



NEWS

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MTA BUS OPERATOR RICARDO KINGI TURNS YOUTH AT RISK INTO YOUTH WITH A PURPOSE

Ricardo Kingi is a living example of how one person can make a difference, a big difference, in the lives of young people who might be headed down a path of crime.

Kingi is an MTA bus operator. That's what he does during the daytime. He has been one for 22 years and possesses an outstanding record. He loves his job, and he is well liked by his passengers.

But he also has made his mark on the world in other ways, notably by helping young people gain needed self-confidence which has propelled them away from gang influences to become good students, school leaders and even police officers.

Kingi teaches martial arts at his own studio in Inglewood. He has worked with hundreds of young boys and girls over the years. As a result of his work, he has seen a documented drop in vandalism, graffiti and criminal involvement among the students who have gone through his program, and at the schools they attend.

"Martial arts changed my life and it changed me," said Kingi. "I loved it so much I wanted to pass on what I had learned. In junior high and high school I used to get into a lot of fights but after a year of martial arts, my temper mellowed out. It built my confidence. It got to where I could go anywhere because I was not afraid of being attacked."

Tall and powerfully built Kingi is of Japanese/Samoan/French descent, on his father's side, and Afro-American and Portuguese on his mother's. Influenced by both grandfathers, one who taught judo in the U.S.Navy and the other who was a boxer, Kingi began studying martial arts in 1962. By 1968 he had earned his black belt, and in 1979 he opened the Kajukembo Institute of Self Defense.

His own personal experience is what allows Kingi to relate to youths-at-risk. The term refers to youths ranging from 8 to 16 who have already been contacted by the

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juvenile authorities or police department or have been disciplined at school. Approximately 80 percent have no fathers and little parental guidance.

"When a kid has little or no parental guidance, he grows up wild," explains Kingi. "Most of the kids who come to my studio are there because they've been disciplined. So when a kid walks in he has an attitude. He's mad, his fists are clenched and he's ready to fight anybody. He thinks he's being disciplined once again, which he is in a sense, but what we're really giving him is what we call *tough love*."

Kingi says kids are spoken to aggressively, military-style, and taken through the fundamentals of martial arts. At first they resist, but by the third month an understanding and appreciation of the training starts to grow. They get over their fear of fighting. Not feeling intimidated anymore, they suddenly find they have less to prove to themselves or others, and therefore less reason to fight.

"We had one kid who was really difficult," said Kingi. "He took our training and his life just turned around. He ended up being student body president."

As the program grew and word got out, youngsters from all over wanted to get into the program. Kids 12 and 13 years old started attending. Many went on to join the police departments and really proved themselves as officers and young adults.

The LAPD kept hearing about Kingi's work and approached him two and a half years ago about running their *Jeopardy and Vandalism Abatement Program*, specifically for youth-at-risk.

"At first the LAPD was nervous that we'd be training these kids how to seriously fight," explained Kingi. "But when they understood that fighting was a very small part of martial arts, that the discipline, self control, concentration and philosophy were the fundamentals, they really got excited."

With the training Kingi has seen kids' grades improve, have less disciplinary problems at school, become less fearful and reactive towards life, and develop a better relationship with their parents.

"We're not just giving these kids training in martial arts, but life skills," added Kingi. "Whenever we start a new class, we invite the parents to come down. Inevitably, 80 percent of those parents are always women."

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Classes are held an hour and a half, twice a week. About 25 percent are girls although Kingi says there is no gender discrimination in the training. Uniforms and supplies are provided by the Institute. Students also are taken to tournaments all over California.

"They're told they're always going to be competing in life for jobs, houses, spouses and they better know how to deal with it," added Kingi. "Although classes are priced at around \$800 total, the kids really get about \$2,000 worth of education and discipline."

Better known as American karate, the Emperado style of martial arts was created in Hawaii in the 1940's and combines 5 different styles: (KA) Korean karate/kicking, (JU) Grabbing and throwing/arms, bars and locks, (KEMPO) Chinese quick hands, chops and pokes, (BO) Korean-style kick-boxing.

"Youth-at-risk are not losers," said Kingi. "They're intelligent kids who are looking for role models, discipline and direction in life. Martial arts has given them that, and here at the Kajukempo Institute we see lives turn around."

Friday, December 19, the Kajukempo Institute celebrates its annual Christmas dinner. Students, parents and instructors will get together to enjoy a meal, a variety show with prizes and celebrate competitions. Interested parties can call (310) 672-1578.

Ricardo and Elaine Kingi live in Los Angeles and have four children: Ricardo Jr., Ronald, Kimberly and Robert.

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