



"God has used us to pioneer this kind of outreach in Denver," says Pambianco. "We are convinced that the fasting and prayer we've done over the years has been what has got us over the hump. Now, what's really on my heart is to teach others to minister to these kids. There are literally millions of kids in the punk/skater/Goth subculture—it's huge."



knows them at their worst yet still loves them, they begin to change. Hanne hasn't lived in Minnesota for many years, but she still receives calls and letters from many of those girls whose lives have forever been impacted by her love and acceptance.

In fact, Tina called recently: "I just wanted you to know how often I think about you, Hanne. I have three kids of my own now. I want to raise them the way God wants me to, but most of the time I feel at a loss when it comes to knowing what he would want me to do. That's when I think of you. I ask myself, 'What would Hanne do?' And then I know that's probably what God would want."

When I talk to youth leaders about fathering and mothering our young people, I get the kind of resistance you'd expect. "If I started reaching out to the fringe kids and bringing them into my church, I'd lose my job!" But if we claim to follow Christ, do we really have an option? Jesus passionately pursued five distinct types of people: the orphan, the widow, the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned. He sought relationship with the outcasts—those who lived on the fringes of his culture. To the degree you do the same, you can be sure of one thing: Your heart is beating in sync with his.

So what exactly do you do to build relationships with fringe kids?

1. You must initiate the relationship. Fringe kids will never make the first move toward relationship. And you may have to jump-start the relationship several times before it begins to

**your job
or your life?**



Pambianco says youth workers can help by consistently praying for his ministry staff, by recruiting people who have a burden for fringe ministry and starting outreaches to needy kids, and by financially supporting his outreach through fund-raisers. For more information, contact Larry Pambianco, Sheridan Youth Ministries, 3030 S. Jasmine St., Denver, CO 80222; (720) 231-0104.

run on its own. Often fringe kids won't take your invitation to get together seriously—they likely can't understand why you'd even want to get to know them. But seldom will a young person continue to turn down a sincere adult who really wants to get together.

2. Plan your get-togethers around an activity. Even though your goal is "just to talk," the first meeting can be very intimidating for both of you. After the first five minutes, when you realize you've run out of things to talk about, it'll be clear you don't have much in common. Each of you will be wondering, "Now what do we do?"



That's why it's better to organize your time around a sporting event, or a movie, or a trip to a restaurant. Shared activities give you opportunities to create memories and provide fuel for future conversations. This is especially true for men and boys, who are generally more open to building relationship in the context of a task such as **coaching, tutoring, or job training**.¹ They're forming significant relationships as a byproduct of the task.

While this is true for men and boys, it's often quite the opposite for girls. They are, for the most part, open to getting together just to talk. Girls are usually more in touch with their



need to express themselves and be heard.

3. Schedule some one-on-one activities. Kids act differently when they're with their friends. In front of their friends, they have an image to maintain. You'll lose every time if you force them to choose between you and their friends. When they're away from friends, they can afford to be who they are.

4. Don't be afraid to go on their turf. You'll always have something to talk about if you connect with kids in their environment. You may know nothing about what their lives are really like. So ask them. Suddenly they're the experts, not you. When you're humble enough to be the learner rather than the teacher, kids will be much more willing to listen to you when it's your turn to teach.

Several years ago, I remember praying, "God, conform me into the image of your Son." God has used troubled teenagers to answer that prayer in my life. I'm certainly not the same person I was 10 years or even one year ago.

God is calling you to minister to hurting young people—and that's a high calling indeed. You'll not only touch the lives of kids who desperately need to be touched, but your life will certainly—permanently—be changed. ■

Scott and Hanne Larson are founders and directors of Straight Ahead Ministries. This national organization trains and equips Christians to run weekly Bible studies in more than 100 juvenile jails in 10 states. It also operates after-care homes for youth released from juvenile jails. Scott is the author of a just-released book on reaching fringe kids At Risk: Bringing Hope to Hurting Teenagers (Group Publishing, Inc.).

1 For a penetrating look at the issues and struggles today's boys face, read *Real Boys* by William Pollack (Owl Books). Comparable to Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* in its impact, the book offers groundbreaking research into why so many boys are sad, lonely, and confused. Pollack believes boys have "a hidden yearning for relationships" that is forced underground by what he calls the Boy Code—a set of stereotyped rules and expectations. The book has rocketed up the New York Times Bestseller list.