

# Flowers works to cushion the impact from high-risk youths

**'M**y father was murdered when I was 10."

"I became a ward of the court when I was 15 months old."

"Most of my first 15 years were spent in detention centers, group homes or psychiatric wards."

"Everyone thought I'd be in jail or dead before I turned 21."

"At 18, I got into a fight with a guy I played basketball with. He shot me, and I've been partially paralyzed and in a wheelchair ever since."

The above quotes come from an extraordinary 38-year-old Kansas Citian who is doing remarkable things in turning around the lives of high-risk urban youth. His efforts have attracted the attention of the White House, where he has been invited on three occasions to describe his organization's incredible successes.

Today, I am describing Tyrone Flowers, who founded Higher M-Pact, a local organization that seeks to make meaningful changes in the lives of youths whose lives are on a collision course with disaster.

Tyrone's downhill spiral turned abruptly when, at age 15 and locked up in the hole of a detention center, he said he realized "for the first time in my life, how little control I had over my life. I understood my history would never leave me. Only time would allow me to change it."



Flowers school.

Tyrone then spent his "time" graduating from Central High School, Penn Valley Community College, the University of Missouri and its law

While at MU, he met his wife, Renee, and together they began their life-long commitment to serving severely troubled kids. Upon completing law school, Tyrone eschewed six-figure opportunities in the legal profession and, instead, launched Higher M-Pact with Renee.

Today, the organization has a staff of five and an impressive board of 20, including such prominent Kansas Citians as Ray Evans, Bernard Franklin and Patrick McGannon.

I asked Tyrone whether Higher M-Pact competes with organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters or the Boys & Girls Clubs.

"Absolutely not! We get our referrals from these groups," he said. "We work with kids they don't want to work with. Our kids have more friends in jail than in college. Our kids are well beyond at-risk."

Higher M-Pact has a threefold mission. First, its professionals engage in "intense mentoring," Tyrone said.

"We have to be father figures to kids who have seen dead bodies and who have been shot at," he said.



MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS

Michael Braude

Second, Higher M-Pact literally sets up shop in high-risk communities, such as the Wayne Miner Court and Charlie Parker Square housing complexes. Once there, it forms softball teams, Scout groups and other positive influence activities for kids who have never experienced hope, love or self-worth.

**IF HIGHER M-Pact can keep 20 boys out of prison for 10 years, the state will save \$4.4 million.**

Third, Higher M-Pact works at bridging a big knowledge gap with professional development presentations to a host of other organizations that wish to help troubled urban youth.

To put Higher M-Pact's vital mission into economic perspective, consider that if it can keep 20 high-risk boys out of prison for 10 years, the state will save \$4.4 million. The cost to society of a single lifetime of crime is estimated at \$1.3 million to \$1.5 million. A heavy drug abuser costs the system \$150,000 to \$360,000.

Higher M-Pact's budget of less than half a million dollars comes entirely from the private sector — individuals, foundations and religious institutions. It receives no government help.

Tyrone does not envision Kansas City's Higher M-Pact going national. Rather, his hope is that it will serve as a role model for lots of similar efforts throughout the United States.

The thing that knocks me out about Higher M-Pact is that Tyrone Flowers' own life is testimony to the fact that very high-risk lives can be turned around.

**Michael Braude** | [lmbraude@aol.com](mailto:lmbraude@aol.com). He writes weekly for the *Kansas City Business Journal*.