Testimony from an Ex-Gang Member

Name: Jessica
Gang: Black Disciples (in Chicago)
Purpose: She was looking for someone to love her. All she wants now is to get out.

"You need to find something else better to do to occupy your time because the **streets don't love you, they just take you away from the people who do**," said Jessica, 21. "**I joined a gang to be loved** and I had to find out the hard way that the streets don't love you."

Jessica has spent her life trying to get "fast money" on the streets of Chicago **by stealing cars and selling drugs.** She has experienced so much pain during her time in the gang that nothing can hurt her anymore, she said.

"Only things the streets got to offer is money, death or incarceration -- because gang members don't want to end up in jail, so they going to give you the gun and tell you to go out and shoot somebody," she said.

*****NOW*****

Jessica is trying to turn her life around. She is studying criminal justice and wants to be a probation officer. She is looking for a job and working to control her anger.

"When I get angry from now on, **I just write,**" she said. "I use this stuff that goes on around me and turn it into stories and maybe I'm going to write a book some day.

"I think I could be a motivation to stop all this violence and stuff," Jessica said. "I used to be a complete hothead in the streets. I used to steal cars, all type of stuff. I'm just trying to better myself."

Jessica also tries to go to church every Sunday. She attends to Pleasant Grove Baptist Church where she sings in the choir. "**Feel loved when I'm at church**, a different kind of love, real love," she said, "a different kind of love than you get in the streets."

*****RELATIONSHIPS*****

Jessica lives with her great-grandmother, "I feel like if me and my momma would have had a better relationship, then maybe I wouldn't be the way that I am," she said. Her father is a member of a different gang, the Four Corner Hustlers.

*****SOLUTION?*****

LIVEWORKSHEETS

In Jessica's perfect world, no one in Chicago would have guns, not even police officers. She dreams of a Chicago without any gangs and she believes that the dream starts with her peers.

"We got to be the solution. We got to want this for ourselves," she said. "If only some of us want it, then it's not going to ever stop. People say we're a **generation of no tomorrows**, so they're basically saying, like: What have we got to live for? The only thing we're doing, we're killing each other. Like, you don't hear about stuff like this happening in no other city, all this stuff, we're killing people. People are dying young, 7 and 6 year olds. That hurt my heart."

For now, however, Jessica's main goal is to continue working on herself.

Word Bank: Match the words with the correct definitions

Incarceration
Criminal justice
Probation
Hothead
Peers

Angry person
System of law enforcement
People of your age or in your social group
Jail time
Time when you are supervised

Answer the following questions

1. Why did Jessica join a gang?
2. What did Jessica learn?
3. How does Jessica help herself **now**?
4. What **solutions** does Jessica think can help reduce gang involvement?
5. Do you agree with Jessica's solutions? Why? Why not?

LIVEWORKSHEETS