

Jailed KZN youths offered hope

TANIA BROUGHTON

HE HAS turned around the lives of hundreds of young men in America who have dabbled in crime and he now hopes to help rid South Africa's youth of violence.

"There is no right way to do wrong," said Joseph Marshall.

It was this message that he passed on to about 200 inmates at the Westville Prison Youth Centre recently.

Back in his home country, Marshall founded the Street Soldiers' National Consortium, which is dedicated to fighting violence, and the Omega Boys/Street Soldiers' Club, a youth development and violence prevention organisation in San Francisco which emphasises academic achievement and non-involvement with drugs.

He is passionate about the youth and believes that every young person, no matter how badly he or she may have behaved in the past, can change.

His pet hate is to see them in prison.

"It is so disheartening to walk in there and see the young ones. They are not meant to be there," he said.

Marshall persuades youths to change using true examples of hope from those he has worked with before.

He likened his Westville experience to "teaching a college class".

"They sat and listened to me for an hour and half, and after-

wards they thanked me. I felt I had made a connection," he said.

Marshall's message to the youths was simple: they had to change.

"Most of them have been told that two plus two makes five. They then make every life decision based on that wrong formula, which produces criminal behaviour."

He said the youths' questions had been interesting: they wanted to know why there were so many people in prison in America, which is a First World country, implying that crime was reserved for the poor.

Character

"I told them it's not about the money you have, but the character you have," he said.

One prisoner had also suggested he had committed crime in order to support his family.

"I asked him if it had worked out. Of course it hadn't, because he was in jail.

"I believe that if you want to do right, then people will help you. But you have to want to do right."

During his US State Department-sponsored trip to the country, Marshall has also been liaising with non-governmental organisations, such as Nicro.

Marshall was also scheduled to meet Business Against Crime to discuss ways to address the problem of street children.



PICTURE: STEVE NAIDOO

DR JOSEPH Marshall, who has changed the lives of hundreds of young American men dabbling in crime, is on a visit to South Africa, inspiring change in imprisoned youths