

# GIVING TEENS TOOLS FOR LIFE

KATY AUTHOR, WIFE, MOTHER, AND MENTOR ESTABLISHES  
'TOOLS 4 LIFE' PROGRAMS THAT EMPOWERS INCARCERATED  
YOUTH TO TURN THEIR LIVES AROUND

Kelly Litvak felt a calling to work with and encourage at-risk teenagers, providing them hope for the future



Written by Meagan Clanahan

*To say that Executive Director Kelly Litvak is passionate about the non-profit "Tools 4 Life" organization would be an understatement. She is a woman with seemingly boundless energy who lives and breathes to save one at-risk teenager at a time; offering them hope, guidance, and oftentimes, a gentle push to get them on the straight and narrow.*

## INSPIRATIONAL SCRAPBOOKING

In 2001, Litvak was operating a successful home scrapbooking business where clients would bring her shoeboxes of pictures for her to create beautiful keepsakes. One day, she received a call from a former client that would change the direction of her life. The woman wanted to put together a scrapbook to encourage and educate at-risk teenagers, hoping they would be inspired after seeing themselves on those pages.

She focused on creating a digital image book for teens, filled with powerful biblical scriptures as well as educational resources on topics such as cyber bullying, abstinence, and underage drinking. The initial plan was to release a universal "Tools 4 Life" book that anyone could pick up or go online

## GET INVOLVED!

### "Tools 4 Teens"

Re-Entry Program offspring ministry will offer mentorships, educational opportunities, and tangible solutions to the graduates of the prison programs

Needs approximately 120 mentor volunteers for their young people

### Adopt-a-student

Visit [www.tools4lifebooks.org](http://www.tools4lifebooks.org) for more information on how to sponsor a graduate or current enrollee



Kelly Litvak's "Tools 4 Life" program uses scrapbooking as a way to connect with incarcerated teens as they begin a new chapter in their lives through love and healing

to upload their child's picture into the digital images for a personalized edition. The idea took off among area churches and charities, and Litvak knew she was on to something.

### POSITIVE MESSAGES OF LOVE

A few years later, Litvak rolled out the first "Tools 4 Teens" eight week program at a local middle school. When the students created their customized scrapbooks with Godly messages, they began to see themselves in a new and positive way that improved their self-esteem. At the end of the inaugural program, the school found that almost all the students that took part improved academically, showed up for school, and had increasingly better behavior. Inspired by that success, Litvak's team began contacting hospitals and other organizations to share the program.

### FEELING AS THOUGH THEY MATTER

Soon after, Litvak introduced the program to juvenile offenders through the Harris County Leadership Academy. "As I saw these children, children in orange jumpsuits, I just knew this is where God had called me; where He knew I could make the biggest impact." She used the same recipe of scrapbooking for the prisoners and was shocked by their enthusiasm to create their projects. Inmates saw Litvak and her mission team as people who cared enough to spend time with them. In Litvak's eyes, underneath these offender's tough facades and tattooed bodies were children who just wanted to feel like they mattered.

### MAKING A DRAMATIC IMPACT

Today, after each life lesson presentation, the inmates and Litvak's team break up into small groups to do their scrapbooking work. It's during this time that the team has the most dramatic impact on these young lives. They are able to sit down with the kids, discover what's happening in their world, and understand their inner-most feelings in a non-confrontational way. Litvak says she's not interested in why they are incarcerated; she only wants to know what their plans are for moving forward. "It's done. It's happened, you can't change it. It is just a chapter in your life. It does not have to define your whole book."

Week after week, the prisoners began to open up to the team. Many have come to accept Christ into their hearts and make plans for what they will do once they are released. Just as importantly, the recidivism rate, or the rate of reoffending, among the program participants is just 25 percent, compared with the Harris County average of 70 percent. "I am so convinced that they can overcome their situation inside and outside of these walls. Each one has potential," says Litvak.



*MEAGAN CLANAHAN is a Katy wife and mom who loves to write in her "free" time. She believes Katyites have some of the most generous hearts and attitudes of service around.*

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