



## A JUSTICE THAT HEALS Youth Guide

**An activity manual for youth by youth**

On June 9, 1996, Mario Ramos graduated from high school. The next day, he murdered Andrew Young. It was one of 90 homicides in Chicago that month and, in many ways, it was nothing unusual – an 18-year-old gang member shot and killed a 19-year-old male on a street corner in broad daylight. But the events that followed were anything but typical.

The murderer was a parishioner at a nearby church; his victim lived in the neighborhood. The parish priest and members of the community rallied around the murderer and his family – not to defend what he had done, but to defend his *humanity*. They also reached out to the victim’s family, determined to arrive at a form of justice that would heal all concerned.

Their actions brought together the families of the murderer and his victim, started the murderer on his road to rehabilitation and, ultimately, led to a rare – and controversial – bond between the victim’s mother, Maurine Young, and the man who killed her son. Their extraordinary story offers an approach to justice that moves beyond confrontation – and attempts to restore harmony to the lives shattered by a terrible crime.

A one-hour documentary film, ***A Justice That Heals***, originally aired on WTTW in Chicago in April 2000. Produced by Jay Shefsky, ***A Justice That Heals*** opens with Mario, in prison, recounting a dream he had before the crime: blood on his hands, police, a murder. He knew it was coming, he says, yet he did nothing to stop it. Then, Mario and his victim’s twin brother recount Andrew’s murder. Andrew’s parents enter the story, then Mario’s parents. Finally, we meet Father Robert Oldershaw, a priest with the courage to “love the sinner” while he “hated the sin.”

This film, a story of two young men, their families, and a caring parish, provides an opportunity for youth to explore their own beliefs, values, and faith. A story of tragedy, transformation, and healing, ***A Justice That Heals*** can also be used as a youth development programming strategy in congregations, schools, youth centers, neighborhoods, and families. Themes such as violence, gun control, “zero tolerance,” conflict resolution, peace education, grief, and justice can be powerful backdrops for a range of activities.

These activities, developed by youth for youth, are some that young people might do alone, in partnership with other youth, or with youth-adult teams.

**As an individual:**

- Educate yourself about gangs
- Become passionate about a non-violent cause
- Seek parental guidance about problems
- Reflect upon the value of human life and try to cherish it
- Choose nonviolence as a way of life and relating to others
- Write to a prisoner connected with your church
- Learn leadership skills
- Invite friends to watch the video and talk about it
- Ask parents about times they forgave someone who harmed them
- Be a peacemaker
- Learn how to forgive instead of taking revenge
- Let go of grudges
- Join an organization that promotes gun control
- Join an organization that works for nonviolent solutions to problems
- Encourage your family and friends to get rid of their guns
- Engage in personal reflection on forgiveness
- Seek reconciliation with a person with whom you don't get along
- Be a spokesperson for non-violence in your own group of friends
- Volunteer for the teen court program in your community
- Learn how the juvenile justice system works in your community
- Write an editorial on the merits or pitfalls of "zero tolerance" in your school or community or about youth tried as adults
- Develop a Web site on which teens can write stories about their experiences with forgiveness or not being forgiven
- Write poems or songs to describe your feelings
- Practice martial arts
- Help younger kids learn how to manage their anger
- Find out about programs for grieving youth

**In schools and youth organizations:**

- Organize a peer mediation program
- Encourage educational achievement as the key to a bright future
- Promote anti-gang messages and promote involvement in school clubs and organizations as a way to belong to good things
- Visit prisons to learn about the reality of prison life
- Sponsor speakers such as victims of violence, their parents, or individuals who have formerly been

- incarcerated; hearing their stories will make violence real for youth
- Organize mentoring programs, both peer to peer and older youth to younger youth
  - Teach communication skills so that youth can learn to express their negative feelings in ways that won't lead to violence
  - Start peer education programs that promote non-violent solutions and encourage other schools to do the same
  - Learn about anti-gun and anti-violence causes and clubs
  - Advocate for more teachers that care about kids, not just teaching subjects
  - Adopt a youth in a juvenile facility
  - Become a peer conflict mediator
  - Write and present a play about forgiveness
  - Watch the video and have a class discussion
  - Practice forgiveness in everyday conflicts in the classroom and on the playground
  - Study and investigate the justice system
  - Organize a poster contest about forgiveness and non-violence
  - Invite individuals who were formerly incarcerated to present at a convocation
  - Talk about constructive punishment in schools
  - Start or join a leadership program
  - Study ways to make decisions
  - Raise money for a fund to help kids of crime victims to go to camp or have some other positive experience
  - Work with school administrators to have a day of remembrance for classmates who have died from violence
  - Write letters to legislators and newspaper editors expressing your views
  - Begin peer education programs about gangs, drugs, sex, decision making, and other topics
  - Set up a school or classroom review board for offenses in school
  - Produce media pieces of all kinds – commercials, Web sites, print ads in teen magazines, billboards – to encourage teens not to use guns
  - Take a field trip to a prison to talk to prisoners about getting their lives back together
  - Produce a book, written by students, with personal reflections on the impact of violence
  - Organize support groups for classmates who have witnessed violent acts
  - Bring in speakers who can talk about the impact of violence on the victims, family, and community
  - Invite defense attorneys, prosecutors, probation officers, victims' advocates,

and judges to talk about their

roles in the justice system

### **In the Community:**

- Advocate for art and drama classes to provide positive outlets and expression for youth
- Promote healthy dialogue between parents and youth: open, honest, and two-way about the dangers and challenges of daily living
- Educate parents about building relationships with their children
- Plan parents' nights that provide opportunities for parents to learn skills and gain support from other parents
- Plan more family activities that engage and involve whole families in constructive and creative activities
- Host gang workshops for parents and community members so they can recognize the early signs of gang involvement and develop strategies to keep kids away from gangs
- Organize groups of people to get rid of guns in a neighborhood
- Build community unity around common goals of safety and security
- Create ways to bring people together—sports leagues, neighborhood meetings, crime watch; build bridges and relationships
- Use media, e.g., commercials, and flyers, that promote non-violence
- Create neighborhood murals and positive graffiti walls
- Expand teen court in order to bring victims and perpetrators together
- Start early with community involvement to instill positive messages
- Plan and create safe places for teens to go to hang out
- Promote ways for people of different backgrounds to get together and get to know each other – barbecues, picnics, festivals, block parties, discussion groups, and meetings
- Show the video and have a community discussion
- Organize assistance to families of victims and criminals
- Start anti-violence groups
- Organize a peace march
- Plant a neighborhood peace garden
- Volunteer for a prison reentry program
- Help establish or expand a teen court program and volunteer for it
- Help youth who are reentering the community following incarceration
- Organize a walk of remembrance
- Be part of a neighborhood watch
- Start a community mediation program
- Avoid fighting

### **In a Congregation:**

- Do more outreach to victims of violence
- Expand or begin prison ministries
- Talk about violence and forgiveness from the pulpit
- Find ways to link different churches in joint projects as another way to break down barriers
- Support families who have members in jail; hold a special dinner, a prayer service, give gifts at holidays, provide transportation so they can visit loved ones
- Establish prayer programs for inmates so they pray for those on the outside
- Form or participate in a prayer tree that asks for forgiveness
- Create a special memorial site and plan a special service
- Show the video and talk about it
- Talk about how to accept change and renewal in your life
- Be a part of the youth group
- Write a play about nonviolence, violence, forgiveness or healing and perform it for the church
- Bring in special speakers for programs on victims, the justice system, prison reentry
- Start a peace education program
- Pray for peace, justice, and healing
- Begin or participate in prayer circles when a violent death has occurred
- Learn what other faiths teach about justice and forgiveness
- Read scripture about justice, forgiveness, and healing
- Work with the youth group to begin a mentoring program for younger children
- Adopt a prisoner
- Raise money for the children of prisoners or victims to attend camp or receive special gifts
- Make the church a safe place for kids to hang out
- Write a book of memories about those in the congregation who have died from violence
- Plan a special Youth Sunday or Youth Sabbath service

These programming strategies were developed for youth by youth from the United Methodist Youth Fellowship from Meridian Street United Methodist Church; the Teen Staff of Teen Court, a project of Reach for Youth, Inc.; youth from Kaleidoscope Youth Center; teen members of the Children's Museum of Indianapolis Museum Apprentice Program and teen members of the Y-Press staff, in partnership with John Brandon, Executive Director of the Marion County Commission on Youth and Gail Thomas Strong, Learning Services Director, WFYI, Indianapolis.



***A Justice That Heals*** is one of the public television programs showcased in the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. All productions incorporate the theme of **reentry into family and community by individuals who were formerly incarcerated**. These and other programs are elements of the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI), an outreach project supported by The

Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Launched in February 2001, MCMOI links public television stations to local stakeholders as a means to promote the Foundation's Core Results for strong and connected neighborhoods for children and families.

MCMOI campaigns are managed by Outreach Extensions, a national consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive, high-profile educational and community outreach campaigns for media projects. Please visit the MCMOI Web site at

**[www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/communications/mcmoi/](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/communications/mcmoi/)**

for more information and community-use materials for these exciting programs.

For more information on the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign ([www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org)), please contact:

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