a book, you can read it as fast or as slowly as you want. You can think about things at your own pace. And because you can read this book privately, you may find yourself able to be more honest with yourself than you can be when talking to other people.

Other Things to Know

We have worked with many kids who have gone to jail, prison, residential treatment centers, and foster care. We have talked to kids who have been hurt and who have hurt others. We think that this book has a lot of truth in it. And we believe that these truths can give you a great deal of power.

We try not to assume to know how you feel or what your life has been like. Nobody knows that but you.

We don't know where everyone is coming from. We all have different family backgrounds. Some are "traditional" and some are not. Throughout this book when we say "parent," we mean anyone who has been responsible for raising you. This can include biological parents, foster parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or anyone else who has cared for you.

Most of all, we believe that each one of you reading this book has a lot to give to the world. You are strong, powerful, loving, and wise. You might not be connected to those things within you at the moment,

but they are there. They are waiting to come out. It is your decision whether you take these gifts out and share them or whether you bury them forever. Only you can make that decision. Only you have that power.

