



**A Series of Information Resources  
on**

***Youth Subcultures:  
Understanding Subgroups to Better  
Address Barriers to Learning  
& Improve Schools***

As calls for addressing barriers to student learning and improving schools increase, better understanding of youth subculture is essential. This series is intended to stimulate thinking about the implications for policy and practice of the complex, multifaceted subgroups with which youth come to be identified and/or assigned by peers.

Public health and education policy makers, practitioners, researchers, and educators need to know as much as they can about the factors that lead youth to manifest behaviors stemming from group defined values, beliefs, attitudes, and interests. Such understanding is basic to promoting healthy development, preventing problems, intervening as soon as problems arise, and enhancing intervention impact on severe and chronic problems.

To these ends, the Center is producing a series of resources, such as this one, as aids for policy and practice analyses, research, education, and school and community improvement planning.

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## About Youth Gangs

Our focus here is on briefly highlighting:

- (1) how gangs are defined and members identified
- (2) the impact of gangs on society and on gang members
- (3) prevalent policy and practice approaches to address the negative impact of gangs
- (4) data on intervention impact
- (5) proposed new directions
- (6) resources for more information.

Note: In 2007, the Center prepared a policy and practice analysis brief on *Youth Gangs & Schools* (online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/policyissues/Youth%20gangs%20&%20Schools.pdf> ). This *Information Resource* complements and does some updating of that report, but the brief does provide more details.

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## About Youth Gangs

After a decline from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, survey findings point to a steady increase in gangs and gang activity. It is estimated there are now about 30,000 youth gangs and 782,500 gang members active in the U.S. Analyses of the data over many years stresses that gangs are not just in urban centers. Smaller cities account for just over 30 percent, and rural counties account for 4.5 percent. The problem also is a source of significant concern on Native American reservations (National Youth Gang Center, 2011).

A consistent finding over the years is that poor school performance, feeling unsafe on the way to, from, and at school, and association with peers who engage in delinquency are among the strongest factors correlated with youth gang membership (Egley, Howell, & Major, 2006; Hill et al., 1999; Le Blanc & Lanctot, 1998; Thornberry et al., 2003; Wyrick & Howell, 2004). Surveys indicate that 23-24 percent of students reported that there are gangs at their schools and in the community (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006; National Crime Victimization Survey, 2007). Hispanic and Black students were more likely than Whites to report gangs in their schools (38 and 37 percent, respectively, vs. 17 percent). This pattern held among students in both urban and suburban schools. Between 2003 and 2005, reports of gangs increased among both Black students (29 vs. 37 percent) and White students (14 vs. 17 percent), but not Hispanic students. In terms of race/ethnicity of gang members, recent reports indicate that about 46 percent are Hispanic/Latino, 35 percent African-American/black, 11 percent white, and 7 percent other.

### Defining Gang and Identifying Members

There is considerable disagreement in the social science and criminal justice literature when it comes to identifying the characteristics that define a youth gang. This is the case even among law enforcement agencies because of differences in the laws under which they operate and the agency's language, observations, and experiences. Definitional variations, of course, are problematic for policy, practice, research and training (Esbensen, Winfree, Jr., He, & Taylor, 2001; OJJDP, 2000). What follows is a sample of prevailing efforts to grapple with definition and identification.

As defined in Oregon's *Policy to Reduce Gang Involvement, Violent Activities and Drug Abuse*, gang "means a group that identifies itself through the use of a name; unique appearance or language, including hand signs; the claiming of geographical territory; or the espousing of a distinctive belief system that frequently results in criminal activity."

One synthesis states that gangs are commonly seen as "a loosely-organized association of socially excluded, alienated, or bigoted individuals acting together within a fluid structure with informal leadership. Youth gangs are bound by a common ethnicity, race, social class, or other determinant and employ distinctive symbols, including style and color of dress, hand signs, tattoos, and graffiti. Loyal gang members follow a gang-defined system of rules, rituals, and codes of behavior. Gangs serve some individuals as a substitute family structure. Membership imparts a sense of empowerment as members act together to defend territory and provide mutual protection. Youth gangs typically engage in delinquent, criminal, and violent activities, often for financial gain" (Children's Health Encyclopedia, online <http://www.answers.com/topic/gang> )

Another synthesis begins by recognizing that "The word 'gang' conjures up many different images and feelings." A gang is defined as "three or more persons with common interests, bonds and activities characterized by criminal or delinquent conduct." The discussion goes on to stress that a gang is based on "pride, loyalty, friends, trust ... it's about structure, rules, consequences ... it's being somebody, having success and feeling safe and wanted." And, to really make a gang work, it is

noted that the members “need to pattern themselves after the ideal family ... to entice teenagers, and children, toward an element that would otherwise appear criminal and out of line with what we as parents have taught them.” This source suggests that to truly understand a gang, it is necessary to look at three different areas; the structure of a gang, who joins gangs and why, and gang identifiers.

Here is a bit of what is highlighted:

“At the introductory phase, the young person latches on to peers or older youth who impress them in a variety of ways. It can be dress, self confidence, or the number of close friends they have available to them. Unfortunately, gang involved youth utilizes the need for praise, friendship, and attention as a means to entice further involvement. Most youth at this phase are just beginning to show interest. A slight change of clothing, graffiti on notebooks and some rule bending at home or school may begin to surface.

As the youth progresses further into gang activity, there is a higher level of risk taking. They often attend gang functions, tattoo themselves, and dress the part” (gangfreekids.org ).

Youth also vary in how they identify gang members. Non-gang members tend to use the label to designate those who look and act in the ways described above. Gang members themselves use a variety of ways to differentiate among gangs (e.g., clothing, hand signs, graffiti symbols). Others broaden use of the label to include any peers that band together, differentiating between those groups that pursue violent and illegal behavior and those who do not. For example, the Teens Against Gang Violence program in Dorchester, MA state: “We consider ourselves a gang, but we are a non-violent, peace and justice gang. We are not against gangs – we are against gang violence. We are trying to let everyone see that we are all part of the same gang – the human race” (<http://www.tagv.org/faq.htm> ).

In contrast to social clubs, the organizing structure is described in the literature as hierarchical. At the top are the *leaders*. These members like conventional leaders, are the most powerful and dictate the day to day activities of the gang. Below them are the *hardcore* members, who make up about ten percent of the gang. The leaders and hardcore members achieve their status by committing criminal, violent acts.

*Associates* are those who have indicated commitment and eagerness to gain higher status, but have yet to perform acts warranting a hardcore ranking. Below the associates are the fringe members, drifters who are not fully committed to the gang and may not be participants in criminal activities. Lastly, are the *wannabes* who are not actually members, but dress in the gang’s colors and adopt the gang’s demeanor.

**Note:** A common response to the question of why youth join gangs is that they join to gain a sense of family, protection or fast cash. The matter, of course, is a bit more complicated. **A brief discussion of why youth join gangs is in Appendix A.**

## What Is the Impact of Gangs on Society and on Gang Members?

The natural tendency is to emphasize the negative impact of gangs on *society*. For example, the 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment warns:

“Once found principally in large cities, violent street gangs now affect public safety, community image, and quality of life in communities of all sizes in urban, suburban, and rural areas. No region of the United States is untouched by gangs. Gangs affect society at all levels, causing heightened fears for safety, violence, and economic costs”

There also is an impact on gang members. Clearly, there are negative consequences that accrue from gang membership. And, while it is unpopular to mention, it should be noted that some gang members experience some positive benefits.

Among the earliest societal concerns related to youth gang membership is poor academic achievement, the undermining of school safety, vandalism, substance abuse problems, and truancy. In turn, these generate youth who are disconnected from school, and schools that view gangs as a barrier to achieving their accountabilities.

The National Youth Gang Center (2000) stresses that “Prolonged gang involvement is likely to take a heavy toll on youths’ social development and life-course experiences.” That Center notes:

“The gang acts as ‘a powerful social network’ in constraining the behavior of members, limiting access to prosocial networks and cutting individuals off from conventional pursuits. These effects of the gang tend to produce precocious, off-time, and unsuccessful transitions that bring disorder to the life course in a cascading series of difficulties, including school dropout, early parenthood, and unstable employment. For some gang members, the end result of this foreclosure of future opportunities is continued involvement in criminal activity throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

Despite the apparent popular belief among youth that joining a gang will afford protection, in reality the opposite is true. Youth are far more likely to be violently victimized while in a gang than when they are not. This relationship holds irrespective of the primary reason for joining a gang (i.e., whether for protection or not).”

Others have suggested that “Hard core gang members care very little for anything outside of the gang. They fail in all other structures: family, school and community. Hard cores often find themselves in trouble with the police for a variety of reasons: aggressive behavior, stealing, alcohol and/or other drugs, vandalism, violence. Much of this criminal behavior is done in groups. Where a youth would seldom do this alone, the support of a group is encouraging” (Gangfreekids.org )

But, for some gang members, their association with a gang provides benefits. Among the most prominent are companionship, protection, and a sense of belonging, feelings of power and competence, and often access to fast money.

## **What Are the Prevalent Policy and Practice Approaches to address the negative impact of gangs?**

Gottfredson and Gottfredson (2001) estimate that there are 803,000 programs, activities, or arrangements operating in the nation's schools that are intended to reduce or prevent gang participation. Of these, 782,000 were identified as prevention-oriented. A program was designated as a gang prevention or intervention activity based on principals' identification that it was "intended to reduce or prevent problem behavior or to promote a safe and orderly environment *and* ... that it had the specific objective of reducing or preventing gang participation or that it was targeted at gang members"

A perspective on the federal approach to youth gangs can be garnered from the programs listed on the Office of Justice Programs website section devoted to youth gangs ([http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/programs/yvp\\_gangs.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/programs/yvp_gangs.htm) ). The intervention emphasis is primarily on (a) community problem solving to better understand and address the problems and (b) gang suppression. There is increasing recognition that good intervention varies culturally (Field, 2011).

Many states and localities have policies that include a focus on educational programs for prevention and early intervention related to gangs and other safe school concerns (e.g., conflict resolution strategies). Some states also have tried to enhance interagency coordination and collaboration to address gang and other problems. (The National Association of State Boards of Education provides a compendium of state-by-state policies – <http://nasbe.org/index.php/shs> .) Again, a review of state policies makes it clear that the primary focus at school and community levels is on the suppression of gang activity through dress codes/school uniforms, discipline related to bullying/fighting, collaboration with law enforcement, zero tolerance, comprehensive school safety plans, and so forth. Partially in reaction to the climate created at school by efforts to make schools safe (including suppressing gangs), there currently is increasing advocacy for a focus on enhancing school climate so students can feel not only safe, but also experience the setting as positive.

### **Any Data on Intervention Impact?**

In practice, school policy focused on suppressing gang activity has had limited impact. Schools located in neighborhoods where gangs are a significant force find that school programs are insufficient to address the problem. In an online training resource entitled *Youth Gangs: Going Beyond the Myths to Address a Critical Problem*, the U.S. Department of Education states:

“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.”

Evaluation findings looking at participation indicate that “secondary school students who report being involved in gangs are less exposed to many prevention activities than are students who are not involved in gangs.” This led the Gottfredsons to suggest the potential for including more of the highest risk youths by actively seeking ways to include them (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). This, of course, assumes that such youngsters are or can be motivated to participate.

In analyzing program quality, the Gottfredsons conclude that there is great variability, and even those that have been evaluated and found effective need improvement. This includes modifications in content and methodology and increases in the extent of application and how long and how frequent programs are operated.

### **Gang Prevention Program Example**

(OJJDP description reproduced from <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/SPT/Programs/67>)

Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (GPTTO), operated by Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA), is a community-wide gang prevention program that attempts to intervene with youths at risk of gang involvement. Targeted Outreach incorporates four objectives: community mobilization, recruitment, mainstreaming/programming, and case management. Local implementation of this program begins with mobilizing community leaders and club staff, who discuss local gang issues and clarify their roles as they design a strategy to prevent gang involvement. Police departments, schools, social service agencies, and community organizations recruit at-risk youth into club programs in a nonstigmatizing way through direct outreach efforts and a referral network that links local clubs with courts. Once in the Boys & Girls Club, youth participate in programs based on their individual interests and needs.

In the prevention model, the youth are recruited into local Boys & Girls Clubs to participate in all aspects of club programming. Programs are offered in five core areas: character and leadership development; education and career development; health and life skills; the arts; and sports, fitness, and recreation. In general, the GPTTO has been shown to produce positive outcomes both in behavior related to school and delinquency measures, although differences between the comparison group and those participating in the program are stronger for school-related behaviors than for delinquency and gang-related behaviors. Evaluations of youth behavior after participating in the GPTTO program for one year suggested that more frequent GPTTO club attendance is associated with the youth being less likely to start wearing gang colors, being less likely to have contact with the juvenile justice court system, exhibiting fewer delinquent behaviors, and demonstrating improved school outcomes and increased levels of positive peer and family relationships.

**For more, see Appendix B.**

### **Any New Directions Being Proposed?**

The U. S. Department of Education suggests that many communities are adopting a more “comprehensive” (read multifaceted) approach to dealing with gang problems (<http://www.ed.gov/print/admins/lead/safety/training/gangs/problem.html>).

The multiple facets include:

- *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.”

While a move toward “comprehensiveness” is logical, the current approach still reflects traditional tendencies to look at gangs as a discrete problem group. It is true that some facets of intervening with gangs differ from dealing with other youth subculture groups; however, it also is the case that concerns raised by many subgroups overlap. On the next page and in the box that follows, we offer a perspective about policy and practice related to all students with a few examples to illustrate how specific considerations related to gang members might be addressed.

The emphasis is on developing and implementing a comprehensive intervention continuum that:

- *Promotes healthy development and prevents problems*

For instance:

- > providing information to educate school and key community stakeholders about gangs in general and specific gangs in the community
- > establishing working alliances to dialogue with gang members (e.g., about what behaviors can and cannot be accommodated, including codes for dress; about increasing safety at schools and in the community)

- *Intervening early when problems are noted*

For instance:

- > implementing agreed upon accommodations
- > ensuring protection from gang harassment and gang-related conflicts
- > ensuring gang members have a good opportunity to succeed at school (e.g., enhancing regular attendance and motivated participation)
- > providing medical, mental health, and learning supports (e.g., related to social, emotional, and learning problems)

- *Attending to chronic and severe problems*

For instance:

- > identifying and referring gang members for appropriate individual interventions (e.g., related to drug abuse, neglect, trouble with juvenile authorities)
- > establish a safety net of support (e.g., through school, family, community mental and physical health providers, social service and juvenile justice agencies)

When it comes to gangs, schools naturally think first and foremost about matters such as safe and drug free campuses, abating vandalism, and decreasing truancy. By developing a comprehensive approach that weaves school and community resources together, they can do all this in ways that help establish a positive school climate and that increases the focus on enhancing the school performance of gang affiliated students.

## A Perspective on What Schools Should Do Based on the Work of our Center at UCLA

Schools experience many overlapping concerns related to youth subgroups and youth subculture. Of special concern is addressing any negative impact (e.g., criminal acts, bullying, sexual harassment, interracial conflict, vandalism, mental health problems). But, also essential is a focus on promoting healthy development and fostering a positive school climate.

As always, the more we understand about subgroups and individual differences, the more effective our interventions can be. But to keep from the tendency to focus on each concern as if it is discrete, schools need to work in a new way.

Given the complexity of the negative behaviors that arise in relation to youth subgroups, those in the school, district, and community who have responsibility for gangs, safe schools, violence prevention, bullying, interracial conflict, substance abuse, vandalism, truancy, and school climate need to work collaboratively. The *immediate objectives* are to (1) educate others about motivational and behavioral factors associated with a particular subgroup, (2) counter the trend in policy and practice to establish initiatives in terms of separate categories that lead to a host of fragmented and too often ineffective programs and services, and (3) facilitate opportunities on campus for youth subgroups to engage positively in subcultural activity and connect with effective peer supports.

By working collaboratively and differentiating the causes of observed problems, school staff and community stakeholders can integrate fragmented and marginalized initiatives for promoting positive youth development, preventing problems, intervening as soon as problems are identified, and providing effective ways to respond to pervasive, chronic, and serious problems. *Longer-term*, the aim is to help develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports that (a) addresses a wide range of barriers to learning, teaching, parenting, and development and (b) re-engages disconnected youth. Such a system encompasses a continuum of integrated school-community intervention systems that are fully integrated into the improvement agenda for schools and communities (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, b).

Toward these ends, schools must reach out to the community and establish a collaborative mechanism where those with specialized knowledge not only bring that knowledge to the table, but also work to build the needed comprehensive system of student and learning supports that addresses a wide range of barriers to learning, teaching, parenting, and development (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). And it is essential to remember that those with specialized knowledge include youth themselves (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2009).

Moving forward requires building a comprehensive and systemic continuum of interventions and fully integrating the system into the improvement agenda for schools and communities. To guide development of a systemic approach, we have suggested using a continuum of integrated school-community intervention systems as a unifying framework. This includes school-community systems for promoting healthy development, preventing problems, intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible, and addressing chronic and severe problems.

Policy that helps schools and communities develop the full continuum of interventions is essential to moving forward in enhancing equity of opportunity. Such policy must effectively establish a *comprehensive intervention framework* that can be used to map, analyze, and set priorities. It must guide fundamental *reworking of operational infrastructure* so that there is leadership and mechanisms for building integrated systems of interventions at schools and for connecting school and community resources. And, it must provide guidance for the difficulties inherent in facilitating major *systemic changes*. By working in this way, we can counter the trend in policy and practice to establish initiatives in terms of separate categories that lead to a host of fragmented and too often ineffective programs and services.

For resource aids related to policy examples, intervention frameworks and related mapping tools, examples of ways to rework the operational infrastructure and develop key mechanisms such as a *Learning Support Resource Team*, guides for facilitating systemic change, and much more, see the Center's Toolkit at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

## Appendix A

### Why Do Kids Join Gangs?

The process of joining the gang has two elements; the first is a series of "pulls" that attract individuals to the gang, the second are the "pushes" that compel individuals to join the gang

Decker & Van Winkle

According to the National Gang Center:

“The notion that youth are primarily, if not exclusively, actively recruited into a gang by older members is often circulated in the general public. However, systematic research continuously fails to support this view. Among the various reasons youth give for joining a gang, the following are the two most commonly observed: (1) social reasons – youth join to be around friends and family members (especially siblings or cousins) already part of the gang; and (2) protection – youth join for the presumed safety they believe the gang can afford (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Peterson et al., 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003). Also reported by youth, albeit far less frequently, are more instrumental reasons for joining a gang, such as drug selling or making money. Moreover, few youth, irrespective of race/ethnicity, report they have been forced or coerced to join a gang (Freng & Winfree, 2004; Peterson et al., 2004). In other studies, many adolescents reported they could refuse to join a gang without reprisal (Decker & Kempf-Leonard, 1991; Fleisher, 1995, 1998).”

In 1991, Prothrow-Stith (1991) wrote that gangs attract members because they provide individuals with the following:

*Sense of Community* – Gangs provide friends, a feeling of family, support for survival.

*Self-esteem & Recognition* – Bolsters sense of self among individuals who are outcasts/isolates/"no ones." Gangs provide some empowerment and opportunities to build a reputation.

*Moral Code* – Gang culture provides a set of criteria and standards for living that fills a void in the member's life. The code usually is rigid and serves the interest of the gang.

Wyrick and Howell (2004) assert that feeling unsafe at school and having friends that act delinquently are very strong correlates to gang membership.

### Examples of Psychosocial Theoretical Explanations

Various theories can be applied in explaining why kids might be drawn to gangs. Briefly stated:

>*Strain Theory* – Posits that people living in poverty feel strained about their inability to achieve success through conventional means. Lack of opportunities and resources steer them toward criminal acts and gang involvement (Anderson & Dyson, 1996).

>*Social Learning Theory* – Youth who are surrounded by family member and peer role models who engage in criminal behavior and join gangs are more likely than not to follow suit, especially if they do not have strong bonds to prosocial societal institutions (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Thompson & Braaten-Antrim, 1998).

>*Self-determination theory* – Focuses on three psychological needs: feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Individuals strive to maximize such feelings and to minimize threats to such feelings (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; ). This theory covers concepts such as self-esteem, perceived conro, and a psychological sense of community. When these basic needs are not met through prosocial activities, individuals seek other venues, such as gangs.

According to the National Gang Center:

“Other issues that shed light on youths’ participation in gangs are duration patterns of gang membership and the ways in which youth accomplish leaving a gang. Longitudinal research that follows the same subjects regularly over a long period of time provides the best measure of membership duration patterns. Only a few studies have examined gang membership longitudinally, but each of these has provided uniformly consistent evidence that youth gang membership patterns are very dynamic—most youth reported being in a gang for one year or less (Gatti et al., 2005; Gordon et al., 2004; Thornberry, 1998; Thornberry et al., 2003). These longitudinal studies were conducted primarily in areas with emerging gang problems, and thus it is unknown how these compelling findings compare with those for chronic or long-standing gang-problem areas, which are more likely to contain multigenerational and/or more hierarchically structured gangs. However, field studies in Chicago (Horowitz, 1983) and Los Angeles (Moore, 1991), where these types of gangs are more likely to exist—some of which are intergenerational—provide some evidence of more long-term patterns of gang membership among youth.

In regards to the second issue, research has documented that former gang members, especially marginal and short-term ones, typically left a gang without complication or facing any serious consequences (Decker and Lauritsen, 2002; Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). However, for more long-term and/or core members, the process of leaving a gang is likely to be more gradual and met with greater difficulty—particularly for youths in more highly organized gangs that have a firmer foothold in a community or neighborhood. Other situational factors that make leaving a gang more difficult include greater dependence on or personal status in the group, continuing perceptions by others (e.g., rivals) that the person is a bona fide member of the gang, and the lack of viable lifestyle alternatives (that is, conventional pursuits such as employment opportunities). Further, more hierarchically structured gangs may threaten or enact certain sanctions for those wishing to leave the gang.”

Clearly, some youth join gangs for proactive reasons and others do so reactively. An in-depth understanding of why youth join gangs is critical in addressing the problem (Lachman, Roman, Cahill, 2013; O’Brien, Daffern, Chu, & Thomas, 2013).

### **Gangs and the Neighborhood**

Gangs tend to cluster in highly disadvantaged, marginalized, and isolated neighborhoods. Such neighborhoods have difficulty establishing positive social institutions, provide limited legal economic opportunities for residents, and too often experience high levels of criminal activity. The 1999 Youth Gang survey found that about "half of all gang members are underclass" and 35% "working class."

### **Gangs and Family Influence**

*Gang Family History.* Having a family member who is or was a gang member increases the chances of a youngster (male and female) joining a gang (Miller, 2001; Sanches-Jankowski, 1991).

*Lack of a Sense of Family and Positive Role Models at home.* Research indicates that many gang members report a lack of a sense of family at home and that this is something they gain from their gang (Vigil 2003). Factors such as fatherless homes, abusive and/or substance abusing parents, being raised away from parents, all can work against a sense of family relatedness and make it difficult to find a positive role model at home. As surrogate families, gangs provide support, feelings of relatedness to significant others, a sense of identity and cohesiveness, and a range of role models.

## Appendix B

### A Few More Notes on School and Community Programs to Address Gangs

Gang members manifest a variety of learning, behavior, and emotional problems at school. As individuals and groups, they are associated with acting out, conflict, violence, drugs, truancy, dropping out. They represent a major source of tension at schools and in the neighborhood and hinder efforts to create a positive climate.

Current strategies for addressing problems related to gangs have not been widely effective. Schools and communities must do more to enhance their awareness about what causes youngsters to join gangs and how to work together to counter gang recruitment and deal effectively with gangs. For general resources, see the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on *Gangs* at [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3009\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3009_01.htm) . Below are a few program examples. Note: In all cases, be sure to look for data on program effectiveness.

#### Gang Resistance Programs

With respect to countering gang recruitment, the focus has been on identifying students who are highly vulnerable to gang recruitment and take steps to intervene. Risk factors are discussed by

- >Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention –  
<http://www.ojjdp.gov/jjbulletin/9808/chart.html>
- >The National Crime Prevention Center (NCPC) of the Public Safety Canada –  
<http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsracs/pblctns/yth-gng-nvlvmnt/index-eng.aspx>
- >Communities organized for Relational Power in Action –  
<http://copa-iaf.org/wp-content/uploads/Gang-Risk-Factors.pdf>
- >J.C. Howell (2005) "Moving Risk Factors into Developmental Theories of Gang Membership," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 3, 334-354.

The overlapping correlates stressed in these sources include the following potential risk factors:

- Individual (prior delinquency, aggression, anti-social attitudes, alcohol and drug use, early or precocious sexual activity)
- Peer Group (peer delinquency, association with aggressive peers and gang members, street socialization)
- School (poor school performance, low attachment to teachers, feeling unsafe in schools)
- Family (family violence, family history with gang association, lack of positive adult role models, family disorganization and poverty)
- Community (social disorganization and distressed neighborhood, high crime rate, strong gang presence, feeling unsafe in the neighborhood)

A study done in Seattle suggested that youngsters experiencing seven or more risk factors were of particular concern (Hill, Howell, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999).

In general, it has been recommended that schools watch for early indications that a student is a wanabee or has joined a gang (e.g., associates with known gang members, use of gang signs and colors, gang tattoos).

The major programmatic thrust in countering gang recruitment has focused on building resistance to peer pressure, often building on the early efforts related to generating drug resistance (i.e., DARE). Note: because DARE was found not to be effective, such programs have added components. The following Exhibit highlights two such programs and the effort to make DARE more effective.

## Examples of Resistance Programs

*The Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.)* program is a classroom curriculum that brings in a law enforcement officer to instruct students regarding the dangers of youth violence, gang membership, delinquency, etc. As a prevention strategy, the program usually is carried out in elementary or middle schools. There also is a family component called G.R.E.A.T. families, designed to strengthen families and promote positive family relationships. More program details can be found at [www.great-online.org](http://www.great-online.org). Positive program outcomes are reported at

<http://www.umsl.edu/ccj/pdfs/great/GREAT%20Wave%204%20Outcome%20Report>

The *Jeopardy Program* involves the police department in preventing and intervening the youth involved in gangs. While G.R.E.A.T. focuses on the younger students in elementary and middle schools, the Jeopardy program focuses on any age group that needs help. While G.R.E.A.T. approaches all students, Jeopardy targets those identified as "at risk." It then notifies their parents, holds a family interview, refers families to local community counseling agencies, holds monthly family seminars, offers alternative activities to be selected by each youngster, and monitor them monthly for at least one year. For more information, see [http://www.lapdonline.org/youth\\_programs/content\\_basic\\_view/735](http://www.lapdonline.org/youth_programs/content_basic_view/735).

*Drug Abuse Resistance Education + Play and Learn Under Supervision (DARE + PLUS)* is an enhanced curriculum for middle and late elementary school students. DARE + PLUS concentrates on building students' refusal skills and teaches them ways to avoid peer pressure and how to cope with life stresses. DARE + PLUS's secondary goal is to reduce aggression and violence. Classroom instruction addresses how to refuse drugs and how to avoid violent situations. DARE + PLUS also provides alternative activities through clubs/classes such as the arts, sports and tutoring

<https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=98>

## Prevention through Providing Out-of-School Programs

What youngsters do with their immediate after school time (approximately 20-25 hours per week), evenings, weekends, summer is seen as factors to be addressed by gang prevention efforts. From a gang prevention perspective, the most important criteria for such programs is that they are engaging. In this respect, the need is for a wide range of recreation and social activities, extra- and intra-mural sports, drill teams, and so forth. Additional and optional opportunities are mentoring, health and human services, assistance with school work, part time job information, etc. While most after school programs end around dinner time, the need is for appealing programs that can be available to counter the time gangs convene. For general resources, see the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on After-School & Summer Programs at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/afterschool.htm> and the Quick Find on Transitions [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm).

Here are a few examples of out-of-school efforts:

>After School Alliance –

<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/>

>The STEP UP! After School Program –

[http://www.gangfree.org/programs\\_after\\_school.html](http://www.gangfree.org/programs_after_school.html)

>Learning Enrichment After-School Program (leap) –

<http://leapusa.org/>

>A Place Called Home –

<http://www.apch.org/about/>

## **The National Gang Center and OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model**

The National Gang Center (NGC) is a project jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). The NGC program works to further the mission of DOJ by providing national leadership, information, training, and technical assistance that target gangs and street gang members of all ages. See the Center's resources at <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/> .

The Center offers the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model as a best practice. The model is a set of five core strategies that offer a comprehensive, collaborative approach designed to prevent and reduce gang violence. The strategies are:

- >Community mobilization
- >Opportunities provision
- >Social intervention
- >Suppression
- >Organizational change and development

See the 23-minute overview of the model at

<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Comprehensive-Gang-Model/Online-Overview> .

Key concepts covered include a brief overview of the nation's gang problem, a discussion of theory behind the Model and its five core strategies, a discussion on assessing the gang problem, and tools to assist community leaders in implementing the Model in their communities.

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**Source for Additional Information**

See our Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on **Gangs** – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3009\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3009_01.htm)

The Center's Series of Information Resources on *Youth Subcultures: Understanding Subgroups to Better Address Barriers to Learning & Improve Schools\**

**Online:**

*What is Youth Culture? A Brief Introduction*

*Glossary of Terms Related to Youth Culture Subgroups*

*Youth Subcultures: Annotated Bibliography and Related References*

*About Youth Gangs*

*About the Goth Youth Subculture*

*About Hip Hop Youth Subculture*

*About "Loners" and "Losers"*

*About "Jocks" as Youth Subculture*

*About Emo Youth Subculture*

*About Surfing and Skateboarding Youth Subcultures*

*About the Cheerleading Youth Subculture*

*About "Mean Girls" as a Youth Culture Subgroup*

*About "Nerds" and "Geeks" as an Identified Subculture*

*About "Preppies" as a Youth Culture Subgroup*

*About Sexual Minority (LGBT) Youth Subculture*

*Youth and Socially Interactive Technologies*

*About Raves as a Youth Culture Phenomenon*

Others are in development

\*Many of the terms used by youth in referring to subgroups often are pejorative and offensive. We do not condone such language. We do, however, recognize the need to go beyond adultcentric definitions and descriptions of youth subgroups if we are to understand youth perceptions and perspectives. So the *Information Resource* documents reflect the terms used by youth.