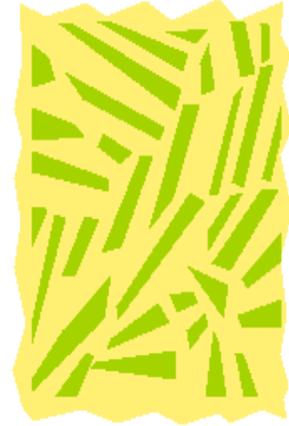


# Youth Gangs: Going Beyond the Myths to Address a Critical Problem

## Day 2

### Model Strategies to Prevent and Address Youth Gangs

*"It is so important that adults build relationships with young people around something they are interested in. As adults, we are often tempted to 'fix' something going on in the lives of kids, and we focus on what is 'wrong' with them. In a youth development setting [and in an educational setting as well], adults have the opportunity to utilize interest-based programs as a vehicle to build a trusting, healthy relationship with young people around something they are interested in first. From there we are more effective in addressing the needs of young people . . . because we are more likely to establish a foundation of trust. So, for example . . . if an educator identifies a kid who is at high risk of gang involvement who is interested in art, but needs conflict resolution skills . . . we have the option to refer the youth into conflict resolution classes and/or an art program. Given the choice to attend one or the other, a young person will most likely choose an art program over a conflict resolution program because it is what he/she likes to do. So, instead of referring this young person to a conflict resolution class first to "fix" the problem, we start with referring him/her to an art program . . . an interest. The art instructor at the Boys & Girls Club [or school or other youth development agency] utilizes art as a vehicle to build a healthy relationship over time and down the road is able to integrate conflict-resolution skills into the art program. The combination of interest- and needs-based programming [instead of just needs-based or just interest-based] is a powerful relationship-building tool that youth development professionals and other adults can utilize to bring about impactful change."*



*- Becky Flaherty, senior director, delinquency prevention, Boys and Girls Clubs of America*

Anthony is just sort of adolescent that people who run gang intervention programs want to reach. The 18-year-old from Riverside, Calif. can't remember a time when gangs weren't part of this life. His Dad and uncle were part of a gang, which he does not want to name, and Anthony remembers all of them gathering at his house, drinking and having fun. Anthony's uncle, who was only a few years older than him, was his role model.

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"I wanted to follow in his shoes," said Anthony (who asked that his name be changed). "Honestly, he had no fear toward anybody. He was his own man and stood alone."

By the time he just 11 years old, the gang allowed Anthony to run with them. Soon, he was drinking, smoking pot, using methamphetamines, carrying a gun, and robbing bystanders, liquor stores and others. For a while he was selling drugs -- anything to get money. But when asked about the appeal of the gang, he first says, "You had another family. Being a gang member, you always had to look over your shoulder. When you had your close friends in the gang, you had people looking out for you. You would have help for anything."

Anthony said that he did well in elementary school but started "messing up" in junior high as he became more involved in the gang, especially as he started doing drugs. He skipped school a lot and during high school he was incarcerated for about half of the time for assault with a deadly weapon and strong arm robbery. What began to turn his life around was a counselor he met while he was in jail. The counselor told Anthony he could help him get a job as long he followed some rules. Anthony was getting tired of the gang life, and his girlfriend was pressuring him to quit.

"I was always being a knucklehead," he said. "My girlfriend wasn't going to deal with me. I hated to see her down. I wanted to get my life on track. I wanted to start making money the right way."

Once he got out of jail, he and some friends signed up for the program, called Project Bridge in Riverside, Calif., a comprehensive anti-gang program funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. Anthony took a job readiness course, went through substance abuse treatment, and learned about anger management. For him, it was another way to do something with his friends.

What he liked most about the program was "that people listened to you," he said. "Not too many people want to pay attention to gang members. For some reason they get nervous. These people listen to you and you can give your opinion. I worked out my anger problem. I felt better about myself."

Since completing the job readiness program, Anthony has held on to a series of jobs with increasing responsibility. He worked for the city of Los Angeles in the rezoning office doing land surveys. While he liked the job, Anthony realized he'd rather work in labor jobs. Now, he works for Riverside Unified School District as a custodian. He plans to attend college soon. Anthony said that he still hangs out with some of his friends from the gang but that they have boundaries now.

"We stop and think what we're going to do," he said. "We think of the consequences and the outcomes."

His advice to people who want to help teenagers who may be involved in gangs?  
"Sometimes teenagers feel like they want to give up on life. That's why they have a lot of tension and anger and violence. If there was someone to sit there and listen to teenagers, wouldn't that be better? If you have problems with your parents, why take it out on innocent people? We want to get a job but it's hard these days. We might have a bad record. We need people to help us with that."



For decades, police and communities have tried to address gang problems in their areas, with often disappointing results. Like many other attempts to solve deep-rooted problems, there has been a swing from one approach to another. Early on, programs emphasized prevention in an attempt to keep youth from joining gangs. Later on, perhaps as gangs grew more violent, the focus shifted to police suppression.

Neither approach, at least alone, has demonstrated much effectiveness in addressing gang problems.

In response to these findings, and work with gangs, many communities have begun to adopt a more comprehensive approach to dealing with gang problems. Many of these approaches have been funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Most are modeled, in one way or another, on the work of Dr. Irving Spergel, a University of Chicago sociologist and researcher, and his colleague, Dr. David Curry. The model is based on survey responses from 254 law enforcement and social service agencies that were part of the National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Research and Development Project. The comprehensive approach, includes these five components:

- ❖ **Community Mobilization:** Involvement of local citizens, including former gang youth, community groups and agencies, and the coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.
- ❖ **Opportunities Provision:** The development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeting gang-involved youth.
- ❖ **Social Intervention:** Involving youth-serving agencies, schools, grass roots groups, faith-based organizations, police and other juvenile/criminal justice organizations in "reaching out" to gang-involved youth and their families, and linking them with the conventional world and needed services.
- ❖ **Suppression:** Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision and monitoring of gang-involved youth by agencies of the juvenile/criminal justice system and also by community-based agencies, schools, and grass roots groups.
- ❖ **Organizational Change and Development:** Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources, within and across agencies, to better address the gang problem.

The model includes a focus on providing safe, gang-free schools by involving both the schools and communities.

Is it a priority of your school to promote a sense of connectedness among students?

Yes

No

### Current Results

In their research, Spergel and G. David Curry found that cities with chronic gang programs reported that providing opportunities like jobs and education, and community mobilization were the most effective responses to gang problem. However, they were the least often employed strategies.

Click [here](#) for a discussion of the Spergel approach.



### Cash Stipend Lures Gang Members at California Project



After finding that gang members were not completing a six-week job readiness program, Project Bridge staff in Riverside, Calif., began providing a \$225 stipend to youth who completed the program. Before the program began providing the stipend, youth felt that they were not receiving anything for participating while the street still held the lure of easy money from selling drugs, said Celeste Wojtalewicz, the program director. The program teaches youth how to complete a resume, fill out a job application, dress for a job, and learn interviewing skills, among other topics.

“You have to say that there's something at the end for them,” she said. “When they get the first check, you can see how good they feel about themselves. It's not money they earned illegally.”

The program also provides participants who complete the training with a voucher of up to \$100 to buy clothes that are appropriate for work settings. Many participants have only gang clothes. Their appearance alone could keep them from landing a job. In addition, once they complete the training program, participants are placed in a job for six weeks where they are paid a stipend. If they are successful, employers agree to hire them. Youth have been hired at local government offices, restaurants, and stores, such as Petsmart.

The National Youth Gang Center (2002) suggests that the chances of community success in dealing with gang problems can be increased by implementing the Spergel-Curry Comprehensive Gang Model (Spergel, 1995). It is a multifaceted, multilayered approach that includes eight critical elements:

- ◆ Initial and continuous problem assessment using qualitative and quantitative data
- ◆ Targeting of the area and those populations of individuals most closely associated with the problem, as described in the assessment
- ◆ Mix of the five key strategies: community mobilization, social intervention, opportunities provision, suppression, and organizational change/development
- ◆ A steering committee to oversee and guide the project
- ◆ A direct contact intervention team that includes police, probation, outreach staff, and others
- ◆ A plan for coordinating efforts of and sharing appropriate information among those who work with the youth on a daily basis, the steering committee, and persons within the partner organizations
- ◆ Community capacity building to sustain the project and address issues that are long-term in nature
- ◆ Ongoing data collection and analysis to inform the process and evaluate its impact

### Research Basis for the Comprehensive Approach

An early demonstration of the comprehensive approach came in an evaluation of a program in Little Village in Chicago, a low-income and working-class community that is approximately 90 percent Mexican-American. The

program targeted older members of two of the most violent Latino gangs in the area through two coordinated strategies: (1) increased police and probation supervision to conduct violent gang youth or delinquent youth at risk of joining a gang; and (2) efforts to encourage at-risk youth to finish school, find jobs, and become part of the conventional adult world through job training, family support, brief counseling, and other interventions. Evaluation results indicated a reduction in the rate of increase in gang violence in the Little Village area compared with a control area.

*For more details on the Little Village intervention and findings, click [here](#).*

OJJDP has since funded several other programs that are modeled on this approach, including the Comprehensive Community-Wide Approach to Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression program (including Project Bridge in Riverside, Calif.), the Gang-Free Schools Program and the Gang Reduction Program. In recent years, OJJDP has begun to emphasize the prevention elements more than it has in the past. Earlier efforts focused heavily on intervention for adolescents who were already involved in gangs, according to OJJDP officials. Prevention efforts are needed as well because it is much harder to dissuade adolescents from gang life once they are involved. While these approaches appear promising, evaluations of the programs are not complete. So it is hard to say with certainty whether the comprehensive approach, while it makes sense in theory, has any long-term impact on reducing gang involvement and violence.

"Overall about half of the programs that have been thoroughly evaluated have shown reductions in gang crime," according to James Howell. "It's as good a model as we have out there and it's preferable to the simplistic suppression approach . . . The combined approach is a lot more effective than one singular approach or another."

Gary and Denise Gottfredson carried out a national study in 2000 titled "Gang Problems and Gang Programs in a National Sample of Schools," of gang problems and prevention and intervention programs in schools. They found that the quality of the programs varied widely, with many falling short in their effectiveness.

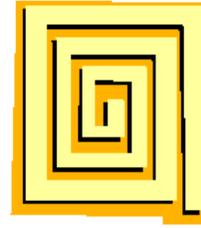
"There is much room for improvement in the quality of gang prevention and intervention programs in the nation's schools," the Gottfredsons wrote. . . .  
 "The typical gang prevention or intervention program implemented in schools does not compare favorably with characteristics of effective programs - for those kinds of programs that have been the subject of research. An exception is classroom organization and management interventions directed at gang members, which make use of a high proportion of best practices and are sometimes used regularly by school personnel, but this type of intervention is rarely used."

*For more information on practical implications of the Gottfredson study, click [here](#).*

Practitioners and researchers suggest that anyone seeking to implement a program to prevent adolescents from becoming involved in gangs also take a look at general juvenile delinquency programs. These programs tend to have more of a research base and, with some changes, could also apply to youth at risk of joining a gang or for those already involved in a gang.

## Overview of the Comprehensive Approach

One of the newest models of a comprehensive approach to gangs is the Gang Reduction Program, funded by OJJDP. At work in four cities (North Miami Beach, Fla., Los Angeles, Calif., Milwaukee, Wisc., and Richmond, Va.), the program has the following elements: (1) primary prevention; (2) secondary prevention, (3) intervention, (4) police suppression, and (5) reentry.



The Gang Reduction Program has a stronger emphasis on prevention than did previous programs. But like other comprehensive approaches, program staff hire outreach workers to spend time out in the streets and connect with youth who are most difficult to reach. These workers actively seek out youth on the cusp of joining or already in a gang. That approach can potentially solve one of the problems of programs reaching only youth who are not at the most risk of joining a gang or in a gang.

Several programs have reported pros and cons in hiring former gang members and community members as outreach workers: they know their community and can reach the adolescents most at risk, but they are not always well-versed in the administrative aspects of the job, such as keeping gang colors, drugs, and weapons outside community organizations, which are also important. A more promising model appears to be combining street outreach workers with college-educated program coordinators to oversee the programs.

"Given the reasons that youth join gangs, prevention strategies must accommodate both youth's developmental needs for safety, support, and structure, as well as their interest in having fun, seeking excitement, and making money," wrote Amy J. Arbreton and Wendy S. McClanahan in an evaluation of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America's Approach to Gang Prevention and Intervention.



These programs typically have an intervention team consisting of school officials, police, probation officers, community agencies, such as the YMCA or Big Brother and Big Sister, mental health services, treatment agencies, and others who work with youths. These teams met regularly to discuss caseloads of adolescents who are involved with gangs or who are at risk of gang involvement. They share information among themselves and make referrals to appropriate agencies.

One of the elements that can be helpful to Coordinators is that the approach often looks to coordinate services in the community, rather than establish new ones.

## Elements of the Comprehensive Approach

As researchers and practitioners have gained experience in trying to prevent gang involvement and intervene with youths already deeply part of gangs, they have seen that a broad range of responses is needed -- from the youngest child to offenders coming out of incarceration and re-entering the communities where fellow gang members are still active (note: when experts talk of gang prevention, it is a short-hand method of saying preventing youth from joining gangs, rather than preventing gangs from forming).

Schools will probably take the most active role in the prevention aspects, but can play an important part in the entire spectrum of responses. The following is a more detailed look at the OJJDP's Gang Reduction Program.

**Primary Prevention:** This approach targets the entire population in a high-crime, high-risk communities. Services may include prenatal and infant care, truancy and dropout prevention and job programs. Many of these programs are based in the schools. These programs typically target elementary and middle schools. Examples include:



#### **Anti-bullying efforts**

Some children report joining a gang for protection from bullying. If schools have a strong anti-bullying program in place, they may help prevent vulnerable children from joining a gang and reduce victimization by others from gangs. For more details on anti-bullying programs, see previous on-line Coordinators event <http://www.k12coordinators.org/onlinece/onlineevents/bullying>.

#### **Truancy programs**

When children stop attending school, they have more free time to get into trouble and hang out with peers who are doing the same. Truancy can become the first step, and a warning sign, toward delinquency and gang involvement. For more details on truancy programs, see previous on-line Coordinators event <http://www.k12coordinators.org/onlinece/onlineevents/truancy>.

#### **Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.)**

This is a 13-session classroom-based course delivered by law enforcement to middle school students. The course is designed to discourage children and young adolescents from joining gangs. *For more details on the course and evaluation findings click [here](#).*

**Secondary Prevention:** This approach identifies young children (age 7-14) at high risk of joining a gang and uses resources of schools, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups to intervene with services before early problem behaviors turn into serious delinquency and gang involvement. Targeted children could include younger siblings of gang members and families with 7- or 8-year-olds who are beginning to show signs of troublemaking such as throwing rocks through schools on weekends. Both secondary prevention and intervention are much more individualized than primary prevention. Among those programs are the following:



#### **Boys and Girls Clubs Gang Prevention/Intervention Through Targeted Outreach**

Staff at the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) drew upon their existing programs to prevent juvenile delinquency when they created two programs in the early 1990s that focused on gangs: (1) Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach, which was designed to help youth stay out of gangs; and (2) Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach, which was designed to help youth get away from gangs. The programs have four components, according to BGCA:

- Mobilizing community resources to combat the community gang problem
- Recruitment of youth at risk of gang involvement or youth already involved with gangs
- Promoting positive experiences for these youth by developing programs based on their interests that also address the youth's specific needs through programming and mainstreaming youth into the Boys and Girls Clubs

- Providing individualized case management across four areas (law enforcement/juvenile justice, school, family, and Club) to target youth to decrease gang-related behaviors and contact with the juvenile justice system and to increase the likelihood that they will attend school and show improved academic success

"In most communities, caring adults don't have any trouble identifying youth who are most likely to become gang-involved. Particularly in a school setting, educators who see the bulk of the kids in their community can easily identify youth they are concerned about. Where the challenge often lies is how to connect these youth with other caring adults who can help them when the school bell rings at the end of the day. Educators can play a critical role in not just identifying 'high-risk' youth, but can also be a great conduit for connecting these youth to positive adults who work in after-school programs like the Boys and Girls Club. As community partners, if we can identify kids who are headed toward gangs and get to them before gangs do, we have an opportunity to find out what they like to do and what they are good at. From there, we can intentionally surround them with positive adults and peers who can then connect the youth with positive activities [use of leisure time], which is what we really want for all young people," said Becky Flaherty, senior director, Delinquency Prevention, Boys and Girls Clubs of America. "Sometimes we have to step forward proactively [beyond the four walls of our own organization] and do that."

For more details on the Boys and Girls Clubs programs and evaluation findings click [here](#).

As adolescents enter high school, school officials and others must look to intervention strategies.

"The prevention window of opportunity closes by about age 15 because almost all youth who join gangs have joined by that age," writes James C. Howell in *Preventing and Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Comprehensive Framework*.

**Intervention:** This approach targets active gang members, close associates, and gang members returning from confinement. It involves aggressive outreach and recruitment. Services can include tattoo removal, help in completing school and obtaining jobs, advocacy in court hearings, and other help. Many of the OJJDP-funded programs put a major emphasis on this strategy. Some of the programs do not try to persuade youth to leave gangs; rather they try to redirect youth to positive behavior and goal-setting. Examples include the following:



Several of these programs will be featured throughout the rest of this event. The box below highlights one such program in Houston:

### **Houston Anti-Gang Program Focuses on Troubled Youth One at a Time**

When Robert Tagle goes out into the streets of Houston to talk to adolescents who may be involved with gangs, he doesn't even mention gangs. He just wants to get to know a kid. The project coordinator of the Houston Gang-Free Schools project, Tagle asks about home life, school, and friends. Many of the youth he talks to come from broken homes, with parents who are sometimes violent or have addictions, are skipping school, have mental health problems, and may have started their own heavy drinking or drug use.

"When you start dealing with all the hurt and pain and all the things that they have buried all over the years, you're going to get gangs," Tagle said. "Sometimes [our work] is about breaking different cycles. If you are raised in an environment where that's all you see, if you've never been to a [Houston] Astros games, never been to the Holocaust museum or been to the zoo, you will think the world revolves around your neighborhood. Sometimes, it's a matter of education, teaching them how to talk right, dress right, good hygiene, brush your teeth, wake up in the morning -- little things that we have taken for granted, some of these guys don't know."

Tagle told of a 15-year-old boy whom an outreach worker referred to the program. He had not been in school for two years, had more than \$1,000 in tickets for curfew and truancy violations, and had been arrested for possession of marijuana. He was scheduled to appear in three different courts to face his various tickets and charges. The intervention team put him on their case load and worked with the probation officer and court officials.

The boy was scheduled to be sent off to boot camp, but now he is headed for an alternative school or an accelerated program to catch up. The team is going to keep close tabs on him and try to enroll him in an alcohol and drug treatment program. Project staff can also arrange counseling, gang tattoo removal, help in finding a job, and securing the necessary identifications, such as a social security number.

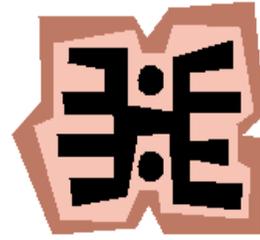
The team tries to work closely with the families, since they are the ones who know their children best. They are also another source of information about their children's habits.

"We need [the parents'] support," Tagle said. "We ask them things like 'how long has he been writing gang symbols, staying out late, and how long have you noticed liquor bottles around your house when nobody else drinks?' That gives you a good indication of what's going on. Ideally we'd like to believe that kids tell the truth, but who would have thought it -- sometimes kids lie."

"Part of your job is to teach the family how to deal with their child," he added. "Parenting groups come in handy, especially when you have other parents who have gone through this. They help each other."

Click [here](#) for tips on working with families

**Suppression:** This approach focuses on identifying the most dangerous and influential gang members and removing them from the community. This is largely a police-driven approach. In general, the effectiveness of these programs have been short-lived, especially when police focused on broad “sweeps” of gang members on minor charges that typically did not result in charges. However, programs in which police officers spend time getting to know the youth and concentrate on investigating and arresting the most dangerous gang members seem to have more success.



### **Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Applies Personal Touch to Gang Members**

“One of the most respected law enforcement gang suppression programs for youth and adults, the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department's Operation Safe Streets (OSS) began in 1979 with the assignment of teams of gang investigators to four sheriff's station areas that were combating a tremendous amount of youth and adult gang violence (McBride, 1993),” according to James Howell. Each team identified and investigated the most active gang in its geographical area, concentrating law enforcement resources exclusively on the targeted gang and its members. These suppression activities were combined with vertical prosecution and intensive probation supervision. McBride (1993) suggested that, apart from the combination of these three elements, a key to the success of the program was the personal rapport investigators established with gang members by maintaining regular contact with them. This helped penetrate the cloak of personal anonymity, which typically helps gang members terrorize communities. At the same time, this rapport led investigators to begin seeking educational, job placement, and family counseling programs for the youth gang members. As McBride (1993) observed, ‘The investigators found that, as they applied firm but fair law enforcement and used their personal knowledge of the gang members backed by a demonstrated humanitarian concern for the status of the individual, violence within the targeted gangs began to decline.’ Jackson and McBride (1985) referred to this approach as ‘working’ gangs using traditional investigation techniques. Soon, communities in the targeted areas began to respond positively to OSS operations. McBride (1993) reported a 50 percent decrease in youth and adult gang activity.”

Source: Howell, J.C. (August 2000). *Young Gang Programs and Strategies*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

**Reentry:** This is a combination of intervention and suppression for youth who are returning to the community from incarceration. In the past, there has been little coordination between corrections officials and local police so when a gang member is released from jail, local law enforcement might have no idea. Instead, they might see a sudden spike in violence or re-emergence of a dormant gang. This approach coordinates information so that key law enforcement are informed about pending releases, and provides inmates with programs to prepare them to return to the community and stay away from their former life in a gang. Preparation could include help finding a job or a place to live. The Boys and Girls Clubs of America have begun a program that targets youth who are re-entering the community after serving time in juvenile incarceration.



## Looking Ahead

Coordinators already have some tools to address gang problems in their communities, such as programs to combat bullying and truancy. They also have advisory committees composed of community members who can act as resources for potential and current gang members. The first step is to assess the extent of the gang problem in each community. We will take a closer look at that process tomorrow.



*Click to print today's materials  
in PDF format.*



### ***Discussion Questions***

Please think about the questions below and share your responses, comments, and/or any questions about today's material in the [Discussion Area](#).

Look at some of the materials presented today about gang prevention and intervention strategies (such as the Boys and Girls Club evaluation, the Gottfredson study, and the G.R.E.A.T. evaluation).

- ◆ What are one or two key strategies that could be helpful to you in addressing gang problems in your community?
- ◆ If Anthony lived in your community, what resources could you provide him to help him break away from gang life?
- ◆ How can you broaden efforts in addressing school safety and violence prevention, helping you to tackle gang problems in your community?

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**This completes today's work.**

**Please visit the [Discussion Area](#) to share your responses to the discussion questions!**

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# Youth Gangs: Going Beyond the Myths to Address a Critical Problem

## Comprehensive Gang Model

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According to the National Youth Gang Center, the Comprehensive Gang Model came about after extensive research with law enforcement, review of the research literature, and “social disorganization” theory.

On its Web site, the National Youth Gang Center explains the model as follows:

“The terms 'youth gang' and 'street gang' are commonly used interchangeably and refer to neighborhood or street-based youth groups that are substantially made up of individuals under the age of 24. While youth in this age group are most likely to be engaged in or at risk of committing serious or violent gang crimes, the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model focuses primarily on youth gang members less than 22 years of age, which is based on OJJDP's authorizing legislation. Motorcycle gangs, prison gangs, ideological gangs, and hate groups comprised primarily of adults are excluded from the definition.”

The Model holds that the lack of social opportunities available to this population and the degree of social disorganization present in a community largely account for its youth gang problem. The Model also suggests other contributing factors, including poverty, institutional racism, deficiencies in social policies, and a lack of or misdirected social controls. Drawing principally on social disorganization theory to frame the development of the Model, a team from the University of Chicago expected the core strategies of the Model to address gang youth, their families, and the community institutions that purport to promote their transition from adolescence to productive members of society. With this in mind, law enforcement and other agency personnel in 65 cities reporting problems with gangs were surveyed. Analysis of that information, in conjunction with site visits and focus groups, led to a mix of five strategies that address key concerns raised by the theory upon which the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model is based:

- **Community Mobilization:** Involvement of local citizens (including former gang youth and community groups and agencies) and the coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.
- **Provision of Opportunities:** The development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeted at gang-involved youth.
- **Social Intervention:** Youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, police, and other criminal justice organizations “reaching out” and acting as links between gang-involved youth (and their families) and the conventional world and its needed services.
- **Suppression:** Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision or monitoring of gang youth by agencies of the criminal justice system and also by community-based agencies, schools, and grassroots groups.
- **Organizational Change and Development:** Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and

potential resources within and across agencies to better address the gang problem.

These strategies were found to be present -- to a lesser or greater degree -- in the cities with identified gang problems that were having a positive impact on gangs. In addition to data from the surveys, extensive input from expert practitioners and gang researchers made it clear that a community's gang violence problem required attention be paid to both gang-involved youth and gangs themselves. Long-term change would not be achieved without also addressing the institutions that support and control youth and their families.

The OJJDP initially funded five sites in 1995 to implement the Comprehensive Community-Wide Approach to Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression program. Two of the sites, Riverside, Calif., and Mesa, Ariz., had enough promising funding to receive additional OJJDP funding in 1999. In fiscal year 2000, OJJDP launched the Gang-Free Schools Program in four sites (Miami-Dade County, Fla.; East Cleveland, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Penn.; and Houston, Tex.) as a replication of the Comprehensive Model.

In recent years, OJJDP has put more of a focus on emphasizing prevention in the comprehensive approach. In fiscal year 2004, it established the Gang Reduction Program in four pilot sites (Los Angeles, Calif.; North Miami Beach, Fla.; Richmond, Va.; and Milwaukee, Wisc.). Department of Justice officials believe that programs must start as early as possible in children's lives to prevent them from becoming involved in gangs.

**Sources:**

National Youth Gang Center at <http://www.iir.org/nygc>, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

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# Youth Gangs: Going Beyond the Myths to Address a Critical Problem

## Comprehensive Anti-Gang Effort in Chicago Yields Some Success, Lessons

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In Chicago's Little Village neighborhood, two gangs, the Latin Kings and the Two Six, kept the community in fear and were responsible for 75 percent of gang-related homicides, aggravated batteries, and aggravated assaults in Little Village in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The rival gangs directed much of the violence at each other, with sometimes devastating consequences for bystanders.

To address this problem the Chicago Police Department undertook the Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project between 1992 and 1997. University of Chicago Professor Irving Spergel designed the project and became its coordinator.

According to an article on the project, "the underlying assumption of the project is that the gang problem is largely a response to community disorganization, where key social institutions -- such as family, schools, police, and business -- are unable to collaboratively address the problem. The key idea of the model is to have organizations and representatives of the local community join forces to socially engage and control the behavior of young gang members, and encourage them to participate in legitimate activities in society."

The project targeted 200 members of the Latin Kings and the Two Six. The project combined an approach of social intervention with police suppression. It also included community mobilization strategies and the provision of increased social and economic opportunities for youth between the ages of 17 and 24. Youth outreach workers, a neighborhood organizer, police officers and probation officers all provided counseling to gang members they met on the streets. About half of the gang members also received home visits. Team members provided about 40 percent of the targeted youths with school referrals and special educational programs and 60 percent with job referrals and help with job placement. Workers also referred gang members and their families to medical care and drug and alcohol treatment as well as professional counseling. Police and other team members focused on reducing violence among gang members through monitoring and arrests.

The evaluation yielded the following key findings:

- Participating youth generally reduced and/or lowered their level of arrests for violence and drug crime compared with gang youth who did not receive the intervention services.
- Participating youth decreased their drop out rates (Latin King from 52 to 35 percent, and Two Six from 44 to 26 percent). The percentage of Latin Kings who held jobs increased from 36 to 48 percent and the percentage of Two Six members who were employed increased from 31 to 63 percent.

Evaluators found that a collaborative, community-based approach was more effective than traditional approaches emphasizing singular strategies, such as prevention, intervention, or suppression. However, they also found that the combined approach that brought together police, youth outreach workers, and a neighborhood organizer was difficult to implement and sustain. It was also difficult to work with the outreach workers, some of whom were former gang

members.

**Sources:**

Hahn, T. (March 1999). *Reducing Youth Gang Violence in Urban Areas: One Community's Effort*. Chicago, IL: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Also available on-line at [http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/oga/OGAv2n5\\_0399.pdf](http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/oga/OGAv2n5_0399.pdf)

Spergel, I. A. & Wa, K. W. (August 2002) *Combating Gang Violence in Chicago's Little Village Neighborhood*. Chicago, IL: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority . Also available on-line at <http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/oga/GVRP.pdf>

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# Youth Gangs: Going Beyond the Myths to Address a Critical Problem

## Gottfredson Study

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Gary D. Gottfredson and Denise C. Gottfredson carried out a study of prevention and intervention gang programs in the nation's middle and high schools. Their findings point out some of the pitfalls of these programs, as well as provide some guidance for implementing more effective programs. Among their key findings are the following:

- "There is much room for the improvement in the quality of programs in some straightforward ways. This includes increases in the use of practices with respect to program content and methods that are found in programs that have been evaluated and found to be effective. It includes increases in the intensity (duration and frequency) with which programs are operated and includes increases in extent of their application."
- "A principal implication of the data on quality is that a large fraction of these programs are not programmatic in the sense that they are well-developed and high-quality systems of service. Quite the opposite. It appears likely that the quality of prevention activity in schools might improve if it were consolidated into a smaller number of higher-quality programs."
- "Results show that secondary students who report being involved in gangs are less exposed to many prevention activities than are students who are not exposed to gangs. This suggests the potential for including more of the highest-risk youth by actively seeking ways to include them. An analysis of the forces that limit gang-involved youth from participation should be part of the planning of any gang prevention or intervention program, with program design features or arrangements put in place to cope with or minimize the influence of these forces."
- "Fewer than half of gang prevention or intervention programs have been guided by a formal needs assessment. Formal planning is associated with stronger programs."
- "Formal needs assessment may contribute to (or depend on) principals' willingness to identify problems related to gangs. The finding that principals usually report that gangs are not a problem even in schools with a high percentage of students reporting that they participate in gangs suggests that lack of principal recognition of problems may be an obstacle to the development of effective prevention and intervention programs. At the very least, the results imply that principals' reports that gang activity is not a problem should be met with skepticism unless evidence from other sources confirms the reports."

### Source:

Gottfredson G. D. & Gottfredson D. C. (October 2001). *Gang Problems and Gang Programs in a National Sample of Schools*. Ellicott City, MD: Gottfredson Associates, Inc. Also available on-line at: <http://www.gottfredson.com/gang.htm>

# Youth Gangs: Going Beyond the Myths to Address a Critical Problem

## G.R.E.A.T. Program Shows Promise, but Evaluation Results Are Mixed

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The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and the Phoenix Police Department developed the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.) as a potentially cost-effective approach to reduce serious youth and adult gang crime. The program, which began in 1991, was aimed at providing students with tools to resist the lure of joining a gang. Modeled after the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program (a school-based drug prevention program taught by law enforcement officers), the 13-session course taught by uniformed law officers to middle school students, the curriculum: (1) highlights the dangers of gang life and provides information on the dangers of gang involvement; (2) seeks to help students develop life skills in peacefully resolving conflict and resisting pressure to join gangs; and (3) encourages adolescents to develop a positive relationship with law enforcement. Unlike most efforts to reduce gang involvement, this program is given to an entire classroom, rather than focusing on adolescents who appear to be most at risk for gang membership.

The program also provides a shorter curriculum for third and fourth graders as well as a summer and a family component. Nearly 365,000 students received the G.R.E.A.T. curriculum in fiscal year 2002.

A national evaluation of the program yielded some contradictory findings. There were no significant differences between participants and non-participants after two years, but after four years, G.R.E.A.T. students exhibited more positive social attitudes than non-G.R.E.A.T. students. Students in the G.R.E.A.T. program reported lower levels of risk-seeking and victimization, more positive attitudes toward the police, more negative attitudes toward gangs, and more friends involved in positive social activities than students in the control group. Neither study showed any reduction in gang membership and delinquent behavior.

But the study's authors cautioned that the program results were modest. "Clearly, this program is not a `silver bullet' or a panacea for gang violence," stated evaluator Finn-Aage Esbensen. The initial poor results prompted ATF to solicit a review of the curriculum, which the Bureau revised in January 2001 to provide more interactive lessons, greater involvement with classroom teachers, and booster sessions to reinforce skills learned in earlier years.

For more information on the program see <http://www.atf.gov/great>.

For information on the evaluation see Esbensen, F. A. (June 2004). *Evaluating G.R.E.A.T.: A School-Based Gang Prevention Program*. Washington, DC U.S. Department of Justice. Also available on-line at <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/198694.pdf>.

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# Youth Gangs: Going Beyond the Myths to Address a Critical Problem

## Boys and Girls Clubs Reach Youth at Risk of Joining Gangs, Evaluation Finds

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In the early 1990s, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) began working with youth at risk of joining gangs or already in gangs. Government officials were becoming alarmed about the increasing numbers of youth gangs, and BGCA officials were hearing about increased gang activity from their local clubs.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America drew on their long work in juvenile delinquency prevention in developing programs aimed at preventing youth from joining gangs and enticing youth away from gangs. The programs, Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach, and Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach, seek to reach youth by first establishing relationships with them and then providing them with services they need to keep or get their lives on track. The programs are based on research that showed that risk factors for delinquency are similar to risk factors for joining a gang. BGCA sought to offer alternative activities and supports to youth that a gang typically meets.

The prevention model brings youth into local Boys and Girls Clubs to participate in all aspects of Club programming. Known as "mainstreaming," the approach seeks to avoid labeling adolescents—who probably have already heard a host of negative labels about their behaviors, according to Becky Flaherty, senior director, Delinquency Prevention, Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

"We know from research that you don't put a bunch of high-risk kids together. They will learn high-risk behavior from each other," Flaherty said.

She continued, "When we talk about community mobilization, we are talking about working with adults who understand mainstreaming. Let's say a fifth grade teacher sees a kid drawing gang signs. He's not there yet [as part of a gang] but he's headed there. Instead of saying, 'I see you drawing gang signs,' and sending him to the Boys and Girls Club for a [anti] gang class, she could say, 'I see you're artistic, and send him to a Boys and Girls Club or YMCA for an art class. The programming, at least initially, is going to be about art.'"

But the art teacher would also incorporate conflict resolution into the art lessons, Flaherty said. As the staff at the Boys and Girls Clubs get to know the youth, they help them set goals for school and for life. An evaluation of the program found that it was difficult in practice to integrate programs that incorporated a youth's interest and builds skills, such as conflict resolution. In practice, the program was typically offered separately.

"Because getting the gang members to the classes the program offers can be challenging, Clubs provide incentives and rewards for good attendance," wrote Amy J. Arbretton and Wendy S. McClanahan of Public/Private Ventures in an evaluation of the programs. "A reward might be the opportunity to go waterskiing or rock climbing. These events give youth an important chance to see appropriate behavior outside of the neighborhood."

The approach also involves a close working relationship with the parents, the school, and law enforcement and probation, if necessary, so all the key adults in the youth's life know what is happening with her. Club staff make special efforts to recruit youth, going to schools, hanging

out in parks, and seeking referrals from police, probation officers, and teachers.

Public/Private Ventures, Inc., conducted an evaluation of the BGCA prevention and intervention programs between 1997 and 2000. Both programs fared well. For the prevention program, the evaluators surveyed the youth when they first were recruited to the program and 12 months later. The evaluators found that the majority of youth engaged in Club activities for 12 months (73 percent for the prevention group and 50 percent of the intervention group) reported going to the Clubs or projects several times per week in the month prior to the follow-up interview.

The evaluators pointed out that those levels of retention and participation “are difficult to achieve with any youth or teen, let alone with youth who have been engaging in high-risk behaviors.” Study findings also reported that participating youth reported several experiences that are critical to healthy development, according to the research literature. Those experiences included (1) receiving adult support and guidance from at least one Boys and Girls Club staff; (2) feeling a sense of belonging and safety; and (3) finding the Club activities interesting and challenging.

In trying to determine whether the prevention program played a role in keeping youth away from gangs, the evaluators reported that more frequent participation was "associated with the following positive outcomes":

- Delayed onset of one gang behavior (less like to start wearing gang colors)
- Less contact with the juvenile justice system (less likely to be sent away by the court)
- Fewer delinquent behaviors (stealing less and less likely to start smoking pot)
- Improved school outcomes (higher grades and greater valuing of doing well in school)
- More positive social relationships and productive use of out-of-school time

#### **Sources:**

Arbreton, A. J. and McClanahan, W. S. (March 2002). *Targeted Outreach: Boys and Girls Clubs of America's Approach to Gang Prevention and Intervention*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. Also available on-line at [http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/148\\_publication.pdf](http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/148_publication.pdf).

Boys and Girls Clubs of America Web site <http://www.bgca.org>.

Flaherty, B. (July 2004). Personal communication.

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## Working with Gang-Impacted Families

*The City of Houston Mayor's Office offers these suggestions in working with Gang-Impacted Families:*

As you reach out to enlist families in keeping their children out of gangs and gangs out of the community, these reminders may be helpful.

### **LISTEN.**

Ask how they feel; consider body language as well as words and voice tones. Listen to the interactions among family members for clues to underlying relationships.

### **DON'T BLAME.**

Sometimes family members will try to enlist you on "their side." Sometimes it's tempting to deal in "if only . . ." thinking. You are trying to enlist, encourage, and empower people, not load them with guilt.

### **BE AVAILABLE.**

In a busy world with many urgent priorities, this can be the hardest job of all. But being in places where family members can reach you in person and by phone, and being open to their concerns makes the overall job much easier.

### **HAVE THE FACTS.**

Dealing in rumors, opinions, and surmises hurts your own credibility. Factual answers can also help defuse tensions.

### **BE AN ALLY.**

Helping people do things themselves may at first seem more difficult than doing it on your own. But keeping in mind the ally and helper role makes it easier to enjoy enormous benefits of empowering the families you are working with.

### **BE A RESOURCE.**

As a professional with training, experience, and contacts, you doubtless know many ways to help people avoid "re-inventing the wheel." There is nothing wrong with offering guidance and advice.

### **BE SENSITIVE TO FAMILY CULTURE.**

Regional differences, cultural differences, and differences in heritage can all affect how family members go about working together and with you.

### **Source:**

City of Houston Mayor's Anti-Gang Office.