

## **Key Principles In Helping Troubled Teenagers**

In 5 years we have taken over 100 teenagers through intensive mentoring programmes, lasting an average of 5 months each and totalling over 40 years combined. In that time we have observed 12 key principles and here is one...

**4/12 Rejecting Crime Starts With A Spark** - Crime is often a result of lack of legal opportunity. Where openings for qualifications and employment are withheld or hard to find, it is tempting to go for the 'easier' criminal option for quick money. Agencies supporting such young people should probe to identify a spark of interest in a career or sport, and then develop it. A meeting with a professional footballer, mechanic or recording engineer can make the difference between an inspired teenager and one who believes there is no point in working for qualifications.

A colleague of ours who spent most of his life in custody tells his story to illustrate this. He loved cars and wanted a job as a mechanic. However, nobody offered him a job, and he started hot-wiring cars and joy riding. That led to graver crimes and a serious bank robbery, before he turned over a new leaf. He insists that if he had been offered a job in a garage, even sweeping up, he would have avoided the slide into crime. He had a spark and it needed to be recognized and nurtured.

So, one of the first things you should do with a troubled teenager is to find their spark. If they can't identify one, then you need to explore as many options as possible, and work on whatever they respond to.

This also pays dividends with young people struggling with motivation and attendance in education. Once a spark is recognized, then a career opportunity or apprenticeship can be held up as a motivator for getting qualifications.

If they stay blank, try a couple of exercises that can work well.

One is to give them a blank sheet of paper and ask them to write or draw everything that is in their head right now and what is important to them; good and bad. It is interesting to see what comes out. Also writing lyrics or a poem can be revealing. Secondly, ask them in a lighthearted way what they would do if they won a fortune. After a few silly ideas of luxuries they will likely start talking about interesting ideas. One young man on a court order said he wanted to fund an environmental project and to start a high class tailors to make sharp suits, but it had to have good security because it was in his home town!