

# MEET OUR FOUNDER

*“As I visit chapters I am profoundly moved by the transformations I witness in our members and the schools and communities who are the beneficiaries of our services. New partnerships, increased collaboration, reduced anonymity, greater safety, cross cultural relationships and heightened achievements are the byproducts of our outreach.”*

**ROBERT J. DE SENA**  
Founder and President  
Council for Unity, Inc.

**Council for Unity was established over 30 years ago. What have you learned over these years?**

**What I have learned is that most conflicted kids never have been given an option to change.** In over 33 years of running CFU, every time a group of gang kids or kids otherwise involved in violence were assembled to hear about our program, they joined. What does that tell you? They are not born criminals; they are not happy in their circumstances and given the option to change, they will take it. That is the CFU experience.

**How has the “landscape” changed since you founded Council?**

**In the early years, the primary challenge for CFU stemmed from the violence generated by racism and ethnic bias. Today, the big problem is gangs.** Clearly racial and ethnic issues still exist but not as intense as during our early days.

### **Three things compound our challenges today:**

1. Schools, communities and even the political establishment often deny the problem of gangs exists.
2. The belief that a singular investment in law enforcement and interdiction will reverse the problem – neither schools nor the police have the resources to change the conditions that breed gangs and as a result will always be reacting to the problem rather than alleviating it.
3. The media perpetuates the dilemma through "gangsta" rap, which glorifies violence and gang life, demeans women and sets up counter culture role models who glorify the very life style that leads to gang recruitment.

**Looking back over Council’s 33 years, what stands out as your most significant accomplishments?**

In 1975, without any model or guide, 6 gang leaders were motivated enough to give up an endless cycle of hate and violence and create something that never existed – CFU. Our key accomplishment is the creation of the CFU syllabus, including the Comprehensive Curriculum, the Dragon Slayer Curriculum, the Public Safety Curriculum, the Correctional Facility Curriculum and all the induction manuals: elementary, junior high and high school. Everything was created from scratch with no reference points other than the philosophy of John Dewey and world mythology.

**You say Council’s success is because it is a culture – not a program. What do you mean by that?**

Council perceives the complex problems kids face and engages them to meet their deepest needs.

- **The child's need for a constructive, supportive environment** is addressed through CFU's family circle concept
- **The child's need for safety and freedom from bias or racial persecution** is met through CFU's unity strategy.
- **CFU sees and utilizes the innate ability of every child** who participates in our program. This doesn't happen in other classroom environments. Kids feel good about themselves the minute they enter a chapter.
- **Finally CFU addresses the sense of impotency most kids feel.**

**Council’s business model is expanding from exclusively “school-based” to encompass whole communities. When you speak with community leaders how do you position Council’s proposition?**

My message to the public is simple and compelling. If it costs the taxpayer over \$100,000 to incarcerate a youth for one year and by extrapolation if it costs 12 million dollars to house 120 kids in similar fashion, those same 120 youth could be placed in 4 CFU programs for \$100,000. Given CFU's 30 plus year track record of graduating a consistent 90% of its participants with close to 94% of those kids going on to college, then you are confronted with an interesting dilemma. You can burden the tax payer by constructing more prisons to house more inmates – OR – invest in CFU and see the same kids graduating college, going into careers and adding to the tax base instead of subtracting from it.

**It is clear that Council’s philosophy and model are succeeding. What is your vision for Council five years from now?**

In 5 years CFU will span the nation from coast to coast and broaden its presence globally. Its school-based, community-based, correctional and public safety models will generate compelling results that will lead to unprecedented demand for its services. The community spirit that it generates will kindle a new breath of democracy where people will realize that the only way to generate desired change is to take responsibility for that change instead of investing in others to bring it to them. CFU will become a bulwark for the democratic spirit everywhere.