Gangs: The Push for Effective Prevention and Intervention Programs for Youth

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Gangs: The Push for Effective Gang Prevention and Intervention Programs for Youth

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The fact that I am at the closing stages of completing my master’s degree is so unbelievable that I have to pinch myself a few times to see if I am dreaming. Getting to this stage has not been an easy task. I have had to overcome tremendous hurdles to get to this point. Initially, I had no plans on going back to school when I completed my bachelors because I was convinced that my bachelor’s degree would be all I would need to pursue a career in law enforcement. Through trial and error though, I realized that the law enforcement avenue was not my calling and the desire I once had to pursue such career path was no longer there. As time progressed and while I began to figure out what my next steps were, I realized that one thing was still evident: my desire to help others overcome adversities.

My education and personal experiences have helped me to understand how the system has been working against people of color and disadvantages. As an African American, I have been blessed to live a privileged life which includes having both parents in the picture, having access to great schools, violence-free neighborhoods, a disciplined upbringing, and strong support system that have played a major role towards where I am today. It was not until during college that I realized that the world is not fair. I have come across some people with great hearts who have faced circumstances that shaped their criminal thinking and did not have very many people in their corner to direct them in the right path.

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Abstract

Gang activity is one of the most contributing factors to juvenile delinquency among youth. The problem is that little to no research has been done on the effective program features and their influence on prevention or discouraging youth from joining gangs. Street gangs have been around America since the late 1700s when immigrants began migrating to America. Gangs emerged as a result of the social disorganization and turmoil that evolved over time. In the late 20th century, juveniles were becoming more involved in the gang lifestyle while the older individuals left to assimilate to the social norms of society. Other factors that influenced these individuals to leave were changes in life events such as employment, marriage, and/or children. There are individual, family, peer, school, and community factors that influence gang membership. Weakness in one or many of these factors increase the likelihood of gang membership. While prison for gang members is a reactive approach to reducing gang violence but causes taxpayers money, therapy and other intervention methods are a proactive approach to steer youth away from gangs. Intervention programs have developed to assist at-risk/gang involved youth and their families in turning their lives around and minimizing their criminal thinking. The OJJDP gang model has suggested that to be effective, programs would need to address the problem, develop and effective organizational plan, develop a mobilization strategy, create goals and objectives for services and organization, implement rationales for services, engage community participation, hold youth accountable, and hire and train the right staff with knowledge of the problem.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The word gang has a variety of definitions with the intent of defining an organization of three or more people who claim a group identity. This common definition alone does not necessarily refer to a criminal or street gang. In fact, it can refer to a boy scout group, student organization, or a sports team because they too are an organization of three or more people who claim a group identity. Wisconsin Statute § 939.22(9) defines criminal street gangs as:

“an ongoing organization, association or group of 3 or more persons, whether formal or informal, that has as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts, or acts that would be criminal if the actor were an adult…that has a common name (ie. Vice Lords) or a common identifying sign or symbol” (Wisconsin Legislature, n.d.)

Bates and Swan (2014) define gangs as an “organization of the street composed of either 1.) the socially excluded or 2.) alienated, demoralized, or bigoted elements of a dominant racial, ethnic, or religious group” (p. 230). Lastly, NCJRS (n.d.) defines gangs as groups of three or more individuals engaging in criminal activity. For the purpose of this research, we look to explore the definition of gangs as an organization of three or more people who claim a group identity whose intent is to commit criminal activity.

According to Lenzi et al. (2015), gang membership among youth is a widespread issue that is receiving more attention. Between 2002 to 2010, the United States saw nearly a 35% increase of youth gangs (Simon, Ritter, and Mahendra, 2013). Gang violence has also become a widespread issue since the mid- 20th century. All 50 states including District of Columbia have made reports of gang problems (Howell, 2010). There are around 30,000 gangs in the United
States today with approximately 800,000 members (Gottfredson et al., 2018). The National Gang Center (n.d.) reports that there are more Hispanic, Black, and male gangs than any other race or gender. Gang affiliation is not something youth leave behind when they enter school grounds. Behaviors, attitudes, and conflicts tend to follow youth when they enter the school environment as well (National Gang Center, 2019). Gang membership affects school involvement and educational attainment and is an issue for youth between the ages of 12 and 24 (NIJ, 2011).

Estrada, Gilreath, Astor & Benbenishty (2016) found that schools are one of the important places to implement gang prevention and intervention strategies. Lenzi et al. (2015), suggests that youth are more likely to join gangs when influenced by delinquent peers and for protection because they feel the school environment is unsafe. Youth males are more susceptible to gang membership in pursuit to find a sense of belonging. The obstacles that those who live in urban areas face are what influence gang involvement. Ice-T, a former gang member turned successful actor, talks about how certain circumstances lead youth to get in trouble. He explains that when a child has no hope, they have nothing to lose and it is easy to make bad decisions (Ice-T., 2015).

Depending on where the youth is from, these bad decisions can range anywhere from a minor theft to auto theft to intentional homicide. It is important and concerning that youth in gang are more likely to commit more crimes than non-gang members. This notion can be supported with the ideology that broken youth will do any and everything to feel a sense of belonging. Hill, Lui, and Hawkins (2001) suggest that it is important to understand what factors predict gang membership in order to prevent youth from joining gangs. Such factors can be found within neighborhood, family, school, individual, and peer group domain levels.
Purpose of the Study

Gangs in schools often cause an issue with threats, youth recruiting, and criminal activities (National Gang Center, 2019). According to NIJ (2019), gang members engage in more serious and violent crimes than non-gang members. The United States Department of Justice (n.d.) explains that gang violence has risen drastically in larger cities and youth gangs continue to become more violent. Organizations have taken steps to create programs to prevent, intervene, and reduce the impact of gang involvement. The purpose of the study is to bring awareness to gang membership, examine some gang prevention and intervention programs, and examine the strategies necessary to design an effective gang prevention and intervention program that follows the comprehensive gang model from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program (OJJDP). This paper will advocate for prevention and intervention programs that stop youth from joining criminal street and violent gangs.

O’Connor and Waddell (2015) have found that skill-building and family focused programs worked to prevent and improve a youths chances of joining a gang or committing gang-related activities while programs such as mentoring, community-based, and gang-specific programs were promising but had limited evidence displaying effectiveness. Meanwhile, programs centered on scare tactics (i.e., prison visits) and militaristic methods (i.e., boot camp) were proven to be ineffective and potentially cause more harm than good.

Significance or Implications of the Study

As mentioned previously, youth gangs have been a widespread issue in the United States. By 2010, the total of youth gang members in the United States reached 1 million (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). This issue can primarily be found within larger cities and disproportionately influence both Black and Hispanic males from single family households living below the poverty
A vast majority of inner-city youth find themselves joining gangs for protection, because they have a family member or peer in a gang, respect, a sense of belonging, and other social, economic, and psychological factors. A deeper look to what interventions can prevent youth from joining violent gangs is necessary since gang members engage in more serious and violent crimes than non-gang members.

The findings of the research presented would impact the states, juvenile justice facilities, the community, schools, and other gang intervention and prevention programs. Finding alternatives more effective than punishment for gang affiliated youth would help minimize crime, build safer communities, and save taxpayers money. When a youth gang member (juvenile delinquent) under the age of 18 commits a crime and are caught, they are detained by law enforcement officials and processed through the juvenile justice system (OJJDP, n.d.). Approximately 60,000 children are locked up in juvenile facilities (American Civil Liberties Union, 2019). States spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for youth incarcerations (Kirchner, 2014).

**Assumptions Necessary**

In order to design a program that effectively prevents and curbs youth from gang membership and involvement, one must understand the factors that contribution to gang membership. Factors such as poverty, academic failures, family issues, and parental criminality among others. Those factors explain the social, economic, and psychological influences of gang membership. Knowledge of these factors will be reviewed below to provide a better blueprint for future programs.
Methods of Approach

The methodology that will be used for this paper will be a review of research studies on gang involvement. The history of gangs, risk factors such as sociological, economical, and psychological reasons for why youth males join gangs, and consequences of gang involvement will be explained. Secondary data analysis will be used to examine the effectiveness of prevention and intervention methods. Research will be presented using EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, National Gang Center, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), FBI.gov, and textbooks from criminal justice courses arguing why prevention and intervention methods are more effective when used for therapeutic and rehabilitative purposes as opposed to punitive and supervisory sanctions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of Gangs

Colonial America & the 1700s

Gangs have always been a part of American history dating back to during colonial times in the late 1700s. These gangs emerged in East Coast cities before migrating to the Midwest, West, and South. They were created as a result of immigrants migrating to the United States through Ellis Island and settling in the urban areas. This caused inner cities to be overcrowded which led to social disorganization between neighborhoods (Howell and Griffiths, 2019). Schmallager (2017) defines social disorganization as the displacement and hostility among different social, or ethnic groups. The first wave, immigrating to the United States around 1786, began after the American Revolution with people coming from England and other English territories including a small number of the Dutch, Germans, and Swedish (Howell and Griffiths, 2019). Immigrants came to the United States in search of wealth and the pursuit of happiness, only to experience poverty and economic struggles. Crime rates began to rise as homeless youth roamed the streets looking to find food and clothing to survive. They also did not want to become products of their families struggle. The first gangs were initially formed to keep ethnic groups together for protection and serious criminal activities were not present during this period (Gang Mentality, n.d.).

800s

The second wave of immigrants began around the mid-1800s with more Europeans. Gangs grew significantly, committing crimes and robberies to earn money to support their families and themselves. They felt neglected by society, which led them to find ways to survive and get ahead. The first criminally dangerous recognized gang emerged in New York after the
1820s and were known as the Forty Thieves. Forty Thieves, an Irish gang, was founded by Edward Coleman in 1825 (The Bowery Boys, 2009). Edward Coleman, an Irish immigrant, formed this organization as a rebellious tactic to combat their low social status and specialized in murders and robberies (Gang Mentality, n.d.). According to The Bowery Boys (2009), the Forty Thieves were in existence for 25 years before its members joined other gangs or left entirely on their own terms. Forty Thieves were considered more powerful and violent than other gangs like the Bowery Boys and Five Points (Howell & Griffiths, 2019).

After the Civil War, the next powerful gang to emerge were the Whyos (Howell and Moore, 2010). The Whyos, an Irish gang in New York City, were active from the 1860s to 1890s. They specialized in crimes ranging from pickpocketing and murders and performed special crimes; such as punching, breaking bones, biting off ears, shootings, stabbings, and murders. Their fees ranged from one dollar to over 100 dollars. Following the deaths of its leaders Danny Lyons and Danny Driscoll, the gang lost its powerful status declined (Forsyth, 2018).

**20th Century**

Gangs grew as a social and physical disorders continued to grow. The first war on gangs was initiated in the early 1900s by police where gang members were beaten, arrested, and leaders were sent away to prison but the street gangs survived and continued to grow as a result of the slum conditions (Howell & Griffiths, 2019). Around the late 1900s, some gang members began migrating to the Midwest and settling in Chicago. These groups were populated by the Italians and Polish. White ethnic groups began unifying, forming gangs – like the Ragen Colts – to protect their turfs from the Blacks and Hispanics (Howell and Moore, 2010).
It was not until after the 1920s that gangs in the Midwest and West coast became more popular. During the 1920s, violence gained the nation’s attention as organized crime gained prevalence, following the likes of Al Capone. Street gangs wanted to prosper under the examples of Al Capone’s crime mobs. Soon white gangs began to scatter away from Chicago cities in search of better opportunities for their families, leaving Black and Hispanic gangs to fend for themselves in the now impoverished city. Blacks continued migrating to Chicago to escape the Jim Crow laws and slavery they experienced in the South and East. As Black immigrants continued to populate Chicago, the White ethnic groups continued to escape to the suburbs as they now began assimilating into mainstream American society. Poverty was a result of Whites leaving the minorities with little to no resources to help them prosper. Black youth began participating in more delinquent activities while hanging out and forming cliques with other black youth. This led to the creation of more street gangs causing more violence as Blacks began to lash out their frustrations on the Black community sparking wars between the White and Black gangs of Chicago. Three major black street gangs, Gangster Disciples, P-Stones, and Vice Lords, formed in Chicago after the 1940s (Howell and Moore, 2010).

**Juvenile gangs in the 21st Century**

Gangs of the past began to decline as members matured, found employment, and started families. Although some adults remain in the gang life as a result of being released from prison and having no other outlet outside of crime, youth gangs have begun to emerge since the late 20th and significantly into the 21st century. Youth gangs are defined as youth between the ages of 12 and 24 in groups of three or more people, who have common name and/or sign, and a motive of committing illegal. Some youth under the age of 12 are finding ways to seek membership into these gangs (Howell, 1997). Street gangs have three prominent goals: defending territory,
maintaining honor, and achieving respect by defeating their competition. The functions that
gangs serve include providing living space, supporting group honor, policing neighborhoods to
provide safety, and providing economic, social, employment, welfare, and recreational services.
When separate groups of people are fighting to obtain that same goal, conflict occurs and
violence erupts. Gangs identify themselves through gang colors, gang signs, clothing, language
content, and graffiti. They do this to intimidate others and present a dangerous image (Howell &
Griffiths, 2019).

**Defining Gangs**

**Criminological definition**

As explained earlier, the definition of gangs has a variety of meanings so much that there
has been no universally accepted common definition. Scholars have characterized gangs as:

“…an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated
through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting
face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The
result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective
internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and
attachment to local territory” (Thrasher, 2013, p. 57).

Gangs are groups whose members meet together with some regularity, over time,
on the basis of group-defined criteria of membership and group-defined
organizational characteristics; this is, gangs are non-adult-sponsored, self-
determining groups that demonstrate continuity overtime (Short, 1996, p. 3).

Gangs consist of a group of three or more individuals who identify themselves
through a group identity and other identifying symbols (graffiti, signs, colors,
clothing, etc.) serving with the intent to create an environment of fear and intimidation. The members of such organization engage in criminal/delinquent activity, meet on a regular basis, employ rules for membership, involvement, and structure, provide protection to its members, and seek control over a specific location (NIJ, 2011).

Asking a youth if they are involved in a gang could be difficult making it important to analyze the characteristics the youth presents all while analyzing the characteristics of a gang. To some youth, the gang in which they are involved in could be what they consider to be family because it offers them a sense of unity and security. Some youth are also associated with gang members but never join (Howell & Griffiths, 2019).

**Legal definition of gangs**

Even on the legal level, the definition of a gang varies, it all depends on who you ask. The legal definition of a gang in Wisconsin is:

“…an ongoing organization, association or group of 3 or more persons, whether formal or informal, that has as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts, or acts that would be criminal if the actor were an adult…that has a common name (ie. Vice Lords) or a common identifying sign or symbol” (Wisconsin Legislature, n.d.).

An organization group, club, organization, or association, of five or more persons: (A) that has as one of its primary purposes the commission of one or more of the criminal offenses……(B) the members of which engage, or have engaged within the past five years, in a continuing series of offenses…… and (C) the activities of which affect interstate or foreign commerce (18 USC § 521[a]).
There are various types of gangs such as prison gangs, motorcycle gangs, drug gangs, and street/youth gangs. There is a common myth that gangs, drugs, and violence are linked by nature. This is a myth because not all gangs base their organization around drug distribution. Howell and Griffiths (2019) found a chart that distinguishes street gangs from drug gangs. They found that street gangs can adapt to crime; meaning that crime can occur anywhere within their territory for any given reason. Street gangs operate in large structures, with less cohesion, looser leadership, with no clear roles, a code of loyalty, residential territories, intergang rivalries, and younger in age. Some, not all, members sell drugs in street gangs. Contrary to street gangs, drug gangs focus their activity on the drug business, are smaller in structure, more cohesive, have more leadership, more defined roles, require loyalty, sales market territories, members do sell drugs, are competition controlled, and the members are older in age. For the purpose of this research, attention will be focused on youth/street gangs.

**Why Youth Join Gangs**

Gang membership among youth can be explained through social, economic, and psychological factors. These individual, family, peer, school, and community factors contribute to gang involvement. Youth join gangs in search of protection from potential violence in their communities. They feel the gang will provide them with the mean to obtain resources that may not seem attainable through legitimate means. They often feel that gang members will offer them a sense of belonging and will offer them the excitement and entertainment associated with such lifestyle. Gangs are also attractive to youth facing economic, educational, and social circumstances and they feel the gang life will offer them a better alternative since they lack the skills necessary to be productive (Dunbar, 2017). Strain, routine activities, differential opportunity, social disorganization, developmental theories, and other social theories are theories
coined by scholars that best explain gang involvement among youth and will be examined more in the next section (Howell and Griffiths, 2019).

**Consequences of Gang Involvement**

Youth involved in gangs engage in higher rates of crime than non-gang members (Matsuda et al., 2013). These crimes include the distribution of drugs, robberies, weapon assaults, property, fraud, homicides, and the trafficking of women (Dunbar, 2017). The 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment reports gangs are responsible for about half of violent crimes in most jurisdictions (2011). As of 2011, there are 67 known gangs in Wisconsin (FBI, 2011). According to Kozlowska (2017), in 2016, Chicago reported 735 murders, a 63% increase from the year prior (n= 468).

Gilman, Hill, & Hawkins (2014) found that those who had joined a gang in adolescence had poorer outcomes in multiple areas of adult functioning, including higher rates of self-reported crime, receipt of illegal income, incarceration, drug abuse or dependence, poorer health, and welfare receipt and lower rates of high school graduation (p. 938).

**Prior Research on Gang Prevention Programming**

Research available on the successful evaluation of gang programs is limited with some research outdated. For example, Curry (1995); Klein (1995); Howell (2000); Mihalic, Irwin, Elliot, Fagan, and Hansen (2001); Sivilli, Yin, and Nugent (1995); Spergel (1995) have evaluated gang prevention and intervention programs. Spergel, Ming Wa, and Sosa (2005) have analyzed that gang programs fail because they have developed poor ideas, have vague or conflicting objectives, weak implementation, organizational and goal displacement by police and youth agencies, conflict within the agencies, politics, lack of effort, and no resources among other reasons. Curry and Decker (1995) found the analysis of gang programs to be difficult
because rarely are gang programs systematically evaluated. Curry and Decker also found that programs fail to distinguish gang delinquency and delinquency in general.

Research found that having school resource officers in city schools was effective in reducing violent crimes (Theriot, 2009). NCJFCJ (2011) finds mentoring to be an effective way to reduce youth violence. After school programs are also effective but youth access to such programs has been limited because funding is limited (Tanner, 2015). Gottfredson et al., (2004) found participation in after school programs, from middle school youth, reduced delinquent behavior with programs who place an emphasis in social skills, character development, and positive peer associations. Machin, Marie, and Vujic (2011) explain that improving education in city schools is effective in reducing crime among youth. Research has demonstrated that when used properly and with a high emphasis, the OJJDP Gang Model is effective at reducing crime and gang-related behavior in affected communities (National Gang Center, n.d.). According to OJJDP (2015), positive parental involvement can keep youth out of gangs. Parents should talk to their children about the negative consequences of gang behavior, parents should know their child’s friends and friend’s parents, parents should pay attention to their child’s online activity, limit their child’s interaction with gang-involved individuals, set firm limits with their child, and plan get-togethers as a family.
Chapter 3: OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention was initiated in 1974 through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Their mission is to support local and state efforts to prevent delinquency and improve the juvenile justice system entirely. They strive to find ways to enhance safety, ensure accountability, and empower youth (OJJDP, n.d.). Gang scholar, Irving Spergel was aware of the youth gang epidemic and developed the first national comprehensive assessment of the problem and the available gang reduction programs. OJJDP (2010) analyzed the strategies other programs were using to deal with their gang issues. Through this evaluation, researchers then developed five strategies that were commonly used: community mobilization, social intervention, provision of opportunities, organized change and development and suppression. OJJDP then suggests that an ideal gang reduction program should address the problem, develop an effectively organized community, manage the collaborative process, develop goals and objectives, implement a program, gain cooperation from the community, hold youth accountable, hire the right staff who understand the complexity of gang activity, train the right staff effectively, establish annual program research and evaluation, and prioritize funding sources (OJJDP, 2010).

Irving Spergel began implementing his gang model in Chicago, IL, in a community known as Little Village. Following its implementation, a program evaluation was conducted and found a reduction in serious violent crime, criminal activity, and gang membership. Over the years, Spergel, along with his team of researchers, tested their gang model, adapting to new challenges, evolving gang issues, and city demographics. They later found that in order for the model to be successful, it must be implemented properly and a community’s gang problem must be properly assessed (National Gang Center, n.d.). The gang model was adopted by the Office of
Juvenile Justice and Juvenile Delinquency Prevention program where OJJDP funded the Gang Reduction Program. The model was demonstrated in four cities: Los Angeles, CA; Richmond, VA; Milwaukee, WI; and North Miami Beach, FL (OJJDP, 2010).

Richmond, VA was concerned with gang crimes and delinquency towards Hispanics. They had problems with African American and Hispanic gangs. With hopes of decreasing gang violence and membership, Richmond began offering: a one stop resource center to offer preventative services, support for pregnant woman and their infants, English and Spanish literacy to provide language skills, class action summer camp, school resource officers in schools with gang problems, public awareness programs, school based educational services, sports and life skills training, recreational and arts groups such as theater, community-oriented gang awareness training, Hispanic liaisons to engage Hispanic residents, mentoring/tutoring services for youth at-risk of gang involvement, immigration services, after school and summer programs for youth. Street outreach, job training development and placement, entrepreneurial training for business oriented youth, mentoring services, truancy and dropout prevention, mental health and substance abuse programs, educational services to keep youth in school or make them eligible to receive a GED, tattoo removal, and community service projects are a part of Richmond’s gang reduction program. Richmond observed that gang violence and crime could be reduced through increased police patrols, community policing, awareness of gangs in community, the support of law enforcement sharing their Intel regarding gang leaders, the increased presence of school resource officers, and Richmond Police partnership with Neighborhood Watch community members. Richmond Gang Reduction program offers skills and job placement training and support services for gang members reentering in the community (OJJDP, 2010).
In Milwaukee, the gang reduction model was utilized in the Metcalfe Park, Midtown, and Armani neighborhoods. The neighborhoods were economically deprived and had higher rates of unemployment and school dropout with a history of gang crime and violence in the city. The preventative activities the Milwaukee Gang Reduction program offers include: finding paths to prosperity, truancy intervention, positive alternatives to violence, vocational life skills for youth, parental support, youth empowerment, family empowerment, behavioral health, and community mobilization (OJJDP, 2010). Wrap Around is an intervention program in Milwaukee for at-risk youth and families. This program is considered one of the best reduction practices for gang involved youth. Wrap Around offers youth and their families with the services necessary to be productive members of society. They offer programs to cater to the emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of their clients. The program saw a reduction in recidivism rates, crime, and referrals for youth who utilized their services (Public Safety Canada, 2016).

The OJJDP designed a Gang Reduction Program and they analyzed that gangs are a product of a failed system and/or disorder in the community. With this knowledge, Gang Reduction Programs would strive to create an environment within the community to help reduce youth gang crimes in affected neighborhoods. Their goals were to examine the key factors for success and reduce youth delinquency. To accomplish these goals, they began helping communities develop integrated approaches such as primary prevention: focusing on targeting the entire high-crime, high-risk population and creating accessible services to members of the community; secondary prevention: focusing on identifying those individuals between the ages of 7 and 14 who are at-risk and finding appropriate services through the school, community, and faith-based organizations before early problem behaviors become serious acts of delinquency; intervention: targeting active gang members through aggressive outreach and providing services
to youth and their families that will help them make positive choices; suppression: removing the most dangerous gang members from the community; reentry: targeting serious offenders who are being released from incarceration and providing them with services that will be beneficial to reduce recidivism while monitoring them. The program plans to identify and address individual, community and family needs, analyze the human and financial resources available and creating a plan to fill the gaps to develop effective gang reduction strategies, creating the best research based programs for every age group, risk category, and boundaries, encouraging cooperation and coordination from all agencies and community based programs (OJJDP, 2010).
Chapter 4: Recommendations for the Future

Keys for Success

The key to implementing a successful gang reduction program is to first acknowledge the gang issue. After acknowledging the issue, it is important to establish a team of decision makers from organizations and agencies who will address the problem, known as steering committee. After a steering committee has been established, a thorough assessment of the problem, its offenders, and location of the problem is needed. Based on findings from assessment, the program would need to draw a strategic plan focusing on all the key issues. Once a strategic plan is designed, roles of services and activities are defined. Next, the program will establish a multidisciplinary intervention team who will be responsible for targeting gang affiliated youth and become their primary source for services. Lastly, all programs will need to develop plans for frequent assessment and evaluations for long-term sustainability (National Gang Center, n.d.).

For programs to be effective, participation from schools, law enforcement, social service agencies, faith-based, local government, employment, and community services organizations is beneficial to collaborate the operation of the program. These participants are most successful when they can find ways to work together and are able to develop a structure that defines how the committee will function. The lead agency will provide the framework to make work easier for the intervention team and steering committee. They are responsible for providing a secure location, tracking and coordinating the activities and meetings, providing the administrative structure, and distributing funds and grant contracts. Law enforcement, court officials, local government, schools, social service, and state agencies have the ability to work as lead agencies (OJJDP, 2010). There are pros and cons to each sector acting as lead agency. For example, advantages for law enforcement are that they have processes in place for crime and gang
information, easy access to updates of criminal activity. A disadvantage is that community members may not understand the role of law enforcement. Also some community members may not trust law enforcement. State agencies have to resources and credibility to act as a lead agency. They understand how to manage grant and administration. They also have access to financial support and business management. A disadvantage is location to program activities. State agencies also may carry a perception of being an outsider without connection to targeted areas. They also tend to have less knowledge of politics and historical issues (OJJDP, 2010).

As mentioned prior, in order to be effective, there needs to be a plan to conduct an evaluation annually to ensure proper allocations to funding these programs. Program Evaluations are used to determine if a programs outcome is being met through the use of empirical methods and evidence. They are a method used to help improve an organizations sustainability by identifying the methods that are working and the methods that need improvement. When a program is being started, a logic model is created as a visual representation of a program, the situation, inputs, outputs, outcomes, assumptions, and how they are linked together (see table 4.1). Logic models are used to display how a program is supposed to work. The logic model acknowledges the situation and priorities, then acknowledges what is being invested into the program, the activities and interventions being done, what is already known, and things that are out of the programs control such as structural or socioeconomic changes, etc. (Youth.gov, n.d.). When evaluating a program, the stakeholders should be identified, the program should be described, focus should be on the outcomes and process, evidence should be gathered so conclusions can be drawn before findings are presented, listing any necessary recommendations (NWCPHP, 2019).
Table 4.1 – Logic Model for the Gang Rescue and Support Project

Program: Gang Rescue and Support Project (GRASP)

Situation: There is an increase of youth joining gangs

Most affected: Youth living in high poverty and high crime neighborhoods where gangs are present. These youth tend to come from broken homes, negative influences, economic struggles, and AODA issues. They tend to have poor educational opportunities, learning disabilities, and/or other negative educational influences, and hang out with other gang members and delinquent peers while exhibiting delinquent behavior, drug use, child maltreatment, lack of supervision, aggression and/or a desire for status.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Long-term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>Community Outreach</td>
<td>450~ clients/year Life skills</td>
<td>Client develop a better understanding of their gang involvement</td>
<td>Clients develop better coping skills, educational, relational, and decision-making skills</td>
<td>Clients pursue healthy alternatives to gang life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit agency with funding coming from grants, private citizen, and other agencies.</td>
<td>1 on 1 mentoring Healing circles Youth</td>
<td></td>
<td>They learn more about what it is they are getting themselves into from former gang members</td>
<td>Clients gain a better understanding the relationship between gang members and its effect on violence</td>
<td>Become more productive and make better choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget:</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce gang related violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$925,000~ across three different programs (Grasp Enterprises, Mentoring, and AIM project)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Funding remains consistent because officials notice the impact the program is making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>320 staff hrs/week</td>
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<td>200 volunteer hrs/week (avg. 60 volunteers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gang affiliated youth and youth at-risk of gang membership</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Treatment versus Incarceration

When youth commit a crime, or act of delinquency, they then become a product of the criminal justice system and are then taken through the criminal justice process which includes a trial and incarceration if found guilty. Once youth finish their incarceration, they are placed back into the community with little to no tools to become productive members of society. Curley (2016) reports that the justice system tends to do more harm than good. On average, states pay about $148,000 a year to detain just one youth. There has been no evidence to show that youth incarceration is effective and puts juveniles at a higher risk of ending up in the criminal justice system as adults. Even if a youth commits a minor offense, their chance of being incarcerated are higher. Youth who are incarcerated in juvenile facilities have a higher chance of being abused or learning new behaviors.

According to Bureau of Justice Statistics (2013), 10% of incarcerated youth are sexually abused by either another youth or staff. The Wisconsin State Journal (2018) discovered that there had been allegations of abuse at Lincoln Hill School, a facility for incarcerated youth. Such abuse leads to trauma and research continues to find a linkage between trauma and delinquency (National Institute of Corrections, 2015). NIJ.gov (2016) suggests that children exposed to violence are more likely to experience academic difficulties, substance abuse, aggression, depression, problems with mental health, and engage in criminal behavior. Crooks et al., (2007) found a linkage between child maltreatment and violent delinquency. According to Griffin (2011), approximately 75% of child in the juvenile system have witnessed traumatic victimization. Approximately 50% of juveniles could develop posttraumatic stress disorder. 93% of detained youth
have been vulnerable to unfortunate events. Children who have experienced trauma have shown significant disruptive brain development compared to a normal developing brain. Kerig, Ward, Vanderzee, and Moeddel (2009) conclude that PTSD is the mitigating factor between trauma and mental health among youth. Childhood trauma significantly contributes to juvenile delinquency (Kang and Burton, 2014). Baglivio, Wolff, Epps, and Nelson (2015) found that higher adverse childhood experience scores led to juvenile incarceration. To explain the possible linkage between trauma and delinquency, Fox et al., (2015) explain that the trauma an individual experiences may affect the biological and psychological development of the child because it causes some type of neural impairment which disrupts processing responsible for maintaining their normal well-being. These neurological and psychological impairments among other factors are reasons why the maltreated child is more likely to engage in violence.

Research also shows that solitary confinement causes serious mental harm to children and interferes with ones chances for rehabilitation for youth offenders (Muller, 2015). Studies show that when used effectively, rehabilitation and therapy can work for drug offenders. In order to be effective, methods should be evidence-based, cost-effective, and focus should be on inmates of high risk (Legislative Analyst’s Office, 2017). With this in mind, rehabilitative intervention should be used on youth offenders. Rehabilitation offers offenders with the opportunity to change their criminal thinking and behavior, understand the history of their behaviors, and find healthy alternatives to manage their adversities to reduce their chances of reoffending (Raia & Hirschfield, 2014).
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Since 2006, juvenile delinquency arrest rates have decreased. Resources and services have been put in place to target youth at-risk of joining gangs or committing acts of delinquency. These strategical methods include prevention, intervention, suppression, and reentry. Focus continues to be placed on providing support to families, community, and education to provide youth with the opportunity to be productive community members.

Research suggests that there is a relationship between juvenile delinquency and gang membership. Gang members are known to be involved in more serious and violent crimes than non-gang members. Youth in gangs do not leave their gang identity at home, their identity follows them wherever they go which includes schools. This often causes a great deal of disruption in the schools and community. Community programs continue to make significant approaches to target juvenile delinquents and provide them with the tools necessary to live a productive life away from gangs, crimes, and violence. Youth in or at-risk of joining gangs are in need of jobs, education, and training. In order to put these needs effectively to use, services will need to be integrated through the community such as mental health therapy, substance abuse counseling, tutoring, apprenticeship, and job development and placement (Martinez, 2017). With the continued use and implementation of Spergel’s gang model, more programs will be able to use this method for proper evaluation.
References


Kozlowska, H. (2017, Sept 25). The US murder rate was up again – and 20% of the national increase came in Chicago


