

HOMEBOY TO THE RESCUE

Getting into gang life is easy. Getting out is hard. Homeboy Industries helps young people find the exit.

Joining a Gang

For many teens, getting mixed up in gangs is easy. It's even easier if you come from a rough neighborhood or a troubled home. Both Tony Carlos and Carlos Nieto Jr. grew up in tough areas of Los Angeles. Random violence was everywhere. Crime was a part of life. Both boys ended up in gangs.

For Tony, the trouble began in 6th grade. "I started hanging around with the wrong crowd," says Tony. "It was the environment. My older brothers were gang active. I looked up to them. All my friends and neighbors were in gangs. Those were just the circumstances of my life."

Carlos's problems began when he was 12. His home life was difficult. His father was struggling to get off drugs. Carlos ran away. He went to live on the streets. There, he fell into a gang. The gang became his family.

Straight Into Trouble

Gang life leads straight into trouble that's tough to escape. Tony and Carlos found out the hard way. With his gang, Tony started breaking the law. He was arrested and sent to jail.

Carlos had a similar experience. "The gang got me hooked on drugs," he says. "Then I starting doing a lot of crimes." Eventually, Carlos also went to prison.

When Tony and Carlos got out of prison, both wanted to make a drastic change. They wanted to find jobs. But who would hire an ex-gang member? Who would hire someone just out of prison?

Even worse, old friends wanted Tony and Carlos back in the gang. They faced intense pressure. "They weren't happy that I was trying to make something of myself," Carlos says. "They weren't really my homeboys." This experience gave Tony and Carlos insight into the hazards of gang life.

A Second Chance

Luckily for Tony and Carlos, there was a place where they could find help. It was called Homeboy Industries. Homeboy is run by Father Greg Boyle. Known as "Father G," Boyle has helped ex-gang members for years. He started Homeboy Industries to give teens in trouble a second chance.

Boyle's philosophy is that jobs keep young people away from guns and crime. The company's motto is "Nothing Stops a Bullet Like a Job." Homeboy Industries has

many parts. It sells clothing with the Homeboy logo. It has a bakery. It also provides youth services.

Homeboy was just what Tony and Carlos needed. Says Carlos, “Some guys told me, ‘Go to Father G, he’ll hook you up.’ I came in and he saw something in me that no one else did. He said, ‘You got a job.’ I was speechless.”

Skills for Life

Joining Homeboy was an effective way for Tony and Carlos to rebuild their lives – and get job skills.

Tony works in the bakery and in the Homeboy offices. He answers phones and types resumes. He even works side-by-side with former gang rivals. But that is no longer significant to him. “You get to know a person in a new way on the job,” he says. “You don’t even worry about where he’s from.”

Carlos works for Homeboy as a community-service supervisor. He too is learning new skills. He aspires to become a counselor for troubled kids. “You’ve got to make them see that there is hope,” says Carlos. “No matter what life throws at you, never stop trying.”