

Provincial Asset Mapping and Program Inventory Project for Gang-Involved Youth in Ontario

Completed in Collaboration With:



Final Report

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Youth Justice Services Division

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The Effective Programming and Evaluation Unit of the Youth Justice Services Division engaged Gord Boyd, Director of Youth Justice Services at the Youth Service Bureau of Ottawa to take on a provincial coordination role for this project based on the agency's significant knowledge regarding the complex issues surrounding gang-involved youth, and their previous involvement in the mapping of community assets in the city of Ottawa. Through a partnership between the University of Ottawa and the Youth Services Bureau, the latter sought out the services of Professor Ross Hastings and Laura Dunbar (PhD Candidate) from the Department of Criminology to assist in the development of the methodology, coordinate the implementation of the project, and compile the information gathered into a comprehensive report. Melanie Bania, a graduate of the PhD program at the University of Ottawa, was also engaged to provide expertise and lend support in the development of regional asset maps and to assist in finalizing the comprehensive report.

Agencies in each of the four former youth justice regions were identified to provide support to this project. They assisted in the development of the overall methodology for this project. Further, they developed regionally specific processes to engage local community partners/stakeholders and youth in various forums to identify local strengths in programs/resources, and to speak to areas that require further development. Finally, based on the information obtained through various data collection activities, each agency drafted a regional report. The following is a list of the regional partner agencies, their leads and additional support staff that assisted in this project.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) has developed a *Strategy to Support Gang-Involved Youth*. One of the activities within the Strategy calls for a provincial asset mapping of community programs and supports for gang-involved youth justice clients who are transitioning from custody/detention settings and/or those being supervised in the community.

The planning and implementation of this project required a coordinating committee as well as regionally identified agencies in each of the four former youth justice regions.¹ The regional partners involved in this project are the following:

- Central Region: Central Toronto Youth Services
- Eastern Region: Youth Service Bureau of Ottawa
- Northern Region: John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District
- Western Region: John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area

This project involved the identification and the compilation of information on the interventions currently available in each of the four former youth justice regions for gang-involved youth to enable the development of an electronic inventory. Additionally to map assets, it involved the development of processes to engage youth justice staff, local community partners and stakeholders, and youth in forums to identify local strengths in programs, services, supports and resources (soliciting feedback on 'what works and why'), and speak to areas that require further development. These engagement activities also examined the needs and strengths of youth and youth serving agencies/organizations in communities within each of the former youth justice regions. The findings of this research provide information about each of the four former youth justice regions' capacities to address the complex issues related to gang involvement.

While this research project was wide in its scope, covering the four former youth justice regions in the province of Ontario, based on the geographic vastness of the regions and the limited time and resources available to conduct the data collection activities, it is limited in its depth. This comprehensive report includes four qualitative exploratory case studies that, for the most part, focus on a specific geographic area within the larger region and include a relatively small sample of participants. Similarly, the regional program inventories and asset maps while spanning across the whole province should not be regarded as definitive resources. The results obtained in this project are limited by the scope of the data collection activities completed. While some assumptions may be made on the representativeness of the results obtained with respect to overall

¹ During the lifecycle of this project, the boundaries of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services Youth Justice Services Regions were revised and modified and a fifth youth justice region was created. As the data collection activities began prior to this catchment area re-alignment, for the purposes of this project, the youth justice regions refer to and reflect the old regional classifications. Throughout this report we refer to the 'four former youth justice regions'.

system values and philosophy of approach to gang-involved youth involved in the youth criminal justice system, the findings as a whole should not be generalized to be representative of the entire province of Ontario.

This project is intended to be a first step in the examination of important issues with respect to the capacity to address gang-involved youth justice clients who are transitioning from custody/detention settings and/or those being supervised in the community. Further research will be required to examine the themes identified with a larger sample of participants (youth, youth justice staff, community youth service providers) and with additional stakeholders, and to implement a similar data collection process in other areas within each youth justice region.

Context and Conceptual Framework

Youth gangs are considered a dangerous feature of contemporary society, and increasing attention has been directed to strategies aimed at reducing youth gang activities and helping individuals to desist from involvement. In this context, it is important to acknowledge the functional nature of gang membership and to identify some of the reasons why young people may have initially sought membership – e.g., the gang may be a source of protection, a means to acquire material possessions and resources, a social organization, a source of emotional support and/or a means of overcoming difficult social and economic conditions. Although there is a popular belief that it is impossible to exit a gang, most members do eventually leave. The process of desistance from a gang appears to occur over time and to involve a combination of reasons or events that act in concert with one another to push or pull an individual away from the gang. These may include: the temporary nature of gang membership and the importance of aging and maturation; an increasing stake in conformity in terms of the development of bonds and attachments to conventional people and activities; reappraising costs and benefits of membership in the context of experience with violence; and an absence of structural barriers and obstacles to leaving the gang. Several different types of interventions have sought to address these factors in order to support youth wishing to leave the gang lifestyle behind and to reintegrate into the conventional world.

There are several opportunities to promote and support desistance among gang-involved youth. Based on the lack of research in the area of desistance in general, and strategies to support this process for gang-involved youth in the criminal justice system in particular, the focus of this project is on youth justice clients who have been formally convicted and sanctioned – youth who are under formal supervision arrangements or are being released into the community after a period in custody/detention. There is a need to examine how programs, services, supports and resources provided under these circumstances may impact the process of desistance for this high-risk population.

Methodology

The following is a brief overview of the various data collection methods used in this research project. In the individual regional reports, any variances in the data collection and data analysis strategies are identified and discussed.

Online Survey with Youth Service Providers

An online survey was conducted with youth service providers in each of the four former youth justice regions in order to inventory the programs, services, resources and supports currently available for gang-involved youth. The survey was administered electronically using a survey software tool ('SurveyMonkey'). Just under 350 potentially relevant agencies and organizations in the four former youth justice regions were contacted, and of those 66 individuals completed the online survey.

Key Informant Interviews

Interviews were conducted with key informants – various leaders and stakeholders in each of the four former youth justice regions who have knowledge of and experience working with gang-involved youth. Key informants were recruited in person, by phone or by e-mail as appropriate. In total, 32 key informant interviews were conducted across the four former youth justice regions.

Focus Groups with Youth Justice Staff and Community Youth Service Providers

Focus groups were conducted with youth justice staff involved in the supervision of youth (institutional staff, youth probation officers, community reintegration staff, etc.) as well as with community youth service providers (community agencies, non-profit organizations, police, etc.). Some participants were recruited from facilities in each of the former youth justice regions under the jurisdiction of MCYS, Youth Justice Services Division. Other participants were recruited through existing contacts, relevant service provider networks and through participation in the online survey component of this research project. In total, 15 focus groups were conducted involving 96 participants across the four former youth justice regions.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Youth

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with youth between the ages of 16 and 25. These included youth currently residing in youth justice facilities, those currently residing in the community under formal supervision arrangements, and where possible, those who had completed their youth justice sentences and who have general knowledge of the gang lifestyle and the experiences of gang-involved youth. Participants for interviews and focus groups were identified through regular interactions with staff in the custody/detention facilities and/or staff in youth probation offices as applicable. Additional participants (youth residing in the community who have completed

their youth justice sentences) were identified by the regional agencies through their existing contacts. Thirty-two interviews and 6 focus groups were conducted involving a total of 62 youth across the four former youth justice regions.

Additional Data Collection Strategy Employed To Create Regional Program Inventories

Based on the original data collection activities, only 25 interventions were identified across the province. In addition to the different regional strategies employed to address the low response rate of the online survey with youth service providers, a systematic province-wide strategy was developed in an attempt to develop more complete regional program inventories. In order to identify current interventions for gang-involved youth and/or high-risk youth involved in the criminal justice system returning to the community, a provincial online service database was searched, two different federal government funding programs were reviewed, and MCYS, Youth Justice Services Division Program Supervisors were contacted to provide Service Description Schedules for their currently funded programs. This process yielded 144 additional interventions. Appendix G contains the complete list of program summaries included in each of the four regional program inventories.²

Asset Map Development

As a first step in the asset mapping process, the current programs, services, resources and supports available for gang-involved youth and/or high-risk youth involved in the criminal justice system returning to the community were identified.

As a second step in the asset mapping process, tables separated into common themes across all four former youth justice regions, and themes that are region-specific, highlighting current strengths and assets as well as barriers and limitations in the current way of working with gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system have been created. These tables reflect all of the information obtained from all participants (as described in detail in the regional reports) and serve to identify similarities and differences among the regions in their capacity and the requirements needed to meet the needs of gang-involved youth in terms of assisting the reintegration of this population into the community. These tables are included in Appendix I.

Central Region Report

Central Toronto Youth Services (CTYS) coordinated the Central region case study and drafted the accompanying regional report. The former Central region provided youth justice services in Toronto, Dufferin County, Halton Region, Peel Region, York Region, and Simcoe County. Youth gangs and gang violence have been an issue within the Central region for several decades. While it is very challenging to accurately estimate

² The complete regional program inventories are contained in separate documents submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services Youth Justice Services Division, Effective Programming and Evaluation Unit, in conjunction with this final report.

the true size of the gang problem, currently it is estimated that in Toronto there are approximately 3,000 gang members under the age of 28 and 3,000 in York, Peel and the 905 area code. Gangs in both Toronto and Peel region are racially and culturally diverse.

A concern to all service providers, the police and the community is the access that these young people have to guns. In the Central region, the problem of youth gangs is compounded by the current economic situation. Ongoing budget cuts and lack of additional funds for the agencies that serve gang-involved youth may mean less available programming for gang-involved youth. Conversely, less economic opportunities in certain neighbourhoods may encourage more youth to turn to gangs. Feedback from community service providers is clear and consistent: they require ongoing and additional funding to meet the needs of gang-involved youth in their communities.

The Central region's data collection strategy closely adhered to the overall methodology of the project. A multi-method approach was employed and the information contained in this report is based on data collected from the following sources: 26 online survey participants; 4 key informant interviews; 1 youth justice staff focus group with 6 participants; 2 community youth service provider focus groups with a total of 17 participants; 4 interviews with youth; and 2 focus groups with youth with a total of 8 participants.

The results from the various data collection activities demonstrate that a lack of coordination and communication between various sectors and service providers can hinder the ability of agencies to effectively serve gang-involved youth. In addition, service providers advise they require more training on evidence-based models that have shown success when implemented in other areas. Both service providers and youth are calling for a more thoughtful approach towards youths involved in gangs; one that does not focus solely on punishment, but understands the complex situations that lead youths to gangs, and also builds on the youth's strengths. It is a problem of poverty, diminished opportunities, and social and justice systems that struggle with meeting the needs and effectively serving this at-risk youth population. Youth have been equally clear in their identification of the need for additional supports while in custody and as they transition into the community to ensure they can successfully exit gang involvement. Not only do youth require additional supports, but they also require increased opportunities; opportunities for adequate paying jobs and further education.

Eastern Region Report

The Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa (YSB) coordinated the Eastern region case study and drafted the accompanying regional report. The Eastern region provides youth justice services in Durham Region, Kawartha Lakes, Peterborough, Northumberland County, Hastings County, Lennox & Addington County (includes Prince Edward), Kingston, Lanark County, Leeds & Grenville County, Cornwall, Prescott & Russell

County, Ottawa, and Renfrew County. For the purposes of this project, the YSB has chosen to focus its attention on the Champlain region. Within the region, the city of Ottawa is the largest urban area and gangs and their criminal activities are the focus of a significant degree of police activity; they are increasingly presented as a serious problem by the media, and seem to be a growing concern for the public. As of October 2012 the Ottawa Police Service estimated that there were 15-19 identifiable gangs in the city with approximately 473 known members.

The level of the problem is not as serious in terms of volume or severity as in other large Canadian cities. Currently in Ottawa there is not a dedicated gang exit program. The same is true for the other areas included in Champlain region. Most service providers offer individualized interventions to address specific issues and needs for youth who want to leave gangs. The complexity of the issue of youth gangs requires more imaginative solutions and approaches providing youth with viable alternatives to gang membership and building a safety net for those who want to belong and to contribute to their communities in positive ways.

The Eastern region's data collection strategy closely adhered to the overall methodology of the project. A multi-method approach was employed and the information contained in this report is based on data collected from the following sources: 5 online survey participants; 11 key informant interviews; 3 youth justice staff focus group with a total of 17 participants; 1 community youth service provider focus group with 11 participants; 2 interviews with youth; and 2 focus groups with youth with a total of 13 participants.

The results from the various data collection activities demonstrated that while there are many strengths of the current approach to working with gang-involved youth, including the development of a relationship with the youth, a strengths-based, motivational approach to re-establishing a 'sense of hope', and a plan for the future, there are also limitations such as the restrictions in assisting gang-involved youth in the reintegration process based on the operation of the criminal justice system and the problematic nature of the environment to which youth are returning.

The importance of collaboration and communication in assisting gang-involved youth was clearly identified and there is a need to develop a more formalized collaborative framework for agencies and organizations. In order to work more effectively with gang-involved youth, continuity in service delivery must be established through various stages of the transition process with a focus on increasing connections between the institution and the community. There must be increased support for legitimate employment, secure housing, mentoring opportunities, recreational programs, and advocates to help gang-involved youth and their families navigate the various service systems. Youth gangs are an issue that many agencies and organizations in the Eastern region have limited knowledge of, and they have challenges in identifying and providing services, and in measuring the success of those services. The focus moving forward must be on

addressing underlying issues in order to prevent gang-involved youth from becoming further involved in the criminal justice system.

Northern Region Report

The John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District coordinated the Northern region case study and drafted the accompanying regional report. The Northern region provides youth justice services in Kenora, Rainy River, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Algoma, Sudbury, Manitoulin-Sudbury, Cochrane, Timiskaming, Nippising, Parry Sound, and Muskoka. The project attempted to gain information from across the vast Northern region by including research participants residing in Thunder Bay, remote communities, and those who travel throughout the across the northern region to work with people from throughout the north.

Identifying and addressing the topic of gang-involved youth is a positive development in the Northern region as there are gang-involved youth in most areas of this region. Currently, there are no specific gang exit programs and very little programming or supports targeted to gang-involved youth. The lack of programs and services is exacerbated by the vastness of the region, which hinders effective collaboration between sector stakeholders as well as workers' and communities' abilities to work together and communicate to support their youth. There is definitely a need for programs, supports, resources, and educational/prevention programs for gang-involved youth in this region.

The Northern region's data collection strategy closely adhered to the overall methodology of the project. A multi-method approach was employed and the information contained in this report is based on data collected from the following sources: 32 online survey participants; 6 key informant interviews; 4 youth justice staff focus group with a total of 23 participants; 1 community youth service provider focus group with 6 participants; and 18 interviews with youth.

The results from the various data collection activities revealed a high prevalence of gang-involved youth in the Northern region and the very limited programs and services available to assist the youth involved in gangs, as well as a lack of preventative or educational programs. All of the gang-involved youth that participated in the interviews reported having criminal charges and involvement in the youth justice system. Findings from the research activities identified the need for supports that are specifically geared towards youth who are at risk of being gang-involved in addition to gang exit programs designed to assist the youth in making an easier transition away from the gang. Several suggestions were identified, including the following:

- Developing education and prevention programs that help youth become more aware of the dangers and consequences of gang involvement.
- Providing safe re-integrative housing options to allow the youth to transition into the community after custody.

- Developing strong partnerships with educational, recreational and cultural supports to provide foundational support to assist youth in the transition process.
- Increasing collaboration between stakeholders such as police, probation officers and community youth service providers in building a set of safety services.

Western Region Report

The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area coordinated the Western region case study and drafted the accompanying regional report. The former Western region provided youth justice services in Grey County, Bruce County, Huron County, Stratford, London, Lambton, Windsor, Chatham-Kent, St. Thomas, Oxford County, Brantford, Norfolk County, Niagara Region, Hamilton, Waterloo Region and Wellington County. The Western region has urban areas that reflect the primary community barriers and violent crimes that increase risk in evidence-based factors linked to gang activity. In this report, the city of Hamilton is highlighted as an example to identify the scope of community risk for youth gang activity throughout the region. The city of Hamilton has crime patterns and socio-economic conditions that place the community at high risk of increasing violent youth crime and violent youth gang activity. As of 2012, there were approximately 250 hard-core gang members and over 250 gang associates in Hamilton.

Historically gang prevention and intervention program funding has been time limited and gang exit programs throughout the Western region are lacking as only highly populated urban centers are provided funding. For example, in 2013 the National Crime Prevention Centre only funded two gang prevention and intervention programs in the province of Ontario, one of which is in Hamilton – Youth At Risk Development (YARD) program currently under development.

The Western region's data collection strategy closely adhered to the overall methodology of the project. A multi-method approach was employed and the information contained in this report is based on data collected from the following sources: 3 online survey participants; 11 key informant interviews; 2 youth justice staff focus group with a total of 8 participants; 1 community youth service provider focus group with 8 participants; 8 interviews with youth; and 2 focus groups with youth with a total of 9 participants. A supplemental data collection activity was added as a result of the low participation rate on the online survey within the Western region. Over one hundred program representatives across the region were contacted by telephone to gather information for the regional program inventory.

The results from the various data collection activities clearly identified that gang-involved youth who are transitioning out of custody/detention are not provided specific gang intervention programs or services while in the institution. When available, youth who are gang involved can be supported by community-based gang prevention, intervention and re-entry programs. Key elements of these programs should address

the importance of voluntary participation to ensure motivation to attend is based on key readiness factors.

Youth entrenched in the youth gang subculture require intense and prolonged services. One barrier to success is that youth exiting gangs consistently display periods of time in which they are moving towards pro-social behaviour and lifestyles while still connected and partially involved in youth gang peer connections. Consequently, they require support over a period of time that may extend beyond the time constraints and age limits of youth justice services. Gang-involved youth have an inherent distrust of individuals from the justice system including secure custody and detention facilities. Although it is clear that there is significant relational programming, the youth justice staff identified that youth seldom self-disclose gang affiliation.

It is clear from the findings that youth justice and community services need to collaborate to engage in an effective community approach to respond to the needs of those involved in or at risk of gang membership. It is important that protocols and processes be developed to provide effective community support to the gang-involved youth who are leaving custody/detention facilities and returning to the community.

Conclusions

The findings from each of the former youth justice region case studies have been compiled allowing for an examination of regional similarities and differences regarding how we currently work to address the needs and provide support to gang-involved youth, as well as suggestions of what is needed to work better in the future to support meaningful change for this population as they return to the community.

The Relevance of the 'Gang' Label to Our Work with Gang-Involved Youth

In considering the relevance of the 'gang' label to work with gang-involved youth, two general themes were apparent across the four former youth justice regions. First, the 'gang' label is important from a security perspective. The label is used for the purposes of identification in order to promote and ensure the safety of the facility, the agency/organization, the program, the staff and the individuals involved. Second, it was consistently acknowledged that caution should be used when applying the 'gang' label to youth. It was noted that such a label should be applied carefully as it has the potential to create significant barriers for the individuals labeled.

Youth gang involvement is a complex and multi-faceted issue. The importance of acquiring the correct terminology to apply to this population is an issue that was brought forward by youth justice staff, community youth service providers, and youth. Although many agreed these youth were considered marginalized, at risk, and facing multiple barriers, 'gang-involved' may not always be the appropriate way to classify these young people.

Community Youth Service Provider – Central Region:

“Some youth are people who are not actually gang involved but are titled as being gang involved. They get that title then go to jail and once in jail they must build alliances so they can survive and be safe which then in turn makes them end up being gang involved.”

Current Ways of Working to Address the Needs of and Provide Support to Gang-Involved Youth

Across the four former youth justice regions, it was established that knowledge of youth gang involvement is based on a combination of formal and informal identification processes. An inherent issue with this population is a lack of honesty on the part of the youth as it relates to disclosure of information on gang involvement and/or participation in gang related activities.

In general the approach to working with gang-involved youth is similar to working with any other high-risk youth population. The focus is on a youth-centered, strengths-based, motivational approach that identifies and targets the individual's unique risks, needs and protective factors and their particular experience in the gang (type and length of involvement). Across the four regions, representatives indicated a strengths-based approach included a focus on developing new social skills, establishing pro-social relationships, increasing self-esteem, making progress towards an identified goal and connecting gang-involved youth to mainstream society (e.g., through hobbies, school, employment).

One of the strengths of the current approach is a focus on relationship development between the gang-involved youth and the youth justice staff member or community youth service provider. There is a clear emphasis on the development of a personal connection with the individual youth through one-on-one interaction, building a positive rapport and establishing trust. In general, there is also a spirit of collaboration between the various service providers that work with this population of gang-involved youth.

Youth Justice Staff Member – Northern Region:

“I don’t put up that barrier, that wall of judgement, or say that this is what you should be doing instead [...] Maybe this is their only source of safety, or this is the only connection to a peer group that they’ve ever had, and they can’t work their way through that.”

In general, there is also a spirit of collaboration between the various services providers that work with this population of gang-involved youth. Representatives from all regions emphasized the importance of both formal and informal partnerships with others and that there are opportunities to work with partners that specialize in different areas

While there are many strengths and assets in the current approach, several barriers and limitations were also identified in working with gang-involved youth. In terms of the general programming and resources available, there was a general consensus that

there is a lack of reintegration services and limited supports available for gang-involved youth once they are released back into the community. With respect to specific types of programming and services available to support the reintegration of gang-involved youth into the community, there was an emphasis placed on limitations in different areas including the following: the provision of basic services for survival, individual counselling, opportunities for education and legitimate paid employment, safe and secure housing arrangements and mental health and addictions services.

Other, more systemic barriers and limitations were also identified. Representatives from all former youth justice regions touched on the difficulty and/or inability of youth justice staff and community youth service providers to address some of the issues that gang-involved youth face when they return to the community including feelings of insecurity, isolation and estrangement; inequitable access to support and opportunities; experiences of poverty; and the return to a problematic environment (e.g., community with high rates of gang involvement, family supportive of the gang lifestyle).

Working Better to Address the Needs of Gang-Involved Youth

The Youth Perspective

When asked to provide suggestions of what is needed to support meaningful change for gang-involved youth, youth participants from across all four former youth justice regions suggested that more services are needed to support youth through the transition process from the institution to the community.

Youth – Central Region:

“People always look at gangsters as bad people, but there is a reason they are living that lifestyle: their families are deadbeats, they are living in community housing. They don’t just join a gang for fun, they join for a reason.”

They identified needs in various different areas of their lives including the following:

- Education must be viewed as an essential and required service factor as youth plan their transition back to the community.
- Employment training and job programs are needed, as the financial rewards of gang activity are a major reason for youths’ continued participation in gang activities, coupled with an inability to secure adequate employment in their communities.
- Protection must be provided for the youth and their loved ones, and they need a safe and secure place to live.
- Recreational and cultural activities are also important – providing youth with a way to occupy their time.

Youth – Western Region:

“I missed out on the opportunity to attend school or have the ability to obtain legal employment as well I wanted out as a result of the violence and constant police harassment”. [I would seek out] “programs that were voluntary that kids could

participate in to address the things that they needed.....such as employment skills, job searches, recreation and volunteer opportunities.”

They also believed that gang-involved youth would benefit from the support of positive adult role models – individuals with a vested interest in their success, with whom they can develop a trusting relationship.

The Youth Justice Staff and Community Youth Service Provider Perspective

When the youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to consider what would help increase their capacity to work more effectively with gang-involved youth and to provide suggestions of what is needed to support meaningful change among this population, they identified several possibilities. The following table provides an overview of the common themes across all four former youth justice regions, and identifies the themes that are region-specific.

	Youth Justice Region			
	Central	Eastern	Northern	Western
<i>Better Prepare Youth Returning to the Community</i>				
Additional support for current services is needed for gang-involved youth	√	√	√	√
Gang-involved youth would benefit from the support of positive adult role models	√	√	√	√
More services and supports are needed	√	√	√	√
Gang-involved youth need support in increasing their sense of self / pro-social identity		√		√
<i>Develop a Specific Program Targeted to Gang-Involved Youth</i>				
Specific gang-exiting programming should be developed	√		√	√
<i>Build a Bridge Between the Institution and the Community</i>				
Increased opportunities to initiate and establish relationships with community supports	√	√		√
<i>Increase Communication and Collaboration between Youth Criminal Justice and Community-Based Agencies and Organizations</i>				
Protocols and practices related to confidentiality and information sharing		√		
Opportunities to meet and discuss issues; collaborate through existing initiatives	√	√		√
<i>Provide Opportunities for Knowledge Development and Training</i>				
Provide opportunities to increase knowledge on several gang-related issues	√	√	√	√
Provide training opportunities to increase capacity and skills	√	√	√	√

This table above is not meant to be comparative or evaluative. It is based on information shared during the various regional data collection activities and is reflective of areas that were most emphasized during those discussions. It is in no way a complete reflection of the suggestions of what is needed to support meaningful change for gang-involved youth in each region.

Two additional themes were identified across the four former youth justice regions as it relates to working with gang-involved youth. There was a consensus that there is a need for more prevention resources to address the issue of youth gang involvement including programs that are age-specific, developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive. The higher the target population's level of risk, the more intensive the prevention effort must be and the earlier it must begin. Once these youth are entrenched in the gang lifestyle or involved in the criminal justice system, it becomes exponentially more difficult to help them.

Youth – Eastern Region:

“Most youth have normal lives and want to do well; they don’t want to get involved in the gang lifestyle. It is usually the youth that are ‘hard off’ that get involved. If you can help the youth before they get involved in the gang, there is a good chance to preventing future membership.”

Finally, it is a challenge to define and measure success when working with gang-involved youth. The focus should be on individual gang-involved youth – the factors and circumstances that have led them down this path, and the maintenance of realistic notions of success. We must strive to focus on increments of success based on a youth's social ability, and not simply on instances of recidivism.

Considerations in Moving Forward

The findings emerging from this research project provide an overview of the current capacity and available resources, as well as some of the limitations and gaps in addressing the issue of youth gangs in the four former youth justice regions in the province of Ontario. It is our hope that these findings may serve to inform future discussions on ways that we can work together to address the needs of gang-involved youth in custody/detention who are returning to the community.

Leaving the gang is a complex process. Youth gang members often need extensive support to help them leave the gang lifestyle behind and to make a successful transition to the conventional world. This is even more apparent for gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system who may face even greater challenges in leaving the gang. There are several possible targets for intervention for gang-involved youth in custody/detention and under supervision in the community that may impact the process of desistance.

In employing the ‘ecological model’ framework³, we present some possible considerations for moving forward. This model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community and societal factors and suggests the importance implementing a variety of interventions that address different dimensions of the issue of youth gang involvement.

Individual

The consistent focus across the province on a youth-centered, strengths-based, motivational approach to working with youth gang members that identifies and targets the individual’s unique risks, needs and protective factors and their particular experience in the gang, is a significant asset. As identified by representatives from all regions, opportunities to reinforce this approach through additional training related to increasing capacity and developing skills would be beneficial.

Relationship

Gang-involved youth would benefit from the support of positive adult role models – individuals with a vested interest in their success, with whom they can develop a trusting relationship, and who foster engagement in programming. While one of the strengths of the current approach is a focus on relationship development between the gang-involved youth and the youth justice staff member or community youth service provider, more can be done to help ease the transitional phase for youth between the institution and the community. There is a need to increase opportunities for gang-involved youth to initiate and establish relationships with community supports and service providers while in custody/detention. The development of a continuity of services from the institution to the community would help to close the gap between incarceration and community reintegration.

Youth Justice Staff Member – Western Region:

“We welcome programming from other agencies regarding youth involved in gangs.”

Community

While several programs targeted at gang-involved youth are currently in existence, more services are needed to support youth through the transition process and better prepare them to reintegrate back into the community as contributing members of society. Several areas for increased support were highlighted, including:

- Counselling, crisis support, mental health and addiction services

³ The ecological model is used in criminology as a way to understand risk factors for crime and delinquency. In general, the application of this model focuses on several goals: to explain the person-environment interaction, to improve people-environment transactions, to nurture human growth and development in particular environments, and to improve environments so they support expression of individual system’s dispositions.

- A variety of educational options
- Employment training and job programs, opportunities for adequate, long-term employment
- Supportive housing options, a safe and secure place to live
- Protection for gang-involved youth and their loved ones
- Recreational and cultural activities to provide youth with a way to occupy their time

Community Youth Service Provider – Northern Region:

“The guys who are involved in gangs, from what I see, have a higher need, either from a lack of connection to their family, community, or a functional peer group.”

Societal

There is a difficulty and/or an inability of youth justice staff and community youth service providers to address some of the systemic issues that gang-involved youth face when they return to the community. Future discussions on the topic of youth gangs should examine ways to address some of these structural barriers and limitations that youth gang members confront in reintegrating into the pro-social world.

Exiting from a youth gang is a multi-dimensional problem that requires a holistic solution. All of above factors have an effect on the process of gang desistance, and must be considered in the future development of responses to this issue. Further, it is important that various sectors work together to implement interventions that seek to encourage and help youth gang members break their ties with their gangs and successfully work their way back into society. This involves a need to increase opportunities for communication and collaboration between a network of agencies and organizations with a vested interest in improving the lives of gang-involved youth in our society.

Youth Outreach Worker – Eastern Region:

“We need to identify and better utilize the resources that we currently have, determine where there are gaps in service provision and use our collective expertise to find additional solutions to help our shared clients”.

INTRODUCTION

Overview of this Project

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) has developed a *Strategy to Support Gang-Involved Youth*. This multi-year strategy will implement a number of activities in custody/detention facilities with the aim of supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of gang-involved youth and increasing staff capacity to work with this population.

One of the activities within the Strategy calls for a provincial asset mapping of community programs and supports for gang-involved youth justice clients who are transitioning from custody/detention settings and/or those being supervised in the community. The planning and implementation of this project required a coordinating committee as well as regionally identified agencies in each of the former youth justice regions to provide information about each region's respective capacity to address the complex issues related to gang involvement. The regional partners involved in this project are the following:

- Central Region: Central Toronto Youth Services
- Eastern Region: Youth Service Bureau of Ottawa
- Northern Region: John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District
- Western Region: John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area

It should be noted that during the lifecycle of this project, the boundaries of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services Youth Justice Services Regions were revised and modified and a fifth youth justice region was created. Specifically, the County of Wellington and the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, originally part of the Western region, were re-classified to be part of the Central Region, and the city of Toronto, originally part of the Central region, is now the new Toronto Region. As the data collection activities began prior to this catchment area re-alignment, for the purposes of this project, the youth justice regions refer to and reflect the old regional classifications. Therefore throughout this report we will refer to the 'four former youth justice regions'.

This project involved the identification and the compilation of information on the interventions currently available in each of the four former youth justice regions for gang-involved youth (program demographics, eligibility/referral requirements and program components, etc.) to enable the development of an electronic inventory. Additionally to map assets, it involved the development of processes to engage youth justice staff, local community partners and stakeholders, and youth in forums to identify local strengths in programs, services, supports and resources (soliciting feedback on 'what works and why'), and speak to areas that require further development. These engagement activities also examined the needs and strengths of youth and youth serving agencies/organizations in communities within each of the youth justice regions.

Contributions of this Project

The research literature on youth gangs has tended to focus on examining risk and protective factors for gang involvement, documenting the activities of gangs and their members, and comparing the behaviour and attitudes of gang and non-gang members (Tanner, 2010; Thornberry et al., 2003). However, these studies are limited in their ability to address what happens next. In general, this project will contribute to the advancement of knowledge on desistance from gang involvement. In particular, it will help to identify initiatives to support gang-involved youth in the criminal justice system, a population that is often overlooked in discussions of youth gang exit strategies and interventions.⁴

The findings of this research will provide information about each of the four former youth justice regions' capacities to address the complex issues related to gang involvement. This information, vital to planning for reintegration and rehabilitation of gang-involved youth and increasing staff capacity to work with this population, will serve to identify local assets (existing resources, services, supports, strengths, and capacities), shed light on gaps and needs (by revealing a lack of programs or supports in a particular area, or that existing services are not well known or are deemed inaccessible for a variety of reasons), and provide practical information for each region regarding current resources (electronic regional program inventories) for gang-involved youth.

Based on the information provided by youth justice staff, community youth service providers and youth on their perspectives relating to the factors associated with success or failure in desistance for gang-involved youth in custody and/or in the community, the findings may also serve to inform local strategic planning processes, modifications in ways of working, and the development of additional interventions to support gang-involved youth.

The findings from each of the youth justice region case studies have been compiled into this comprehensive report. This allows for an examination of regional similarities and differences regarding how local programs and services are structured. Findings emerging from this research will hopefully help guide the development of provincial policy and program initiatives in the future.

⁴ It is possible that less research exists in this area because of the numerous strategic and operational challenges of conducting research with youth involved in the criminal justice system.

CONTEXT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Situating the Project in the Research Literature

Youth gangs are considered a dangerous feature of contemporary society (Caudill, 2010; Chettleburgh, 2003), and increasing attention has been directed to studying this phenomenon. Only a few studies have attempted to provide a systematic assessment of the extent of the youth gang phenomenon in Canada. According to police statistics (2009) Ontario has the largest number of gang members, with 216 gangs comprising 3,320 members. A more recent estimation is that there are approximately 10,000 gang members under the age of 28 in Ontario (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2014).

Research has consistently revealed that gang affiliation is associated with a number of negative events (including serious crimes such as homicide, attempted murder, break and enter, arson, robbery and indictable drug offences) and that gangs are harmful to communities (Carrington, 2002; Caudill, 2010; Lemmer & Johnson, 2004; Shelden, Tracy, & Brown, 2004). In addition to participation in crime and delinquent behaviours, involvement in the gang lifestyle can lead to problems for its members – school truancy, lack of employment success, exposure to and involvement with drug and alcohol use, increased risk of victimization, and teen parenthood. Participation also reduces the gang member's connections to other mainstream social pursuits and they may cut ties to other important social groups and organizations such as family, friends, and religious communities to focus more intensively on gang participation and identity. The longer an individual is involved, the more severe the effect becomes (Young & Gonzalez, 2013).

Desistance from gang involvement requires addressing the root causes of membership – why individuals believed that joining the gang was the best option for their interests at the moment (Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991), and overcoming a number of problems – some stemming from the gang itself and others having their origin outside the gang. Gang membership is a complex problem, the level of difficulty, perseverance, and commitment that is required when exiting cannot be overstated (Mellor et al., 2005).

Why Youth Join Gangs

It is important to acknowledge the functional nature of gang membership and to identify some of the reasons why young people may have initially sought membership. Gangs exist because they serve a purpose, namely meeting the unfulfilled needs of their members. In this way, the act of joining a gang can be normalized; it becomes a legitimate solution or alternative to a specific problem faced by members (Mohammed, 2007; Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991). Individuals join gangs for a myriad of reasons. Often this decision is not based on individual risk or delinquency but on very real, very rational decisions, and may include the following:

- For youth who have concerns about personal safety and security, whether as a result of personal experiences of violence or due to a fear or expectation of such

violence, a gang can be seen as a source of protection (Stinchcomb, 2002; Taylor, 2009).

- Gang membership can provide the means to acquire material possessions and resources that may not be available through legitimate means. In many instances, joining a gang and a turn to illegal activities is a way for those with low employment integration to increase income and achieve financial goals (Hemmati, 2006; Laidler & Hunt, 1997; Lurigio, Flexon, & Greenleaf, 2008; Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991; Stinchcomb, 2002).
- A gang can act as a social organization that provides its members with entertainment or the status associated with other groups (Goldstein, 2002; Sánchez-Jankowski, 2003; Stinchcomb, 2002; Wood & Alleyne, 2010). In many cases the gang is the primary social institution in the neighbourhood. It also provides members with an opportunity to meet others and can be a source of drugs and alcohol (Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991).
- A gang may offer a source of emotional support to its members and provide individuals with a sense of belonging. Membership can offer a source of self-esteem and identity, as well as companionship and support; the gang becomes a surrogate family for disenfranchised youth, through which they can fulfill personal needs (Goldstein, 2002; Hemmati, 2006; Klein, 1995; Lurigio, Flexon, & Greenleaf, 2008; Taylor, 2009; Wood & Alleyne, 2010).
- Gang involvement may be attractive to those facing difficult social and economic conditions including poverty, low educational performance, lack of job-related skills, and social disorganization (Klein & Crawford, 1967); they may feel that there is no other alternative to a life of crime and gang involvement (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2007).

How Youth Leave Gangs

Although there is a popular belief that it is impossible to leave a gang, most members do eventually leave. Despite myths and sensationalized claims, for example that members must be beaten out of the gang or must undertake a series of exceptional and often illegal tasks in order to be permitted to leave, the academic research that exists on leaving the gang indicates that not only is it possible to leave, but the process of doing so can be fairly uneventful (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002). However, the process is seldom instantaneous and it is not always permanent. Most ex-gang members report gradually severing the bonds between themselves and the gang (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). They usually leave the gang through a process similar to their entry into it – in a series of steps and commitments often involving increasing loyalty to conventional institutions (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Spergel, 1995; Vigil, 1988). Further, the process of leaving the gang is often more difficult than joining. This is because a gang provides a source of social and emotional support and friendship, and members may be reluctant to leave unless and until a suitable substitute has been found (Mathews, 1992; Vigil, 1988).

The desistance process may also be dependent on additional factors, such as the level of engagement within the gang. The gang literature demonstrates that it is more difficult for core members to leave than it is for peripheral members. Lingering ties to the gang are important to understanding the point in time at which the gang loses its power over individuals and they become open to cutting their ties to the group. The severing of ties provides a transitional phase between active gang membership and former gang membership (Pyrooz et al., in press). However, many ex-gang members continue to engage with the gang lifestyle through varying degrees of attachments and activities with others in the gang. In particular, ex-gang members with close friends and family members in the gang may remain enmeshed in a series of ties to this group as involvement in the social network to which these individuals belong may have been a motive for joining initially (Pyrooz et al., in press; Thornberry et al., 2003).

Why Youth Leave Gangs

The desistance process suggests that a number of reasons or events act in concert with one another to push or pull an individual away from the gang. Sánchez-Jankowski (1991) proposes that just as individuals make the decision to join a gang based on a rational calculation of what is best for them at that particular time, they use a similar calculus when deciding whether to stay in the gang or whether to leave. Individuals believe that at the time of their decision to join, the gang is capable of providing them with a number of advantages that would enhance the quality of their lives (Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991). When this is no longer the case, and gang membership starts to become detrimental, the decision to leave the gang may be made. As such, the process of gang desistance may be characterized by an accumulation of perceptions that run opposite to the gang's function (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002).

Temporary Nature of Gang Membership

Research suggests that gang membership is usually temporary, most members leave eventually, and exit is often associated with maturity and life course events such as marriage, employment or parenthood. Battin, Hill, Abbott, Catalano, and Hawkins (1998) and Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, and Jang (1994) note that gang membership among adolescents is most often short-lived, typically averaging two years or less. Much of the literature suggests that gang members age out of the gang. Former gang members often describe having 'grown out of the gang', or simply having 'gotten too old' for the gang lifestyle (Battin et al., 1998; Thornberry et al., 1994). This acknowledges the temporal dimension of lived experience – the ways in which people and circumstances change over time. Youth do not spend all of their lives in the gang doing gang 'stuff' (White, 2008).

Increasing Stake in Conformity – Bonds and Attachments to Conventional People and Activities

A youth may relinquish his or her involvement in a gang as they develop increased ties to non-deviant friends, significant others and family members, an increasing commitment to social institutions (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Esbensen et al., 2001; Vigil, 1988), and take up opportunities for informal social control such as employment or parenthood (Wood & Alleyne, 2010) all of which discourages continued gang involvement. Movement out of gangs and into family and work environments represents a restructuring of routine activities that reduces exposure to situational contexts conducive to criminal behaviour. Further, the growth of social bonds is like an investment process; as the social bond to legitimacy grows, the incentive to desist from gang involvement increases because more is at stake, and there are more effective systems of obligation and restraint (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993). If these newly acquired informal social attachments and engagements are reinforced (e.g., opportunities to advance in employment), the youth's resolve to exit from the gang may strengthen and desistance will continue. If however, they break down (i.e. employment is lost or a relationship breaks up), then the youth may return to his/her previous lifestyle (Wood & Alleyne, 2010).

Reappraising Costs and Benefits of Membership in the Context of Experience with Violence

Research has found that gang exit is associated with violent incidents (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Ngo, 2010); gang members often have a strong motivation to escape violence. Violence within and between gangs is far more prevalent than gang-related harms to the public (Chettleburgh, 2007; CISC, 2006; Wortley & Tanner, 2004). Youth who identify being in a criminal gang also report significantly greater levels of victimization than non-gang-involved youth (Wortley & Tanner, 2004). Decker and Lauritsen (2002) found that personal experience of violence was the most commonly reported reason for leaving the gang, suggesting that increased risk for victimization may lead a youth to desire a gang-free life (Wood & Alleyne, 2010). While internal violence (initiation rites, 'beating in') and mythic violence (stories of altercations between gangs) may serve to intensify gang bonds, the impact of real violence encourages desistance. There seems to be a limit to the tolerance individual gang members have for personal experiences of violence, the threat or fear of personal violence, or having family members be the victims of violence (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002).

Overall, a combination of factors appears to provide some explanation for why youth may leave their gang. However, regardless of the specific reason for leaving, individuals must be ready in order for them to be successful (Totten & Dunn, 2011).

Structural Barriers and Obstacles to Leaving the Gang

Part of the process of exiting the gang involves addressing barriers and obstacles to disengagement. Individuals may maintain membership with a gang out of a fear of the perceived violence accompanying exit or from fear of old rivals attempting retribution if they do leave (Bolden, 2013; Totten & Dunn, 2011). Since gangs are perceived to meet the unfulfilled needs of their members, individuals may be reluctant to leave out of a fear of the loss of these benefits. Gang members are unlikely to desist from gang involvement until and unless a suitable alternative to this support system has been found. Further, relational attachments to other gang members may draw the individual back in to the lifestyle (Bolden, 2013).

External barriers also present challenges to disengaging gang members, particularly the difficulties that many youth face when trying to make new lives for themselves. Bjørge (1999) suggests that membership may be sustained if individuals perceive there to be no alternative places to go outside the gang, and if they believe they will be rejected by conventional society.

Gang members come from a variety of ethnic, demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. However, the majority of youth involved in gangs tend to come from groups and areas that suffer from the greatest levels of economic inequality, disadvantage and social disorganization (Chettleburgh, 2003; CISC, 2006; Wortley & Tanner, 2004). Long-term gang membership may have limited the individual's ability to acquire education and marketable skills for the workforce, thereby limiting a gang member's options for employment if he/she decides to leave. In turn, these limited opportunities may result in the benefits of staying in the gang being seen as outweighing the consequences of being a gang member.

Further, social barriers, such as the 'gang' label, public perceptions of the individual as a gang member, and stigma of former gang membership, may limit opportunities as well as an individual's ability to leave the gang. Gang identities often remain fixed in the public's perception well after the decision to leave the gang has been made and acted on. Youth may continue to be seen as gang members by their own gang, rival gangs, the police, and the community (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002). These negative labels and stigmatization by authorities can propel marginalized individuals deeper into the gang subculture (Williams & McShane, 1999). Further, gang insignias, criminal records and other acts committed while a gang member may hinder their ability to reintegrate into the 'pro-social world' (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002).

Under these conditions, one can see why gang members may decide that leaving the gang is not worth the effort. There is little incentive to leave the gang when it is the source of friendships, and when past activities as a gang member cause others to continue to treat them as if they were still gang members. Even though adolescence is a period in life when many affiliations are tried and rejected, the dilemma surrounding

gang membership is that it has more enduring consequences than many other affiliations (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002).

Current Interventions

Leaving the gang is a complex process; it involves pushes and pulls to conformity and back to the gang (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Vigil, 1988), and the interaction of a combination of factors, including: individual choice; relational, social and institutional forces and practices; and structural level constraints and opportunities. While the combination of reasons, events or circumstances that lead to and/or prevent exit is different for each individual, the overall factors that appear to influence desistance represent the possible targets for intervention. The following is an overview of the different types of interventions that have sought to address these factors.

Law Enforcement / Suppression

The most common response to youth gangs is suppression by the criminal justice system (Chettleburgh, 2007; Klein, 1995). This strategy focuses on criminal behaviour, and usually employs a coordinated justice response emphasizing arrest, prosecution and the incarceration of gang members (Bania, 2009; Fritsch, Caeti, & Taylor, 1999; Jones, Roper, Stys, & Wilson, 2004; Westmacott, Stys, & Brown, 2005). Critics suggest that these enforcement policies alone have limited effects on reducing gang involvement. This is not surprising given that there is almost no mention in the desistance literature of motives related to law enforcement or the criminal justice system (e.g., fear of arrest or incarceration) as explanations for a decision to exit the gang. This suggests a mismatch between traditional gang-control policies, which seek to deter gang activity through the use of criminal justice sanctions, and the reality of gang membership (Greene & Pranis, 2007).

These enforcement policies can even lead to unintended consequences and counter-productive impacts, including: increasing the cohesiveness of a gang and its attractiveness to vulnerable youth; promoting a counter-productive reaction in targeted gang members resulting in increased criminal behaviour and/or the encouragement of such behaviour in others; and creating a damaging cycle of imprisonment and release of youth gang members (Ayling, 2011; Bania, 2009; Chettleburgh, 2007; Decker, 2004). Criminal justice policies which serve to exclude youth gang members from mainstream society and to categorize them based on their level of risk to re-offend appear likely to hamper the processes of desistance and individual change. A more effective policy needs to recognize that relapses are common, even within a desisting pathway, and that automatic harsh enforcement may create more problems in the longer term (Farrall, Bottoms, & Shapland 2010; Maruna et al., 2004).

Human Capital Development

The main objective of the majority of youth gang interventions is to increase basic capacities, skills and individual propensities to help youth shift their life trajectories from gang-associated behaviours and affiliations to more pro-social lifestyles. Interventions focusing on increasing the psychological capacities of youth gang members through individual counselling and cognitive-behavioural approaches, as well as programs focusing on education, training and job opportunities have been shown to be effective (NCPC, 2012).

The lives of youth gang members may be characterized by a host of problems, all of which can impact on an individual's psychological well-being and make leaving the gang more difficult. Programs and services that help youth to change their attitudes, and deal with their problems have been shown to have a positive impact on the willingness to leave their gang. The majority of current exit interventions seek to provide youth with opportunities for personal change and positive development. Most interventions are targeted at individual behaviour and offer content focusing on perspective taking, moral reasoning, increasing self-esteem, developing a stronger self-identity, promoting the acquisition of conflict resolution skills, better managing actions and feelings (self-control), changing attitudes and making positive choices (personal change).

Helping gang members to improve their education and offering them training opportunities might play an important role in helping gang members to leave their gang. Some gang exit programs provide gang-involved youth with access to educational, training, and employment programs. Other programs offer remedial education, life skills and job training services, and mentoring opportunities to encourage youth to develop supportive relationships with employers. However, only a few programs go on to provide youth with actual employment opportunities.

Mechanisms of Social Support

Interventions under this heading are centered on providing gang-involved youth with legitimate alternatives for fulfilling their basic needs. These programs serve to facilitate new sources of social support, including working with the family, identifying new peer groups, and identifying a support network for the youth at school, at work, and in the community. When the social structure that the gang provided is no longer present in the youth's life, it is crucial to teach them how to seek out and gain support that can help sustain his/her positive efforts. Programs focus on strengthening family bonds – reducing/mediating family conflicts; building positive relationships; family management skills; parenting skills; and providing opportunities for families to spend positive time together. Others focus on the development of healthy positive peer relationships – gain access to more positive peer groups to meet the need for belonging and socialization (recreational, educational, social, mentoring and faith-based programs). Finally, peer mentoring programs allow youth to share similar experiences, validate each other's reality, and gain a greater sense of self-esteem as peers feel useful to other group

members. The experience of confrontation in a supportive atmosphere allows peers to challenge behavioural responses and support the adoption of new behaviours. It is during this process that a sense of acceptance and togetherness develops. Further, peer mentoring gives gang members the opportunity to learn from those who have chosen to leave the gang lifestyle behind (Young & Gonzalez, 2013).

Social Capital Development

The focus of these interventions is developing relationships and networks that generate opportunities. Emphasis placed on the importance of addressing issues related to social context especially those with a clear orientation towards community integration. Emphasis is placed on the development of opportunity structures that provide youth with a 'sense of hope' – this relates to the objective level of opportunity provided by society, and to the willingness and ability of the representatives of these institutions to include formerly gang-involved youth.

Some programs and services seek to increase social determinants of health and to help youth to exit gangs safely and live successfully in the larger community. The programs may provide individual supports in the form of mental health interventions, health care, substance abuse treatment and tattoo removal. Family services focus on improving pro-social relationships and delivering family counselling. Finally, life skills development assistance includes housing referrals, court attendance and criminal justice supports, and addressing food and income support needs. Criminal justice system officials, youth serving agencies, schools, faith-based groups and other organizations can provide these services (Hastings, Dunbar, & Bania, 2011).

These interventions focus more comprehensively on prevention, intervention and suppression with the goal of designing a tailored strategy and to foster community mobilization and organizational change and development. This involves the coordinated action of criminal justice officials, local residents, youth, community groups, civic leaders and a range of agencies to plan, strengthen, or create new opportunities or create linkages to existing organizations for gang-involved youth and at-risk youth, and to coordinate programs and services within and across agencies (Fritsch et al., 1999).

Approaches to intervention must address issues of identity and diversity (Weaver & McNeill, 2010). Youth gang members are not a homogeneous group or population; in order to encourage the potential for positive outcomes, intervention design must respond to individual differences and unique needs (Boerman, 2007; McGloin, 2005). Addressing differing personal and environmental variables requires a process of 'prescriptive programming' – an assessment-based approach to individualized intervention planning that reflects an understanding of these variables in an individual's life and their potential effect on the intervention process (Boerman, 2007). For example, when gang exit programming does not consider the variability in gang ties and gang networks which differentially affect the ability and readiness of a gang member to leave their gang, they are likely to be less successful (Pyrooz et al., in press). Theories of

desistance acknowledge the importance of human agency, and interventions need to encourage and respect self-determination; this means working with individuals and not on them (McNeill, 2006). Initiatives should also be gender-specific, age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and developed on the basis of updated information (Stinchcomb, 2002).

Gang-related initiatives must also address the specific dimensions of the problem at the local community level (McGloin, 2005). At least some portion of the problem is a reflection of the macro-level social obstacles experienced by members of communities, and as a result, merely addressing gang problems through intervention will not have much effect in the absence of social and economic improvements. It is the interaction of macro-level social forces in the community with individual and peer group influences that contribute to gang involvement (Stinchcomb, 2002). All of these factors have an effect on the process of gang desistance, and must be included in the development of responses to this issue.

Definitions of Key Concepts

Youth

'Youth' is defined by the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* as a person between 12 and 17 years old. In the context of this project 'youth' is more broadly defined in an attempt to better capture the increasingly longer transition to adult roles in western societies (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007; Clark, 2007; Gaudet, 2007). This delay may be further accentuated for individuals whose involvement in the criminal justice system can interfere with relationships, education, employment and community involvement. Studies investigating youth gang members in the Canadian context have found the typical age range to be 11-25 years old with 17 being the average age (RCMP, 2006) – almost half of members fall within the age range of 16 to 18 (Chettleburgh, 2003). A study of Toronto youth found the mean age of first gang involvement to be 14 and the mean age of gang exiting at 20 (Wortley, n.d.). While acknowledging this broader category of 'youth', the focus of this project was on identifying programs and services available for current youth justice clients so the emphasis was placed on interventions that target youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years old. However, where pertinent, additional interventions that cater to youth into their early twenties were also included.

Gang

There is currently no unique and universally accepted definition of youth gang in Canada, and there is a lack of consensus over the explanation of 'gangs', both on the level of the attributes and motives of individual gang members and of the origins and the persistence of group behaviour (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2003).

A youth gang, as defined by the Montreal Police Service (2005), is "an organized group of adolescents and/or young adults who rely on group intimidation and violence, and

commit criminal acts in order to gain power and recognition and/or control certain areas of unlawful activity". The University of Toronto's Centre of Criminology uses a similar definition but adds that to be considered a gang at least three youth must have participated in criminal activity on more than one occasion. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) use the following definition developed by Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson (2006):

A gang is any group of adolescents and young adults who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighbourhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of illegal incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighbourhood residents and/or enforcement agencies.

As denoted above, often a gang is defined as a group of individuals with a specific set of negative personal attributes who engage in deviant activity as part of their membership (Curry & Decker, 2003; Esbensen et al., 2001). However, what is often missed is that the gang may also represent a solution to the problems experienced by its members; affiliation is one response to address these issues (Bania, 2009; Sánchez-Jankowski, 2003). A gang serves to meet the unfulfilled needs of its members (e.g., providing access to resources and money, prestige/status, protection, social support, excitement) (Ball & Curry, 1995; Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991; Wood & Alleyne, 2010), and as an organization it engages in a form of collective behaviour that is a response to the social, economic and cultural conditions its members confront (e.g., poverty, school exclusion, unemployment, racism) (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2003). This latter research points to the functional role of the gang and suggests that youth gang involvement, and the criminal activities associated with it, may be framed as problem-solving behaviours (strengths-based approach) and not just symptoms of a condition (deficit-oriented approach).

Desistance

Desistance is a decline over time in some behaviour of interest (Mulvey et al., 2004). Desistance is often conceptualized and viewed as a process; a social transition that involves changes in individuals and how they interact with the world (Bushway et al., 2001; Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003; Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996). This includes complementary processes of 'knifing off' (separating oneself from the triggers associated with the behaviour) and cognitive transformation (a change in one's way of thinking) (Maruna, 2001). This perspective assumes that desistance does not occur as an abrupt termination ('break point'); it usually consists of a gradual reduction in the frequency, severity and versatility of actions and behaviour (Kazemian, 2007). However, even then, desistance is rarely absolute and so-called 'desisters' may continue to engage in the behaviour (Healy, 2010). It is a fluid process where individuals have varying degrees and types of association with the gang over time (Esbensen et al., 2001; Maxson, 1998).

Success

A distinction can be made between ‘insertion’ and ‘integration’ into the pro-social world as different definitions or measures of success. In the case of insertion, the focus is primarily on the point at which the youth decides to leave a gang, and tries to take up what would be considered a more legitimate path. Usually, the focus at this level is on reducing the risk that the youth will return to the gang. Interventions involve attempts to increase the willingness and ability of the youth to exercise greater self-control (such as cognitive skills development or anger management programs) or initiatives that seek to impose greater levels of external control on the youth (involving intensive monitoring and supervision activities, especially on the part of agents of the criminal justice system) (Hastings, Dunbar, & Bania, 2011).

Since desistance has been conceptualized and viewed as a process, it is perhaps better understood in the context of an individual’s ongoing journey toward successful integration within the community (Uggen, Manza, & Thompson, 2006). Integration involves a more positive definition of success; shifting the focus to a more inclusive concern with providing a youth gang member with a sense of well-being and of hope, and with the skills and resources needed to improve their objective standing in terms of agreed upon measures such as the social determinants of health (Farrall & Calverley, 2006). These positive indicators are likely to have an impact on youths’ trajectories in the longer term and therefore may provide a better assessment of the performance of interventions (Cunneen & Luke, 2007; Mears & Butts, 2008). This also permits a rethinking of success not in terms of results but in terms of processes. It should be noted however that insertion and integration are closely intertwined: it is unlikely that a youth will desist from gang involvement until and unless chances for success in the so-called legitimate world are perceived to be realistic (Hastings, Dunbar, & Bania, 2011).

Points of Intervention

There are several opportunities to promote and support desistance among gang-involved youth. The first involves youth who are involved in a gang, but who have not yet come into contact with the criminal justice system. The second involves youth who have had formal contact with the criminal justice system, but who have been dealt with either informally or through alternative measures (diversion). Finally there are those youth who have been formally convicted and sanctioned – these youth are under formal supervision arrangements or are being released into the community after a period in custody. As we move along the continuum, the challenge of leaving a gang involves more people, becomes progressively more public, and requires facing ever-greater challenges in terms of dealing with the negative consequences of exclusion and labeling (Hastings, Dunbar, & Bania, 2011).

Based on the lack of research in the area of desistance in general, and strategies to support this process for gang-involved youth in the criminal justice system in particular,

the focus of this project is on this last point of intervention. There is a need to examine how programs, services, supports and resources provided to youth in custody and under supervision in the community may impact the process of desistance for this high-risk population.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this section is to describe the methodology used to conduct the research for this provincial asset mapping and program inventory project. In this section, the research questions that guided this work are identified, the data collection strategy is outlined – including the data sources and the methods used to collect the data, and the analytical strategy and process used to code and then analyze the data thematically is presented. The additional data collection strategy that was employed to create the final regional program inventories is also outlined. Finally, the limitations of the methodology utilized and of the project as a whole are discussed.

This section represents the overall methodology for the project. In the regional reports that follow, any variances in the data collection and data analysis strategies in the four former youth justice regions are identified and discussed.

Research Questions

Several general research questions were identified in order to guide the data collection activities in each of the four regions.

1. What interventions are currently available, and utilized, by youth justice staff who work with gang-involved youth in custody/detention or under supervision in the community?
2. What are the factors that are associated with success or failure in desistance for gang-involved youth in custody/detention and/or in the community?
3. In the case of youth justice staff, how do they work with gang-involved youth - what factors are prioritized in developing a plan for gang-involved youth, and how are these factors addressed? Are there issues or factors that are considered relevant but that cannot be addressed?
4. In the case of community youth service providers, partners and stakeholders, what services are available for gang-involved youth – what types of youth are they best able to help, what do they do well and what has worked, what are the limitations?
5. In the case of gang-involved youth, what contributes to a desire (decision) to no longer be gang-involved – what are the costs of gang involvement, what are incentives to leave, what would help the most, what are the barriers, what would be the best way to help?

Data Collection Strategy

The following describes the processes involved in each data collection method used in this research project. The table below provides an overview of the total number of participants in each data collection source separated by youth justice region.

Table 1. *Number of Participants in Each Data Collection Source, By Youth Justice Region*

Region	Online Survey Participants*	Key Informants	Youth Justice Staff	Community Youth Service Providers	Youth
Central	Participants (n = 26) Programs (n = 18)	Interviews (n = 4)	Focus Groups (1 group, n = 6)	Focus Groups (2 groups, n = 17)	Interviews (n = 4) Focus Groups (2 groups, n = 8)
Eastern	Participants (n = 5) Programs (n = 3)	Interviews (n = 11)	Focus Groups (3 groups, n = 17)	Focus Groups (1 group, n = 11)	Interviews (n = 2) Focus Groups (2 groups, n = 13)
Northern	Participants (n = 32) Programs (n = 3)	Interviews (n = 6)	Focus Groups (4 groups, n = 23)	Focus Groups (1 group, n = 6)	Interviews (n = 18) Focus Groups (n = 0)
Western	Participants (n = 3) Programs (n = 1)	Interviews (n = 11)	Focus Groups (2 groups, n = 8)	Focus Groups (1 group, n = 8)	Interviews (n = 8) Focus Groups (2 groups, n = 9)
TOTALS	Participants (n = 66) Programs (n = 25)	Interviews (n = 32)	Focus Groups (10 groups, n = 54)	Focus Groups (5 groups, n = 42)	Interviews (n = 32) Focus Groups (6 groups, n = 30)

* It should be noted that additional strategies were employed to address the low response rate of the Online Survey. They are discussed later in this section and also in each of the individual regional reports.

Online Survey with Youth Service Providers

An online survey was conducted with youth service providers in each of the four former youth justice regions in order to inventory the programs, services, resources and supports currently available for gang-involved youth. The survey was administered electronically using a survey software tool ('SurveyMonkey').

The online survey focused on agencies and organizations that play a direct and deliberate part in supporting gang-involved youth – those that currently have an initiative (program, service, support or resource) that addresses this population. It did not include agencies and organizations that may come into contact with gang-involved youth within their broader mandates but to whom no services are provided.

In each region, agency/organization representatives were recruited in person, by phone or by e-mail through existing contacts and relevant service provider networks. They were asked if they currently had an initiative (program, service, support or resource) that addressed gang-involved youth. Representatives who responded 'yes' were asked to follow a link to complete the online survey. Additionally, representatives were asked if they were aware of other organizations or agencies that address and/or work with gang-involved youth that may be contacted for participation in this research study. Agencies and organizations that were referred were then contacted to confirm that they currently had an initiative for gang-involved youth, and if so, they were asked to complete the online survey.

The online survey collected information on current interventions provided by the respondent's agency/organization including a description, population served, recruitment process, key components, funding, and contact information (general and intake). In addition, information was collected from the agency/organization representative to provide insight into the strengths and gaps in current services and resources, and explore how interventions might be improved in the future. The survey had a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions (See Appendix A for the complete list of survey questions).

Just under 350 potentially relevant agencies and organizations in the four former youth justice regions were contacted, and of those 66 individuals completed the online survey. The completion rate for the online survey was low in all four regions. There are several potential reasons for the low response rate including survey fatigue (in two of the four regions a survey on this topic had been conducted in the recent past), relevance (many organizations and agencies may not see themselves as providing services to 'gang-involved youth'), and the ability to identify and recruit all potentially relevant agencies and organizations to participate (limited time, staff and resources to dedicate to this component of the project). In the regional reports that follow, individual strategies developed in an attempt to overcome these challenges are identified.

Key Informant Interviews

Interviews were conducted with key informants – various leaders and stakeholders in each of the four former youth justice regions who have knowledge of and experience working with gang-involved youth. Key informants were recruited in person, by phone or by e-mail as appropriate. A purposive sampling method was employed to select ‘information-rich cases’ that could provide in-depth understanding of the research questions (Patton, 2002). In total, 32 key informant interviews were conducted across the four former youth justice regions.

The interviews were semi-structured, and were organized around a guide that included minimal relatively closed ended questions, and a number of open ended questions with associated prompts (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). Each key informant interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Non-directive interviewing techniques were used whenever appropriate to minimize the interviewer influence in the narratives presented by the participants (See Appendix B for the key informant interview questions and associated prompts).

Focus Groups with Youth Justice Staff and Community Youth Service Providers

Focus groups were conducted with youth justice staff involved in the supervision of youth (institutional staff, youth probation officers, community reintegration staff, etc.) as well as with community youth service providers (community agencies, non-profit organizations, police, etc.). Participants were brought together specifically for the research project, on the basis of their shared experiences (working with gang-involved youth). Some participants were recruited from facilities in each of the former youth justice regions under the jurisdiction of MCYS, Youth Justice Services Division. This included facilities and probation offices directly operated by the Ministry, and facilities (open and secure detention and custody) operated by transfer payment agencies. Other participants were recruited through existing contacts, relevant service provider networks and through participation in the online survey component of this research project (at the end of the survey, participants could express interest in participating in another component of the research project). In general, the focus groups comprised between 4 and 8 participants and each session lasted approximately 60 minutes. In total, 15 focus groups were conducted involving 96 participants across the four former youth justice regions.

The focus groups followed a semi-structured focus group protocol, including a number of open-ended questions with associated prompts. Participants were able to guide the direction of the discussion – building upon the responses of others (Berg, 2001; Wilkinson, 2004) (See Appendix C and Appendix D for the focus group questions and associated prompts for youth justice staff and community youth service providers, respectively).

Interviews and Focus Groups with Youth

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with youth between the ages of 16 and 25. These included youth currently residing in youth justice facilities, those currently residing in the community under formal supervision arrangements, and where possible, those who had completed their youth justice sentences who have general knowledge of the gang lifestyle and the experiences of gang-involved youth. Participants for interviews and focus groups were identified through regular interactions with staff in the custody facilities and/or staff in youth probation offices as applicable. With their agreement and support, the staff were asked to provide their clients with a brief overview of the research project and give the youth a letter of information/invitation for participation. Additional participants (youth residing in the community who have completed their youth justice sentences) were identified by the regional agencies through their existing contacts. Thirty-two interviews and 6 focus groups were conducted involving a total of 62 youth across the four former youth justice regions.

The interviews were semi-structured; organized around a guide that included minimal relatively closed ended questions, and a number of open ended questions with associated prompts (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Non-directive interviewing techniques were used whenever appropriate to minimize the interviewer influence in the narratives presented by the participants. Great importance was placed on the meanings that youth attributed to their actions and on understanding the particular social context within which these meanings and actions emerged (See Appendix E for the interview questions and associated prompts). The focus groups followed a semi-structured focus group protocol, including a number of open-ended questions with associated prompts. In general, the focus groups comprised between 4 and 8 participants and each session lasted approximately 60 minutes. Participants were able to guide the direction of the discussion – building upon the responses of others (Berg, 2001; Wilkinson, 2004) (See Appendix E for the focus group questions and associated prompts).

Consent

Consent was obtained from all participants in this research project and each was assured of the confidentiality of the information disclosed in the online survey and of the information discussed during the interview and focus group sessions. It was emphasized that individual identities would not be discernible in the results. In order to capture the scope of participants in this research project, a list of the facilities, agencies and organizations from which participants were recruited and/or are affiliated appear in Appendix F, however, the names and positions/titles of participants are not included.

Youth participants were provided with an age-appropriate consent text to support their agreement to be involved in this project. As the Youth Justices Services Division of MCYS has experience with addressing issues of consent with this population of youth, they provided samples of wording and documentation to be used. As this project only

included youth participants 16 years of age and older, written consent from a parent/guardian authorizing the participation of the individual in the research was not required.

Analytical Strategy

Online Survey with Youth Service Providers

The data obtained from the four regional online surveys was exported to Microsoft Excel and made available in printable PDF format. With respect to the questions addressing the programs, services, resources and supports currently available for gang-involved youth, the information provided⁵ was extracted and compiled in order to produce a one-page summary including all information on each intervention (as available). This provided the basis for the development of an electronic inventory (see Appendix G for the list of program summaries included in each of the four regional program inventories – entries resulting from this data collection exercise are denoted with an asterisk). While the focus of this exercise was descriptive and not evaluative, only interventions deemed relevant for gang-involved youth and/or high-risk youth involved in the criminal justice system returning to the community were included in the final regional program inventories.

With respect to the questions addressing the strengths and gaps in current interventions, the qualitative responses were compiled and analyzed along with the data from the interviews and focus groups (see below).

Interviews and Focus Groups

The key informant interviews, focus groups with youth justice staff and community youth service providers, and interviews and focus groups with youth were audio recorded (with the consent of participants) and transcribed in order to produce detailed notes of each data collection session (verbatim transcription was not deemed necessary for the purposes of this project).

All of the qualitative data was compiled, organized and coded for key themes. The data were coded both inductively and deductively – tracking themes identified by the researchers (analytical dimensions) and those that emerged from the research process (discovery).

The pre-determined general themes identified by the researchers were based on the research questions guiding this project and included the following:

- The relevance of the 'gang' label to our work with gang-involved youth.
- How we currently work in order to address the needs of and provide support to gang-involved youth.
- The perspective of youth as it relates to our work with gang-involved youth.

⁵ This includes the program description, the population served, the recruitment process, the key components, the funding sources and the contact information.

- How we can work better to address the needs of gang-involved youth.

In order to address emerging themes, an open coding technique (Corbin & Strauss 1990, 1998; Glaser & Strauss 1967) that relied on the participants' accounts to generate coding categories was used. These themes varied by youth justice region and were based on their current situation and context with respect to gang involvement.

Each regional agency was asked to use the four themes identified above as the sub-headings to organize the presentation of their findings. They were asked to code their data based on a series of questions listed for each sub-heading (see Appendix H) as much as they were reflected in the data collected and/or relevant to the situation in their respective region. They were then asked to include and discuss any additional issues and/or themes that emerged from their data collection processes (as applicable).

The findings are reported as a rich, descriptive overview of each of the four former youth justice regions' capacities to address gang-involved youth – describing local strengths and resources as well as identifying gaps and limitations, and providing practical information. This allowed for the identification of regional differences regarding how local programs and services are structured and administered. From the perspective of gang-involved youth, the findings provide a descriptive overview of desistance and the events and influences that encourage reintegration into the pro-social world and/or a changing affiliation with the gang. We have strived to conduct and present the analysis in a way that faithfully represents the experiences of all those involved in the research process.

Additional Data Collection Strategy Employed To Create Regional Program Inventories

Based on the original data collection activities, only 25 interventions were identified across the province. In addition to the different regional strategies employed to address the low response rate of the online survey with youth service providers, a systematic province-wide strategy was developed in an attempt to develop more complete regional program inventories. In order to identify current interventions for gang-involved youth and/or high-risk youth involved in the criminal justice system returning to the community, a provincial online service database was searched, two different federal government funding programs were reviewed, and MCYS Youth Justice Services Division Program Supervisors were contacted to provide Service Description Schedules for their currently funded programs.

Provincial Online Service Database – 211 Ontario

211 Ontario (www.211ontario.ca) provides information on community, health and social services and programs in the province of Ontario. Most of the services listed are provided by non-profit, community-based or government organizations that provide

direct service to the public. Some private or commercial organizations that do not duplicate the work of these sectors are also included.

Searches were conducted for 'youth gang' and 'youth gang exit'. This yielded only 2 results: Breaking the Cycle: Youth Gang Exit and Ambassador Leadership Program offered by the Canadian Training Institute in Toronto (former Central Region) and the Durham Youth Gang Strategy offered by the Durham Family Court Clinic in Oshawa (Eastern Region). No programs were identified in the Northern and Western regions.

Under the 'youth' topic on 211 Ontario there are programs, services and resources offered in key areas including homeless/at-risk youth, LGBTQ, recreation for youth, shelters for youth, summer employment, young parents, youth advocacy/legal help, youth employment, youth health services, youth mental health, and youth with disabilities. In total, there are approximately 3,000 programs listed under the 'youth' topic area. As it was not feasible to review every listing, the following search terms were used to limit the number of results:

youth + offender + reintegration

youth + offender + key area (based on list identified above)

Based on the 117 results obtained from the refined search, each of the listings was scanned and assessed for its relevance to this exercise. Similar to the inclusion criteria identified above for the online survey with youth service providers, only interventions deemed relevant for gang-involved youth and/or high-risk youth involved in the criminal justice system returning to the community were included in the final regional program inventories.

Federal Government Funding Programs

Youth Gang Prevention Fund – National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC), Public Safety Canada

The Youth Gang Prevention Fund (YGPF) provides time-limited grant and contribution funding for initiatives in communities where youth gangs are an existing or emerging threat and supports initiatives that clearly target youth with a demonstrated history of serious violence and/or who are clearly at risk of joining gangs and/or are already in gangs. In the first funding cycle (2007-2012), of the 17 youth gang intervention projects funded in communities across Canada, 5 of these were implemented in Ontario. In the second funding cycle (2013-2018), funding was provided for 14 youth gang intervention projects, and only two were implemented in Ontario communities. Only those programs currently funded in Ontario, either by NCPC for the initial demonstration project or by another funder who has taken over the costs for maintaining the program following the demonstration period, are included in the program inventory.

Guns, Gangs and Drugs Component of the Youth Justice Fund – Department of Justice Canada

The Youth Justice Fund provides grants and contributions to projects that encourage a more effective youth justice system, respond to emerging youth justice issues and enable greater citizen and community participation in the youth justice system. The Guns, Gangs and Drugs component responds to youth involved in the justice system and involved in, or vulnerable to, gun, gang and drug activities. It promotes the provision of community-based educational, cultural, sporting and vocational opportunities to these youth to allow them to make 'smart choices' and resist gang involvement or exit gangs.

The Youth Justice Fund generally supports projects for a period of up to three years. All projects approved April 1, 2011 and later were reviewed.⁶ Only programs currently funded in Ontario, by the Department of Justice Canada for the initial demonstration project, or by another funder who has taken over the costs for maintaining the program following the demonstration period, are included in the program inventory.

Funded Programs – Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Youth Justice Services Division

MCYS Youth Justice Services Division Program Supervisors were contacted via e-mail in March 2014 and asked to provide 'Service Description Schedules' for all currently funded programs that address and/or support youth in custody/detention returning back to the community. Only interventions deemed relevant for gang-involved youth and/or high-risk youth involved in the criminal justice system returning to the community were included in the final regional program inventories.

The different regional strategies and the systematic province-wide strategy implemented in order to develop more complete electronic program inventories yielded 144 additional interventions. Appendix G contains the complete list of program summaries included in each of the four regional program inventories.⁷

Asset Map Development

Asset mapping is a participatory assessment and planning process that engages a group in exploring the assets within their physical and/or social environment, in relation to a specific issue or theme (McKnight & Kretzman, 2001). It is the process of cataloguing and highlighting the programs, services, supports, resources, strengths and capacities in a given area, rather than focusing on problems or deficiencies. The purpose is to create a concrete output, often a visual representation of existing assets in the context of geography or a guide to services and supports.

⁶ Youth Justice Fund project descriptions for all approved projects are only available online after this date.

⁷ The complete regional program inventories are contained in separate documents submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services Youth Justice Services Division, Effective Programming and Evaluation Unit, in conjunction with this final report.

The mapping process has several goals including creating awareness of available assets, identifying connections among service providers, and meeting the requirements of stakeholders. Though it is not its primary objective, the mapping process can also help to shed light on gaps and needs, by revealing a lack of initiatives in a particular area, or that existing programs, services, supports and resources are not well known or are deemed inaccessible for a variety of reasons. This approach inventories, acknowledges and values existing resources and allows stakeholders to build on this foundation when undertaking formal and/or informal planning processes (McKnight & Kretzman, 2001).

As a first step in this process, the current programs, services, resources and supports available for gang-involved youth and/or high-risk youth involved in the criminal justice system returning to the community were identified.

As a second step in the process, tables separated into common themes across all four former youth justice regions, and themes that are region-specific, highlighting current strengths and assets as well as barriers and limitations in the current way of working with gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system have been created. These tables reflect all of the information obtained from all participants (as described in detail in the regional reports) and serve to identify similarities and differences among the regions in their capacity and the requirements needed to meet the needs of gang-involved youth in terms of assisting the reintegration of this population into the community. These tables are included in Appendix I.

Limitations

As noted previously, there is no universally accepted definition of 'youth gang' and there is a large variance in how young people see themselves in terms of gang involvement. For the youth perspective component of this research project, youth were included as participants based on self-identification. While, the self-nomination method of identifying gang-involved individuals has been validated in previous literature (Curry, Decker, & Egley, 2002; Esbensen et al., 2001; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen & Winfree, 1998), relying on this type of data – using self-reported information from youth as opposed to administrative data (law enforcement intelligence, criminal justice system records, etc.) – influenced the number of youth eligible for participation in this study. Further, in order to protect youth currently residing in youth justice facilities, participants were asked to share knowledge, thoughts and views on the issue of youth gang involvement in general terms. Former or current gang affiliation was not a requirement for participation in the data collection activities. Based on these two criteria, in some cases youth participants may not necessarily have first-hand experience with gang involvement, and have chosen to participate in the data collection activities for other reasons (e.g., general interest in the topic, because of the honorarium provided, as an alternative to regular institutional programming).

While this research project was wide in its scope, covering the four former youth justice regions in the province of Ontario, based on the geographic vastness of the regions and the limited time and resources available to conduct the data collection activities, it is limited in its depth. This comprehensive report includes four qualitative exploratory case studies that, for the most part, focus on a specific geographic area within the larger region and include a relatively small sample of participants. Similarly, the regional program inventories and asset maps included as appendices to this report should not be regarded as definitive resources. Finding accurate data sources, identifying assets (programs, services, supports and resources), and engaging participants representing the full spectrum of service providers that address the needs of gang-involved youth across the entire province of Ontario is a daunting task. The results obtained in this project are limited by the scope of the data collection activities completed. While some assumptions may be made on the representativeness of the results obtained with respect to overall system values and philosophy of approach to gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system, the findings as a whole should not be generalized to be representative of the entire province of Ontario.

This project is intended to be a first step in the examination of important issues with respect to the capacity to address gang-involved youth justice clients who are transitioning from custody/detention settings and/or those being supervised in the community. Further research will be required to examine the themes identified with a larger sample of participants (youth, youth justice staff, community youth service providers) and with additional stakeholders, and to implement a similar data collection process in other areas within each youth justice region.

CENTRAL REGION REPORT

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Youth Justice Services Division (MCYS-YJ) contracted Central Toronto Youth Services (CTYS) to coordinate the former Central region case study. The former Central region provided youth justice services in Toronto, Dufferin County, Halton Region, Peel Region, York Region, and Simcoe County.⁸ This vast geographic region includes urban, suburban and rural centres with a population of just under 6 million residents. In the 2013 calendar year, there were a total of 4,521 admissions under MCYS-YJ jurisdiction in the former Central region.⁹ This includes 606 probation orders, 736 secure detention and secure custody orders and 779 open detention and open custody orders.

CTYS is a Children's Mental Health Centre accredited through Children's Mental Health Ontario. It is fully funded through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Health Long Term Care, Toronto Central LHIN. MCYS-YJ Central region funds the CTYS youth justice programs. These programs include both diversion and reintegration for youth before the Toronto youth court system or those serving a youth sentence under the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA). Diversion programs include the Enhanced Extra Judicial Sanctions Program and the Relationship Skills Violence Prevention Program. Reintegration programs include the Early Release Support Program, Transitions and the Youth Justice Outreach Program. The Mental Health Assessment Service is a collaboration with Turning Point Youth Services and the Hincks Dellcrest Centre. Approximately 380 youth are served annually.

Youth being served in the CTYS youth justice programs can also access a broader range of CTYS services. MCYS additionally funds the CTYS Community Outreach Counselling Program, Group Services, School Based Outreach Programs, Student Focused Workers Initiative and the LGBTQ (Pride & Prejudice) counselling program. Health funded programs provide services for transitional aged youth up to age 24 struggling with issues of serious mental illness. Services include short and long term case management, youth hostel outreach and a Day Treatment Program.¹⁰

Situation and Context of Youth Gangs in Central Region

Youth gangs and gang violence have been an issue within with Central region for several decades. It is very challenging to accurately estimate the true size of the gang problem. Research and police estimates have been skewed and there are challenges with definitions across the country as well as the variance in how young people themselves identify as gang-involved. It is estimated that there are approximately 3,000

⁸ Please note that data collection activities in this project utilized the old MCYS Youth Justice Services Regions. Under the new regional classifications, Waterloo Region and Wellington County have been added to the Central Region and the city of Toronto is now part of the new Toronto Region.

⁹ Total admissions includes detention, custody and community admissions, as well as re-offenses, transfers from other facilities and from the adult system, and breaches of supervision.

¹⁰ See Appendix J for more information on the programs and services offered by Central Toronto Youth Services.

gang members under the age of 28 in Toronto and 3,000 in York, Peel and the 905 area code (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2014). Gangs in both Toronto and Peel region are racially and culturally diverse. A concern to all service providers, the police and the community is the access that these young people have to guns. Within the Central region of Ontario there are a number of organizations that provide services to gang-involved youth, including both community service providers and youth justice agencies. Services may include but are not limited to: legal advice and counsel, case-management, youth justice diversion programs and drop-in counselling.

In the Central region, the problem of youth gangs is compounded by the current economic situation. Ongoing budget cuts and lack of additional funds for the agencies that serve gang-involved youth may mean less available programming for gang-involved youth. Conversely, less economic opportunities in certain neighbourhoods may encourage more youth to turn to gangs. Feedback from community service providers is clear and consistent: they require ongoing and additional funding to meet the needs of gang-involved youth in their communities. Youth have been equally clear in their identification of the need for additional supports while in custody and as they transition into the community to ensure they can successfully exit gang involvement. Not only do youth require additional supports, but they also require increased opportunities; opportunities for adequate paying jobs and further education.

METHODOLOGY

The Central region's data collection strategy closely adhered to the overall methodology of the project as described earlier in this report. A multi-method approach was employed for data collection and is described below. Data were gathered from four main sources: gang-involved youth and youth at-risk for gang involvement, community agencies and community service providers who work with gang-involved youth (community youth service providers), and youth justice staff.¹¹

Online Survey with Youth Service Providers

In the Central region, 67 agencies/organizations equipped to provide service to gang-involved youth in some capacity were identified. Agencies were identified from service provider lists, network contacts and the MCYS-YJ list of funded programs and services. Representatives were contacted via e-mail for participation in this electronic survey. Although all 67 agencies were encouraged through a number of e-mail requests to respond and provide agency data on their programming, in the end only 23 agencies/organizations completed the survey. As always, it is difficult for many service providers to provide the additional time, resources and effort it takes to complete surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews, as organizations are often already working well over their intended capacity.

¹¹ See Appendix F for a complete list of facilities, agencies and organizations represented in the data collection activities

The data from the online survey were downloaded by CTYS from SurveyMonkey into a Microsoft Excel format and then inputted into SPSS v.20. All quantitative data underwent univariate analysis (frequencies and percentage agreement) and all qualitative data (narrative-based responses) were examined by question and then analyzed for themes and content.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with leaders and stakeholders in the Central region who have knowledge of and experience working with gang-involved youth. Individuals were recruited by e-mail invite and direct phone contact based on their expertise. It was anticipated that approximately 5 individuals would be selected for this component of the data collection process. In the end, key informant interviews were conducted with 2 youth justice staff members via telephone and 2 youth justice staff at the Mississauga Probation Office.

Focus Groups with Youth Justice Staff and Community Youth Service Providers

Focus groups were conducted with youth justice staff involved in the supervision of gang-involved youth in the youth justice system. Individuals were identified and recruited by e-mail invite and direct phone contact. It was anticipated that 2-3 focus groups would be conducted with this population. One focus group (comprising a total of 6 participants) was conducted with youth justice staff at the Mississauga Probation Office.

Focus groups were also conducted with community youth service providers. This included agencies and organizations playing a role in supporting gang-involved youth. Individuals were identified by e-mail invite and direct phone contact. It was anticipated that 1-2 focus groups would be conducted with this population. Two focus groups were conducted; one was held at Central Toronto Youth Services and the other was at East Metro Youth Services with a total of 17 participants.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Youth

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with youth (between the ages of 16 and 25 years old). It was anticipated that between 5-10 interviews and 2-3 focus groups would be conducted with this population. Four one-on-one interviews were conducted with youth and took place at Central Toronto Youth Services (youth on community probation orders). Two focus groups (comprising a total of 8 participants) were conducted with young people. These focus groups were held at Everett Observation & Detention Program, Turning Point Youth Services (open custody/detention setting) and Syl Apps Youth Centre (secure custody/detention setting), Kinark Child and Family Services.

All narrative-based data gathered from the key informant interviews, one-on-one interviews with youth and focus groups with youth justice staff, community youth service

providers and youth underwent the following process: review and confirm transcription, first level, second and third level analysis for themes and content. Quotes used in this report are direct quotes from the respective data sources.

FINDINGS

The Relevance of the ‘Gang’ Label to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

The Gang Label is Relevant for the Referral Process to Community Agencies and Case-Planning

Through the various data collection activities, youth justice staff members, youth justice service providers and community youth service providers were asked to consider how the ‘gang’ label was relevant to their work – individually and organizationally – and to their work with partners. In response, youth justice staff members and community youth service providers reported that there is legislation regarding the definition for organized crime, and gangs are conceptualized as groups conducting organized crime. The gang label is relevant in how these youth are processed and sentenced in the courts. The gang label is further relevant regarding the receipt or identification of referrals from the court system or community agencies, and in determining potential planning in case management.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“It is relevant... in regards to court and identifying agency referrals.”

The Importance of Correct Terminology (Gang vs. Affiliations vs. Neighbourhood Associations)

Being gang-involved is a complex, multi-faceted concept. Acquiring the correct terminology to discuss the type of youth being considered was a unanimous issue that was brought forward by youth justice staff, community youth service providers, and youth. Although many agreed these youth were considered marginalized, at risk, and facing multiple barriers, ‘gang-involved’ may not always be the appropriate way to classify these young people. Some service providers mentioned that although the term ‘gang’ typically refers to groups of people involved in organized crime, it is not always an appropriate label for many of the youth they serve, even though these youth may be in conflict with the law. Many youth lack the organization and sophistication in their activities to be deemed as belonging to a ‘gang’.

Community youth service providers and youth discussed how neighbourhood affiliations seem to be more influential in how youth self-identify. Many youth identify as being a member of more localized communities or specific residential areas (i.e. apartment building) rather than the city or town in which they reside. Many youth are labelled as being part of a gang simply due to the community they represent, or the people they

associate with, although they may not be specifically gang involved. The level of involvement or participation in gang activity is deemed to be a more pertinent issue than the community with which a youth identifies. Complicating the issue around accurate identification of gang association is that many youth do not disclose or self-identify as being part of a gang.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“Some youth are people who are not actually gang involved but are titled as being gang involved. They get that title then go to jail and once in jail they must build alliances so they can survive and be safe which then in turn makes them end up being gang involved.”

Youth:

“Gangs are, more or less, groups of people who are outcasts who want a sense of belonging.”

Safety Concerns for Youth and Staff

Consideration of safety concerns becomes an issue for gang-labelled youth. Youth may be at risk of harm when in a residential/custody/detention setting or at a community agency where there may be other youth who are in conflicting or rival groups who are sharing the same space. Safety for staff members who spend time in the community with people who are gang involved or affiliated presents safety risks to both the staff and the youth.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“If there is something from the critical information form from probation, I have concerns about the safety of my colleagues. How are we going to safely provide services to youth and keep our staff safe?”

Service Providers Need to Have a Broader Understanding of Why Youth are Gang-Involved

A key misconception of gang-involved youth is that they join gangs exclusively to be involved in criminal activity. The reality is that the reasons are much more complex. For example, youth may have turned to gangs to seek opportunities to earn income to support themselves and their families, when more traditional opportunities for employment may be unavailable or unattainable. Gang-involved youth often feel service providers view them through a lens of criminality rather than considering the adversity to a gang lifestyle in the first place.

Youth Justice Staff Member:

“The gang label isn’t cut and dry, it’s complex and multi-faceted.”

Youth:

“People always look at gangsters as bad people, but there is a reason they are living that lifestyle: their families are deadbeats, they are living in community housing. They don’t just join a gang for fun, they join for a reason.”

Current Ways of Working to Address Needs and Provide Support to Gang-Involved Youth

Knowledge of Youth Gang Involvement

The youth justice staff members, youth justice service providers and community youth service providers were asked to discuss how they know if a youth they are working with is gang-involved. Gang-involved youth enter the youth justice system for many reasons. The youth justice staff and community youth service providers suggested that youth come to their attention due to criminal behaviour and behaviour that may stem from unmet mental health needs and/or the lack of community-based service options. Youth justice staff tend to receive gang-involved youth through the criminal justice system, while community youth service providers receive youth through a referral system, which can include the court system.

Community Youth Service Provider:

*“We work off [a] referral system; we get referrals from Guns and Gangs, and school boards;
60-70% of referrals come from the community.”*

Youth justice staff members employ a standardized tool called the Gang Risk Assessment Instrument (GRAI) that aims to identify a youth’s level of gang involvement. However, not all professionals who work with gang-involved youth have access to this tool. In short, the GRAI is a specialized tool that requires that staff be trained and qualified to use it. Community service providers stated that while the GRAI is being utilized by the provincially operated agencies, the community agencies do not have access to the tool. Some community youth service providers indicated they are utilizing a strengths-based approach and/or a youth-centred approach, both of which are based on engagement and relationship building with the gang-involved youth.

Online survey respondents also advised that an inherent issue within the gang-involved population is a lack of honesty on the part of the youth. Youths do not generally or openly admit to gang involvement and/or their level of gang involvement. This leaves service providers to rely on informal information gathering techniques, which depend on open communication with community members, peers, other service providers and the police.

Approach to Working with Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members, youth justice service providers and community youth service providers were asked whether they took a different and/or unique approach to working with gang-involved youth. The approaches in working with gang-involved youth were identified as needing to be youth-centred across all stages from engagement, to planning, and to discharge. Staff members from the youth justice system have gained an understanding of how to best work within the current system, recognizing that youth are complex individuals with many challenges. Both the youth justice staff and community youth service providers indicate that there is not an exact or one 'best-practice approach' with these youth.

Youth Justice Staff Member:

"Once we know there is involvement we can begin to process and plan youth-centered engagement."

"Not an exact approach...each [youth] is different...each one at a different level... what's the history...is it generational?"

Community Youth Service Provider:

"We do not have a best practice approach, we haven't stepped back to look at the best practice approach."

"I think that we have gone through a generation shift in our organization; youth in custody, do your time, into a residential relational-based and motivational organization, but we tend to fall back into the same routine. We need to lead by example and utilize an evidence-based practice."

Both the youth justice service providers and the community youth service providers identified the need for more services for these youth. Their recommendations included services such as the Breaking the Cycle program and the need to have a main referral list of services (which currently does not exist) along with criteria and demographics. Their aim: to be very knowledgeable about the services offered at the community level. Further suggestions included prevention programs that are age-specific, developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive. They posit that the higher the target population's level of risk, the more intensive the prevention effort must be and the earlier it must begin. A current reality is that many programs and services are unavailable for this youth population as the waitlists for service prohibit timely service.

Current Capacity to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members, youth justice service providers and community youth service providers were asked to reflect on their current capacity to work with gang-involved youth. They were asked to discuss the strengths of their approach as well as common barriers and limitations encountered in working with this population.

Online survey respondents underscored that safety and security are important issues to consider when working with gang-involved youth. Safety includes both staff and the youth themselves.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“Concerns about not knowing if a youth is involved in a gang and having them attend the agency with potential rival gang members. We try and find out where and when possible [if] this is the case and [we] monitor the youth closely while they are here.”

“[Specific agency] has dealt with high risk youth before the courts for over ten years. During that time there have been approximately one or two youth killed per year.”

Service providers identified some strategies they use to be informed about safety concerns, with most appearing to be informal. Examples given include but are not limited to: monitoring the youth and his or her peers while they are at the community service, and relying on community information from police, community members and other agencies to assess when and whether a certain youth may be in danger. Service providers aim to work out a safety plan with the youth and review it regularly. The staff groups stated that receipt of ongoing training and professional development relating to safety within this very specific work contributes to improved safety initiatives.

Other concerns identified by the two community youth service provider staff groups include the youth's lack of basic needs such as housing, clothing, and food. It is difficult to work on complex issues with a youth when hunger or the need for other basic necessities is the most pressing presenting issue. Provision of such basic services often lies outside of the youth service provider's mandate. The result is reliance upon other community services to provide basic needs. Therefore, healthy, positive relationships between community youth service providers are essential to meeting the needs of these youth.

Another significant barrier to working effectively with gang-involved youth is that many youth are unable to be transparent about their level of gang involvement; this makes it difficult to accurately assess, treat, and plan for these youths.

Finally, one of the most concerning issues that service providers raised is the lack of reintegration services for youth. This often means that once a youth is released from custody or finishes a program there may be limited support for the youth to keep up any positive gains they have previously made.

Service providers feel strongly that the best approach to working with gang-involved youth is a youth-centred approach where there is clear focus on youth engagement and relationship building through one-on-one contact. Focus on the youth's strengths is key, as is building up the youth's positive connection with community resources and involving their family, if at all possible. For some youth this is not achievable as their

families are often involved in gang activity as well. Some agencies identified that without familial support, it is very difficult for a youth to effect the changes needed. In sum, gang-involved youth who appear most able to avail themselves of help are those who are open, honest, looking for assistance, and are ready and willing to make positive changes.

Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations

When asked about the nature of their partnerships with other agencies and organizations in their work with gang-involved youth, the various community youth service providers noted that the different communities these youth are associated with have different needs, problems, beliefs, practices, assets, and resources related to gang-involved youth. Involving the community in program design and implementation helps ensure that strategies are appropriate for and acceptable to the community and its youth.

The youth justice staff members identified that community connections are of the utmost importance to realizing good outcomes when working with gang-involved youth. Discharge planning for a youth should always include outreach to other community service providers prior to the youth returning to their communities. The relationship building and rapport/trust with the community youth service providers should be initialized while the gang-involved youth is still in custody/detention.

Youth Justice Staff Member:

“We need the supports put in place in the Centre as part of a transitioning plan back into their community, we need to work in collaboration with the communities and make it realistic for the youth.”

The Perspective of Young People As It Relates to Our Work with Gang-Involved Youth

In order to understand the perspective of young people as it relates to working with gang-involved youth, individuals participating in this research study were first engaged in a discussion concerning the benefits and consequences of involvement in the gang lifestyle.

Rational or Advantages for Youth to be Involved in a Gang

Youth discussed their many motivations for participating in gang activity. The reasons provided include: gangs provide opportunities to make fast and substantial financial gains; gangs are a way to make important connections within the community; gangs can provide protection from other gang members; gangs give a sense of belonging or support; gangs can give one feelings of empowerment as a result of gang position or activity; gangs allow youth an ability to provide for their families or the desire to give their families a better life; gangs let you feel involved with your community or

neighbourhood; gangs give you a place to go or report to every day – they give you purpose; and finally, gangs are an opportunity, perhaps the only one, to escape poverty.

Youth:

“You make money faster. The amount [of] money can’t do much for you in a minimum wage job; the money [from a gang] is good. Everyone wants to be rich, everyone wants the good life, nobody wants to live in the hood, [and] minimum wage jobs aren’t going to do anything. I want to move my mom out of the hood, I don’t want her to live in crime-infested areas, that’s why people want to get money.”

“I haven’t lived in a home since I was 13 [years old]. It’s a family aspect. It’s really hard because they [the gang] become your family, they accept you for your mistakes, there was a routine.”

Youth-Identified Reasons for Wanting to Leave a Gang

Youth also provided reasons for why someone might want to leave a gang. They suggested the desire to have a better lifestyle for themselves, their children, or their families; recognition of the negative impacts of violence, alcohol and drug abuse; the impact of prostitution and violence on one’s self-worth (for female members); and a fear of going to jail and wanting to set a better example for their younger family members.

Participants were then engaged in a discussion pertaining to the experiences of gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system. They were asked to identify challenges that gang-involved youth may face when leaving custody and returning to the community and to provide their perspective with respect to how staff in the criminal justice system might support youth in exiting from the gang lifestyle.

In general, the youth participants indicated that more supports/resources are needed for youth transitioning out of custody, including: more counselling services; financial rewards for good behaviour or program participation; mentoring relationships from supportive staff; and help completing education.

The youth interviewed indicated that they felt there were inadequate services available to them when it came to transitioning out of custody. Youth recommendations included:

- More opportunities to speak with a supportive counsellor while in custody to help them more effectively and efficiently reintegrate back into the community.
- A link to an identified, caring adult to whom they could express their fears, concerns, emotions and requests for resources or supports.
- More opportunities to engage with positive adult role models to aid in their rehabilitation while in custody.

Another key barrier youth identified as a significant factor to leaving gang activity is their financial needs. Notwithstanding the reality that for many gang-involved youth the money they obtain or can access through illegal actions far, far exceeds the amount of money the youth can earn through legal means. To begin to recognize this reality, the youth interviewed suggested that there be a system in custody where they could have opportunities to earn money through program participation, job training or rewards for positive behaviours. The youth felt that this would provide them with some funds when coming out of custody, which could alleviate the temptation to return to gang activity as a result of desperate financial circumstances.

Youth also identified that to help foster their exit from a gang that they need, want, and must have support with improving their educational outcomes. Most often this means helping them obtain course credits. At a minimum, these youth need aid and support in making connections to school programs while in custody. In short, education must be viewed as an essential, important service factor as youth plan their transition back into the community. Youth said that pre-planned enrolment into a school upon their release from custody is a requirement if they are to succeed in returning to school; the youth felt if they were not placed into an educational program immediately upon their release, they would be tempted to return to gang activity. It is important to note that overall, education did not seem to be recognized by these youth as being as important in finding employment and making money upon their release from custody.

Employment Programs and Job Training

From the youth's lens, lack of paid employment was viewed as the greatest barrier for them to be able to successfully return to their community and leave gang activity. All the youth interviewed said that opportunity for employment was the most significant factor impacting their success upon return to their communities. Employment was associated for the youth with procuring positive feelings of self-worth, it offers a place for them to go to every day, they have responsibilities to their employer, it offers the ability to earn money legally to support themselves or family members, and it offers opportunities for skill development, such as learning a trade. The youth provided many suggestions regarding how best to incorporate job training, skill development and financial gain while in custody. Youth felt that if there were partnership programs of employers willing to hire youth transitioning out of custody, this would be a great benefit to their future success. Youth requested to have support in resume writing, certificate programs while in custody, connections to employment databases, employers and interview clinics, and that all these strategies would be assets in their successful return to the community. Again, youth indicated that employment needs to be linked with discharge (and therefore pre-planned) otherwise the risk of falling back into gang activity would be great. The youth interviewed readily acknowledged that the financial rewards of gang activity were a major reason for their participation in gang activities coupled with an inability to secure adequate employment within their communities.

Youth:

“Instant enrolment into employment, interviews in institutions so you have a job ready when you’re out. You can hook me up with a job, help me with a resume.”

“The financial piece is the thing that is missing as youth go home.”

Negative Attitudes of Staff, Workers, Probation Officers and Supervisors Toward Youth in Custody/Detention

Youth felt supportive individuals were essential and important to their success. Yet, specific to custody/detention settings, that was not how youth generally described their relationship with staff.

- Youth interviewed felt that staff treated them very poorly while in custody/detention, examples of attitudes included: derogatory statements, that they were untrustworthy, confiscation of items or privileges when staff recognized enjoyment, disrespectful, perceptions that youth had no feelings or emotions, and humiliation tactics.
- Youth identified not having anyone they could go to for support (comfort, or to talk to).
- Youth stated they felt that staff and supervisors did not care about them.
- Youth stated when they did identify a supportive staff member; there was pressure from other staff for that individual to treat them poorly.
- Youth’s perceptions that the ‘system’ sets them up for failure and that the system does not prepare them to reintegrate into the community.
- More skill development for staff in working with youth (counselling or interventions).
- Changing the custody/detention system to work from a place of caring and support.

Youth felt that the attitudes of staff, workers, probation officers and supervisors were one of the most important things they needed if they were to be successful in making better choices. They then spoke about the negative attitudes of many justice staff towards them as one of the most difficult aspects of their time in custody/detention. Youth described experiences with staff where they felt demoralized, disrespected, abused, humiliated, scared and hopeless. As a result of these punitive actions by staff, the youth discussed feelings of disengagement or lack of motivation. Although the youth recognized that custody/detention was not supposed to be an enjoyable place, being treated in a humane, respectful manner was something they did expect. These youth stated that in their experience it was uncommon to build strong, positive connections with staff; for those who felt engaged with and cared about, these relationships had positive impacts on their morale and increased their desire to want to succeed. In sum, the youth believed that staff training was needed to help change negative attitudes, and that training should focus on building trusting, positive relationships with the youth. Their hope: that the custody/detention system is set up to foster their successes – and not assume they are failures; that the custody/detention system consistently conveys to them there is hope for a better future, free from criminal activity – and not to relay a message of hopelessness.

Youth:

“Supervisors don’t care about the youth - they need people who are trained in this field, people [who] don’t get emotional. We’re not animals, we are humans.”

Youth:

“They make me feel like I am more of a criminal then I am. They always watch to see if I make a wrong move. The other day one of them (staff) said, ‘I’m not leaving the door open, I might get my purse stolen’.”

“They take away any little enjoyment. If you enjoy something, they take it away.”

Youth Are Responsible for Creating Positive Change in Their Own Lives

While the youth felt that better supports and resources would most certainly help them in their transition from custody, they also believed that they, themselves, were equally responsible in making positive changes within their lives. Many youth said that despite their workers providing an abundance of services, that until they were ready to change their lifestyle, supports would have little impact.

Youth also recognized that the shift to making more positive changes involved two separate and distinct choices: 1) to accept services and supports, and 2) to disengage with their gang-involved peers. While some of youth felt that they could leave their gang and still maintain relationships with affiliated peers as long as they set clear boundaries for themselves, other youth referenced the control gangs have over members, and leaving is not an option.

Youth:

“You can’t help someone who doesn’t want to help themselves.”

“In the end, it just comes down to what they want to do. You can create all these supports. If they want to do something, they’ll do it.”

Working Better to Address the Needs of Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members, community youth service providers and youth justice service providers were asked to consider what would help increase their capacity to work more effectively to support gang-involved youth.

Results from the online survey indicate that organizations that work with gang-involved youth have a number of needs. Like many community services, funding and programming availability is also an issue with this population. However, because this is a very unique and difficult-to-serve population, additional targeted resources are also required.

Priorities for organizations that serve gang-involved youth can be broadly defined as follows:

- Increased programming for gang-involved youth.
- Specific, targeted programming for gang-involved youth.
- Enhanced collaboration and communication with community partners.
- More training and professional development for service providers.
- Increased funding for services that work with this population.

Increased Programming for Gang-Involved Youth

Most organizations highlighted the need for more evidence-based programs for gang-involved youth. The reduction of waitlists is needed, as they are often a barrier in accessing services for these at-risk youth, especially youth who are leaving youth justice agencies and who have a need for follow-up treatment. Also required is an increase in the duration and intensity of the programming that is already available. Other suggestions included longer, flexible interventions, more dedicated staff resources and one-to-one time with gang-involved youth to foster engagement and build trust relationships with youth. When youth have positive relationships with their workers they are more likely to continue their involvement with the service.

Specifically Targeted Programming for Gang-Involved Youth

Gang-involved youth are a very specific cohort of the youth population. More precisely, this group is composed of youth with complex, high needs. Gang involvement is not a separate aspect of a youth's life, but is often entrenched within and throughout a youth's life (i.e. multi-generational familial involvement). For these youth, programming that is targeted at very specific issues is required. Agencies that service gang-involved youth feel strongly that more life-skills training is required for these youth. Life-skills training can assist youth in gaining new skills, which will aid them in becoming independent (financially, physically, and socially) which is a requirement for many if they are to successfully exit gang involvement. Other targeted programming areas should focus on assisting youth in exiting gangs, as well as providing assistance in reintegrating into the 'mainstream' community. A very important aspect of reintegration support is that it must be immediate.

Services for gang-involved youth that are involved in the criminal justice system and/or who are reintegrating into the community must be immediate and fulsome. Service providers for gang-involved youth understand the necessity of connecting with youth immediately when they first become involved in the criminal justice system. This time is recognized as a prime opportunity to connect with gang-involved youth as they are separated from their gang counterparts and are generally feeling more vulnerable.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“...once arrested, they [youth] are often diminished by the arrest process to the point of willingness to consider options. This has been seen to be a critical point of intervention.”

To optimize this key intervention point, immediate contact from a community or court worker who specializes in working with gang-involved youth must take place. These workers should have expertise in reintegration, relocation, and should be well versed regarding available community supports. Access to a range of comprehensive community supports must also be available to the youth. Ensuring that the youth has ample support from positive community supports, before they have contact with their gang-involved peers, is the key to a successful intervention.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“The gap between the inspired moments in custody where they are willing to be accountable and want supports until they are connected in the community is pivotal. While we wait for the connection, the gang does not. They are there as [the youth] get released and the peer pressure is relentless.”

Many of the youth justice workers interviewed stressed the importance of having immediate community resources available to the youth not only at the time of release, but that youth are connected to community programs and have built relationships with community workers well in advance of their release and prior to entering the community. This connection would close the gap from incarceration to community and ease the transitional phase for youth. Some of these important connections should be with schools, employment programs, and spiritual centres.

Although female gang-involved youth are a small element of the gang-involved youth population, special consideration is needed when working with female gang-involved youth as they have very different needs compared to the male population. Service providers advise that support in becoming independent is especially important for females who are involved with gangs, as many are involved through their significant relationships. However, service providers noted that building rapport and relationships with gang-involved females can be easier when compared to males, and some service providers feel as though it may be an easier process for a female to exit a gang compared to a male.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“Female numbers are low, however for the very small population [they] need support to become independent and move out of gang involved peer relationships and families involved with gangs.”

Enhanced Collaboration and Communication with Community Partners

The majority of the professionals surveyed advised that enhanced collaboration between various community partners is a priority. There are three main areas in which

communication should be enhanced: 1) with the police, 2) with the school system, and 3) with other community agencies who serve a similar demographic. In addition to increased communication between these sectors, agencies that serve gang-involved youth are focusing on building positive, lasting relationships and a collaborative approach is needed to assist youth involved in gangs.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“[We require] more neighbourhood satellite collaboration [and] focused relationship-building with police.”

Working to Understand Which Youth Are Gang-Involved, and to What Extent

It is often difficult to identify gang-involved youth, as many of them are not honest with service providers about their involvement. When a youth's level of gang affiliation is not known it confounds the ability to develop an accurate service plan. To combat this, service providers generally rely on three strategies to access information regarding a youth's level of involvement. One strategy is to rely on informal and formal communication across the community, friends, neighbours and the police to identify a youth's level of involvement of gang affiliation. This is one of the reasons why enhanced communication and positive relationship building across sectors is so important. The second strategy is to build a positive and trusting relationship between worker and youth, encouraging more honest disclosure on behalf of the youth. The third means to detail the level of youth gang involvement is to employ standardized assessment tools (e.g., Gang Risk Assessment Instrument (GRAI)).

Community Youth Service Provider:

“The GRAI assessment tool is utilized for identifying the level of gang involvement and it is a specialized tool that only trained staff can use. In the particular area the facility is located, they [youth] refer to [it as] Diggs.”

Increased Training and Professional Development Opportunities

Through their survey data, agencies underscored the need for increased training. Of greatest interest was obtaining evidence-based research in relation to working with gang-involved youth as well as practices that are having a positive effect in other communities and worldwide.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“...sharing of research and evidence-based practices that are working in other communities that have more experience [with gang-involved youth].”

“We are relatively young in Canada when dealing with gang-involved youth and we're not on a scale of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago but [we] would like to see what effective programs of disengagement are [and be]able to safely disengage them.”

Service providers stated what is key to realizing positive outcomes with gang-involved youth is the embracement of a youth-centred approach whereby goals include engagement with the youth and breaking down barriers between the youth and service providers. The shift is from a punitive, penal approach towards a more caring, understanding, individualized approach.

The Need for Increased Funding

Three of the 23 organizations that responded to the online survey advised that increased funding would help them in addressing the needs of gang-involved youth. One agency specified that with increased funding they would have more opportunities to do community outreach, which is a gap in service when it comes to serving gang-involved youth.

Better Preparation for Youth Returning to the Community

Youth consistently stated feeling unprepared to return to the community upon discharge from custody. The youth suggested more counselling services with a supportive and caring adult while in custody, as well as being connected with the same individual or another identified adult to provide counselling after discharge from custody.

The most important service that youth could suggest for reintegrating into the community was gaining employment. Youth stated having opportunities for job training, interviews or co-op placements while in custody which carry on once discharged back into the community, would be the most helpful resource for them. Youth also identified the need for more education and employment opportunities, which should be in place before or as soon as they are released from custody. Without immediate access to these types of programs, there are too many opportunities for youth to revert back to their old habits once released.

Youth:

“You guys have to create a new program. Instant enrolment in school. It has to be right away or you’re going to go to your old [ways].”

“Create an out-of-gang program. It has to be continuous; without things being continuous they just fall down.”

Comparing Perspectives of Service Providers and Youth

There was considerable alignment of views amongst the youth, the youth justice staff, the community youth service providers and the youth justice service providers. The separate stakeholders had very similar perspectives regarding what is needed to assist gang-involved youth to successfully integrate back into the community. The elements rated most helpful and the most required services were:

- A caring, knowledgeable individual who connects with the youth while in custody and then maintains that relationship when the youth returns to the community.
- Services such as education, employment, and counselling that begin in custody and then continue throughout the transition into the community. Relationships with service providers need to be made while the youth is in custody, and remain intact throughout the transitions process.
- Services for gang-involved youth must be made available immediately. If there is no access to positive programming, youth will likely return to gang-related activity.

Additional Issues Identified and Themes Discussed by Participants

The following section outlines the additional issues and themes that emerged from the various data collection activities involving discussions with youth justice staff, community youth service providers, youth justice service providers, and youth.

Connection between Poverty and Lack of Opportunities as the Rationale Gang Involvement

Youth overwhelmingly indicated that lack of employment, inability to provide for their struggling families and to make adequate money as reasons to become involved in gangs and stay involved in gangs. Youth wanted to escape poverty and provide a better life for their families and gang involvement allowed them to obtain these goals.

The connection between poverty and gang involvement was evident in the comments made by the youth interviewed. Many of the youth shared experiences of their families living in housing projects or unsafe neighbourhoods, experiencing economic stress, family violence, drug and alcohol addiction and underemployment. Some worried about younger siblings following their path into gang involvement. The youth recognized that through gang involvement they had more opportunities to help improve the quality of life for themselves and their families, making it difficult for them to resist participation. A lack of services and supports for their families was also a contributing factor. For many of the youth joining gangs, participating in gang activity was a tangible and proactive way in which they could try and help improve their families' circumstances.

Youth:

*"They need that balance; there have to be people in poverty, everyone can't be middleclass, so the system sets you up for failure...
People who grow up in jail, on the street; it becomes their home."*

The Impact and Outcomes of Incarcerating Youth Serves as a Double-Edged Sword

Community youth service providers discussed the impact of youth incarceration as having both advantages and disadvantages. Incarceration provided youth with an opportunity to become stabilized, start taking medications, attend school, and sleep regularly. It allowed service providers to meet with the youth in a secure location to start

the process of engagement, goal-setting and case planning. Unfortunately, in custody youth may be surrounded by negative peer influences, which support the youth in becoming a 'better criminal'.

Community Youth Service Provider:

"We are looking at a young man on our caseload. This is going to sound bad, but I hope he gets arrested. That is the only way to get services going."

"Youth jail is probably the best training place for youth to become better criminals."

CONCLUSION

As shown above, the problem of gangs within the Central region of Ontario is complex and multi-faceted. Youth are not entering gangs because they want to be criminals; youth enter gangs for many reasons, one of the most important being a result of limited employment and educational opportunities.

Currently in the way of supports for gang-involved youth, the Central region has a number of dedicated services that work to support these youth. While current approaches to working with these youth vary, the consensus appears to be that most services strive to work with youth from a supportive, youth-centered and strengths-based model. However, as was heard from service providers and youth alike, there is still work to be done in this area to ensure that all gang-involved youth receive comparable positive support.

Services that assist gang-involved youth are very concerned with helping youth exit gangs in a safe and effective way. Service providers point out that there are two periods when gang-involved youth are especially susceptible to assistance; when they are first incarcerated, and again when they are transitioning out of custody and back into the community. Service providers and youth are clear that for supports to be effective at these times, they must be immediate, fulsome, and continuous. There must be ongoing communication and collaboration between the sectors, and sectors need to work together to help plan for these youth, instead of working in silos. One example of increased communication and collaboration could be between the youth justice system and the education system. These two sectors must work collaboratively to ensure that education is in place before the youth leaves custody. If not, the likelihood of the youth returning to school is very low. The same could be said for employment opportunities. Youth advised that if they had an appropriate job or trade when they left custody, they would not feel persuaded to re-enter the gang life.

Lack of coordination and communication between various sectors and service providers can hinder the ability of agencies to effectively serve gang-involved youth. In addition, service providers advise they require more training on evidence-based models that have shown success when implemented in other areas. Both service providers and youth are calling for a more understanding approach towards youth involved in gangs;

one that does not focus solely on punishment, but understand the complex situations that lead youth to gangs, and also builds on the youth's strengths.

The Central region is working to address the problems of gangs; however, modifications within a number of systems are required for effective and prolonged change to take place. For this to happen, increased communication, collaboration and commitment across all sectors is required.

It is clear that the problem of youth gangs goes much further than the gang itself. It is a problem of poverty, diminished opportunities, and social and justice systems that struggle with meeting the needs and effectively serving this at-risk youth population.

EASTERN REGION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Youth Justice Services Division (MCYS-YJ) contracted the Youth Services Bureau (YSB) of Ottawa to coordinate the Eastern region case study. The Eastern region provides youth justice services in Durham Region, Kawartha Lakes, Peterborough, Northumberland County, Hastings County, Lennox & Addington County (includes Prince Edward), Kingston, Lanark County, Leeds & Grenville County, Cornwall, Prescott & Russell County, Ottawa, and Renfrew County. In the 2013 calendar year, there were a total of 2,512 admissions under MCYS-YJ jurisdiction in the Eastern region.¹² This includes 679 probation orders, 276 secure detention and secure custody orders and 480 open detention and open custody orders.

The YSB is an accredited agency through Children's Mental Health Ontario. The funding model for each program is based on the consolidation of dollars from various funding sources: Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Youth Justice Service Division, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, City of Ottawa, Board of Education, United Way Ottawa, Children's Aid Society, Public Health Agency of Canada, LHIN, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Centre of Excellence, and the Canadian Mental Health Association.

The YSB is a multi-service agency that understands that many of the concerns facing youth today need to be dealt with in the family, the peer group, the cultural group, and the community. The agency works in partnership to develop, deliver and advocate for better conditions, services and opportunities for youth and families in 20 sites across Ottawa (offering services in both English and French). Building on the resources available in their immediate environments, the YSB guides high-risk youth through whatever threatens their physical, sexual and mental well-being through the following programs and services¹³:

- Youth Engagement – The YSB supports youth advisory committees that develop leadership skills, give youth a chance to speak out about issues that are important to them, and educate the community about youth issues. The focus of the committees changes over time.
- Mental Health Services – The YSB is accredited by Children's Mental Health Ontario and has a team of experienced counsellors, with access to a multidisciplinary team. They offer welcoming, non-judgmental services for youth and families.

¹² Total admissions includes detention, custody and community admissions, as well as re-offenses, transfers from other facilities and from the adult system, and breaches of supervision.

¹³ See Appendix J for more information on the programs and services offered by Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa.

- Community and Housing Services – These services are designed to provide food, shelter, safety, health services — and even a sense of belonging — for those who otherwise might go without. The Downtown Drop-In provides a safe and welcoming place for youth (aged 12 to 20) living on the streets or in poverty. From there, youth can access a full range of services to help them address whatever challenges they face. Further, the YSB offers multiple services and housing programs to suit young people in a variety of life situations (shelters, transitional housing, long-term housing).
- Employment Services – These services help both youth and adults who are looking for work and career opportunities. They provide help with resume writing, preparing for the job market, upgrading skills, job placements, etc. They also work with employers to match job seekers with job opportunities.
- Youth Justice Services – The justice programs provide youth the knowledge, training and counselling they need to make positive life choices. Residential programs at the William E. Hay Centre and Livius Sherwood Detention and Custody Centre help young men in conflict with the law complete high school credits and receive valuable life skills training. The focus is on helping youth make a positive transition back into the community.

Situation and Context of Youth Gangs in the Eastern Region

For the purposes of this project, the YSB has chosen to focus its attention on the Champlain region, which encompasses Renfrew, Cornwall, Ottawa-Carleton, and Prescott & Russell. Within the region, the city of Ottawa is the largest urban area and gangs and their criminal activities are the focus of a significant degree of police activity; they are increasingly presented as a serious problem by the media, and seem to be a growing concern for the public. At a public forum held in the fall of 2012, the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) presented statistics suggesting that there was a 30% increase in shootings in Ottawa in the previous year, half of which were gang related.

The OPS treats a 'gang' as: any group of three or more people, formally or informally organized, which may have a common name or identifying sign or symbol, whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged primarily in street level criminal behaviour, creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation within the community.¹⁴ Based on this definition, as of October 2012 the Ottawa Police Service estimated that there were 15-19 identifiable gangs in the city with approximately 473 known members. The average age of gang members is 24.5 years, though they can be as young as 13 and as old as 37. In Ottawa, most gangs are considered to be transient, with Toronto and Montreal easily sharing members. Even boundaries within Ottawa are

¹⁴ This is the definition of gangs drafted by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Street Gangs Committee in June 2011.

vague and poorly defined – gangs appear to be less concerned with defending territory, and more concerned with making money through the drug trade.¹⁵

The level of the problem is not as serious in terms of volume or severity as in other large Canadian cities. On a density basis, Ottawa's gang problem is among the lowest in the country (with a rate of 0.53 per 1,000 population). Compared to Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina and even Toronto, Ottawa's gang problem is real but is not yet "beyond control" or of "epidemic proportions" (Chettleburgh, 2008). This presents a unique opportunity to address the issue while it is still relatively manageable.

Youth who become members of gangs in Ottawa grow up in our neighbourhoods, attend local schools, and are often involved in some way with the social services system. While many young people share the general risk factors of poverty and social exclusion, only a small number of those individuals become involved in the gang lifestyle. There are often signs that an individual is at-risk of future gang membership but we are not skilled at clearly identifying these youth.

Ottawa has many excellent services for young people. There are after-school programs, homework clubs and recreation opportunities in neighbourhoods, and there are specialized services in the education, mental health, child protection and youth justice systems. For a high-risk youth, there are often multiple agencies intervening to provide supervision and support. Unfortunately, these agencies do not always know what the others are doing. While there are many complex issues of confidentiality, service eligibility and accountability, a diversity of players and stakeholders must somehow work together collectively to support the most high-risk youth in the city.

Once a youth has become involved in a gang, getting out can be a daunting prospect. Specialized assistance is often needed for those involved in a gang to change their life. They need help with personal and family safety, housing, finding a new income source through employment or returning to education, repairing relationships with family and, often, dealing with trauma. Currently in Ottawa there is not a dedicated gang exit program. The same is true for the areas included in Champlain region. Most service providers offer individualized interventions to address specific issues and needs for youth who want to leave gangs. The complexity of the issue of youth gangs requires more imaginative solutions and approaches providing youth with viable alternatives to gang membership and building a safety net for those who want to belong and to contribute to their communities in positive ways.

METHODOLOGY

The Eastern region's data collection strategy closely adhered to the overall methodology of the project as described earlier in this report. A multi-method approach

¹⁵ This information was taken from the record of proceedings for *Taking Action Together: Addressing Gangs in Our City* which included a public forum held on October 17, 2012 and a leadership symposium held on October 18, 2013, both in Ottawa.

was employed for data collection and is described below. Data were gathered from four main sources: youth justice staff members (custody-based and community-based), community youth service providers, youth outreach workers, and youth.¹⁶

Online Survey with Youth Service Providers

Representatives from youth serving agencies and organizations across the Eastern Ontario youth justice region were contacted via e-mail for participation in this electronic survey. Relevant youth service provider networks identified by the YSB were used to recruit participants. Based on a similar survey conducted for the city of Ottawa where 40 youth serving organizations were contacted (Hastings, Dunbar, & Bania, 2011), it was anticipated that over 100 potentially relevant agencies and organizations in the Eastern region would be contacted for participation in this project. From there, it was anticipated that one-third to half of the agencies and organizations contacted would complete the online survey with a total sample anticipated to be 30-50 respondents. The online survey invitation was sent out in July 2013 and a reminder e-mail was sent out in September 2013. Of all the agencies/organizations contacted, a total of 5 responded to the online survey. The low response rate is similar to that obtained in a similar exercise conducted in 2011 to inventory the resources and services currently available for gang-involved youth and young adults (ages 16-25) in Ottawa who may wish to exit gang life.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with leaders and stakeholders in the Champlain region who have knowledge of and experience working with gang-involved youth. Individuals were recruited by the YSB project leads based on their engagement and expertise in this area. It was anticipated that approximately 5 individuals would be selected for this component of the data collection process. In the end, key informant interviews were conducted with 11 representatives from 7 different agencies/organizations.

Focus Groups with Youth Justice Staff and Community Youth Service Providers

Focus groups were conducted with youth justice staff involved in the supervision of gang-involved youth in the youth justice system. Individuals were identified and recruited by the YSB project leads via e-mail. It was anticipated that 2-3 focus groups would be conducted with this population. In the end, two focus groups (comprising a total of 12 participants) were conducted with staff employed in a youth justice facility (open and secure detention and custody) and one focus group (comprising 5 participants) was conducted with staff from MCYS Probation Services.

Focus groups were also conducted with community youth service providers and youth outreach workers. This included representatives of agencies and organizations playing

¹⁶ See Appendix F for a complete list of facilities, agencies and organizations represented in the data collection activities.

a role in supporting gang-involved youth. Individuals were identified through several mailing lists and recruited by the YSB project leads via e-mail. It was anticipated that 1-2 focus groups would be conducted with this population. In the end, one focus group (comprising 11 participants) was conducted with representatives and youth outreach workers from Ottawa-based agencies and organizations.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Youth¹⁷

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with youth (between the ages of 16 and 25) involved in the criminal justice system (those currently residing in youth justice facilities). Youth residing in open and secure custody/detention facilities in Ottawa were provided with a letter of information outlining the research project and an invitation to participate. Youth were asked to share knowledge, thoughts and views on the issue of youth gang involvement. Former or current gang affiliation was not a requirement for participation. It was anticipated that 5-10 interviews and 2-3 focus groups would be conducted with this population. Based on the level of interest in this project, 2 one-on-one interviews and 2 focus groups (comprising a total of 13 participants) were conducted with young people.

The Eastern region case study additionally provided a unique research opportunity. The data collected from this project will serve as a basis for a doctoral dissertation on a similar topic for a PhD in Criminology at the University of Ottawa. As such, approval to use the information obtained in this research project for this purpose was sought from all administrative bodies involved. Applications were submitted to the following research review committees:

- Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Youth Justice Services, Operational Support and Program Effectiveness Branch, Youth Justice Services Research Committee
- Youth Service Bureau of Ottawa Research Ethics and Advisory Committee
- University of Ottawa Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

Approval was granted from all three bodies. This secondary use of data was described and outlined in the informed consent process. Permission was explicitly obtained from online survey, interview and focus group participants to additionally use the information obtained through these research activities for the completion of a doctoral dissertation.

¹⁷ It should be noted that the findings referring to the 'youth perspective' are based on a small sample of youth participants, and that these individuals do not necessarily have first-hand experience with gang involvement.

FINDINGS

The Relevance of the 'Gang' Label to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

Through the various data collection activities, youth justice staff members, community youth service providers and youth outreach workers were asked to consider how the 'gang' label was relevant to their work – individually and organizationally – and to their work with partners. With respect to the use of the 'gang' label and associated terminology, the community-based youth justice staff members (probation and community supervision) and some community-based youth service providers apply it in the context of the administration of various screening tools to identify a youth's level of involvement (e.g., 'hard core' and 'wannabe'), to determine service eligibility, and to develop a plan of service. For example, the designation may have an influence on the youth's risk profile and the staff that they will be assigned. For other community-based service organizations and youth outreach workers, the term 'gang' is not used at all – the preference is to use the term 'high risk youth' and there is a focus on the criminal acts perpetrated by the youth and/or the problematic behaviour issues that they present.

It was clear from all participant groups that the label of 'gang member' or 'gang involved' is rarely formally applied to the youth themselves and/or disclosed to partners. In general, participants felt they would be doing a disservice to youth by identifying them as gang members. The 'gang' label may cause problems with respect to accessing community-based support services, to being accepted back into education institutions, and to obtaining employment. Further the role of the media and the community in portraying a certain version of the gang situation may negatively influence the lives of youth who are labeled as gang members (e.g., stigmatization, and an impact on rehabilitation and reintegration). One community-based organization particularly noted a preference to use more neutral language (at-risk youth) in order to avoid any isolation or reluctance to seek out services that may result from the 'gang' label.

There was also a reluctance to disclose gang affiliation to partners. On the one hand, custody-based youth justice staff members indicated that for the most part a youth with serious gang affiliation is already known to community agencies and organizations (as well as to the police and probation services). On the other hand, it is difficult to confirm legitimate involvement in a gang. Several youth outreach workers indicated that youth may affiliate with gang members, show gang symbols and/or participate in gang culture but that does not confirm that they are involved in the gang lifestyle (i.e. wannabe gang members, associates, etc.). Often the youth in question do not see themselves as gang members but instead identify as a group of friends or a social circle.

The youth participating in individual interviews and focus groups were asked to consider what the term 'gang' meant to them and to provide their thoughts on what it meant to be a 'gang member'. Youth primarily described 'gangs' as a group of friends with a name and associated identity (displaying certain colours, symbols, tattoos, with specific attitudes, certain neighbourhood affiliations, control over territory, in some cases having

the same heritage or ethnicity, etc.). Some believed that a gang is not necessarily a group of criminals (crime is something separate from the gang), while for others gangs are primarily involved in illegal activities (theft, robbery, drug dealing, prostitution) in order to make money. Some participants indicated that the gang is like a family, particularly in the case of youth who come from backgrounds of neglect. Some participants indicated that the gang label relates to 'loyalty' while others believed that it carried negative connotations including the assumption of criminality. Their main concern was that the police, community members and service providers might too easily apply this label.

Current Ways of Working to Address Needs and Provide Support to Gang-Involved Youth

Knowledge of Youth Gang Involvement

The youth justice staff members, community youth service providers and youth outreach workers were asked to discuss how they know if a youth they are working with is gang-involved. For all groups, knowledge of gang involvement is based on a mixture of formal and informal identification processes. Formal identification of gang involvement is often provided through intake assessments and documentation from the police, the courts, and probation services. Other than this formal identification, youth justice staff make some assumptions about gang association or gang affinity based on the nature of the crimes committed by the youth.

However, for the most part, youth justice staff and community youth service providers indicated that information about gang involvement is gained through informal interactions and discussions with the youth themselves. In some cases, youth will disclose information about their gang involvement to staff. In general hard-core members are not usually open about their level of involvement while the fringe members/wannabes are much more open to disclosing information. For youth outreach workers, knowledge of gang involvement is often based on the worker's knowledge of the youth's neighbourhood/community, associates and/or background. Several participants indicated that often they do not want to know or do not feel it is necessary to know if a youth is involved in a gang as it may cloud their judgement as it relates to service referrals. They prefer to refer a youth based on the information that the youth discloses first-hand.

Approach to Working with Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members, community youth service providers and youth outreach workers were asked whether they took a different and/or unique approach to working with gang-involved youth. In general, youth justice staff members suggested *how* they approach working with youth that are known or suspected to be gang involved is different from other youth. Several custody-based youth justice staff members indicated that while many youth in residence at the facilities are very reactionary and impulsive in

their behaviours, the gang-involved youth often demonstrate greater self-control – their actions are premeditated and instrumental – and their approach must reflect this understanding. For the community-based youth justice staff members a more direct approach is taken in terms of having candid conversations with the youth about the consequences of the gang lifestyle. Additionally, for some community-based youth service organizations, whether the youth is involved in a gang becomes relevant as it relates to safety issues, for instance known conflicts between certain groups and certain youth. They use this information in order to determine how and/or where the staff will interact with the individual youth and how to work differently in the administration of group programming in order not to create conflicts at the program site.

Youth justice staff members suggested that *what* they do in their approach to working with this population is similar to what it would be for any other high-risk youth group. Both groups noted the importance of challenging distorted thought processes. They try to ascertain an indication of the youth's belief/value system, the extent of their anti-social attitudes, and their level of motivation for change. This is a way for them to gauge the types of programs, resources, supports and opportunities that may be beneficial for, and accepted by, the youth. Similarly both community youth services providers and youth outreach workers indicated that they approach gang-involved youth in the same manner as other high-risk youth. For them, gang membership is just one risk factor and gang affiliation is not necessarily given any more weight than any other factor in terms of the type of intervention that is recommended.

Community-Based Youth Justice Staff Member:

“At the end of the day, the information concerning a youth's gang involvement is for me as a case manager, it doesn't really change the way that I deal with the youth. I am just aware of the affiliation and try to use this in my case planning, as I would any other information”.

There was general agreement among all participants that the focus is on developing an individualized approach to addressing the particular risks and needs of a given youth in a holistic manner that is both culturally sensitive and gender-specific. The youth justice staff members noted that it is hard to classify gang-involved youth clients into one category – they may come from very different backgrounds and have different motivations for involvement. The focus is on developing a plan that: addresses the drivers of criminal behaviour and understands the root issues for involvement and needs satisfied by the gang; includes family members (and addresses the risk of involvement of siblings) and other supports in the youth's life; and takes an approach where the youth's interests are matched to available services.

Both the custody- and community-based youth justice staff members indicated the importance of taking a strengths-based, motivational approach to gang-involved youth. All youth have strengths and there is a need to think ‘outside the box’ and work to identify these skill sets and channel them into something productive. The focus is on developing new social skills, addressing feelings of disconnect, establishing pro-social

relationships, increasing self-esteem, making progress towards an identified goal and connecting them to mainstream society. Part of this approach also involves helping the youth to recognize that there is an alternative to their current lifestyle. It is possible to live a life outside this realm of violence and the type of social structure within which they operate. However, it is important to keep in mind that leaving the gang is a slow process.

Use and Relevance of Services Targeted to Gang-Involved Youth

When the youth justice staff members, community youth service providers and youth outreach workers were asked whether they offered or referred youth to services specifically targeted to address the needs of this population, in general the response was 'no'. Youth justice staff members working in the community indicated that they would sometimes refer gang-involved youth to programs for high-risk youth who require intensive services. Participants noted that these services are not specifically geared to gang-involved youth; it just so happens that these youth tend to also have high risk profiles. Most importantly, participants indicated that they would refer gang-involved youth to community-based agencies/organizations with staff that are persistent and are willing to work with these youth beyond the 'resistance stage' (missing meetings, resistance to change, etc.).

For community youth service providers, in general participants indicated that they would make referrals to other service providers based on a particular risk or need identified in the youth's individual profile. Referrals are often made to addictions and mental health programs as well as housing programs. One participant noted that their programs are targeted at high-risk youth, some of whom may be gang-involved. Affiliation with a gang is not a criterion for participation.

When asked about the role of gang-specific programming and support, most youth outreach workers indicated their reluctance to employ a 'one-size-fits-all' model. They indicated their concerns with bringing a group of youth together (e.g., issues of competing gangs and negative influences). They also indicated concerns with making assumptions with respect to involvement in the gang lifestyle and the desire to leave it and the negative/reductionist identification of a youth as first and foremost a gang member. They believed that programming should be personalized/individualized and should address the underlying issues of gang affiliation (e.g., money, prestige, status, mental health issues, social issues, peer pressure).

Current Capacity to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members, community youth service providers and youth outreach workers were asked to reflect on their current capacity to work with gang-involved youth. They were asked to discuss the strengths of their approach as well as barriers and limitations encountered in working with this population. The custody-based youth justice staff members indicated that one of the strengths of their approach is the strong

focus on 'relationship custody'. Staff members are able to interact with youth, often one-on-one, and focus on their individual situation. They focus on building a positive rapport and are interested in what is best for the youth and their stability within the institution. One participant also indicated a strong focus on youths' feelings of disenfranchisement and the importance promoting belonging, consistency, predictability, acceptance, and a sense of hope while they are in custody. Staff members also indicated that the physical cottage-style structure of the facilities within which they operate is conducive to creating the right type of environment that supports a positive, strength-based approach. Safety and security are the priority, but once that is in place you have the opportunity to engage with the youth and build relationships.

Similarly, the youth justice staff members working in the community indicated that one of the biggest strengths in their approach is the connection that they develop with their clients. The staff are patient with the youth, listen to them, value their opinions, and offer them possible options. The goal is not to get a youth 'out' of a gang necessarily, but to provide services that support the youth's daily lifestyle. There is a collaborative environment among the staff members; a wealth of knowledge and experience is shared concerning the needs and issues that youth encounter.

In the case of community youth service providers, each agency highlighted the different strengths of their organization in their approach to addressing this population. These included the ability to target the underlying needs and risk factors associated with criminality and/or gang involvement; the importance of and success in administering a wraparound approach and engaging with community partners; a dedication to researching and adhering to evidence-based practices; the skill sets and dedication of staff in being able to engage this youth population; and the ability to deliver programming to a large population of youth and to bridge the youth and adult justice systems.

The youth outreach workers indicated that the strength of their approach is their non-traditional and flexible service delivery model and their role as a 'bridge' connecting youth and their families to services. They offer youth support through the establishment of a personal connection and the development of a rapport. The workers learn about the youth's interests and needs, act as a mentor/positive role model, advocate on their behalf and link them to services that present meaningful opportunities. They believe that the youth need a sense of hope and they need someone to be there for them over the long term. A big piece of this is establishing a permanent connection with a community-based organization so that the youth can receive continuous on-going service referrals if needed.

With respect to barriers and limitations encountered in working with gang-involved youth, several common issues were identified across all participant groups. First is the lack of adequate and consistent funding and supports to address the needs of youth gang members. While several programs exist, they are time-limited and dependent on strategic funding opportunities. Further, there are often strict timelines that are placed

on program participation which can have negative impacts on engagement and transition. Participants also identified difficulty finding gang-involved youth proper housing arrangements, and a general lack of familiarity with issues of trauma and PTSD experienced by population. Other participants indicated difficulty in providing gang-involved youth with options for legitimate employment because of the financial incentives and independence that participation in gang activities provides. They believed that youth will only consider leaving the gang if they can be promised the same amount of money and security that the gang offers – current programs that offer low-level, service sector employment are not enough.

Another issue discussed concerns the community to which gang-involved youth return once released from custody and how it can impact an individual's willingness and ability to 'change'. Participants indicated that they felt limited in their ability to help gang-involved youth with the challenges that they face when returning to the community (e.g., having a criminal record, estrangement from the community) and to address the systemic issues in their environment (e.g., communities with high rates of gang involvement, families supportive of the gang lifestyle, a lack of positive male role models). This challenge is further compounded by youth who are resistant to change or not open to intervention and who wish to return to the gang lifestyle.

Finally, the custody-based youth justice staff members identified a unique barrier when working with gang-involved youth, which is the operation of the criminal justice system itself. Youth will often do a significant amount of 'dead time' (detention) and then receive a relatively short custody sentence. This practice makes it difficult to develop a proper reintegration plan for the youth.

Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations

When asked about the nature of their partnerships with other agencies and organizations in their work with gang-involved youth, various opportunities for communication and collaboration were identified. While the nature of the partnerships depend on the particular agency/organization, in general participant groups identified official protocols with the police, schools and other social services in terms of 'purchase of service' agreements, formalized partnerships and collaboration in the case of shared clients and shared programs, informal connections and information sharing practices, and regular participation in the networks of broader service systems.

The most important thing is the maintenance of open communication among service providers. As one participant noted, it is important to remember that by the time that a youth is gang-involved, they have probably already been involved with other parts of the criminal justice system and/or social services system. It is important to establish key contacts and to work with others in order to meet a youth's needs. Participants also identified the importance of having committed workers who are willing to go outside their own agencies/organizations to work with others, to provide and accept support in terms of shared projects and to assist shared clients. Some youth outreach workers identified

the significance of informal relationships in the sense that they work closely with partners with whom they have developed personal connections.

Youth Outreach Worker:

“A lot depends on the relationship between individuals; not all organizations, interventions and workers are created equal. There are some agencies/organizations that individual staff will gravitate towards because they get better service for their youth.”

In terms of collaborating in the delivery of services, community youth service providers refer youth to other partners in the community that specialize in areas that fall outside their own service domains. The youth outreach workers noted that every service provider has expertise in certain areas and it is important to bring them together, pooling expertise and resources in order to determine solutions.

For custody-based youth justice staff members in particular, most of the partnership development with community-based agencies and organizations is currently done through probation services. Once the youth leave the facility, the custodial youth justice staff members have little to no contact with them. While they can outline different opportunities for youth and provide them with contact names and phone numbers, it is primarily the probation officers who will make referrals to community resources based on what is available and accessible for the youth.

Participants discussed the need to find a way to develop and maintain a continuous relationship with youth from custody back into the community. There is a role for reintegration workers and probation officers within custodial facilities, and those relationships should be developed earlier in the process. There is a need to connect youth to community youth outreach workers prior to their release. Relationships are often developed between custodial staff and youth outreach workers through informal channels; perhaps it is time to formalize this process. Also, because of the nature of timelines for program involvement, there is a concern with maintaining relationships with various agencies and organizations in order to connect youth and their families to ‘long-term’ services in the community.

The Perspective of Young People¹⁸ As It Relates to Our Work with Gang-Involved Youth

In order to understand the perspective of young people as it relates to working with gang-involved youth, individuals participating in this research study were first engaged in a discussion concerning their beliefs with respect to the benefits and consequences of involvement in the gang lifestyle.

¹⁸ As gang involvement as a was not a requirement for participation in this research project, it is important to keep in mind that the knowledge and opinions expressed by youth participants may in some cases be based on media portrayals and myths rather than on lived experience.

The participants outlined several reasons for involvement in a gang, including:

- Support and belonging – the gang may act as a surrogate family for youth who are no longer welcome in their homes.
- Respect/status/reputation – from peers both inside and outside the gang, from other gangs, from their neighbourhood, etc.
- Intimidation – some youth join because they want to be feared by others.
- Protection – some youth join a gang in order to protect themselves and/or their family.
- Money – some youth are unable to seek legitimate employment and see the gang as a way of making money in order to secure the things they want and/or need.

Some participants clearly articulated that youth do not join a gang for ‘fun’ (excitement, entertainment, etc.). Youth join a gang as a sacrifice, sometimes to support their families. When asked if it is hard to join a gang, several participants indicated that you must earn ‘stripes’ (complete certain tasks for the gang) and you may have to undergo beatings as initiation. One youth suggested that joining a gang is like obtaining a job; you need to have a resume before joining.

The participants also provided several reasons for leaving a gang, including:

- The realization that the gang is not all it was perceived to be at the outset.
- The ‘trouble’ and consequences associated with involvement – e.g., multiple arrests and incarceration.
- The hurt and pain suffered, both to themselves and to others, and by witnessing violent events.
- The lifestyle is too ‘tough’ on them, they want out of the environment.

The participants generally agreed that people have individual motivations to support their exit from the gang. When asked to comment on the general age of youth gang members, participants indicated that they are generally between 16-25 years old. They seemed to believe that some people grow up in the gang and around gang members and this is the only lifestyle they know, but they also felt that there are relatively few adults involved in the gang lifestyle (other than those in ‘biker gangs’). The general belief is that eventually individuals ‘get wise’; they are not going to spend their whole life in a gang.

When asked if they believed that it is challenging to leave a gang, the participants generally agreed that leaving is much more difficult than joining. Some youth indicated that joining a gang is a long-term commitment based on loyalty. The individual must determine at the outset whether they are ‘built’ for this lifestyle and should expect to remain in a gang for a significant period of their lives. Other participants indicated that it is hard to leave a gang because of the anticipated beatings, the assumption that you would be seen as a ‘snitch’ who would betray the gang’s confidences, and that the gang would follow you and potentially retaliate against you for leaving. They also indicated

that it is difficult to leave a 'family'. Alternatively, some participants indicated that if you no longer want to be involved in the gang lifestyle, then the gang does not necessarily want you to stay involved; the gang does not want anyone that is not committed to them. As long as the individual did not betray the gang in any way, there is no reason why they should not be able to leave. One participant even suggested that ultimately the gang wants you to succeed and to 'do good' in life.

Participants were then engaged in a discussion pertaining to the experiences of gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system. When they were asked to identify challenges that gang-involved youth may face when leaving custody and returning to the community, the following obstacles were identified: being recognized as a gang member and the reluctance of others to believe that they have left the gang lifestyle; a lack of money and housing; concerns that they may be considered a 'rat' or a 'snitch' and are no longer protected by the gang; and fear of missing out on the benefits offered by the gang. Several youth indicated that maintaining gang involvement is often better than the alternative. For example, some individuals discussed the futility of trying to obtain legitimate employment. They suggested that once you are in a gang that becomes your job/career. They argued that even if you are arrested and incarcerated you are not going to change your habits when you are released. Most employers will not hire an individual with a criminal record so you stay with the gang and continue to make money.

Finally, when participants were asked to provide their perspective with respect to how staff in the criminal justice system might support youth in exiting from the gang lifestyle, two general responses were offered. Some youth indicated the importance of having somebody to talk to about everything that's happened with respect to gang involvement. Others indicated the importance of planning for a future beyond the gang (e.g., how to finish high school, how to get a job). The participants indicated the need to have a solid idea of what you are going to be able to do after leaving the gang. Alternatively, some youth indicated that this is something they need to do on their own and they do not need support from anyone else. Individuals need to ask themselves 'what am I missing in my life' and then they need to go from there. It is up to the individual and if they need help then they just have to ask; support is available.

Youth:

"You come into a facility and youth are either going to be released, re-offend and return to custody, or you are going to be released and change your life – it is up to you. It is all about how you work with the cards you are dealt; it can be positive or negative."

Working Better to Address the Needs of Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members, community youth service providers, youth outreach workers and youth were asked to consider what would help increase their capacity to work more effectively to support gang-involved youth. Several common priorities were identified and are described below.

Increased Reintegration Programs and Supports for Youth

As noted previously, an issue identified in relation to the capacity to work with gang-involved youth is the nature of the environment to which these youth return upon release from custody/detention. Overall, all participant groups indicated that reintegration practices must be improved. In the education sector, there need to be alternative personalized arrangements for this population and in the housing sector, the choices for supportive housing are limited; smaller conglomerations of housing units spread throughout the city are needed. More youth-directed employment assistance and more options for legitimate employment are also needed. While there are several programs with the goal of assisting youth to gain entry into the workforce, often employers are reluctant to accept high-risk youth on probation (including gang-involved youth). Several custody-based youth justice participants indicated that youth need to be offered a variety of different employment options and provided with opportunities to learn while getting paid.

Youth outreach workers indicated the need to establish more programs and supports targeted to older youth (18-25 years old) such as mentorship opportunities, programs that run during critical hours of the day, and support to gain stable, long-term employment – including skills development programs that help youth to keep a job once they obtain it.

Several custody-based youth justice staff members also identified implementing opportunities to share ‘success stories’. They would like to invite former youth gang members and/or youth who have reintegrated in the community to come back to the facility to share their stories with the youth and the staff. This would provide youth with examples of individuals who shared similar experiences and who were able to find a more positive path in life and it would provide former youth justice clients with the opportunity to update the youth justice staff members on their successes. Additionally, it would provide the youth justice staff members with additional insight on what works well with this population and what other supports and resources they need to become contributing members of society.

Improved Continuity in Service Provision from Custody to Community

The custody- and community-based youth justice staff members indicated that what is needed to increase their ability to work more effectively is continuity of services from custody to the community and an increase in support for youth through the various stages of transition. While probation services may act as link, a more concerted effort is needed to ease this transition. For several youth, they may have developed positive relationships with staff members while in custody, and once they are released back to the community this relationship is essentially terminated. In order to work more effectively, participants indicated the need to maintain connections between the institution and the community. Some options suggested include allocating institutional staff a number of hours to spend with youth once they are released back into the

community and/or to bring community-based services and resources into the facility so that youth may establish relationships with these supports prior to release.

Above all, a youth needs to feel supported by someone who understands them and their situation, who does not judge them, and who has a vested interest in their success. This could be in the form of a mentor; one participant suggested that several youths have indicated that there was one supportive person in their lives who acted as the catalyst to their reintegration. There also needs to be more involvement from family members and community supports (e.g., community houses) in the transition process. The youth outreach workers also discussed the importance of providing 'advocates' for youth. Many youth lack the basic skills needed to find services and obtain support. They need a community support worker to navigate the service industry – selecting appropriate services, making referrals/connections, determining gaps and connecting youth back to the community.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“The community as a whole needs to take responsibility for their youth. Often we look for complicated ways to make an impact in the lives of our youth, this need not always be the case.”

Enhanced Communication and Collaboration between Service Providers

All participant groups identified the importance of increasing communication between the components of the youth justice system (courts, custody/detention, probation) and community agencies, and the development of protocols related to information sharing. Opportunities for regular dialogue on ways to address the needs of this population must also be established. Several youth outreach workers indicated the importance of identifying what programs, services, supports and resources are currently available for at risk and gang-involved youth. From a systems perspective, it was suggested that at this point there is not a need to create new services, but instead to focus on collaboration through existing services and to leverage funding. Consistent funding is important to the success of programming and will ensure the retention of dedicated and experienced staff members.

Youth Outreach Worker:

“We need to identify and better utilize the resources that we currently have, determine where there are gaps in service provision and use our collective expertise to find additional solutions to help our shared clients”.

Additional Opportunities for Professional Development

With respect to their own professional development, youth justice staff members, community youth service providers and youth outreach workers indicated the importance of increasing their knowledge on gang behaviour, understanding the current situation, and identifying challenges and developing skills needed in working with this

population through additional training. More importantly, what is learned in training sessions should be disseminated to other staff members.

Youth outreach workers also identified the need for more opportunities for service providers to connect and meet in order to discuss shared clients and service provision. Additional communication mediums (e.g., steering committees, forums for community dialogue) must also be established.

Youth Perspective

When youth were asked to discuss what they believed would help those who want to exit the gang lifestyle once they return to the community, some participants indicated that what is needed is support to protect the individual and/or their family from retaliation from the gang. They believed that relocation is not enough; the gang would be able to find you even if you moved to a different city. Youth also discussed the importance of 'motivation' in helping youth to leave the gang lifestyle. While some youth believed that this motivation could come from family and friends, others believed that it must be the individual's decision – if they don't want to change then they won't change. In terms of other supports, youth indicated that what is needed is support to obtain employment in a sector in which they have an interest and to secure safe housing.

When they were asked about some of the things that youth justice staff should do to help youth who are leaving facilities and returning to the community, participants indicated the importance of providing a clear understanding of the 'reality' of gang membership – what happens to members and how membership hurts others. Some suggested providing others with the opportunity to meet with an individual who has spent a significant amount of their life involved in the gang lifestyle and who has been incarcerated. Other youth suggested the importance of having individuals who have been in similar situations but have chosen a more legitimate path in life talk to these gang-involved youth about their other options.

Additional Issues Identified and Themes Discussed by Participants

The following section outlines the additional issues and themes that emerged from the various data collection activities involving discussions with youth justice staff members, community youth service providers, youth outreach workers, and youth.

Improving Community Knowledge Base

Several participants discussed the importance of improving the community knowledge base as it relates to gang-involved youth. First, it is important to disseminate accurate information on the status of the youth gang problem. While it is a population that cannot be ignored, the problem has not yet gotten 'out of hand'. Public understanding with respect to the reality of gang membership and gang activities must be promoted. This means addressing faulty media portrayals and providing accurate information on the issues and challenges that youth face; this is a first step to a different perspective on the

issue and a change in how we approach and treat youth. One participant also indicated the need to educate communities that 'hard time' does not equate to anything positive for the incarcerated youth and it does not pay off for the community.

Importance of Prevention and Early Intervention

The youth justice staff members, community youth service providers and youth outreach workers addressed the importance of prevention, early identification and intervention. More needs to be done in the community to identify youth that are at-risk of gang involvement. Once these youth are entrenched in the gang lifestyle and/or involved in the criminal justice system, it becomes exponentially more difficult to help them. The focus should be on outreach and intervention through the social service systems (schools, community organizations, service providers, etc.) in addition to the criminal justice system. As one participant stated, "too often we hear of stories of youth falling through the cracks and after a while that gets tiresome". Current practices need to be examined to determine what could have been done to better help these youth. Youth participants also discussed the importance of prevention and providing information about the gang lifestyle early on – once a youth has joined a gang, it is often too late.

Youth:

"Most youth have normal lives and want to do well; they don't want to get involved in the gang lifestyle. It is usually the youth that are 'hard off' that get involved. If you can help the youth before they get involved in the gang, there is a good chance to preventing future membership."

It is important to have resources that target youth before they even consider joining a gang (in the school system, in the community and even in justice facilities). They also indicated the importance of sports and recreation programs for youth in order to prevent gang involvement and/or as an alternative to gang involvement. These programs must be well organized, supported and funded, and target the 'right' youth – those that would not otherwise have the opportunity to participate.

Youth:

"If we don't have things to do, what do you think is going to happen? If you can't keep us busy, we are going to find other things to keep us busy."

Focus on the Individual Gang-Involved Youth and Maintain Realistic Notions of Success

Several participants identified important considerations when working with gang-involved youth. The first is that this population often experiences a 'lack of hope'.

Community Youth Service Provider:

"There is fluidity between suicide and homicide – youth put themselves in situations where they are reckless and fearless and the consequences of death don't matter to them."

In working with these youth, it is important to demonstrate to them that things are not hopeless. The focus must be on the youth as an individual; learning about their motives, interests, goals and dreams in order to determine what is important to them and to provide them with appropriate opportunities. As noted by one participant, it is important to acknowledge that no youth thinks 'I want to grow up to be a gang member'. There are other factors that have led the individual down this path. Understanding this and learning how the individual sees their future is important.

The second consideration concerns expectations of this population and anticipated outcomes based on service provision. Regardless of the challenges and issues facing a particular youth, success, that is both measurable and meaningful, is possible. Youth are resilient, if we can encourage them to feel positive about their future and that there is hope for a meaningful existence then we have succeeded. If we measure success by recidivism, then our expectations may be too high and we are ignoring all of the positive steps that a youth has made. For example, a youth may be doing very well for a period of time and then they are involved in one incident and they are automatically seen as a 'failure'. Several participants suggested that the focus should be on measuring increments of success based on improvements in the youth's 'social ability' (e.g., increase in social proficiency, more manageable, less confrontational, and less aggressive). If we are more realistic about our outcomes given the situation and the individual we are dealing with, we may feel more successful.

CONCLUSION

In the Eastern region of Ontario, the youth gang issue is complex and multi-faceted. On the surface, the 'gang' label presents itself as a simple binary concept but upon deeper examination it becomes much more complicated. There are different types of gangs, different levels of engagement, and different types of activities and requirements of membership. Labeling an individual as 'gang-involved' or a 'gang member' may not provide a helpful classification for service provision and it may actually create more problems for the individual so labeled. Youth participants clearly indicated the functional nature of the gang, namely meeting the unfulfilled needs of its members. It is not just a form of excitement or entertainment. With respect to challenges that gang-involved face when leaving custody and returning to the community, the 'gang' label, public perceptions of the individual as a gang member, and the stigma of former gang membership may limit opportunities as well as an individual's ability to leave the gang. Some youth indicated that maintaining gang involvement is seen as better than the alternative.

The approach to working with gang-involved youth differs by agency. Youth justice staff members address thought processes related to gang involvement and criminal behaviour and identify motivation for change. They take a strengths-based approach and focus on making progress towards an identified goal. For the community youth service providers and youth outreach staff, they approach gang-involved youth in the

same manner as they would other high-risk youth. Gang affiliation is only one risk factor and their focus is a holistic approach that is gender sensitive and culturally appropriate, and which considers all of the youth's risks and needs. Overall, participants do not refer youth to services specifically targeted to address the needs of this population. Referrals are more often based on a particular risk or need identified in the youth's profile. Youth outreach workers were particularly wary of gang-specific programs because of the assumptions that are often made with respect to gang involvement.

The strengths of the current approach to working with gang-involved youth for the youth justice staff members and youth outreach workers include the development of a relationship with the youth, a strengths-based, motivational approach to re-establishing a 'sense of hope', and a plan for the future. These groups and the community youth service providers also identified their focus on an individualized approach that takes the youth's interests and needs into account. However, there are also limitations. The custody-based youth justice staff members identified restrictions in assisting gang-involved youth in the reintegration process based on the operation of the criminal justice system and the nature of the environment to which youth are returning. For youth justice staff working in the community, community youth service providers and youth outreach workers, barriers include a lack of funding and resources to assist this population and an inability to assist youth with the specific challenges they face when returning to the community.

The importance of collaboration and communication in assisting gang-involved youth was clearly identified. Participants indicated the need to develop a more formalized collaborative framework for agencies and organizations. It is important to work with partners in the delivery of services based on different areas of specialization to meet a youth's unique needs. The maintenance of open communication and information sharing among service providers is also important: we are all involved in the lives of and servicing the same youth and we need to bring our different expertise(s) together to see where we can go next in this process.

In order to work more effectively with gang-involved youth, continuity in service delivery must be established through various stages of the transition process with a focus on increasing connections between the institution and the community. There must be increased funding and options for legitimate employment (that is accessible, based on interests, includes skills development components, and offers competitive pay), secure housing, mentoring opportunities, recreational programs, and advocates to help youth and their families navigate the various service systems. Opportunities should be provided for at risk and gang-involved youth to learn from 'success stories' and to plan for a future beyond the gang. Finally, professional development and training opportunities to understand gang behaviour and to develop skills to work more effectively with this population must be increased.

Youth gangs are an issue that many agencies and organizations in the Eastern region have limited knowledge of, and they have challenges in identifying and providing

services, and in measuring the success of those services. The focus moving forward must be on addressing underlying issues in order to prevent gang-involved youth from becoming further involved in the criminal justice system. We must provide support for needs that are not currently being addressed and we must help youth who are open and willing to receive assistance to make better choices. Based on the current level of gang activity in this region, a gang-specific program is not needed. A more effective management approach may be the most appropriate strategy moving forward: the key is to design an individual intervention plan tailored to meet the needs of each gang-involved youth justice client in custody/detention.

NORTHERN REGION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Youth Justice Services Division (MCYS-YJ) contracted the John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District to coordinate the Northern region case study. The Northern region provides youth justice services in Kenora, Rainy River, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Algoma, Sudbury, Manitoulin-Sudbury, Cochrane, Timiskaming, Nippising, Parry Sound, and Muskoka. In the 2013 calendar year, there were a total of 2,282 admissions under MCYS-YJ jurisdiction in the Northern region.¹⁹ This includes 598 probation orders, 349 secure detention and secure custody orders and 466 open detention and open custody orders.

The John Howard Society of Thunder Bay's mission statement is to support people who are at risk or involved in the criminal justice system through service, reform, education and advocacy. In addition to providing post-charge services such as housing, discharge planning and programming, the organization provides pre-charge diversion services, bail supervision and community service order supervision. The organization provides services to men, women and youth.²⁰ In partnership with First Nation's communities, JHS assists youth in conflict with the law by providing counselling, programming and community support. It also partners with a rural high school providing mental health supports for at-risk youth through a peer mediation and support program. These two programs are described in more detail below.

The Remote Aboriginal Intervention Program works in partnership with First Nation Communities to assist Aboriginal youth in conflict with the law and their families and is funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The program is currently being delivered in Eabemetoong First Nation, Weagamow Lake First Nation, Long Lake # 58, and Webequie First Nation. Each community has a Remote Intervention Support Worker that works closely with youth to support them through their completion of court ordered sanctions. The Support Workers facilitate culturally appropriate programming and activities that engage youth in addition to promoting positive responses to the challenges faced by the youth in the community. In addition to support workers, the program employs a clinical counsellor who provides counselling support to remote communities on a referral basis. The counsellor travels to the communities and provides counselling support to youth who are living in the community but have criminal justice involvement.

The On-Track Program is offered at the Geraldton Composite High School and is funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. This program aims to resolve in-school conflicts and issues experienced by students in order to avoid suspension from

¹⁹ Total admissions includes detention, custody and community admissions, as well as re-offenses, transfers from other facilities and from the adult system, and breaches of supervision.

²⁰ See Appendix J for more information on the programs and services offered by the John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District.

school, involvement by police, while supporting students experiencing mental health issues. The program encourages youth to take accountability for their behaviour through peer mediation, support services, and provides linkages with needed community services. This program offers support for mental health issues, addiction concerns, and promotes proactive alternatives to suspension to broaden problem solving/conflict resolution skills. Youth attending the high school are trained as peer mediators and assist in developing resolutions to whatever problem has arisen. The coordinator of this program helps students develop their skills as mediators, and partners with the greater community to ensure youth get the support that is needed.

Situation and Context of Youth Gangs in Northern Region

Identifying and addressing the topic of gang-involved youth is a positive development in the Northern region. There are gang-involved youth in most areas of this region. The problem of gang-involved youth is not new in this region, however awareness of the scope of the problem and the need to support gang-involved youth is in the early stages. Currently, there are no specific gang exit programs and very little programming or supports targeted to gang-involved youth. The lack of programs and services is exacerbated by the vastness of the region, which hinders effective collaboration between sector stakeholders as well as workers' and communities' ability to work together and communicate to support their youth. For example, distances between communities where the youth come from, and youth facilities where services can be accessed are sometimes hundreds of kilometers apart with no road access. Developing communication and case management strategies to support these youth is challenging because of the distance between custody/detention centers, programs, workers, and the communities where the youth reside. All of these factors affect the success of supporting these youth who are involved in gangs. Another challenge in helping youth exit from gang involvement is identifying if a youth is involved with a gang. There are very few facilities, or programs that use a gang assessment as part of their intake process. There is also a lack of resources and supports in many of the communities in the Northern region.

Gang exit programs, gang specific programs and a specific approach in supporting gang-involved youth is currently non-existent and discussion is just beginning on this topic in the Northern region. There is a need for programs, supports, resources, and educational/prevention programs for gang-involved youth in this region.

METHODOLOGY

The Northern region's data collection strategy closely adhered to the overall methodology of the project as described earlier in this report. A multi-method approach was employed for data collection and is described below. Data were gathered from four main sources: gang-involved youth and youth at risk for gang involvement, community agencies and community service providers who work with gang-involved youth (community youth service providers), and youth justice staff. In order to obtain data

throughout the Northern region, research participants included individuals residing in Thunder Bay, remote communities, and those who travel across the region to work with people from various communities.²¹

Online Survey with Youth Service Providers

In the Northern region, 112 online surveys were distributed to representatives of agencies/organizations that are equipped to provide service to gang-involved youth in some capacity. Survey recipients were recruited in person, by phone or e-mail through existing contacts and relevant service networks. Over 30 potentially relevant organizations in the region were asked whether they currently had a strategy, initiative, program or service that provides resources to gang-involved youth (aged 16-25) who may wish to exit gang life. There were no programs that were specific in supporting gang-involved youth and youth who wish to exit gang life. In the end, 48 online surveys were returned – including 22 that were complete and 26 that were incomplete. It was reported by several online survey participants that they had attempted to complete the survey on several occasions but came across technical difficulties. Participants reported that they were unsure of how to respond, they did not approve of the questions, or that the questions were long and repetitive. Also, electronic surveys could not be completed in one of the facilities because of an inability to use computers or the Internet.

Key Informant Interviews

The key informant interviews were conducted with leaders and stakeholders in the Northern region who have knowledge of and experience working with gang-involved youth. Individuals were recruited by e-mail, telephone, and in person. Part of the recruitment strategy focused on soliciting individuals with expertise in varying areas and whose experiences covered the different areas in the Northern region, as much as possible. It was anticipated that approximately 5 individuals would be selected for this component of the data collection process. In the end, key informant interviews were conducted with 6 participants and included: a social worker from a secure custody facility, a youth treatment centre counsellor, a community intervention worker from a Northern First Nation community, the region's youth probation manager, and two police officers that work throughout the region.

Focus Groups with Youth Justice Staff and Youth Service Providers

Focus groups were conducted with youth justice staff involved in the supervision of gang-involved youth in the youth justice system. Focus groups were conducted in Thunder Bay because of travel and the distance to other facilities in the Northern Region. Individuals were identified and recruited based on their location in Thunder Bay, and based on their different levels of supervision. It was anticipated that 2-3 focus groups would be conducted with this population. A total of 4 focus groups were

²¹ See Appendix F for a complete list of facilities, agencies and organizations represented in the data collection activities.

conducted with youth justice staff: one at a secure custody/detention facility, one at an open custody/detention facility and two with groups of community supervision workers (comprising a total of 23 participants).

Focus groups were also conducted with community youth service providers. It was anticipated that 1-2 focus groups would be conducted with this population. In particular, a focus group was conducted with staff at a treatment centre in Thunder Bay. The treatment centre was included in the project because staff reported that a high proportion of the youth at the centre were gang-involved; whereas, in the custody/detention and community supervision facilities, a low proportion of the youth were reported to be gang-involved. There were 6 participants in this focus group.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Gang-Involved Youth

Interviews and focus groups were planned with youth (between the ages of 16 and 25 years old). It was anticipated that 5-10 interviews and 2-3 focus groups would be conducted with this population. In total, 18 interviews were conducted with youth in Thunder Bay – 7 at the secure custody/detention facility and 11 at the treatment centre. Of these youth, 13 reported to be gang-involved, and 5 indicated that they had experience with gangs but were not gang-involved. Focus groups were arranged for youth at the secure custody/detention facility and the treatment centre. However, at the secure custody/detention facility the youth chose not to participate, and at the treatment centre 6 youth did not respond to questions and indicated that they wanted the session to end. Therefore, no youth focus groups were fully completed.

FINDINGS

The Relevance of the ‘Gang’ Label to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

Through the various data collection activities, youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to consider how the ‘gang’ label was relevant to their work – individually and organizationally – and to their work with partners. In the Northern region, research participants indicated that there are numerous youth that are either gang-involved or taking steps to become a gang member. The ‘gang’ label is relevant to workers when implementing safety measures and when they are working to prevent recidivism and promote recovery among youth.

Participants explained that being aware of a youth’s gang involvement helps improve safety for the workers, the youth, and the other people receiving services from the organization. The label allows workers to monitor the youth more closely, be more aware of gang-related activities, such as recruitment, and be better able to enforce rules, such as confiscating gang-related paraphernalia. They also explained that they are able to make better decisions when they know about a youth’s gang involvement. For example, fellow or rival gang members may be moved to separate custodial

facilities, or they may be watched more closely if they are residing within the same facility.

Having knowledge of a youth's gang involvement can allow workers to address areas that may have been otherwise overlooked – putting workers in a position where they can better determine what types of tools, resources, and supports the youth need to make positive changes. Gang-involved youth often feel strong pressure to conform and participate in gang-related activities. It is common for gang-involved youth to be afraid of leaving the gang because of the violence and threats that may be inflicted upon them. Participants described the cyclical relationship between gang involvement, committing crime, and becoming involved in the justice system. They explained that it is a difficult cycle to break out of because of the intense peer pressure and fear, and because the youth do not know how to get out of the gang. Research participants reported that the youth consider gang involvement as a barrier to making positive change. As noted by one participant,

Youth Justice Staff Member:

[Some gang-involved youth] “had the desire to make changes and saw their gang involvement as a barrier to making those changes.”

They discussed how gang involvement needs to be addressed to prevent recidivism, and explained that some important questions to consider include: what function does the gang serve in the youth's life (sense of belonging, safety, money, etc.), how do we replace these needs if the youth were to leave the gang, and what resources and supports can we draw upon? Individuals explained that part of their ongoing support for the youth includes connecting the youth with various types of support and resources, including family supports, mental health resources, social workers, community support teams, attendance centres, various pro-social activities, the Friendship Centre, and the Multicultural Association. In one instance, a worker connected with the police gang unit to assist a youth who wanted to exit a gang. Workers from custodial facilities reported that if a gang-involved youth is going to be in custody long-term, it gives them the opportunity to work with the youth by building skills, addressing their needs, and connecting them with community resources while they are removed from the gang. Youth justice staff explained that they will allow community partners to come in and see the youth while they are in custody. However, when discussing the relevance of the 'gang' label, some individuals reported that using this label will not change their approach, as they will still focus on the same things, such as building a relationship and trust with the individual.

Gathering and sharing information about a youth's gang involvement can be helpful for those involved in case planning, including probation officers and workers involved in custodial facilities. Critical information exchange forms are used by the police, probation officers, and custody/detention facilities. These forms alert the various workers of any known gang involvement for an individual. Information is also gathered about the individual's associates.

Participants cautioned that the 'gang' label should be applied carefully and with certainty, as it could follow a person for life if reported to the police, and it has the potential to create significant barriers for a person. For example, workers discussed how youth who have been labelled as gang-involved have trouble accessing resources, including health services.

When youth participants were asked to discuss the significance of the 'gang' label, many of them reported that being in a gang makes a person feel like they are a part of something. One youth described it as a 'brotherhood'. Participants indicated that the gang provides its members with the support that they were not getting from family and friends.

Youth:

"Maybe their family neglects them, [...] and they're looking for a father figure or an older brother figure."

However, the youth reported that being part of a gang also means that one has to follow orders and use violence. As described above, youth that are labelled as gang members may have problems accessing services.

Current Ways of Working to Address Needs and Provide Support to Gang-Involved Youth

When asked about the current ways of working with gang-involved youth, youth justice staff and community youth service providers identified that it is important to maintain respect, address needs, provide educational information, and be aware of safety issues. However, some participants indicated that they work with all youth in the same manner, regardless of whether or not they are gang-involved. It is also important to note that not all research participants agreed with the factors described below.

In general, participants agreed that when working with youth, maintaining respect is essential in order to develop a relationship and build trust. Workers stressed that it is best to use a non-judgemental, impartial approach that works with the youth 'where they're at'.

Youth Justice Staff Member:

"I don't put up that barrier, that wall of judgement, or say that this is what you should be doing instead [...] Maybe this is their only source of safety, or this is the only connection to a peer group that they've ever had, and they can't work their way through that."

Participants also described how practicing positive listening skills, being engaged, and being patient with the youth is helpful.

Identifying needs and working towards goals (or targets) are done with all youth; however, there are some needs that are specific to gang-involved youth. Assessments are used to evaluate gang-involvement and assess risk and needs in some custody/detention facilities and with probation officers. In organizations without a formal assessment tool, the initial intake process helps to identify the areas of risk and need that will be targeted. Individual needs that may be addressed include treatment, counselling, and addressing gang-specific problems, such as searching for funding to help a youth remove a gang-related tattoo from the neck, face, or hands. A worker from the treatment centre reported that she sometimes lets a youth 'talk it out' and explained that this information is kept private, and is recorded in the case management records as 'gang-related talk or exploration'. Workers indicated that it is helpful to use a strengths-based perspective to address a youth's needs – looking at what is keeping the youth alive/what they do well, and using that to work on areas that they are struggling with. Participants also discussed how it is important to recognize the youth's perspective and address the things that they want to work on.

When working with gang-involved youth, participants reported numerous ways in which educational components are important. The Nishnawbe-Aski Police Service (NAPS) has analyzed information that is specific to youth gang activity in the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation territory and is formulating an anti-gang program with it. NAPS plans to deliver this preventive program to communities throughout the region and is working with probation services. The treatment centre reported that they are also taking preventive measures with youth that are at risk of becoming gang-involved. One worker explained that they inform youth about resources, including positive/healthy groups and youth programs to join. Many participants stressed the importance of sharing information on various resources and opportunities for skill development with gang-involved youth. They also explained the importance of using psycho-educational tools when discussing gangs with the youth, such as looking at the pros/cons, discussing true friendship, and looking at consequences. One group expressed that it is also important to educate staff on gang-related issues so that they are addressed properly and taken seriously.

Safety is another important factor to recognize when working with gang-involved youth. Some workers reported that when a youth is identified as being gang-involved, they might have to relocate him because of gang-related issues. Participants described safety issues that could connect to gang-related issues or problems a youth faces if he wants to exit the gang. For example, if a youth indicates that he wants to tell his lawyer where guns are hidden in exchange for a plea deal, the worker must call the police. If this individual is running guns and he wants to stop, resources are limited and that puts the youth at risk, the worker at risk, and potentially, the worker's family at risk of harm. When looking at safety issues, participants explained that it is also important to consider the safety of other youth residing at or receiving services from the organization.

Most of the participants stated that the gang-involved youth that they work with are involved in the criminal justice system. Depending on the type of organization/facility, youth may be detained and awaiting trial, they may be serving a sentence, or they may

have been referred to a program by a probation officer. The youth in the treatment facility are seeking treatment for solvent abuse, many of whom reported that they have been involved in the criminal justice system. Some of these youth had spent time in custody and some were on probation.

Knowledge of Youth Gang Involvement

The youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to discuss how they know if a youth they are working with is gang-involved. It appears that youth are most often identified as gang-involved based on self-reporting and visible signs that are associated with a gang. Visible signs include gang-related tattoos, styles of clothing (bandana, certain colours, one pant leg rolled up, etc.), gang signs or tags (written on walls, personal belongings, etc.), using gang-related hand gestures, and having extensive bruising from being initiated into the gang. When a worker observes these signs, it can present an opportunity to discuss their significance with the youth, which may lead to self-disclosure of gang involvement. For example, a staff member may ask why the youth has a bandana in his back pocket or about the significance of a tattoo. Other signs that help identify a youth's gang involvement include gang-involved peers or close family members. Participants explained that youth might disclose the names of peers who are gang-involved and who also receive services from the organization.

Formal assessments and criminal intelligence sources are used to identify gang-involved youth in some of the organizations. It was reported that formal assessments are used at Justice Ronald Lester Youth Centre, Kenora Youth Centre, and with probation services. The Gang Risk Assessment Instrument (GRAI) is currently being introduced to various organizations and its use is expanding throughout the Northern region. The Criminal Intelligence Service of Ontario (CISO) assessment is used by NAPS to identify suspected gang members and associates. This assessment outlines seven areas of criteria relating to gang involvement. The information gathered from this assessment is used internally; however, if a person is to be officially labelled as a gang member or associate, the connection must be proven in court and decided upon by a judge. Some other sources that can identify a youth as being gang involved include other agencies and social media. An organization may also become aware of gang-related offenses for which a youth has been charged.

Approach to Working with Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked whether they took a different and/or unique approach to working with gang-involved youth. Participants explained that their approach to working with gang-involved youth does not include any significant or structural differences from their work with youth who are not involved in gang activity. Workers discussed the methods that they use for working with all youth: developing relationships, talking to the youth, identifying their needs, deciding how to address the needs, and connecting with various supports. Some

participants believed that certain aspects of their approach may be especially beneficial to those who are gang-involved. One participant explained that topics such as ‘disordered thinking’, ‘criminal pride’, and ‘superiority feelings’, are covered by a program offered at her organization, and she believes that these topics can be particularly valuable to gang-involved youth. Another individual discussed the importance of practicing good listening skills, as the youth may want to share their stories. Some workers emphasized the importance of prevention and connecting youth with positive groups in the community.

When working with youth of First Nations background (those in gangs, and those who are not in gangs), some workers use a culturally specific approach. One NAPS representative explained that the focus of the organization is on First Nations communities, and that they take a cultural perspective when looking at family and community. Another representative indicated that he might attempt an intervention with a youth in the recruitment process of becoming a gang member. Some participants reported that they try to promote culture as a deterrent to gang involvement. A key informant working in Fort Hope described how he incorporates First Nations culture into programming, such as involving youth in traditional life – taking them fishing, and participating in Sweat Lodge ceremonies.

All focus groups involving workers from justice facilities identified safety as a significant factor to keep in mind when working with gang-involved youth. Participants explained the importance of having a greater sense of awareness with gang-involved youth, especially when travelling in a car or being out in the community together. Some workers stated that when they first learn of a youth’s gang involvement, they practice more caution until they are able to develop a rapport and have a better sense of the person. Workers discussed steps they take to ensure the youth’s safety, such as making accommodations, separating individuals, closely monitoring them, and paying attention to any tensions or subtleties that may have more meaning than meets the eye.

Youth Justice Staff Member:

[There are] “subtle little things that go on – punches in the arm, the kids get knocked [...] – it can mean more than it appears upfront.”

Confidentiality was also identified as an area that needs careful consideration when working with gang-involved youth. Workers explained that they must be cautious with sensitive information because of legal obligations, and because a person’s life could be at risk if information is shared in some situations or kept quiet in others. Some participants also stated that they conduct safety planning with gang-involved youth – identifying situations that could cause harm and planning around them.

One key informant interview participant reported that he takes a different approach when working with gang-involved youth. He explained that he tries to understand the youth’s perception and experience, and addresses both the negative impacts and the benefits of being in a gang. While working with the youth, he examines issues such as

the impact the gang has on the youth's ability to function, whether the youth is able to say 'no, this isn't working for me', whether he can say that he does not want to be involved in certain activities, and what the appeal of the gang is for the youth. This informant explained that it is important to recognize that gang-involved youth likely have a higher need for belonging than other youth.

Community Youth Service Provider:

"The guys who are involved in gangs, from what I see, have a higher need, either from a lack of connection to their family, community, or a functional peer group."

Most other participants recognized the need for a gang-specific approach. For example, one of the key informant interview participants explained that when probation officers complete an assessment and identify targets for the youth to work on, these targets may not be impacted by a youth's gang involvement, and an area that may be an appropriate target because of gang involvement, such as peer involvement, could potentially be overlooked. Many participants also expressed interest in discussing options for the future, such as a gang exit strategy, and gang-specific programming, while some indicated that they look forward to having culturally specific programming for First Nations youth who are gang-involved at some point in the future.

When creating a plan for gang-involved youth, participants described how they identify goals with the youth that are specific to each individual. They explained that they look at barriers to be overcome and behaviours that need to change in order to reach the goals. They also address how the 'gang lifestyle' interferes with obtaining the goals. Some organizations indicated that assessments are used to guide the plan. Participants from one facility reported that the risk/need assessment done by probation services identifies targets for each individual, and in some instances it can address factors connected to gang involvement. Workers from another facility discussed how a strengths assessment is used to look at factors that can buffer risks. One participant explained that workers create a plan with the youth to develop these strengths and apply them to other life areas. Generally, workers prioritize factors relating to social connections and safety planning. Other risk factors that were mentioned include addictions (to drugs, alcohol, and solvents), poverty, being involved in the sex trade, and having legal issues. Risk factors were discussed extensively, and protective factors largely focused on building healthy relationships with family members and peers.

Participants from most of the organizations involved in this research study discussed prioritizing issues relating to a lack of social connection, and described how a youth's gang-involvement is connected to the need to belong. They identified risk and protective factors relating to family, peers, and community. Risk factors relating to family included loss of family support, lack of family structure, addictions within the family, gang involvement within the family, and youth who have been Crown Wards. Risk factors relating to peers include intense peer pressure and copying harmful behaviours. One participant spoke about how some youth may be afraid that a peer may move on in life and abandon the gang lifestyle by making positive life choices, such as finding

employment and choosing not to participate in criminal activity. It was also mentioned that going back to one's home community can be a risk factor for youth, as many of the issues that led to gang involvement are still present in the community upon the youth's return. Workers explained that they draw upon a youth's strengths to address these risk factors. They discuss the youth's purpose, belonging, and meaning in life, and set goals for the future.

Participants stressed the importance of relationship building within the family, with peers that are not involved in criminal activity, and with community organizations. Strengthening family relationships may require workers to connect the family with community resources, such as counselling. If the youth's family is gang-involved, workers reported that they assess the situation and decide whether separating the youth from the family may be more beneficial than building the relationship. Workers explained that they might also separate a youth from gang-involved peers.

To strengthen positive peer relationships, participants described helping a youth navigate resources and connect with various agencies and pro-social groups, such as the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, Anishnawbe Mushkiki, drumming groups, the Fall Harvest, sports, and other recreational activities. Participants from the treatment centre also emphasized the importance of giving the youth a stable home. One worker explained how the youth stay at the treatment centre for two years, and how this helps them establish a sense of belonging and connection.

Four of the staff focus groups identified risk in relation to safety as a factor that is prioritized in developing a plan for the youth. They discussed how gang-involved youth are at risk of being involved in violence, both as victim and aggressor, and often through the gang initiation process. Initiation may require a youth to be beaten, or in some cases burned. One worker described an initiation in which gang members put an object into a fire, melted it, and then "they put it on his arm, they branded him. Come back [with] a big scab."

Suicide and self-harm are also risk factors relating to safety. One participant reported that the safety planning for gang-involved youth is the same as that which is done for all youth involved in risky behaviour or living in dangerous environments. Another participant discussed some safety measures that are specific to gang-involved youth, such as removing gang-related colours and symbols, and ensuring that youth are not using gang-related hand gestures. He explained that the glorification of gangs is a barrier when working with gang-involved youth, and these measures help mitigate that glorification.

Workers also discussed the importance of identifying risk factors that could make it easier for a youth to be lured into a gang, and the importance of keeping these youth safe. Participants reported that a high proportion of gang members have low literacy levels, and developmental issues like fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). One worker explained that youth with special needs are

targeted by gangs for various reasons; for example, some of them lack feeling in certain areas of their body and become enforcers, while others have difficulties with boundaries – openly accepting fellow gang members as family and following their orders. They also spoke about the difficulties that younger children have in understanding the consequences to their actions, and how this makes them more vulnerable to being drawn into a gang.

Participants described the various needs of gang-involved youth that they are able to address within their organization. The need for belonging was addressed by providing pro-social connections within the community, providing the youth with fun, free activities to participate in, strengthening family relationships, and working on life skills, such as cooking. Participants from the treatment centre are also able to provide a stable residence and this helps to create a sense of belonging and connection. Therapeutic relationships were identified as needs that are handled through counselling, listening, and addictions treatment. Some of the participants discussed how culturally relevant programming for First Nations people is a need that is addressed at their organization. Participants from various organizations also mentioned needs relating to prevention activities and motivation.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“There needs to be something out there that grabs these guys’ attention, or even motivates them to say ‘okay, this is the life I want to live, so in order to get there I need to go through these steps’ – whether it’s school or employment or whatever.”

Most service providers agreed that there are no programs, services, resources, or supports that specifically target gang-involved youth. NAPS identified Project North Star as a preventative initiative that targets those at risk of becoming involved in gangs. NAPS is working in partnership with probation services, and they have received money to fund the project for six months. The treatment centre staff described one occasion in which workers were able to take the youth to see an Elder in Minnesota who works with gangs. A worker from a custody/detention facility reported that the youth are shown films relating to the subject of gangs. All workers reported that there is no inventory of services for gang-involved youth; however, some organizations have an informal list of contacts that they use when working with all youth.

Current Capacity to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to reflect on their current capacity to work with gang-involved youth. They were asked to discuss the strengths of their approach as well as common barriers and limitations encountered in working with this population.

The strengths that participants identified were: being able to use their experience, education and training in working with gang-involved youth; and having flexibility and adaptability in being able to provide programs and being able to support and follow up

with youth. They identified that a longer community supervision time frame helps because it gives them a longer amount time to work with the youth. Case management, aftercare planning and setting up support for the youth in the communities is very important to many of the workers interviewed. In general, participants shared that in working with the gang-involved youth they take the same approach as with other youth in being non-judgemental, treating them as individuals, building a relationship, and developing case management plans. Individual and group counselling involving open discussion were reported as being successful when working with gang-involved youth. Recreation, sports, spiritual and cultural activities were also identified as strengths.

Community Youth Service Provider:

“We have a kitchen where we feed the youth, cook with the youth and teach the youth to cook.”

Community involvement in aftercare planning was also mentioned to be helpful. Several workers mentioned gang educational presentations, including ex-gang members sharing their experiences, which was positively received by the gang-involved youth. Role modelling by staff was also identified as an approach that worked.

One major issue relating to gang-involved youth is safety. Whether in facilities or out in the community, a safety plan is important for the youth. Loss of family support, no family structure, the need to belong, minimal literacy, addictions, substance abuse, and small communities with few resources were also mentioned as factors relating to gang-involved youth. Many youth also have criminal justice involvement and the legal issues sometimes create challenges and barriers for the workers. Using a strengths-based model with the youth can help the youth recognize their strengths and use them to deal with the challenges they face. In facilities it is important to safeguard the gang-involved youth and other youth. It is also important to have open discussions with the youth, whether individually or in a group. Working with the youth to identify consequences of gang involvement and how it affects their life is also an approach used by many workers.

Workers stated that they need more training and knowledge about which gangs are in certain areas, and explained that this information is not available to them. It was reported by workers in different agencies that a barrier to working towards addressing the specific issues of a gang-involved youth is the limited time available to engage with the youth. In some situations workers have a week or less to work with youth. While working to assist a gang-involved youth, one participant recognized that there is no gang exit strategy in Thunder Bay. The worker told this youth to call the police because he was threatened. Workers also reported that they are not in a position to address situations in which a youth's family is gang-involved.

One of the biggest challenges with working with gang-involved youth is building rapport that is strong and mutual. The youth may decide not to disclose information relating to their gang involvement to protect their personal safety. Other barriers are more

bureaucratic in nature, such as not being able to work with certain youth because they are not on the caseload, i.e. they have not been 'referred'. A lack of resources and pro-social activities also pose problems for the youth, and often the programs that are available do not run consistently. Another barrier regarding gang-involved youth is substance addictions. A limiting factor for this population is financial resources, as many gang-involved youth live in poverty. Organizations involved in the delivery of services need to be cognizant of the lack of financial resources that the youth may have at their disposal. Community agencies need to collaborate with police, probation officers, and custody/detention facilities in order to develop programs that prevent relapse and offer options that outweigh the benefits of being involved in a gang.

Many of the youth turn to family and friends for additional support. If they do not feel they have someone they can turn to, they reported that police and probation officers were helpful. Addictions appeared to be a large problem within this population; therefore the youth and the custody/detention facilities agreed that Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous programs were helpful. It is also helpful if the custody/detention facilities assist the youth with connecting to community resources in preparation for their release.

Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations

When asked about the nature of their partnerships with other agencies and organizations in their work with gang-involved youth, the researchers noted that most of the key contacts include probation officers and police officers, especially when working on a pre-sentence report. There are certain people that are mandated to be involved. Any other contact is usually informal and specific to the youth's individual needs. Every youth is different and each youth may require their own set of personal goals once released from custody, such as addressing their addiction issues or cognitive distortions. Contacts are identified at their own discretion. Participants informally build relationships with community partners, youth employment, family and the community. Many facilities have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the gang intelligence units where everyone contributes and works collaboratively. The Astwood Strategy Corporation with support from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services has developed a gang assessment tool, the Gang Risk Assessment Instrument (GRAI). From the research activities conducted as part of this case study, it appears that most partnerships develop in order to provide each partner with new information resources.

According to information obtained through the research activities, many of the community agencies/organizations and custody/detention facilities work collaboratively with probation officers and police officers in order to keep the youth safe. Custody/detention facilities may formally or informally initiate contact with programs for referral purposes that link the needs of a particular individual. For the delivery of services, participants discussed an MOU. Individuals identified collaborating with Remote Intervention Workers from the John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District

to assist with steering youth away from gang involvement. The Remote Intervention Program assists children with life skills and training, as well as counselling and support.

In general, the idea behind the collaboration of services and referrals between custody/detention facilities and other agencies and/or programming is to provide awareness of the services that each facility offers. It provides a means to connect on all issues, from cognitive issues, to substance use/abuse issues and it is useful in fostering local support from community representatives.

It is a challenge to measure and define success for individuals involved in the gang lifestyle because there are not a lot of agencies that have dedicated programs for gang-involved youth. However, information obtained from the various data collection activities indicates that many of the participants believe that engaging youth and building a strong working relationship is considered a success. Providing the youth with flexibility and availability and being able to adapt to each individual's needs are considered steps in creating a turning point for the youth. Simply being there for support and connecting with the youth in pro-social ways helps demonstrate a different way of living and provides an opportunity for getting out of the gang lifestyle.

The Perspective of Young People as It Relates to Our Work with Gang-Involved Youth

In order to understand the perspective of young people as it relates to working with gang-involved youth, individuals participating in this research study were first engaged in a discussion concerning the benefits and consequences of involvement in the gang lifestyle. Most participants reported that youth become involved in gangs for protection, social connection, and for financial reasons.

Youth:

"Maybe they don't have lots of family, so they may want to be a part of something, might want to like make money, and then you have people back you up and stuff."

The youth also reported that some people join gangs because they think it is cool, and because of the drugs/alcohol available within the gang. Two individuals reported that people join a gang because they are bullied or pressured to do so, and one person responded that people join to prove that they are brave.

Most of the youth report that they believe a person would want to exit a gang because of the violent lifestyle – they do not want to use violence, they do not want to be assaulted, they do not want to see their friends killed, and they do not want to experience any more trauma. Two participants shared their thoughts on why youth leave gangs:

Youth:

“Mostly friends getting killed and they probably don’t want to see that, don’t want to lose any more.”

“Too much damage in their brain, in their heart. They keep having trauma. Even their parents, their whole family [have trauma]. They don’t like the way they are, they are kids.”

Two individuals reported that being in a gang creates a lot of enemies and impacts their sense of safety. Most participants believed that a person would want out of a gang because they do not want to participate in criminal activity or face incarceration. Some youth reported that a gang member who wants out is likely tired of being treated badly by fellow gang members, following orders, and not having freedom. Participants reported that a person might want to leave a gang because they want to get clean or sober. Some youth also explained that a person might seek to exit a gang because they have matured and want to make positive choices in life. One person reported that a gang member would leave for their family and another explained that “they don’t want to be labelled as someone who is in a gang.”

Participants were then engaged in a discussion pertaining to the experiences of gang-involved youth in the criminal justice system. They were asked to identify challenges that gang-involved youth may face when leaving custody and returning to the community and to provide their perspective with respect to how staff in the criminal justice system might support youth in exiting from the gang lifestyle.

When discussing youth who wanted to distance themselves from the gang lifestyle, some of the youth recommended moving elsewhere. For those that do not have that option and have to return to their community, some youth believed that fostering positive relationships with family and pro-social groups would be helpful. Some youth also recommended turning to cultural activities. Participants reported that a big part of moving away from the gang lifestyle involved keeping busy. They recommended getting involved in sports, going back to school, participating in extra-curricular activities, getting a job and finding a safe place to live.

Youth:

“Maybe like, if there was more things for us to do, like sports and stuff. Help to get jobs.”

“Some of us, we’ll get kicked out of our house in the middle of winter and hang out at the trap house, or stay at our buddy’s house. You got to do [expletive deleted] to stay alive.”

When it involves addictions and mental health, some youth suggested that going to meetings would be helpful, such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and having counselling centers for addictions and mental health. They said learning life skills and having a stable housing unit would be very advantageous and help a person

develop a stable, healthy routine. Having a solid, physical, educational and emotional routine would also help keep them busy and out of trouble.

Many of the youth previously involved in gangs reported having a difficult time trying to reintegrate back into society. Many of the challenges involved having to face what they left behind, such as the people, drugs, and debts. Not reverting back to old lifestyles and routines was a challenge especially when faced with peer pressure. Many youth reported they find it difficult to stay away from the gang and find new activities. Some would prefer moving away from their home community because they believe that returning would put them at risk for further gang involvement.

Youth:

“Well, I guess when you return you have a bit more respect, but people expect more from you. Just because you’ve done time they think you’re not going to be scared to do time again. That’s one of the hard things about being released ‘cause you know that there’s people waiting for you to get out. They’re going to want to get all [expletive deleted] and go party, and [expletive deleted] someone is going to get beat up or stabbed and right back [in jail].”

During the data collection activities, the youth mentioned that being around family and friends has been helpful when they get out of jail. They reported that having social supports makes it an easier transition back into society. They also discussed going back to school and being more involved in school activities, such as playing sports – which would also connect the youth with positive role models. Participating in extra-curricular activities or having a job would be helpful by keeping the youth busy and distracted. The youth rely on support to keep them from joining the gang again, not just from family and friends, but also from treatment centers, hospitals and professional counsellors.

One participant explained why he believes it is difficult for gang-involved youth to get help:

Youth:

“We’ll get called snitches or [expletive deleted] or, just anything really. You’ll get bounced out of the gang just for talking to somebody. Or your family could get hurt.”

Another challenge is their safety; the youth feel that if they were to ask for help they would be putting not only themselves but also their families at risk. One participant reported that he is not aware of any resources in his community for addictions or counselling. Another participant reported that he believes that gang-involved youth find it difficult to receive forgiveness from the people they hurt and for the things they have done. A lot of youth have unresolved issues that they left behind when they went into custody and although they want to change and make restitution, the unknown factors of how they would be received causes real fear and anxiety.

Many of the solutions that the youth provided involved searching for support, either from family, friends or cultural activities. Others handled their problems through avoidance – avoiding their old community and avoiding the gang. However, the youth explained how difficult this could be. One person reported that when he went back to his community he tried to avoid the gang by staying home and helping out around the house, but gang members “would just come into my house and like, not knocking, just show up surprisingly.” He continued by stating that this made it more difficult to leave the gang. The majority of youth participants indicated that they are aware of the dangers involved with reconnecting with the gang.

Working Better to Address the Needs of Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to consider what would help increase their capacity to work more effectively to support gang-involved youth. Youth participants were also asked to provide their suggestions to increase capacity.

Many of the research participants reported that acquiring more education when working with gang-involved youth would be effective. Education regarding gangs, how to tell when someone is involved in a gang, which gangs are actually in their area or what trends are developing in gangs and education about available services and programs, and knowing who they are and what they do. It is important to know who and what is out there in order to make a change for the youth. Funding was also mentioned frequently during the data collection activities – particularly for programs tailored to gang-involved youth that work effectively to provide support and connections to the community. One participant suggested providing the youth with the opportunity to reside in a halfway house when they leave custody. A halfway house would provide a safe place to go, so the youth would not have to return to their community where they could be at risk of getting hurt or going back to their gang lifestyle.

According to information obtained through the data collection activities, participants believe that expanding and adapting their work to involve the family would increase their capacity to work more effectively with gang-involved youth. Some ideas that were shared include looking at the youth’s role within the family and getting the family involved in the youth’s rehabilitation and reintegration plan. It was reported that the youth need to feel a sense of belonging, and they need positive role models who can help them understand the risks of being in a gang and help them to gain an alternative perspective regarding their lifestyle choices. Additionally, what participants thought would work effectively was providing youth with employment programs, substance abuse treatment programs, pro-social activities and safe housing options and opportunities to build healthier relationships and communities of support.

Youth justice workers at many facilities are unaware of the gang activity that is occurring. There is also a lack of available programming. Awareness needs to be made a priority, as well as a safe place for the youth to go upon release from custody. Youth

participants frequently reported being afraid or feeling nervous at the thought of reintegration into their community. When they have made a choice to leave the gang, they reported feeling afraid of being assaulted and afraid of the unresolved problems to which they have to return. A large need that was frequently mentioned from workers at the facilities was that the youth needed to feel a sense of belonging and that was why they joined the gangs in the first place. The youth reported needing sports, treatment centers, extra-curricular and pro-social activities to give them that sense of belonging, to help them move forward and keep busy, and to provide them with positive role models.

When the gang-involved youth were asked what they thought would help them reintegrate back into society, many were unsure of how to respond. For those who were able to provide a response, they reported keeping busy would be the most beneficial way for youth justice staff members to help them. The youth suggested needing help to go back to school, participating in organized sports, or being involved in creative activities, such as learning how to play an instrument. Some youth stated that having a job would be helpful too, as it would keep them away from the gang lifestyle and they would be able to earn an honest living. Having officials set conditions for them and be available to talk would also be helpful and keep them out of trouble.

Most of the youth reported a desire to make connections with family, school and organizations. They simply want to feel a sense of belonging and they no longer wanted to be using substances. Therefore the youth suggested making connections with Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, joining clubs and sports, receiving an education and programs that offer ways to meet new people and make new friends. Having family and friends around, along with treatment programs will provide youth with a strong support system that will aid them in a successful lifestyle away from the gang.

After talking with gang-involved youth, the most important thing that would help the youth who want to leave the gang is making sure that they have a safe place to stay. According to the youth, one of the largest concerns when trying to leave a gang is the risk of 'getting beat up'. Many of the youth advised that one should not get involved in a gang in the first place because when you try to leave, you will be hurt. Keeping yourself safe is one of the reasons youth remain involved in the gang lifestyle and it is the most important thing if you ever try to leave the gang. One participant said that he would leave the gang for his family and good friends, but not for any of the other gang members. He referred to his family and friends as the 'good guys' who provided him with support. Many of the participants mentioned that school would help a person that wants to leave a gang. They reported being in school, getting a job and keeping up a physical routine would be vital to remaining out of the gang lifestyle. The youth also explained that they need a place to stay once they get out of custody, and suggested that transitional housing would be helpful. One participant even recommended influencing younger generations in a positive way – to educate them and prevent future gang affiliation.

Additional Issues Identified and Themes Discussed by Participants

The following outlines the additional issues and themes that emerged from the various data collection activities involving discussions with youth justice staff, community youth service providers and youth. First and foremost, a theme that emerged is the lack of exit programs for youth looking to leave the gang. There are not a sufficient number of programs that address the specific issues that gang-involved youth face. Programs that are being delivered in the community and within the institutions do not effectively address the specific needs of gang-involved youth, and some of the programs that are delivered are not funded for extended periods of time. Youth have indicated that pro-social activities and tattoo removal programs are needed to better facilitate a diversion from the gang lifestyle. Many youth indicated that there is a need to belong to a community. Youth experience negative impacts on their mental and physical health from the fighting, substance use, and seeing friends and family injured or killed due to gang related activities; yet frequently reported feeling that they felt protected while they were connected to a gang. The notion that the gang felt like a family and provided a sense of belonging was referenced by many youth. Youth that indicated a desire to no longer be involved in the gang lifestyle reported that a safe place to live is very important when making the transition. They felt vulnerable and worried about what would happen if they were to return to their community and refused to participate in the gang activities. After-care and case management for youth transitioning from institutions or facilities is challenging; connections are difficult to make and maintaining communication between services is challenging due to limited resources and the vastness of the region.

The online surveys and interviews focused on agencies, programs and resources that have direct contact with gang-involved youth. Because of the vast size of the region and the large number of communities, it was not possible to survey all of the agencies that may provide services to gang-involved youth. In order to provide a more thorough investigation of gang-specified support programs and agencies, additional time and resources would be required. Organizational representatives gave information about what protocols and procedures are followed when they come into contact with youths involved in gangs. There are currently no programs identified by this research that deliver services specifically for gang-involved youth. There were no gang exit programs identified by the researcher for youth looking to leave the gang lifestyle. Many of the agencies that were in this study are in contact with youth that are involved with gangs, but not specifically because of their gang involvement.

The results of the online survey reveal that most of the resources and services currently available in the Northern region for gang-involved youth and young adults wishing to exit gang life are provided by elements of the criminal justice system. Most gang-involved youth come to the attention of services linked to the criminal justice system through referrals made from within the organization, or from other criminal justice agencies.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information collected through this research study, it was observed that there is a high prevalence of gang-involved youth in the Northern region. What also became obvious during the research process was that there are very limited supportive programs that would assist the youth in moving away from the gang lifestyle. There are several larger urban centers, many smaller communities, and forty-nine First Nations communities in the Northern region, all of which may include gang-involved youth. Some of the youth gang activities that were reported in the interviews and focus groups included beatings, assaults, drugs, trafficking, murder and other criminal activity. All of the gang-involved youth that participated in the interviews reported having criminal charges and involvement in the youth justice system. The Northern region needs supports that are specifically geared towards youth who are at risk of being gang-involved. There also needs to be exit programs designed to assist the youth in making an easier transition away from the gang and back into the community. There needs to be education and prevention programs that help children become more aware of the dangers and consequences of gang involvement, and useful prevention information must be targeted to communities as a risk management strategy for children at risk. For those who are at risk of joining a gang or who have already joined but are trying to get out, providing training and assessment tools in facilities would be beneficial. Having ex-gang members talk to the youth could provide lived experiential insight on the dangers of being in a gang. Gang-involved youth need life skills training that would assist them in exiting the gang and rebuilding their lives after gang involvement. This training would be useful in further developing case management and communication protocols that would connect the youth with community support, pro-social activities and supportive programming.

Providing safe re-integrative housing to allow the youth to transition into the community after custody is crucial and necessary for youth to succeed in exiting a gang and the associated lifestyle. As mentioned many times throughout the report, activities that replace the gang-related lifestyle are an important aspect of relapse prevention. Creating and strengthening these networks for the youth through a targeted approach to support gang-involved youth has not been implemented in the Northern region. Although some progress has been made in detention and custody centres to collaborate together in the creation of transition plans, there is little to no follow-up upon release. This is exacerbated by the large geographical catchment areas that the custody/detention facilities serve.

Recently, a few custody/detention facilities have taken a step forward and have begun training sessions to use the provincial Gang Risk Assessment Instrument (GRAI) in order to become more aware of who is involved in a gang. What has become helpful is the disclosure between custody/detention facilities, probation services, police and workers about which youth are involved in gangs. The workers also become aware of gang affiliation through colours, and/or tattoos. This assists the workers in helping the youth reintegrate into society because they become somewhat aware of their past.

Acquiring the knowledge of gang affiliation allows workers to build a strong relationship, without judgement so the youth feel comfortable enough to talk to the workers about it. Many participants reported that through one-on-one interaction, they attempt to discourage youth from gang involvement by looking at the experiences and consequences of the gang lifestyle.

Once a youth leaves a custody/detention facility, the following supports and services would assist gang-involved youth to transition more successfully into the community:

- Community reintegration supports such as transitional housing, transition life coaches or systems navigators, and clinical or supportive counselling opportunities.
- Development of strong partnerships with educational, recreational and cultural supports to provide foundational support to assist youth in the transition process.
- Increased collaboration between stakeholders such as police, probation officers and community youth service providers in building a set of safety services.
- Education for all stakeholders of the risk factors of gang involvement for children and youth, the reality of the gang situation in the North, and an increased awareness of community supports and services.

WESTERN REGION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Youth Justice Services Division (MCYS-YJ) contracted the John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area to coordinate the Western region case study. The former Western region provides youth justice services in Grey County, Bruce County, Huron County, Stratford, London, Lambton, Windsor, Chatham-Kent, St. Thomas, Oxford County, Brantford, Norfolk County, Niagara Region, Hamilton, Waterloo Region and Wellington County.²² In the 2013 calendar year, there were a total of 3,756 admissions under MCYS-YJ jurisdiction in the former Western region.²³ This includes 1,046 probation orders, 536 secure detention and secure custody orders and 624 open detention and open custody orders. In all of these areas, general social services are available to gang-involved youth to support needs such as housing, employment and counselling. In most areas of the Western region, no specific gang programming and/or services are available.

The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area is a professional service, not for profit, charitable organization that is committed to provide a broad range of evidence-based and best practice services that are outcome and impact driven. The agency has been delivering community based programs and services for youth, young adults, adults, seniors and families over the past 65 years. Its mission is to promote and foster a safer and healthier community through the provision of a continuum of community based services that are needs-based, consumer-focused and that provide an opportunity for individuals to achieve, maintain and regain a balance in their life within the community. The agency's strategic goals are to provide a range of prevention, intervention, and rehabilitative programs that alleviate issues related to crime and its root causes, poverty, unemployment and homelessness in our community. These programs include, but are not limited to, employment counselling, skills training, adult justice services, youth services, family and community supports. Additionally, their goal is to provide programs and services that are inclusive, innovative, evidence-based and outcome-driven and that are developed and delivered in collaboration with clients, community and government agencies, and local businesses.

John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area Youth and Community Programs

The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area has a wide range of youth, young adult, adult, senior and community services that are supported by evaluation and

²² Please note that data collection activities in this project utilized the old MCYS Youth Justice Services Regions. Under the new regional classifications, Waterloo Region and Wellington County have been added to the Central Region.

²³ Total admissions includes detention, custody and community admissions, as well as re-offenses, transfers from other facilities and from the adult system, and breaches of supervision.

focused on impacts.²⁴ Most important to mention is that the organization has a history of providing gang intervention and prevention services including the current Youth At Risk Development (YARD) Hamilton program funded by the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC). Prior to YARD Hamilton, the organization delivered the Youth Leadership and Ambassador Program (YLAP) – Breaking the Cycle funded by Service Canada Skills Link Program and Justice Canada, and it has developed a Youth Gang Prevention Guide funded by Justice Canada.

YLAP – Breaking the Cycle

YLAP – Breaking the Cycle was a replication of the Toronto and Scarborough project with the same name. The program provided gang intervention programming to 20 participants for a 6-month period over a period of 4 years. Participants engaged in intense cognitive skill restructuring and development after which young people focused on an employment skill development path or an education path. Participants developed Ambassador Presentations reflecting the myths and perils of gang affiliation and provided presentations to school groups including the story of the barriers and trauma experienced as a result of their gang participation.

YARD Hamilton

YARD Hamilton is a gang reduction strategy focused on reducing gang participation through a prevention and intervention strategy modeled after the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model. In keeping with this intervention model, YARD Hamilton is a comprehensive and integrated approach that uses best practice programming to focus on specific locally identified risk domains applied inclusively to young people between 12 and 24 years of age who reside in or are moving back to Hamilton. YARD Hamilton identifies an approach that cuts across traditional agency boundaries through an integrated approach from a team of community agencies and organizations to deliver four core strategies: community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention and organizational change and development.²⁵

Youth Gang Prevention Resource Guide

The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington, & Area was provided funds in January 2011 from the Federal Department of Justice: Youth Justice Fund – Guns, Gangs, and Drugs component to develop a Youth Gang Prevention Resource Guide for young people and their families that are currently engaged in the youth justice system. The guide provides prevention and intervention resources aimed at young people, their

²⁴ See Appendix J for more information on the programs and services offered by the John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area.

²⁵ Additional details on the four core strategies of YARD Hamilton are provided at the end of the Western Region Report.

parents or guardians and youth service providers in efforts to prevent and/or stop gang involvement.

The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area provides contracted services to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for the following service provisions: Non-Residential Attendance Centre; Extrajudicial Measures; Extrajudicial Sanctions; and Choices. Along with the youth services identified above, the John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area was successful in a grant application and has received funding from NCPC to deliver YARD Hamilton – A Community Gang Reduction Strategy focusing on prevention, intervention and re-entry programs, and will provide this gang specific targeted intervention and service to young people involved in MCYS-YJ services.

Situation and Context of Youth Gangs in the Western Region

The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area understands that the entire Western region has urban areas that reflect the primary community barriers and violent crimes that impact the prevalence of evidence-based risk factors linked to gang activity. Research has demonstrated the following as risk factors for gang involvement: high risk of drug and alcohol use; family barriers, disconnects and/or dysfunction; history of criminal activity and violence; anti-social peer group; and community bias (NCPC, 2007).

All of these factors and community attributes are indicators that increase the risk of a youth gang presence in the Western region. In this report, Hamilton will be highlighted as an example to identify the scope of community risk for youth gang activity throughout the region. The city of Hamilton has crime patterns and socio-economic conditions that place the community at high risk of increasing violent youth crime and violent youth gang activity. According to the most *recent Crime Severity Analysis Report 2010* from the Hamilton Police Service (HPS), Hamilton is identified as 21.1 points higher on the *Crime Severity Rating Scale* over the Ontario average and 10 points higher than the Canadian index rating. Reflected in the *HPS Overview of Violence Prone Areas in Hamilton*, violent criminal acts most associated with gang activity – homicide, shooting, stabbing, person with weapon, robbery and assault – have been mapped since 2006 and show consistent areas throughout Hamilton with growing incidents of violence. The heightened pattern and concern in Hamilton compared to other municipalities is the increase in violent crimes committed by youth. These areas demonstrating a higher proportion of violent activity include all of the priority neighbourhoods and other smaller communities throughout Hamilton. Each of these communities has identified similarities, which foster risk factors. According to the 2011 year end *Guns and Weapons Enforcement Unit Report* by the Hamilton Police Chief, “there was a drastic 49% increase in warrants executed and the seizure of \$100,000 more in cash proceeds and almost two million more of illicit drugs in 2011” by the Guns and Weapons Enforcement Unit. There is extensive gang activity in Hamilton as indicated by the data from Hamilton Police Service’s Gang Intelligence Unit.

As of 2012, there were approximately 250 hard-core gang members and over 250 gang associates in Hamilton. Additionally, statistics identify 1000 peripheral associates to gangs and 22 structured 'street gangs'. There has been a 10% increase in the number of specific gangs entering the City of Hamilton over the last year. Police intelligence identifies that gangs are either native to Hamilton or are gangs that have immigrated from other municipalities or regions. The *2011 Hamilton Youth Crime Statistics* identify a significant increase in violent crimes that link to the *Guns and Weapons Enforcement Annual Statistics*. There exists an 18.7% increase in 2011 compared to 2010 in violent incidents by youth. There was an 8.5% increase in youth crime incidents in 2011, which further indicates that the prerequisites of violence and criminal behaviour, and risk and predictors of gang involvement continue to grow in communities throughout Hamilton. In 2012 there was a 7.1% decrease in violent youth crime from 2011 with 184 young persons charged with violent crimes compared to 198 in the previous year.

In other urban communities within the Western region data reflects similar community risk of violent and gang-involved activity. *Windsor Police Service Annual Report 2012* identifies 223 persons that were investigated for gang-specific activity related to weapons, violence and or drug trafficking. There was a 10% increase in youth violent offences from the previous year. In the Niagara Region, the *Niagara Regional Police 2012 Annual Report* identifies that the Gun, Gang and Grow Unit identified 98 active gang members, and within this population made 201 charges. Niagara Regional Police reported a 100% increase in Gun, Gang and Grow related criminal offences compared to 2011.

Many of the young people and families of communities identified as having high numbers of incidents of violence and gang-related criminals face numerous barriers, and have risk factors and anti-social coping mechanisms that create risk for gang involvement and engaging in violent behaviours.

Challenges of Supporting Youth Making Efforts to Exit from a Youth Gang

Through the John Howard Society's experience in providing gang prevention, intervention, and exit strategies in Hamilton, significant challenges in providing support to youth with the motivation to exit a youth gang have been identified, and include the following:

- Historically gang prevention and intervention program funding is time-limited and gang exit programs throughout the Western region are limited as only highly populated urban centres are provided funding.
- Youth entrenched in the youth gang subculture require intense and prolonged cognitive skill restructuring and development. The barrier to identifying success is that youth exiting a gang have all consistently displayed periods of time during the transformation in which they are moving towards pro-social behaviour and lifestyles while still connected and partially involved in youth gang peer connections. Often

youth justice service providers are limited with respect to the time within which they are able to provide direct service support to gang-involved youth.

- Youth who are affiliated with youth gangs all identify as high to very high risk using a criminal risk assessment tool. As a result, significant barriers are present that create challenges to change behaviour and take an intense targeted approach that requires a significant period of time to support the reduction of risk factors and increase protective factors.
- The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area's previous Youth Leadership and Ambassador – Breaking the Cycle Program experience has identified that one of the most significant barriers to supporting gang-involved youth is their consistent resistance and lack of trust for mainstream services. As a result, the intervention and prevention strategies must focus on providing links and considerable case management and goal achievement support. The challenge is building trust and developing initial motivation among youth to continue to engage in programs and services. Experience suggests that gang-involved youth have an inherent distrust of individuals from the justice system including secure custody and detention facilities.
- Experience indicates that youth who are gang affiliated extend well beyond the youth justice age parameter and a higher percentage of gang-involved youth participating in the YLAP – Breaking the Cycle program were over 18 years of age.
- Many of those that associate with youth gangs 'fly under the radar'. There is a significant number of gang-involved youth that come to the agency's attention through Extrajudicial Sanctions and Measures, the Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC) and outreach programs.
- A consistent challenge in working with the gang-involved youth is the inherent risk related to the values and subculture of violence and weapon carrying. This has evolved into stigma and fear and provides specific challenges related to the safety of program staff, the youth involved, and the community.

METHODOLOGY

The Western region's data collection strategy closely adhered to the overall methodology of the project as described earlier in this report. A multi-method approach was employed for data collection and is described below, as are some adjustments and additions that were made to the data collection process. Data were gathered from four main sources: gang-involved youth and youth at risk for gang involvement, community agencies and community service providers who work with gang-involved youth (community youth service providers), and youth justice staff.²⁶

²⁶ See Appendix F for a complete list of facilities, agencies and organizations represented in the data collection activities.

Online Survey with Youth Service Providers

In the Western region 62 agencies/organizations equipped to provide service to gang-involved youth in some capacity were identified. Representatives were contacted via e-mail for participation in this electronic survey. These agencies were selected based on identifying youth justice services providers in the region that included open and secure custody and detention service providers and community youth justice service providers. A reminder e-mail was sent to these organizations prior to the identified deadline. During the data collection period, only 5 online surveys were opened with only 3 completed. An alternative strategy was developed and was put in place to contact agencies/organizations throughout the Western region via telephone to complete the program inventory questions. The low response rate for the electronic surveys may have been attributed to the length of the survey and to the need to engage in direct or phone contact to determine suitability. Based on this revised strategy, 104 program inventory forms were completed via telephone interview.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with leaders and stakeholders in the Western region who have knowledge of and experience working with gang-involved youth. Individuals were recruited based on their agency's connection to a youth justice and youth service providing organization as well as our agency's knowledge of their contact with youth at risk or involved in gang activity. It was anticipated that approximately 5 individuals would be selected for this component of the data collection process. In the end, key informant interviews were conducted with 11 individuals selected from across the Western region.

Focus Groups with Youth Justice Staff and Youth Services Providers

Focus groups were conducted with youth justice staff involved in the supervision of gang-involved youth in the youth justice system. Individuals were identified and recruited by engaging in information sharing around the focus group and inviting participants to prescheduled meeting times. It was anticipated that 2-3 focus groups would be conducted with this population. Two focus groups (comprising a total of 8 participants) were conducted with youth justice staff.

Focus groups were also conducted with community youth service providers. This included agencies and organizations playing a role in supporting gang-involved youth. Individuals were identified through existing relationships with youth service providers in the region. It was anticipated that 1-2 focus groups would be conducted with this population. One focus group was conducted (comprising a total of 8 participants) with community youth service providers. Recruitment was determined based on our agency's knowledge of the service provider's service delivery to individuals that are at risk or involved in gang affiliation. A meeting was scheduled and identified individuals invited to participate.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Gang-Involved Youth

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with youth (between the ages of 16 and 25 years old). It was anticipated that 5-10 interviews and 2-3 focus groups would be conducted with this population. Eight one-on-one interviews were conducted with youth (this includes an additional ad-hoc interview that was conducted with the single participant of a planned focus group). In addition, two focus groups (comprising a total of 9 participants) were completed with young people.

FINDINGS

The Relevance of the ‘Gang’ Label to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

Through the various data collection activities, youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to consider how the ‘gang’ label was relevant to their work – individually and organizationally – and to their work with partners. In response, youth justice staff members identified the importance of the ‘gang’ label for the purposes of identification – to encourage safety and security to the facility, program, individuals and staff participating in the service. Interview and focus group participants identified that the ‘gang’ label would be used for internal protocols and policies regarding unit placement in custody or detention, degree of supervision, and any special operational changes needed to maintain the level of security or safety required. The information collected also clearly identified that youth justice staff have little knowledge of youth who are gang involved.

Some youth justice service providers indicated that identification or gang assessments are currently not available but would enable the programs to confirm gang affiliation or risk of gang involvement for the purpose of security as well as to then refer the participant to existing gang intervention programs in the community. Participants in one focus group expanded and discussed interest in having the community gang intervention and prevention program start before the young person is released. Participants also identified a future training opportunity through MCYS in a gang affiliation assessment tool (Gang Risk Assessment Instrument (GRAI)).

Youth Justice Staff Member:

“Gang-involved youth are generally low key and well behaved while in the program and without a gang assessment tool there is no opportunity to identify youth who may require gang specific programming upon release.”

For the community youth service providers, little importance was attributed to the ‘gang’ label. The service providers indicated that the label is not considered in terms of service provision. Equally the information gathered from the data collection activities clearly indicated that youth services focus on a specific program or service and participants discussed the importance of a non-biased approach to referrals for service. Information from the youth serving staff clearly identified that intake and program policy and

procedures do not include any questions or cues to determine gang involvement or risk of participation, and that suspected or known gang-involved youth were collectively engaged in a similar manner to non-gang-involved youth during the provision of service. A consistent theme identified throughout the data collection process was that participants interpreted the 'gang' label to have a stigma or bias without using either of these two terms explicitly.

Two themes regarding the relevance to work with partners were identified through the data collection activities. The first is the importance of the case manager providing information to the youth justice secure custody/detention facilities for the purpose of developing a safety plan. The second is the importance of communicating with gang prevention and intervention community programs with permission from the youth for the purpose of referral to the program.

Current Ways of Working to Address Needs and Provide Support to Gang-Involved Youth

Knowledge of Youth Gang Involvement

The youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to discuss how they know if a youth they are working with is gang-involved. While no formal process for identification is currently in place, youth justice staff members identified that training is scheduled to provide gang affiliation assessment tools in the future. Informal modes of identification such as tattoos, self-disclosure, court, police or probation information are used currently. The justice service provider focus groups identified that youth seldom self-disclose gang affiliation and information is limited to information provided by the probation officer and/or limited to significant known indicators such as tattoos. Youth participants from most interviews and focus groups identified that fear of suppression was always a factor in sharing (or not disclosing) information about gang affiliation with any service provider connected to the justice system.

Approach to Working with Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked whether they took a different and/or unique approach to working with gang-involved youth. It was consistently reinforced by both the youth justice staff members from secure custody and detention facilities and the community youth service providers that all individuals would participate in the same program and services regardless of their gang involvement. However, individuals may be strategically placed in a unit, have increased supervision or a specific plan developed for the purposes of safety and security. Community youth service providers identified that this population was provided support and within the realm of the service delivery some needs were identified and provided.

Youth Justice Staff Member:

"We welcome programming from other agencies regarding youth involved in gangs."

The information gathered through data collection activities with youth identified a distrust of the justice system and fear or intimidation from mainstream systems and services. Many youth discussed avoiding what the interviewers interpreted as mainstream youth services from the examples used.

Youth:

"I missed out on the opportunity to attend school or have the ability to obtain legal employment as well I wanted out as a result of the violence and constant police harassment". [I would seek out] "programs that were voluntary that kids could participate in to address the things that they needed.....such as employment skills, job searches, recreation and volunteer opportunities."

The interviews and focus groups all consistently identified a reluctance to work with workers directly connected to the justice system (custody and detention) as a result of the nature of their relationship.

In terms of a specific approach, the youth justice staff members identified that the individual youth would be given programming and supports consistent with programs and services offered to all youth in the program. In terms of specific intervention programs, the youth justice services and/or probation services would provide a voluntary referral to various programs offered by the John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area – the Youth Leadership and Ambassador Program (in the past) and the YARD Hamilton program (currently). In one focus group it was identified that if a young person was suspected of gang involvement, a referral to a community gang intervention would be encouraged through probation services and through the community justice program staff team.

In another focus group with youth justice staff from secure custody and detention facilities, it was identified that an anticipated training session in a gang affiliation assessment tool would provide more opportunity to identify gang-involved youth. This group also identified establishing a protocol to encourage voluntary referral to their community's existing gang prevention and intervention program. Focus group participants noted that external partnerships have been established with previous community gang related programs such as YLAP and current program YARD and that connection to these community programs were how they approached providing specific gang intervention services.

Community youth service providers identified that the approach of the service provider was similar for gang-involved youth as it was to youth not at risk or involved. Reference was made that some attention to safety and increased supervision was used when information was available that participants were gang involved.

Participants from the youth justice staff focus groups and key informant interviews clearly identified that there is no gang-specific program or service offered by Ministry of Children and Youth Services in the Western region and that programs and services are not offered for gang-affiliated young people over the age of 17. All gang-specific prevention and intervention programs and services are community-based and not funded by the Ministry.

Current Capacity to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to reflect on their current capacity to work with gang-involved youth. They were asked to discuss the strengths of their approach as well as common barriers and limitations encountered in working with this population.

Participants from the key informant interviews, the youth justice staff and community youth service provider focus groups as well as representatives from the John Howard Society of Hamilton's gang prevention and intervention program (YARD Hamilton) have identified several issues in working with this population. The youth justice staff members identified that no gang specific program services are offered within their youth justice programs and services. The focus group and interview participants identified a theme that case management focuses on programs that decrease risk factors and increase protective factors that may include the gang-specific risk factors. However, a specific targeted plan regarding gang intervention is not developed. Participants also identified that gang-involved youth in secure custody and detention are provided referrals to services available in the community as identified in their plan of care.

According to the program inventory, each township within the Ministry of Children and Youth Services Western region identified that services are available for youth involved in the justice system in the following service domains: counselling; cognitive behavioural development; crisis support; mental health; addictions; pre-employment skills development; parenting; family support; life skills; peer mentoring; housing; food security; and recreation.

A significant barrier to working effectively with gang-involved youth is that many gang-involved youth have identified that they seldom use mainstream services. Where available through the region, youth justice service providers identified a gang prevention and intervention program that is used as a resource and referral source. In Hamilton for example, all youth justice service providers have the opportunity to refer at-risk or gang-involved individuals to YARD Hamilton and have access to the online Youth Gang Prevention Manual available at www.jhshamilton.on.ca. YARD Hamilton will be used as an example of a community-based program that can increase the capacity of the Western region to work with gang-involved youth.²⁷

²⁷ For a detailed overview of the YARD Hamilton program and its role in increasing the capacity of the Western region to work with gang-involved youth, see the end of the Western Region Report.

Additionally, the issue of violence and weapons, and resulting safety issues, are identified as primary issues and concerns among youth justice staff members and community youth service providers. Secondary issues include the barriers this population faces as it relates to poverty, employment and education.

In relation to community gang prevention and intervention programs outside of the realm of youth justice services, the issues identified are a focus on risk factors, barriers and needs of the gang-involved youth population. In community-based programs, the youth gang members engaged in services are an average age of 16-24 years old, which extends service beyond the range of 12-17 years of age covered by youth justice services.

In areas within the Western region that have a community gang targeted program, many of the risk factors and issues are being addressed for participants who volunteer to participate. For areas without a community program, the targeted gang risk factors are not coordinated.

Participants from the youth justice staff focus groups identified that youth are reluctant to identify gang involvement. Gang-involved participants consistently identified distrust of individuals in custody and detention programs resulting in resistance to engage with them.

The strength of the approach in community gang prevention and intervention programs (i.e., YARD Hamilton) is the specific targeted curriculum for each of the prevention, intervention and re-entry streams. Strength is the community's strategic focus on reducing gangs from a community perspective. The wraparound case management model and mentoring component provides reinforcement of pro-social values and skills creates effective connections to community services and develops positive peer groups. Programs outside of the realm of youth justice services provide the opportunity to target young people beyond the age of 18 years old.

The challenge of a community program funded by the National Crime Prevention Centre is the voluntary referral criteria. Based on the community program design, participants need to volunteer to attend and it cannot be identified in a court or probation order. The second challenge for this population is the need to have a dynamic program that enables the participants to want to participate and to continue to attend throughout the duration of the project. The challenge is reduced with the dynamic elements aimed to address the needs that the participants have, the ability of incentives in the form of opportunities, training, skill development, recreational activities and the involvement of a mentor and staff to engage the young people.

Targeted gang programs such as YARD Hamilton identify the need for continuous support that extends beyond the program's duration. The model specifically identifies a mentor that extends beyond the program's service provision. This is critical for youth in order to re-establish trust with community members who are able to provide ongoing

community connections. The wraparound case management component develops community connections for the purpose of ongoing support beyond the program.

Youth justice staff members indicated that one barrier is often the short period of time that the youth is with their service and the limited support that is provided after reintegration plans are established. The option for areas in the region with a targeted gang intervention strategy is to refer these individuals to the community program.

Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations

When asked about the nature of their partnerships with other agencies and organizations in their work with gang-involved youth, the youth justice staff members identified existing protocols and partnerships with police and probation services for the purpose of providing gang affiliation information. Reintegration services provided integration supports and included targeted approaches to reduce criminal and anti-social risk factors and to increase protective factors. No targeted approach to the specific risk factors identified as indicators of gang affiliation or specific gang intervention program are provided directly by youth justice service providers.

For the community youth service providers, relationship and protocols are currently established where time limited funding exists for gang prevention and intervention programs. Programs such as YARD Hamilton are based on best practices. With that said, the program design incorporates the need for community collaboration at multiple levels to ensure service protocols are established to meet the unique needs of this population.

The Perspective of Young People as It Relates to Our Work with Gang-Involved Youth

In order to understand the perspective of young people as it relates to working with gang-involved youth, individuals participating in this research study were first engaged in a discussion concerning the benefits and consequences of involvement in the gang lifestyle.

Youth discussed many reasons for participating in gang activity. The consistent themes across the data collection activities are in the core areas of finances, family, social stability and security. Participants from the focus groups identified that money was a lure to participate or become affiliated with a gang. This often correlated with acknowledgement that it was the group of friends from the neighbourhood in which they grew up. Additionally, neighbourhood identity was identified as important – there is a labelling of ‘bad’ neighbourhoods and young people suggested that they were identified based on their neighbourhood and they required or sought some degree of security or protection. Participants with a past positive relationship with the interviewers identified that family disconnect and a need to replace family was the primary lure to the gang.

Youth also provided reasons for why someone might want to leave a gang. The prominent themes identified by youth in interviews and focus groups were being tired of the cycle of violence, police suppression and barriers specifically regarding family connection, school and employment. Additional themes were related to efforts to not return to jail and the acknowledgement of getting older and feeling that criminal offences were escalating. Another less consistent theme was the concept of wishing to focus on a career path that would lead to a pro-social life.

Participants were then engaged in a discussion pertaining to the experiences of gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system. They were asked to identify challenges that gang-involved youth may face when leaving custody/detention and returning to the community and to provide their perspective with respect to how staff in the criminal justice system might support youth in exiting from the gang lifestyle.

In general, currently or previously gang-involved young people suggested that what would help youth in returning to the community was to have a mentor who would support pro-social friend development, referrals to increase employability, training, education, and support regarding social and emotional needs. Relationships were identified as a strong theme that connected with the concept that organizations that build relationships slowly with youth are more effective. One participant commented that most youth justice service provision does not build trust and move forward with a therapeutic relationship slowly. Other comments suggested that effective support services need to be delivered by individuals that show they care – demonstrating that they are not just working for a paycheck. This confirms the importance of relationship development and the need for youth to feel understood and not judged. Other themes identified were the importance of having someone check in periodically to provide support, and the availability of opportunities to volunteer in the community or sports and recreation opportunities. Several interview participants raised the issue of structure. A participant identified that leaving the structure of the institution is difficult and suggested programming specific to skills to structure goals and strategies to think independently without institutional structure are needed. Another issue identified by youth is a distrust for justice related services and community services and the lack of self-sufficiency or capacity to seek out and access services.

With respect to the challenges in leaving custody/detention and returning to the community, the key challenges identified were related to the intensity of peer pressure in the community. Linked to this was the barrier of an individual's reputation and how young people identify pressure to re-engage according to their reputation or role. Individuals identified the importance of supports regarding employment, housing and school. Youth identified the need to have support when returning to the community to connect with family.

Youth:

"If you don't have love from family you will go back to the gang."

The youth perspective is that role models are an important element of success in changing attitudes and behaviours post release. Another challenge identified is that organizations providing services try to engage too quickly and, according to the youth, often this approach creates a resistance or refusal to participate. Another challenge regarded identifying the need for service providers to support children by working with parents to increase the parents' skills and address barriers.

Youth:

"You can't expect kids to know how to or make changes in their family".

The youth participants identified that the challenge in returning to the community is to balance reputation, esteem, a connection with their group upon release, and the desire to seek support. There is a strong need to establish a mentor and to reconnect with family. Further, young people need assistance in encouraging their parents to seek out support for addressing these barriers and developing skills.

With respect to how staff in the criminal justice system might support youth in exiting from the gang lifestyle, youth participants identified the importance of being supported by reintegration staff and efforts to support referrals to service.

Youth:

"The youth should be provided programs specific to their [criminal] charges."

Collectively, youth participants noted the importance of case management planning which must include reintegration into the community. Youth consistently identified that they are hesitant to build relationships with youth justice service providers and to seek out support from specific agencies.

Working Better to Address the Needs of Gang-Involved Youth

The youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to consider what would help increase their capacity to work more effectively to support gang-involved youth. Youth participants were also asked to provide their suggestions to increase capacity.

Youth justice staff members and community youth service providers clearly identified the need for a gang affiliation assessment tool to assist them in identifying individuals involved in a gang. As identified throughout the report it was clear from the youth justice staff in secure custody/detention facilities that youth seldom disclose their gang affiliation. Although it is clear that there is significant relational programming, the justice service provider focus groups identified that youth seldom self-disclose gang affiliation and information is limited to information provided by the probation officer and/or limited to significant known indicators such as tattoos. Training was identified by both youth justice staff and community youth service providers as essential to increase the capacity to work with young people affiliated with gangs. All community youth service providers

identified more training and supports were needed regarding gang prevention and intervention strategies. Both groups also identified the need to refer to a gang intervention program if available in the community.

According to the youth participants, it is essential for youth justice staff and program staff to build effective relationships and develop trust prior to engaging in questions regarding gang affiliation. They also noted the importance of being heard and understood. Another prominent theme reflected in the information gathered from the various interviews and focus groups is the need for a mentor who understands the importance of building a relationship over time and can support the individual to help them navigate supports and services.

Youth also identified the need for younger children to be provided information regarding the myths of gang involvement. Finally, they identified the requirement for connections to supports regarding family, school, pro-social peers and employment. Both youth service providers and youth participants identified the importance of connecting youth with the community in which they are living. Both groups also identified the importance of case management, discharge planning and the need for pro-social peer connections.

It was clear from the findings that the lessons learned from the region identify that gang-involved youth will resist engaging in services directly connected to youth justice services and therefore it is essential to have gang prevention and intervention services that are not a part of the direct youth justice services. Participants identified the need for specific gang prevention and intervention programs that have a specific and targeted best practice approach to working with gang-involved youth that are involved in the youth justice system – from extrajudicial measures up through to and including secure custody/detention. These programs are voluntary and cannot be identified in a youth justice probation order.

CONCLUSION

The results of the data collection activities in the Western region clearly identify that gang-involved youth who are transitioning out of custody/detention are not provided specific gang intervention programs or services while in the institution. When available, youth who are gang involved can be supported by community-based gang prevention, intervention and re-entry programs. Key elements of these programs should address the importance of voluntary participation to ensure motivation to attend is based on key readiness factors.

Historically gang prevention and intervention program funding has been time limited and gang exit programs throughout the Western region are lacking as only highly populated urban centres are provided funding. For example, in 2013 the National Crime Prevention Centre only funded two gang intervention and prevention programs – Hamilton and Toronto are currently in the process of launching focused youth gang related programs.

Youth entrenched in the youth gang subculture require intense and prolonged cognitive skill restructuring and development. The barrier to success is that youth exiting gangs have all consistently displayed periods of time during the transformation in which they are moving towards pro-social behaviour and lifestyles while still connected and partially involved in youth gang peer connections. Often youth justice service providers have time limits on their direct service support to gang-involved youth. Gang-involved young people require support over a period of time that may extend beyond the time constraints and age limits of youth justice services.

Youth who are affiliated with gangs all rate as high to very high risk using a criminal risk assessment tool. As a result, significant barriers are present that create challenges to changes in behaviour and take an intense targeted approach that requires a significant period of time to support the reduction of risk factors and increase protective factors. The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area's previous gang program experience has identified that one of the most significant barriers to supporting gang-involved youth is the consistent resistance to and trust of mainstream services on the part of youth. As a result, intervention and prevention strategies must focus on providing links and considerable case management and goal achievement support. The challenge is to build trust and develop initial motivation for youth to continue to engage in programs and services.

Past experience and the themes identified by the research participants through the various data collection activities suggest that gang-involved youth have an inherent distrust of individuals from the justice system including secure custody/detention facilities. Although it is clear that there is significant relational programming, the youth justice staff identified that youth seldom self-disclose gang affiliation and information is limited to that provided by the probation officer and/or limited to significant known indicators such as tattoos.

A gang assessment tool would identify youth who could be referred to a specific gang intervention available in the community. Experience indicates that youth who are gang affiliated and seeking help may require support that extends beyond the youth justice age parameter. It is understood that a large proportion of gang-involved young people are engaged in youth justice services beyond the custody and detention programs. It is our experience and observation that youth coming out of secure and open custody/detention facilities, who are identified as high risk to become gang-involved are in community justice services such as Extrajudicial Sanctions, Extrajudicial Measures and Non-Residential Attendance Centre programs and therefore identification of these young people is critical to provide referral to gang prevention and intervention programs. It is critical to engage these young people and their families in a prevention/early intervention program as early as possible.

A community approach to providing support to gang-involved young people is a strategic community response and therefore it is imperative that protocols and processes are developed to provide effective community support to the gang-involved youth.

YARD Hamilton

YARD Hamilton is a replication of a 'promising practice' program developed in Calgary and implemented by Calgary Police Service and identified as a gang reduction intervention. YARD Calgary was modeled after the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model. In keeping with this Intervention Model, YARD Hamilton is a comprehensive and integrated approach that uses best practice programming to focus on specific locally identified risk domains applied inclusively across appropriate ages of young people in Hamilton between 12-24 years of age. YARD Hamilton identifies an approach that cuts across traditional agency boundaries through an integrated approach from a team of community agencies and organizations to deliver 4 core strategies that are the following:

1. Community Mobilization
2. Opportunities Provision
3. Social Intervention and Outreach
4. Organizational Change and Development

YARD Hamilton is an integrated approach with a Gang Reduction Strategy Coordinator (JHS Manager) providing leadership to develop a community strategy. The strategy includes developing committees and groups comprised of critical partners, community stakeholders and service providers to ensure clients are served across multiple organizations and any identified gaps in service are filled. A community gang assessment will be coordinated to assess the current barriers and needs in Hamilton. YARD Hamilton replicates the Strategies of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model.

1. Community Mobilization

John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area is the lead organization in delivering the Community Mobilization Strategy and Prevention, Intervention and Re-Entry Programs. The YARD Hamilton Manager is identified as the Gang Reduction Coordinator and provides leadership to the community mobilization activity, chairs the Steering Committee and the Community Operational Committee, coordinates the Priority Neighbourhood Planning committees and manages the facilitation of the Prevention, Intervention, and Re-Entry program service delivery. The Gang Reduction Coordinator has expertise in community collaboration and mobilization and will use the following committee structures and partnerships to effectively establish a gang reduction strategy for Hamilton.

- a) Steering Committee: John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area (JHS), Hamilton Police Service (HPS), Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDSB), a Ministry of Children and Youth Representative, a representative from the Ministry of Attorney General and the City of Hamilton will be identified as critical partners and will provide leadership to the direction of YARD Hamilton. Each partner is prepared

to provide in kind resources to support the program. This committee is be comprised of senior staff from partnering agencies each having a vested interest in targeting gang involved and at risk youth in our community. The Manager of YARD Hamilton will chair this committee, which meets quarterly.

- b) Community Operational Committee: The Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area is a founding and active steering committee member of the Hamilton Community Child and Youth Services Network. This network is comprised of key agency representation from social services, youth justice, mental health, addiction, spiritual based services and other community based supports that provide critical linkages for effective case management activities for YARD Hamilton. Our agency has established alliances and partnerships through active participation in many community committee structures that will be essential in establishing the network of referral sources, service providers and partnerships. The Manager of YARD Hamilton (Gang Reduction Coordinator) provides leadership to this committee which will be comprised of the organizations identified in our list of service providers, critical partners and stakeholders including representation from MCYS Justice Service providers.
- c) Priority Neighbourhood Working Groups: Many of the priority neighbourhoods have formal neighbourhood associations that are resident led and driven. All have expressed strong concern regarding the conflict, violence and youth gang activity within their neighbourhoods. YARD Hamilton staff and Program Coordinator will work with these groups to develop and align YARD Hamilton with the communities' strategies to develop healthier and safer neighbourhoods.

2. Opportunities Provision

A Prevention and Intervention Program will provide Hamilton with a variety of specific Gang Prevention and Intervention Opportunities identified below.

- a) Primary Prevention (120 families per year over 5 years): Parents of each participant in prevention, intervention and re-entry will be encouraged to participate in case management planning. Any needs or supports for parents identified through participation in case planning will be referred to John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington, & Area parent support or outside services that are not provided by the organization. As a result of their participation in the case management planning and referral to service for specific needs, there will be an anticipated increase in parental participation and support of the young person participating in YARD Hamilton, increased knowledge in parenting strategies and skills and an increased knowledge of gang prevention strategies.
- b) Secondary Prevention (50 participants per year over 5 years) – The prevention program target group is 12 to 24 year old male and female youth residing in Hamilton identified through the Youth Level of Service – Case Management

Inventory or Level of Service Inventory Ontario Revision (LSI-OR) as having risk factors directly related to gang involvement. These participants identify risk in the following core areas:

- Negative influences in the peers life
- Limited attachment to the community
- Over-reliance on anti-social peers
- Poor parental supervision
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Poor educational or employment potential
- A need for recognition and belonging

Participants will identify medium risk in the YLS-CMI in the areas identified above and as a result will attend a 12 week Prevention Program that will be provided in individual and group formats for 2 hours each week facilitated by the youth worker team. Each program participant will be matched with a mentor / youth worker who will provide tutoring, individual cognitive skills counselling, and community integration for 2 hours per week in a group setting. This mentoring will continue for an additional 12 weeks after completion of the prevention programming to ensure sufficient support for each individual participant. The assigned youth worker will provide case management and goal setting for one hour each week. The youth worker will initiate a connect to the school liaison officer who may provide ongoing support at the school. One hour a week recreational group activities (30 minutes twice a week) will be scheduled after programming each week to reinforce and support skills learned during the Prevention Program.

Outcomes for individuals that participate in the YARD Hamilton Prevention Program include an increase in motivation to change anti-social thinking and behaviour; an increase in pro social cognitions; increase in pro-social skills and positive work/school goals. With these changes in attitude, skills and behaviour there will be an increase in school attendance, school participation and attachment to positive role models. As a result of the program there will be a decrease in anti-social behaviour at school, which will increase the connection to school and increase academic and social success.

- c) Intervention (60 participants per year over 5 years) – The intervention program target group is 12-24 year old male and female youth residing in Hamilton, identified through the Youth Level of Service – Case Management Inventory for young people 12-18 and the Level of Service Inventory Ontario Revision for young people 19-24. Additionally, a Gang Affiliation screening tool will be used to identify gang involvement.

These participants identify risk in the following core areas:

- Negative influences in the peers life
- Limited attachment to the community

- Over-reliance on anti-social peers
- Poor parental supervision
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Poor educational or employment potential
- A need for recognition and belonging

Participants will identify high risk using the YLS-CMI or LSI-OR for the above areas and a Gang Affiliation Screening process will confirm gang affiliation.

A 24 week intensive personal development and intervention program will be delivered in individual and group formats facilitated by the Youth Worker Team. Each young person will attend two sessions each week for 24 weeks for 2 hours. A mentor and youth worker will provide gang exit support, tutoring, group recreational programming, employment and training support, and reconnection to the community for a minimum of 3 hours each week during the 24-week intervention program and for an additional 24 weeks. The assigned youth worker will provide case management coordination and goal setting for one hour each week while in the program. One hour of activities will be immediately following the intervention program and directly relate to the cognitive skills learned.

After completing the intervention program the participants will have an increase in motivation to change anti-social thinking and behaviour, increase pro-social cognitions and skills, positive work / school related goals, and motivation to achieve success in school or work. The program focus on gang intervention, exit strategies and substance abuse education that will decrease positive attitudes towards gangs and use of drugs. As a result of the increase in pro-social attitudes, beliefs, skills, and behaviour, participants will have a reduction in police contact, gang involvement and criminal offences. As well, participants will have a decrease in association with anti-social peers, substance use and anti-social behaviour at work or school. The program will provide the skills to increase school / work attendance and participation and increase attachment to positive role models.

- d) Re-Entry (20 participants each year over 5 years) – Along with the components, target group and outcomes of the Intervention program, the re-entry component focuses on release or re-entry planning. Additional support is required prior to and immediately following release to establish an effective transition to the community. Re-entry planning engages the individual and family immediately following release to support the individual to successfully transition back to the community and to support the individual to exit pre-existing connections with a gang. Service provision to Intervention and Re-Entry participants will occur concurrently. The long-term outcome of YARD Hamilton is the reduction in youth gang crime and violence in communities.

3. Social Intervention and Outreach

Through the Community Mobilization activities identified above, YARD Hamilton will mobilize youth serving agencies, schools, faith based groups, Hamilton Police Service and other criminal justice organizations to reach out to young people and their families who are identified as at risk of or affiliated with a gang. Critical to this strategy within the Comprehensive Gang Model is the integration of 2 part-time Community Outreach Workers who will be the links between community, social services and the young people. The Outreach Workers seek to identify young people requiring support and provide connects to community services.

Community Outreach Worker – Two part time Community Outreach Workers are the connect between the gang affiliated and at risk young people and the community supports and resources and YARD Hamilton Intervention and Prevention Programs. Their role is connected to the social intervention strategy by building relationships with clients and other gang members within their own communities, recruiting gang members or at risk young people by encouraging participation in the program, serve as the intervention team's eyes and ears on the street, link clients to necessary services and support their participation, provide supportive interaction with young people, act as a liaison between participants and service providers, resolve difficulties between clients, their families, other youth and / or agencies, and provide family support.

4. Organizational Change and Development

The ongoing community mobilization committee structure identified above and the Community Gang Assessment will identify gaps and barriers to service essential to support young people at risk and / or gang affiliated. Through the leadership of the Steering Committee, strategies will be identified to change or identify more effective protocols, referral criteria and / or systems to ensure the young people are provided appropriate supports. The long-term outcome of YARD Hamilton is the reduction in youth gang crime and violence in communities.

CONCLUSIONS

This asset mapping and program inventory project is one of a series of activities implemented as part of MCYS's *Strategy to Support Gang-Involved Youth*, a multi-year initiative to work with gang-involved youth in custody/detention with the aim of supporting their rehabilitation and reintegration and increasing staff capacity to work with this population.

In addition to the identification and compilation of information on the interventions currently available in each of the four former youth justice regions for gang-involved youth, this project involved processes to engage youth justice staff, local community partners and stakeholders, and youth themselves in forums to identify themes in relation to how we currently work to address the needs and provide support to gang-involved youth, as well as suggestions on what is needed to work better in the future to support meaningful change for this population as they return to the community. Drawing on the findings from the four regional reports, this section highlights the commonalities and differences in themes across the four former youth justice regions.²⁸

The Relevance of the 'Gang' Label to Our Work with Gang-Involved Youth

In considering the relevance of the 'gang' label to work with gang-involved youth, two general themes were apparent across the four former youth justice regions. First, the 'gang' label is important from a security perspective. The label is used for the purposes of identification in order to promote and ensure the safety of the facility, the agency/organization, the program, the staff and the individuals involved. In the case of youth justice staff members, the label is used for internal protocols and policies regarding unit placement in custody or detention, degree of supervision, and any special operational changes needed to maintain the level of security or safety required. For community youth service providers, information is used in order to determine how/where staff will interact with a youth and administer programming, and the steps to be taken to ensure the youth's safety in programming. Representatives from the Western region also identified the relevance of the 'gang' label in identifying the existing limitations in institutions with respect to issues of accessibility.

Second, it was consistently acknowledged that caution should be used when applying the 'gang' label to youth. It was noted that such a label should be applied carefully as it has the potential to create significant barriers for the individuals so labeled. Several community youth service providers indicated that they are reluctant to disclose gang affiliation when referring a youth to programs and services in the community – on the one hand, it is difficult to confirm legitimate involvement in a gang and on the other hand they felt they would be doing a disservice to the youth by identifying them as a gang

²⁸ For a more detailed overview of the common themes across all four former youth justice regions, and the themes that are region-specific with respect to the strengths and assets as well as barriers and limitations in the current way of working with gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system, see Appendix I.

member. Being labeled a gang member can lead to increased surveillance by the police and to problems in accessing community-based support services, to being accepted back into education institutions, and to obtaining legitimate employment.

Youth gang involvement is a complex and multi-faceted issue. The importance of acquiring the correct terminology to apply to this population is an issue that was brought forward by youth justice staff, community youth service providers, and youth alike. Although many agreed these youth were considered marginalized, at risk, and facing multiple barriers, 'gang-involved' may not always be the appropriate way to classify these young people.

Current Ways of Working to Address the Needs of and Provide Support to Gang-Involved Youth

Across the four former youth justice regions, it was established that knowledge of youth gang involvement is based on a combination of formal and informal identification processes. In the custodial setting, there are general intake assessments, gang-specific risk assessments (e.g., GRAI) and documentation from the police and probation services. However, in most cases, information about gang involvement is gained through informal interactions with the youth themselves (self-report) and/or based on visible identifiers (e.g., tattoos, styles of clothing, gang signs or tags, using gang-related hand gestures). An inherent issue with this population is a lack of honesty on the part of the youth. Representatives from the former Central and Eastern youth justice regions particularly emphasized the reluctance on the part of gang-entrenched youth to disclose information about gang involvement (level and nature of activities) to 'authorities'. This leaves service providers to rely on informal information gathering techniques, which depend on open communication with community members, peers, other service providers and the police.

Representatives from all youth justice regions indicated that in general the approach to working with gang-involved youth is similar to working with any other high-risk youth population. As noted by several community youth service providers, in this instance gang involvement is simply the acute issue. The focus is on a youth-centered, strengths-based, motivational approach that identifies and targets the individual's unique risks, needs and protective factors and their particular experience in the gang (type and length of involvement). Across the four regions, representatives indicated a strengths-based approach included a focus on developing new social skills, establishing pro-social relationships, increasing self-esteem, making progress towards an identified goal and connecting gang-involved youth to mainstream society (e.g., through hobbies, school, employment). Youth justice staff members particularly noted the importance of challenging youth gang members' mode of thinking as it relates to engagement in criminal activities. They also try to ascertain an indication of the youth's belief/value system, the extent of their anti-social attitudes, the level of their entrenchment in the gang, and their level of motivation for change. This is a way of for them to gage the

types of programs, resources, supports and opportunities that may be beneficial for, and accepted by, the youth.

In the four regions, community-based youth service providers identified the importance of developing an individualized service plan/case management approach to addressing the needs of the particular individual in a holistic manner – the Central region highlighted the importance of a gender-specific approach, while the Northern and Eastern regions emphasized a culturally adaptive approach (language, beliefs and attitudes), and the Western region cited the importance of gang-specific programming. Overall, the focus is on developing a plan that: addresses the drivers of criminal behaviour and understands the root issues for involvement and needs satisfied by the gang; includes family members (and addresses the risk of involvement of siblings) and other supports in the youth's life; and takes an approach where the youth's interests are matched to available services to provide the youth with an opportunity to develop new pro-social relationships.

All four regions unanimously identified that one of the strengths of their current approach is a focus on relationship development between the gang-involved youth and the youth justice staff member or community youth service provider. There is a clear emphasis on the development of a personal connection with the individual youth through one-on-one interaction, building a positive rapport and establishing trust. Some of the custody-based youth justice staff members indicated that through the implementation of 'relationship custody', they are able to interact with youth, often one-on-one, and focus on their individual situation. They focus on building a positive rapport and are interested in what is best for the youth and their stability within the institution. In the community, youth service providers also indicated the importance of establishing a relationship with gang-involved youth. The workers learn about the youth's interests and needs, act as a mentor/positive role model, advocate on their behalf and link them to services that present meaningful opportunities. They believe that these youth need a sense of hope, they need someone to be there for them over the long term, and to feel understood and not judged.

In general, there is also a spirit of collaboration between the various services providers that work with this population of gang-involved youth. Representatives from all regions emphasized the importance of both formal and informal partnerships with others and that there are opportunities to work with partners that specialize in different areas – every service provider has expertise in certain areas and it is important to bring them together in order to determine solutions to meet the needs of gang-involved youth.

While there are many strengths and assets in our current approach, several barriers and limitations were also identified in working with gang-involved youth. With respect to the youth themselves, resistance to change was a common barrier emphasized by representatives from the Central, Eastern and Western regions. Despite successful participation in programs and positive gains in the custody/detention setting, once

released back into the community youth return to the gang lifestyle, are often unwilling to make different choices, and are reluctant to access mainstream services.

In terms of the general programming and resources available, there was a general consensus among representatives from all four former youth justice regions that there is a lack of reintegration services and limited supports available for gang-involved youth once they are released back into the community. In particular, rigid program timelines and limited funding impact the engagement and transition process – limiting the nature of reintegration plans that can be developed and reducing the likelihood of long-term community-based supports. In addition, there is a lack of gender-specific programming – particularly as it relates to female involvement in youth gangs, a lack of culturally relevant programming, and a lack of services available for youth over the age of 18. With respect to specific types of programming and services available to support the reintegration of gang-involved youth into the community, representatives from the four regions placed the emphasis on limitations in different areas including the following: the provision of basic services for survival, individual counselling, opportunities for education and legitimate paid employment, safe and secure housing arrangements, and mental health and addictions services.

Other, more systemic barriers and limitations were also identified. Representatives from all youth justice regions touched on the difficulty and/or inability of youth justice staff and community youth service providers to address some of the issues that gang-involved youth face when they return to the community including feelings of insecurity, isolation and estrangement; inequitable access to support and opportunities; experiences of poverty; and the return to a problematic environment (e.g., community with high rates of gang involvement, family supportive of the gang lifestyle). Additionally, representatives of the Eastern and Western regions particularly noted the barriers inherent in the nature of the operation of the youth criminal justice system itself. For example, they highlighted that there is often large amounts of ‘dead time’ while a youth is in detention, which is followed by a short custody sentence allowing only a limited amount of time for reintegration planning.

Working Better to Address the Needs of Gang-Involved Youth

The Youth Perspective

An important component of this project involved the engagement of young people in order to understand their perspective as it relates to working with gang-involved youth. Findings from the various data collection activities revealed that a key misconception of gang-involved youth is that they join gangs exclusively to be involved in criminal activity. The reality is that the reasons are much more complex. For example, youth may have turned to gangs to seek opportunities to earn income to support themselves and their families, when more traditional opportunities for employment may be unavailable or unattainable. Gang-involved youth often feel service providers view them through a lens of criminality rather than considering the adversity of the gang lifestyle in the first place.

When asked to provide suggestions of what is needed to support meaningful change for gang-involved youth, youth participants from across all four former youth justice regions suggested that more services are needed to support youth through the transition process from the institution to the community. They identified needs in various different areas of their lives including the following:

- Education must be viewed as an essential and required service factor as youth plan their transition back to the community.
- Employment training and job programs are needed, as the financial rewards of gang activity are a major reason for youths' continued participation in gang activities, coupled with an inability to secure adequate employment in their communities.
- Protection must be provided for the youth and their loved ones, and they need a safe and secure place to live.
- Recreational and cultural activities are also important – providing youth with a way to occupy their time.

Representatives from all four former youth justice regions also believed that gang-involved youth would benefit from the support of positive adult role models – individuals with a vested interest in their success, with whom they can develop a trusting relationship. In the Northern and Western regions, youth participants particularly emphasized that it is important for gang-involved youth to have support in addressing challenges associated with reintegration back into the community to help them counter the temptation to remain involved with and/or return to the gang (e.g., having to face what they left behind, peer pressure, managing reputations and roles). Youth generally felt that supportive individuals were essential and important to their overall success in the community. Yet in some instances, and particularly in custodial settings, this is not how youth generally characterized their relationship with staff. Instead they described the negative attitudes of staff and their poor treatment in the facilities. Specific to the Central region, youth participants emphasized that training is needed for youth justice staff to address their negative attitudes, and should focus on ways to develop positive trusting relationships with youth.

Participants from the Central, Eastern and Western regions indicated that people have individual motivations and reasons to support exit from the gang lifestyle. They believed that it is important that gang-involved youth are assisted in addressing negative attitudes and beliefs about what is possible in life, re-establishing a sense of hope, and provided help in planning for a future beyond the gang. However, representatives from both the Central and Eastern regions believed that ultimately, they are responsible for creating positive changes in their own lives. Until youth are ready to make these changes, services and supports will have little impact.

The Youth Justice Staff and Community Youth Service Provider Perspective

When the youth justice staff members and community youth service providers were asked to consider what would help increase their capacity to work more effectively with

gang-involved youth and to provide suggestions of what is needed to support meaningful change among this population, they identified several possibilities, which have been categorized into the following five general themes.

Similar to the youth participants, youth justice staff and community youth service providers from all four former youth justice regions identified the importance of better preparation for gang-involved youth returning to the community. Additional support for current services is needed for gang-involved youth. Several options were identified, including the following: an increase in duration and intensity of programs; the inclusion of flexible interventions; the provision of additional funding; an increase in programming for gang-involved youth who are past 18 years of age; an increase in programming options that are separate from youth justice services; and more involvement of family and community supports in programming. Representatives particularly emphasized that other services and supports are needed for gang-involved youth transitioning out of custody/detention and returning to the community, including: employment assistance and training, supportive housing options, alternative education options, crisis support, and addictions services.

Participants from all regions also believed that gang-involved youth would benefit from the support of positive adult role model in their lives – an individual with a vested interest in their success, with whom they develop a trusting relationship fostering engagement in programming. Participants were clear that this support must to be provided consistently, coherently and cohesively over a long period of time. These youth also need someone to act as an advocate to help them navigate the service systems – selecting appropriate services, making referrals, determining gaps and connecting youth back to the community. Representatives from the Eastern and Western regions particularly emphasized that gang-involved youth need support in increasing their sense of self and pro-social identity. This includes assistance in finding the ‘hooks’ that can compete with the benefits of gang involvement, and creating a sense of hope for the future.

A second theme identified involved the need to develop a specific intervention program/service targeted at gang-involved youth. This population includes youth with multiple and complex needs. Representatives from the Central, Northern and Western regions believed that specific programming should be developed to focus on assisting youth in exiting gangs, and providing assistance with reintegration into the community. Additional funding should be allocated to these types of programs.

The importance of ‘building a bridge between the institution and the community’ was a third theme identified by the youth justice staff and community youth service providers. Participants from the Central, Eastern and Western regions emphasized that gang-involved youth should be provided with increased opportunities to initiate and establish relationships with community supports and service providers while in custody/detention. Reintegration planning for a youth should always involve outreach to community service providers prior to the youth returning to their community. The development of a

continuity of services from the institution to the community would help to close the gap between incarceration and community reintegration and could help to ease the transitional phase for youth. Additionally, there is a need for continuous support that extends beyond any given program's duration. This is critical for youth in order to re-establish trust with community services that are able to provide ongoing connections.

The fourth theme involved the importance of increasing communication and collaboration between criminal justice and community-based agencies and organizations. There are several challenges as it relates to working with others. Participants from the Eastern region emphasized the need to develop protocols and practices related to confidentiality and information sharing. In addition to the Eastern region, representatives from the Central and Western regions suggested that communication and collaboration with community partners is needed including professional development opportunities for service providers to meet and discuss issues. Finally, there should be a focus on identifying the programs, services, supports and resources that are currently available for gang-involved youth, and an emphasis placed on collaboration through these existing initiatives.

The final theme relates to increased opportunities for knowledge development and training. Representatives from all four former youth justice regions emphasized the importance of being provided with opportunities to increase their knowledge on several gang-related issues, including: reasons for gang involvement, current status of gang involvement in the region, gang identification and affiliation protocols, and current best practices in working with this population of youth. They also wanted to be provided with more training opportunities to increase their capacity to implement a youth-centered, strengths-based approach and to increase the skills needed to address challenges in working with this population of youth.

With respect to these suggestions of what is needed to support meaningful change for gang-involved youth, the following table provides an overview of the common themes across all four former youth justice regions, and identifies the themes that are region-specific.

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Table 2. *Suggestions by Youth, Youth Justice Staff and Community Youth Service Providers of What Is Needed to Support Meaningful Change for Gang-Involved Youth*

This table is not meant to be comparative or evaluative. It is based on information shared during the various regional data collection activities and is reflective of areas that were most emphasized during those discussions. It is in no way a complete reflection of the suggestions of what is needed to support meaningful change for gang-involved youth in each region.

	Youth Justice Region			
	Central	Eastern	Northern	Western
Youth Perspective				
More services and supports are needed for gang-involved youth	√	√	√	√
Gang-involved youth would benefit from the support of positive adult role model	√	√	√	√
Gang-involved youth need assistance in addressing negative attitudes and beliefs	√	√		√
Gang-involved youth need support in addressing challenges related to reintegration			√	√
Ultimately, gang-involved youth are responsible for creating change in their own lives	√	√		
More training is needed for youth justice staff	√			
Youth Justice Staff and Community Youth Service Provider Perspectives				
<i>Better Prepare Youth Returning to the Community</i>				
Additional support for current services is needed for gang-involved youth	√	√	√	√
Gang-involved youth would benefit from the support of positive adult role models	√	√	√	√
More services and supports are needed to assist gang-involved youth	√	√	√	√
Gang-involved youth need support in increasing their sense of self / pro-social identity		√		√
<i>Develop a Specific Program Targeted to Gang-Involved Youth</i>				
Specific gang-exiting programming should be developed	√		√	√
<i>Build a Bridge Between the Institution and the Community</i>				

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	Youth Justice Region			
	Central	Eastern	Northern	Western
Increased opportunities to initiate and establish relationships with community supports	√	√		√
<i>Increase Communication and Collaboration between Youth Criminal Justice and Community-Based Agencies and Organizations</i>				
Protocols and practices related to confidentiality and information sharing		√		
Opportunities to meet and discuss issues; collaborate through existing initiatives	√	√		√
<i>Provide Opportunities for Knowledge Development and Training</i>				
Provide opportunities to increase knowledge on several gang-related issues	√	√	√	√
Provide training opportunities to increase capacity and skills	√	√	√	√

Additional Reflections on Working with Gang-Involved Youth

The following is an overview of some of the additional issues identified and themes discussed across the four former youth justice regions as it relates to working with gang-involved youth.

The Importance of Prevention and Early Intervention

There was a consensus across all four former youth justice regions that there is a need for more prevention resources to address the issue of youth gang involvement including programs that are age-specific, developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive. The higher the target population's level of risk, the more intensive the prevention effort must be and the earlier it must begin. Once these youth are entrenched in the gang lifestyle or involved in the criminal justice system, it becomes exponentially more difficult to help them.

The Need for Realistic Measures of Success

It is a challenge to define and measure success when working with gang-involved youth. The focus should be on individual gang-involved youth – the factors and circumstances that have led them down this path, and the maintenance of realistic notions of success. We must strive to focus on increments of success based on a youth's social ability, and not on instances of recidivism. Representatives from the Northern youth justice region suggested from their perspective, engaging the individual and building a strong working relationship with gang-involved youth is considered a success.

Final Thoughts and Considerations in Moving Forward

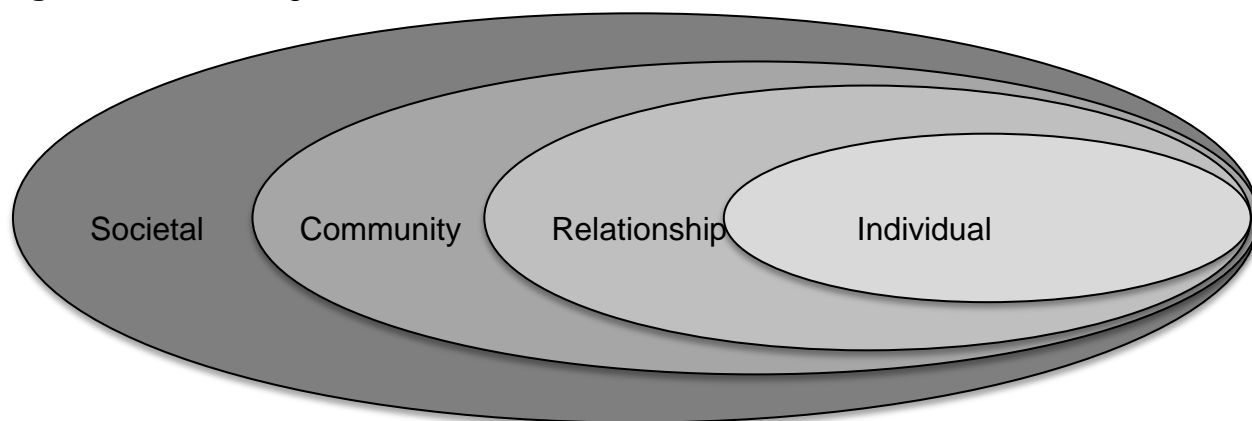
The findings emerging from this research project provide an overview of the current capacity and available resources, as well as some of the limitations and gaps in addressing the issue of youth gangs in the four former youth justice regions in the province of Ontario. It is our hope that these findings may serve to inform future discussions on ways that we can work together to address the needs of gang-involved youth in custody/detention who are returning to the community.

As discussed in the introductory sections of this report, leaving the gang is a complex process; it involves pushes and pulls to conformity and back to the gang, and the interaction of a combination of factors, including: individual choice, relational, social and institutional forces and practices; and structural level constraints and opportunities. Youth gang members often need extensive support to help them leave the gang lifestyle behind and to make a successful transition to the conventional world. This is even more apparent for gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system who may face even greater challenges in leaving the gang. There are several possible targets for

intervention for gang-involved youth in custody/detention and under supervision in the community that may impact the process of desistance.

In employing the 'ecological model' framework, we present some possible considerations for moving forward. This model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community and societal factors and suggests the importance of implementing a variety of interventions that address different dimensions of the issue of youth gang involvement.

Figure 1. *The Ecological Model*²⁹



Individual

This level examines the individual risk factors of youth gang members. Strategies at this level are often designed to promote pro-social attitudes, beliefs and behaviour and emphasis is placed on the willingness and ability of the individual to exercise greater self-control and on identifying objective versus perceived opportunities and the individual's preparation to take advantage. The consistent focus across the province on a youth-centered, strengths-based, motivational approach to working with youth gang members, that identifies and targets the individual's unique risks, needs and protective factors and their particular experience in the gang, is a significant asset. As identified by representatives from all regions, opportunities to reinforce this approach through additional training related to increasing capacity and developing skills would be beneficial.

²⁹ The ecological model is used in criminology as a way to understand risk factors for crime and delinquency. In general, the application of this model focuses on several goals: to explain the person-environment interaction, to improve people-environment transactions, to nurture human growth and development in particular environments, and to improve environments so they support expression of individual system's dispositions.

Relationship

This level examines close relationships that may impact the lives of youth gang members including peers, partners, and family members. Strategies at this level are often designed to provide gang-involved youth with opportunities for pro-social supportive relationships. Unanimously across all four former youth justice regions and among the youth participants, youth justice staff members and community youth service providers alike, participants suggested that gang-involved youth would benefit from the support of positive adult role models – individuals with a vested interest in their success, with whom they can develop a trusting relationship, and who foster engagement in programming. The participants were clear that this support must to be provided consistently, coherently and cohesively over an extended period of time. While one of the strengths of the current approach is a focus on relationship development between the gang-involved youth and the youth justice staff member and/or community youth service provider, more can be done to help ease the transitional phase for youth between the institution and the community. Participants from all four regions suggested the need to increase opportunities for gang-involved youth to initiate and establish relationships with community supports and service providers while in custody/detention. The development of a continuity of services from the institution to the community would help to close the gap between incarceration and community reintegration.

Community

This level examines the settings, such as schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods, in which social relationships occur and seeks to identify the characteristics of these settings that are associated with the gang lifestyle. Strategies at this level are typically designed to impact the climate, processes, and policies in a given system. These approaches would focus on the 'de-labelling' process at the community level and the provision of services to gang-involved youth. While several programs targeted at gang-involved youth are currently in existence, representatives from all participant groups in all four former youth justice regions suggested that more services are needed to support youth through the transition process and to better prepare them to reintegrate back into the community as contributing members of society. Several areas for increased support were highlighted, including:

- Counselling, crisis support, mental health and addiction services
- A variety of educational options
- Employment training and job programs, opportunities for adequate, long-term employment
- Supportive housing options, a safe and secure place to live
- Protection for gang-involved youth and their loved ones
- Recreational and cultural activities to provide youth with a way to occupy their time

Societal

The final level examines the broad societal factors that help create a climate in which youth gang activity is encouraged or inhibited. These factors include social and cultural norms. Other large factors include the health, economic and social policies that help to maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in society. These approaches would focus on addressing and reducing patterns of stress, inequality and relative deprivation with emphasis placed on providing opportunities to improve the social determinants of health for youth gang members. Representatives from all youth justice regions touched on the difficulty and/or inability of youth justice staff and community youth service providers to address some of the systemic issues that gang-involved youth face when they return to the community including feelings of insecurity, isolation and estrangement; inequitable access to support and opportunities; experiences of poverty; and the return to a problematic environment (e.g., community with high rates of gang involvement, family supportive of the gang lifestyle). Future discussions on the topic of youth gangs should examine ways to address some of these structural barriers and limitations that youth gang members confront in reintegrating into the pro-social world.

Exiting from a youth gang is a multi-dimensional problem that requires a holistic solution. All of above factors have an effect on the process of gang desistance, and must be considered in the future development of responses to this issue. Further, it is important that various sectors work together to implement interventions that seek to encourage and help youth gang members break their ties with their gangs and successfully work their way back into society. As highlighted by representatives from the four former youth justice regions, this involves a need to increase opportunities for communication and collaboration between a network of agencies and organizations with a vested interest in improving the lives of gang-involved youth in our society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Questions from Online Survey for Youth Service Providers

Introduction and Identification

1. I have read the above information, and:
 - I would like to proceed with this survey.
 - I do not wish to participate in this survey.
2. Please complete the following information:

Name:

Agency/Organization:

Address:

City/Town:

Province:

Postal Code:

E-mail Address:

Telephone Number:

Description of Agency/Organization and Its Work with Gang-Involved Youth

3. How do gang-involved youth come to the attention of your agency/organization?
 - Request for service
 - Referral from within your agency/organization
 - Referral from outside your agency/organization
 - Other (please specify)
4. When gang-involved youth come to your attention, are they involved in the criminal justice system?
 - Yes
 - No – Please skip the next question
 - It depends on the individual
5. If they are involved in the criminal justice system, at what point of contact are these gang-involved youth?
 - First point of contact (e.g. police warning, police cautioning, police referral, pre-court diversion or alternative measure)
 - Serving a court ordered sentence in the community (e.g., alternative measure, probation, intensive supervision)

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- In custody/detention and preparing to return to the community.
 - All of the above
 - It depends on the individual
6. Your services are available to:
- Young men involved in gangs
 - Young women involved in gangs
 - Both young men and young women involved in gangs
 - Family and/or siblings of young men/women involved in gangs
7. What is the typical age range of gang-involved youth you come into contact with?
- Under 12 years old
 - Ages 12 to 15
 - Ages 16 to 19
 - Ages 20 to 24
 - Age 25 and over
 - We encounter a range of these ages
8. On average, how many gang-involved youth do you provide services to in any given month? Please specify by gender and age if applicable.
9. What is the maximum capacity of your services for gang-involved youth? Please specify by gender and age if applicable.
10. Do you typically have a waiting list for the services you offer to gang-involved youth?
11. Please identify the sources of funding for your work with gang-involved youth:
12. Do you collaborate with any other agency/organization(s) in the delivery of services to gang-involved youth? If so, please describe.

Description of Specific Initiative(s) for Gang-Involved Youth

Please complete the following information (as available and/or applicable for each of the initiative(s) that your agency/organization provides to gang-involved youth.

13. Initiative #1

- Name of Initiative
- Description – Please provide a brief overview of the initiative. If the initiative follows a particular program model or service orientation, please identify it here.

- Population Served – Please discuss the population served by this initiative, addressing any of the following criteria as applicable: location/catchment area, primary target group, gender, age range, involvement with criminal justice system.
- Recruitment Process - Please identify any restrictions and/or conditions that participants are required to possess. Please discuss the referral process for participation. If applicable, please discuss the intake cycle.
- Key Component(s) – Please discuss what is offered to participants. Please include frequency and length of time, etc.
- Funding – Please identify the sources of funding for this initiative. If there is funding, is it ongoing, time-limited?
- General Program Contact Information - Please provide general contact information for individuals wishing to know more about this initiative.
- Intake Contact Information - If applicable, please provide contact information for individuals wishing to participate in this initiative.

14. Initiative #2 (if applicable)

- Name of Initiative
- Description – Please provide a brief overview of the initiative. If the initiative follows a particular program model or service orientation, please identify it here.
- Population Served – Please discuss the population served by this initiative, addressing any of the following criteria as applicable: location/catchment area, primary target group, gender, age range, involvement with criminal justice system.
- Recruitment Process - Please identify any restrictions and/or conditions that participants are required to possess. Please discuss the referral process for participation. If applicable, please discuss the intake cycle.
- Key Component(s) – Please discuss what is offered to participants. Please include frequency and length of time, etc.
- Funding – Please identify the sources of funding for this initiative. If there is funding, is it ongoing, time-limited?
- General Program Contact Information - Please provide general contact information for individuals wishing to know more about this initiative.
- Intake Contact Information - If applicable, please provide contact information for individuals wishing to participate in this initiative.

15. Initiative #3 (if applicable)

- Name of Initiative
- Description – Please provide a brief overview of the initiative. If the initiative follows a particular program model or service orientation, please identify it here.
- Population Served – Please discuss the population served by this initiative, addressing any of the following criteria as applicable: location/catchment area,

primary target group, gender, age range, involvement with criminal justice system.

- Recruitment Process - Please identify any restrictions and/or conditions that participants are required to possess. Please discuss the referral process for participation. If applicable, please discuss the intake cycle.
- Key Component(s) – Please discuss what is offered to participants. Please include frequency and length of time, etc.
- Funding – Please identify the sources of funding for this initiative. If there is funding, is it ongoing, time-limited?
- General Program Contact Information - Please provide general contact information for individuals wishing to know more about this initiative.
- Intake Contact Information - If applicable, please provide contact information for individuals wishing to participate in this initiative.

Agency/Organization Capacity to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

16. Are there specific issues or concerns relating to gang-involved youth that are important to your agency/organization? If so, how do you deal with these?
17. What do you think are the strengths of your approach to working with gang-involved youth? What types of youth are you best able to help? What has worked well?
18. What are the most common barriers and limitations you encounter when working with gang-involved youth?
19. What would help you to increase your capacity to work with gang-involved youth, to work more effectively, etc.?
20. Please feel free to provide any other pertinent information or comments:

Thank You and Follow-Up

May we contact you in the future to discuss the possibility of participating in another component of this research study?

- Yes
- No

If yes, may we contact you using the information provided herein?

- Yes
- Please use this alternate contact information:

Appendix B – Guide for Key Informant Interviews

Description of Work with Gang-Involved Youth

1. How is the 'gang' label relevant to the work that you do?
 - Prompt: How is it relevant to your work with partners?
2. How do you work with youth that you know or suspect to be gang-involved?
 - Prompt: If applicable, how do they come to the attention of your agency / organization?
 - Are they involved with the criminal justice system?
 - Prompt: How do you know if they are gang-involved (formal/informal identification, process, assessment tool, etc.)?
 - Prompt: Do you take a different approach? If so, in what way?
 - Is there a gendered-approach?
 - Is there an ethno-cultural approach?
 - Prompt: Do you offer/refer to programs, services, resources, etc., specifically targeted to address the needs of this population?
3. Please discuss your capacity to work with gang-involved youth. Are there specific issues or concerns relating to gang-involved youth that are important to your agency/organization? If so, how do you deal with these?
 - Prompt: What do you think are the strengths of your approach to working with gang-involved youth? What types of youth are you best able to help? What has worked well?
 - Prompt: What are the most common barriers and limitations you encounter when working with gang-involved youth?
 - Prompt: What would help you to increase your capacity, to work more effectively, etc.?

Partnerships and Collaboration

4. In working with gang-involved youth, what is the nature of your partnerships with other agencies/organizations?
 - Prompt: Do you have formalized protocols, informal relationships, key contacts, etc., with other agencies/organizations?
 - Prompt: How do you work with others?
 - Prompt: Is there an 'inventory of services' that your agency/organization is connected to address issues faced by this population?

Accessing Services / Referrals for Intervention

**Optional Question – This may not be applicable to all key informants.*

One of the components of this project involves identifying and compiling information on the programs, supports and resources currently available for gang-involved youth to enable the development of an electronic inventory to support front-line youth justice staff in their work with this population.

5. As a front-line youth justice staff member working with a gang-involved youth, how might I obtain support from your agency/organization?
 - Prompt: How might I go about contacting your agency/organization (formal protocol, informal process, key contact, etc.)?

Closing Remarks

Do you have any questions, or anything else you would like to discuss with respect to working with gang-involved youth and what can be done to help them?

Do you have any suggestions/recommendations for us as we move forward in this data collection process and/or with this project as a whole?

Appendix C – Guide for Focus Groups with Youth Justice Staff

Description of Work with Gang-Involved Youth

1. How is the 'gang' label relevant to the work that you do?
 - Prompt: How is it relevant to your work with partners?
2. How do you work with youth that you know or suspect to be gang-involved?
 - Prompt: How do you know if they are gang-involved (formal/informal identification, process, assessment tool, etc.)?
 - Prompt: Do you take a different approach? If so, in what way?
 - Is there a gendered-approach?
 - Is there an ethno-cultural approach?
 - Prompt: Do you offer/refer to programs, services, resources, etc., specifically targeted to address the needs of this population?
3. What risk and protective factors do you prioritize in the development of a plan for gang-involved youth?
 - Prompt: Are there factors and/or issues that are specific to gang-involved youth? If so, what are they and how are they relevant?
4. How do you work to address these risk and protective factors?
 - Prompt: Are there factors and/or issues that you consider relevant but that you are not in a position to address? Which ones? Why?
5. Please discuss your capacity to work with gang-involved youth. Are there specific issues or concerns relating to gang-involved youth that are important to your agency/organization? If so, how do you deal with these?
 - Prompt: What do you think are the strengths of your approach to working with gang-involved youth? What types of youth are you best able to help? What has worked well?
 - Prompt: What are the most common barriers and limitations you encounter when working with gang-involved youth?
 - Prompt: What would help you to increase your capacity, to work more effectively, etc.?

Partnerships and Collaboration

6. In working with gang-involved youth, what is the nature of your partnerships with other agencies/organizations?
- Prompt: Do you have formalized protocols, informal relationships, key contacts, etc., with other agencies/organizations?
 - Prompt: How do you work with others?
 - Prompt: Is there an 'inventory of services' that your agency/organization is connected to address issues faced by this population?

Closing Remarks

Do you have any questions, or anything else you would like to discuss with respect to working with gang-involved youth and what can be done to help them?

Do you have any suggestions/recommendations for us as we move forward in this data collection process and/or with this project as a whole?

Appendix D – Guide for Focus Groups with Community Youth Service Providers

Description of Work with Gang-Involved Youth

1. How is the 'gang' label relevant to the work that you do?
 - Prompt: How is it relevant to your work with partners?
2. How do you work with youth that you know or suspect to be gang-involved?
 - Prompt: How do you know if they are gang-involved (formal/informal identification, process, assessment tool, etc.)?
 - Prompt: Do you take a different approach? If so, in what way?
 - Is there a gendered-approach?
 - Is there an ethno-cultural approach?
 - Prompt: Do you offer/refer to programs, services, resources, etc., specifically targeted to address the needs of this population?

Description of Interventions Available for Gang-Involved Youth

With respect to interventions (programs, services, supports and resources) available for gang-involved youth:

3. What is the structure?
 - Prompt: What is the recruitment/referral/intake process, what are the eligibility criteria?
 - Prompt: What is the model for service delivery?
 - Prompt: Is it (or are certain components) specific to gang-involved youth?
4. What type(s) of intervention(s) is/are provided?
 - Prompt: What are the particular needs addressed by the intervention(s)?
 - Prompt: What are the key components?

Description of Capacity to Work with Gang-Involved Youth

5. Are there specific issues or concerns relating to gang-involved youth that are important to your agency/organization? If so, how do you deal with these?
 - Prompt: What do you think are the strengths of your approach to working with gang-involved youth? What types of youth are you best able to help? What has worked well?
 - Prompt: What are the most common barriers and limitations you encounter when working with gang-involved youth?

- Prompt: What would help you to increase your capacity, to work more effectively, etc.?

Partnerships and Collaboration

6. In working with gang-involved youth, what is the nature of your partnerships with other agencies/organizations?
 - Prompt: Do you have formalized protocols, informal relationships, key contacts, etc., with other agencies/organizations?
 - Prompt: How do you work with others?
 - Prompt: Is there an 'inventory of services' that your agency/organization is connected to address issues faced by this population?

Closing Remarks

Do you have any questions, or anything else you would like to discuss with respect to working with gang-involved youth and what can be done to help them?

Do you have any suggestions/recommendations for us as we move forward in this data collection process and/or with this project as a whole?

Appendix E – Guide for Interviews and Focus Groups with Youth

Description of ‘Gang’ and ‘Gang Member’

1. What does the word ‘gang’ mean to you and what do you think it means to be a ‘gang member’?
 - Prompt: What activities are these individuals involved in; how can you tell that an individual is a gang member?
 - Prompt: What do you think about the label of ‘gang member’ (perceptions)? How do you think this label impacts an individual (positive/negative)?

Benefits and Consequences of Gang Involvement

2. Can you tell us why you think a young person may want to be involved in a gang?
 - Prompt: What do you think are some of the benefits – what does the gang offer, what can it provide, what are the good things, etc.
3. Can you tell us why you think youth may want ‘out’ of the gang?
 - Prompt: What do you think are some of the costs, drawbacks, and limitations of involvement?
 - Prompt: What do you think are some of the reasons (motivations or incentives) to leave the gang?

‘Gang Members’ Leaving Institutions and Returning to the Community

4. In returning to the community, what do you think would help youth who want to get out of a gang, what would help them stay on track, what would improve their lives?
 - Prompt: Are there certain people, programs, services, supports, resources that are important?
 - Prompt: What needs do you think should be addressed (personal identity, relationships, education, employment, life skills, health, housing, etc.)?
5. What do you think are some of the challenges (obstacles/barriers) that gang-involved youth face in returning to the community?
 - Prompt: What needs do you think are not being addressed? What do you feel is missing?
 - Prompt: What are the things that make it difficult for gang-involved youth to get the help that they need (knowing where to go, access, etc.)?

What Should be Done in the Future to Help Gang-Involved Youth?

6. What are some of the things that the youth justice staff do and/or should do to help gang-involved youth who are leaving the facility and returning to the community?
 - Prompt: Is there certain information that they should be providing to these youth?
 - Prompt: Are there connections that need to be made, if so with whom (family, school, peers, community agencies/organizations, etc.)?

Scenario

7. What do you think is the most important thing that would help youth who may want 'out' of the gang?
 - Prompt: If you had a sibling and/or friend who were in a gang, what would you like to see done for them?

Closing

Do you have any questions or any other things you want us to know about gang-involved youth and what can be done to help them?

Appendix F – List of Participating Facilities, Agencies and Organizations by Region

Central Region

- Agincourt Community Services
- Associated Youth Services of Peel
- Astwood Strategy Corporation
- The Boundless School
- Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough
- Breaking the Cycle, The Canadian Training Institute
- Canadian Mental Health Association – York Region Branch and Simcoe County Branch
- Central Toronto Youth Services
- East Metro Youth Services
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel Halton
- Eva's Initiatives
- Fernie House
- Justice for Children and Youth
- Kennedy House Youth Services, Inc.
- Leave Out Violence (LOVE)
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Probation Services (Mississauga and North York)
- Operation Springboard
- Peel Children's Centre, Nexus Youth Services
- ROCK
- Roy McMurtry Youth Centre (secure custody/detention)
- Syl Apps Youth Centre (secure custody/detention), Kinark Child and Family Services
- Toronto Police Services
- Everett Observation & Detention Program (open custody/detention), Turning Point Youth Services
- Youthdale Treatment Centres
- Warden Woods Community Centre

Eastern Region

- Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa
- Children's Aid Society
- Crime Prevention Ottawa
- Economic and Social Council of Ottawa-Carleton
- Immigrant Women Services Ottawa
- John Howard Society of Ottawa
- Laurencrest Youth Services, Inc.

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- Livius Sherwood Detention and Custody Centre (open custody/detention), Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Probation Services (Ottawa)
- Murray McKinnon Foundation
- Ottawa Police Service
- The Phoenix Centre for Children and Families
- William E. Hay Centre (closed custody/detention), Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
- Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
- You Turn Youth Services (formerly the Eastern Ontario Youth Justice Agency)

Northern Region

- Grand Council Treaty #3
- John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District
- Justice Ronald Lester Youth Centre (secure custody/detention)
- Kairos Community Resource Centre
- Ka-Na-Chi-Hih Specialized Solvent Abuse Treatment Centre
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Probation Services (Thunder Bay)
- Nishnawbe Aski Police Service
- William W. Creighton Youth Services

Western Region

- Alternatives for Youth
- Arrell Youth Centre (secure custody/detention), Banyan Community Services, Inc.
- Dawn Patrol Child & Youth Services
- Foundations Program, Hamilton Wentworth District School Board
- Gateway Suspension and Expulsion Program
- George R. Force Group Home (open custody/detention), Banyan Community Services, Inc.
- Good Shepherd
- Hamilton Youth Justice Probation Services and Community Youth Justice
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Probation Services (Hamilton)
- Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC), John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area
- Pathways to Education Hamilton
- Peninsula Youth Centre (secure custody/detention), Banyan Community Services, Inc.
- Youth At Risk Development (YARD) Hamilton, John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area

Appendix G – Regional Program Inventories: List of Program Summaries³⁰

Former Central Region

- Aboriginal Attendance Centre Program, Enaahchtig Healing Lodge & Learning Centre
- African Heritage Counselling Program, Harriet Tubman Community Organization
- Anger Management Program, Family Services York Region
- Attendance Centre, Associated Youth Services of Peel*
- Attendance Centre, Family Services York Region
- Attendance Centre, New Path Youth & Family Counselling Services of Simcoe County
- Attendance Centres – Halton & Brampton, Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel-Halton
- Attendance Program, Operation Springboard*
- Breaking the Cycle Program and Follow-Up Youth Outreach Workers/Case Managers, The Canadian Training Institute*
- Camping, Recreation Programs and Drop-In Centre, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST)
- Child, Youth and Family Program, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- Community Outreach and Support Program, YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka
- Community Support Workers, Fernie House*
- Directed Counselling Program, Family Services York Region
- Dufferin Housing Help Centre, John Howard Society of Peel-Halton-Dufferin
- Early Release Support Program, Central Toronto Youth Services*
- Employment Services, Canadian Mental Health Association – Toronto Branch
- Employment Services, John Howard Society of Peel-Halton-Dufferin
- Employment Services, JVS Toronto
- Employment Services, Operation Springboard*
- Eva's Phoenix, Eva's Initiatives*
- Halton Youth Attendance Centre, John Howard Society of Peel-Halton-Dufferin
- Homeless Initiative, The Christie Ossington Neighbourhood Centre
- Human Services Justice System Program, Canadian Mental Health Association – Simcoe County Branch
- Individual and Family Therapy, ROCK*
- In-Sourcing Community Talent: Violence Intervention Ambassadors Project, Operation Springboard*
- Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP), Kinark Child and Family Services

³⁰ During the lifecycle of this project, the boundaries of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services Youth Justice Services Regions were revised and modified and a fifth youth justice region was created. Specifically, the County of Wellington and the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, originally part of the Western region, were re-classified to be part of the Central Region, and the city of Toronto, originally part of the Central region, is now the new Toronto Region. As the data collection activities began prior to this catchment area re-alignment, the regional program inventories were developed using the old regional classifications. Therefore we refer to the former Central region and the former Western region.

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- Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP), Youthdale Treatment Centres*
- K.O.S Project: Colour Coded, African Canadian Legal Clinic
- Live-In Learning, The Boundless School*
- Mental Health Services, Oolagen Community Services
- Miikanaake Youth Justice Reintegration Program, Enaahtig Healing Lodge & Learning Centre
- Multisystemic Therapy, Kinark Child and Family Services
- New Directions Program, New Path Youth & Family Counselling Services of Simcoe County
- Nexus Youth Centre, Nexus Youth Services*
- Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC), John Howard Society of Simcoe & Muskoka
- Prisoners HIV/AIDS Support Action Network
- Probation In-House Clinical Services, New Path Youth & Family Counselling Services of Simcoe County
- Probation Outreach Program, Central Toronto Youth Services*
- Reaching Adolescents in Need (RAIN), Associated Youth Services of Peel
- Reintegrating through the Arts, Upfront Theatre Foundation
- Re-Integration Social Workers, African Canadian Legal Clinic
- Syl Apps Program, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST)
- Taking Action Against Gangs Scarborough (TAAGS), Agincourt Community Services Association*
- Transitional Youth Program (TYP), Canadian Mental Health Association – Toronto Branch
- Transitions, Central Toronto Youth Services*
- The Turning Point Attendance Centre (TAP), Turning Point Youth Services*
- Violence Intervention Program (VIP), East Metro Youth Services*
- Youth Court Support, Warden Woods Community Centre*
- YSJD Directed Counselling, Associated Youth Services of Peel

Eastern Region

- Aboriginal Reintegration and Supportive Services, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne
- Aboriginal Reintegration and Supportive Services, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Inc.
- A Different Street (ADS), John Howard Society of Ottawa & You Turn Youth Support Services (formerly the Eastern Ontario Youth Justice Agency)
- Ajax Alternative School Program, Murray McKinnon Foundation*
- Anger Management – On-TRAC, YOURS and Workbook, Rebound Child and Youth Services, Inc.
- Attendance Centre, Laurencrest Youth Services, Inc.
- CHOICES, Rebound Child and Youth Services, Inc.
- Collaborative Day Treatment Program, Durham Family Court Clinic

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- Community Reintegration Program, Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
- Community Support Supervision Team (CSST), St. Lawrence Youth Association
- Community Support Team (CST), Durham Family Court Clinic
- Community Support Team (CST), Peterborough Youth Services
- Community Support Team (CST), You Turn Youth Support Services (formerly the Eastern Ontario Youth Justice Agency)
- Durham Youth Gang Strategy, Durham Family Court Clinic
- Employment – E-Learning Program and Workbook, Rebound Child and Youth Services, Inc.
- Employment and Summer Job Services, John Howard Society of Durham Region
- Employment Services, John Howard Society of Kingston & District
- Hire Power Employment Services, John Howard Society of Ottawa
- Housing and Shelter, Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
- Housing / Residential Services, John Howard Society of Kingston & District
- Housing Services, John Howard Society of Durham Region
- Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP), Durham Family Court Clinic
- Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP), Peterborough Youth Services
- Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP), St. Lawrence Youth Association
- Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP), You Turn Youth Support Services (formerly the Eastern Ontario Youth Justice Agency)
- M.A.C. Non-Residential Attendance Centre, Murray McKinnon Foundation*
- Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC), John Howard Society of Kawartha Lakes & Haliburton
- Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC), John Howard Society of Ottawa
- Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC), Point in Time Centre for Children, Youth and Parents
- One-on-One Anger Management Program, Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
- QUINTAC Attendance Centre, Community Organized Support and Prevention (Quinte)
- Reintegration and Community Support Program (RCSP), Dalhousie Youth Support Services
- Reintegration and Supportive Services, Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa
- Reintegration and Supportive Services, Point in Time Centre for Children, Youth and Parents
- Re-Integration Program (RI), John Howard Society of Kawartha Lakes & Haliburton
- Reintegration Support Outreach Program, Murray McKinnon Foundation*
- St. John Bosco Achievement Centre, John Howard Society of Ottawa, Ottawa Carleton Catholic School Board & You Turn Youth Support Services (formerly the Eastern Ontario Youth Justice Agency)
- Substance Abuse – E-Learning Program and Workbook, Rebound Child and Youth Services, Inc.
- Substance Abuse Program, Youth Diversion Program
- Summerville Supporting Housing (SSH), John Howard Society of Ottawa

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- The Attendance Centre, Dalhousie Youth Support Services
- Youth Outreach Worker Program, Boys and Girls Club of Durham – Youth Justice Department
- Youth Outreach Worker Program, Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa
- YSB Mental Health, Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa

Northern Region

- Anger Resolution Program, White Buffalo Road Healing Lodge
- Attendance Centre, William W. Creighton Youth Services
- Community Support Team (CST) – Youth Justice Services, Algoma Family Services
- Community Support Team Kenora & Rainy River District, William W. Creighton Youth Services
- Employment Programs, Yes Employment Services
- Intensive Support Supervision Program (ISSP), HANDS The Family Help Network (formerly the Algonquin Child and Family Services)
- Ka-Na-Chi-Hih Specialized Solvent Abuse Treatment Centre Program, Ka-Na-Chi-Hih Specialized Solvent Abuse Treatment Centre*
- Native Pride: An Aboriginal Youth Cultural Awareness Education Program, White Buffalo Road Healing Lodge
- Nipissing Attendance Centre, Crisis Centre North Bay
- Ontario North Regional Attendance Program, W. J. Stelmaschuck and Associates Ltd.
- Reintegration and Community Services, Kairos Community Resource Centre*
- Remote Aboriginal Intervention Program, John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District*
- WAABAN, North Bay Indian Friendship Centre
- Youth Reintegration Workers, Grand Council Treaty 3 Representative Services, Inc.

Former Western Region

- Alternative Education Services, Ray of Hope, Inc.
- Attendance Centre, Community Options for Justice (Oxford)
- Attendance Centre and After Care, WAYS (Western Area Youth Services)
- Attendance Centre Program, St. Leonard's Community Services London Region (SLCS)
- BRIDGE Program, Dawn Patrol Child & Youth Services
- Clinical Supports Program, Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System (London Family Court Clinic, Inc.)
- The Cornerstone, Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU)
- Counselling and Assessment, Banyan Community Services, Inc.
- Counselling and Treatment Services, Lutherwood
- Counselling Services, St. Clair Child & Youth Services

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- Counselling – Youth Justice Services, Kitchener-Waterloo Counselling Services Incorporated
- Crisis Intervention and Reintegration, John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area
- Drug and Alcohol Related Services, Alternatives for Youth
- Education, Employment and Youth Programs, Niagara Regional Native Centre
- Employment and Training Programs, John Howard Society of Waterloo-Wellington In Association with Cambridge Career Connections
- Employment Programs, John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area
- Employment Services, YMCA of Owen Sound Grey Bruce
- Halton Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Assessment, Prevention and Treatment Service, ADAPT: Burlington
- Housing Services, Argus Residence for Young People
- Housing Services, Reaching Our Outdoor Friends (ROOF)
- Housing Support, Living Rock Ministries
- Intensive Reintegration Service, St. Leonard's Community Services London Region (SLCS)
- London CArES (Community Addiction Response Strategy), Addiction Services of Thames Valley (ADSTV)
- Mental Health Intervention Program, Haldimand-Norfolk Resource Education and Counselling Help (REACH)
- Mental Health Services, Chatham-Kent Children's Services
- Mental Health Services, Craigwood Youth Services
- Mental Health / Specialized Programming, Canadian Mental Health Association – Waterloo Wellington Dufferin Branch (CMHAWWD)
- Mental Health Treatment Services, Windsor Regional Hospital
- Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC), John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area
- Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC), John Howard Society of Niagara
- Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC), New Beginnings
- Non-Violent Choices Men's Program, Family Counselling Centre of Cambridge & North Dumfries (FCCCND)
- PASS – Progressive Accountability through Supervision and Support, Dawn Patrol Child & Youth Services
- Perspectives, T. A. Patterson & Associates, Inc.
- "Picture It", Elgin Counselling & Meditation Centre
- The RAFT Hostel, Niagara Resource Service for Youth
- Reintegration Services (Hamilton and Niagara), Banyan Community Services, Inc.
- Residential Services Programs, House of Friendship
- Residential Treatment Program and Supportive Apartment Living Transition Program (SALT), The Inn of Windsor
- Safe Haven Shelter, Betty Thompson Youth Centre – Lutherwood
- Substance Abuse Program, Youth Diversion, Essex County Diversion Program

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- Substance Abuse Programs, Windsor-Essex Community Health Centre
- TRI-Rock Program, Living Rock Ministries
- U-Turn Program, Haldimand-Norfolk Resource Education and Counselling Help (REACH)
- Youth Attendance Centre Programme Kitchener, John Howard Society of Waterloo-Wellington
- Youth At Risk Development (YARD) Hamilton, John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area
- Youth Community Support Program, John Howard Society of London and District
- Youth Contact, Lutherwood
- Youth Housing Program, Wesley Urban Ministries
- Youth Housing Services, Good Shepherd*
- Youth in Transition Program, John Howard Society of Waterloo-Wellington
- Youth Justice Mental Health Program, Woodview Mental Health & Autism Services
- Youth Justice Program, Oxford-Elgin Child & Youth Centre
- Youth Justice Services Dedicated to Probation, Huron-Perth Centre for Children and Youth
- Youth Opportunities Strategy, New Beginnings
- Youth Reintegration Program, Ray of Hope, Inc.
- Youth Re-Integration Support Program, John Howard Society of Windsor and Essex County
- Youth Services, Wyndham House
- Youth Support Program, St. Leonard's Community Services
- Youth Support Services, The FORT (Foundation of Resources for Teens)

*Indicates a resource identified through the Online Survey with Youth Service Providers.

Appendix H – Regional Report Findings: Questions Used to Guide Thematic Analysis

What is the Relevance of the ‘Gang’ Label to Our Work with Gang-Involved Youth?

- How is the ‘gang’ label relevant to the work that we do (as a group/as an individual)?
- How is the label relevant to our work with partners (do we disclose, not disclose gang affiliation)?
- How is the label relevant to youth – what are their perceptions?

How Do We Work to Address the Needs of and Provide Support to Gang-Involved Youth?

- How do we work with youth that we know or suspect to be gang-involved?
 - How do gang-involved youth come to our attention (is involvement with the criminal justice system a prerequisite; if so, what is the point of contact with the criminal justice system)?
 - How do we know if the youth are gang-involved (formal/informal identification process, assessment tool, etc.)?
- Do we take a different and/or unique approach to work with gang-involved youth?
 - If so, in what way (gendered approach, ethno-cultural approach, etc.)?
 - What are the risk/protective factors that are prioritized in the development of a plan for this population (are there issues that are specific to gang-involved youth – what are they and how are they relevant)?
 - What are the particular needs of gang-involved youth that are addressed?
 - Are there programs, services, resources and/or supports that are specifically targeted to address the needs of this population?
 - Are there any inventories of services that exist and/or to which we are connected?
- What is our capacity to work with gang-involved youth?
 - Describe the provision of services (what is the target population(s); what is the typical age-range; how many youths are provided services in any given month; what is our maximum capacity; what are our sources of funding; what is our recruitment/referral/intake process; what is the structure / model of service delivery, etc.).
 - What are the specific factors/issues or concerns relating to this population that are important to us – how do we deal with these?
 - Are there factors/issues that are considered relevant to gang involvement but that we are not in a position to address?
 - What strengths are identified with respect to particular approaches to working with this population (what types of youth are we best able to help; what has worked well, etc.)?

- What challenges are identified in working with this population (what are the common barriers and limitations encountered)?
 - Where do these youth go next (upon program completion, for additional support, etc.)?
- In working with gang-involved youth, what is the nature of our relationships with others?
 - What do our partnerships look like – do we have formalized protocols, informal relationships, key contacts, etc., with other agencies and organizations?
 - How do we work with others (collaboration in the delivery of services, referrals, etc.)?
- How do we define and measure success as it relates to working with gang-involved youth?

What is the Youth Perspective As It Relates to Our Work with Gang-Involved Youth?

- Why do they believe that youth may want to be involved in a gang (what are some of the benefits; what does the gang offer; what can it provide)?
- Why do they believe that youth may want to leave a gang (what are some of the costs, drawbacks and limitations of involvement; what are some of the motivations, incentives to leave)?
- What do they believe would help those who want to exit the gang lifestyle once they return to the community (what would help them stay on track and/or improve their lives; what needs should be addressed)?
- What is their perspective concerning how experiences in the criminal justice system might harm/help the ability of youth to leave gangs?
 - What are some of the challenges (obstacles/barriers) that these youth face in returning to the community (what needs are not being addressed; what is missing)?
 - What are the things that make it difficult for youth to get the help that they need (knowing where to go, access to programming, etc.)?
 - What are some of the things that youth justice staff do to help youth who are leaving a facility and returning to the community?
- How do they define and measure success as it relates to working with gang-involved youth?

How Can We Work Better to Address the Needs of Gang-Involved Youth?

- What would help increase our capacity to work more effectively to support gang-involved youth?
 - What are our needs and priorities with respect to helping this population?

- What are some of the things that youth justice staff should do to help youth who are leaving youth justice facilities and returning to the community?
 - Is there certain information that should be provided to youth?
 - Are there connections that need to be made, if so with whom (family, school, peers, community agencies, organizations, etc.)?
- What would help improve the situation (address the challenges that youth face in returning to the community)?
- What is the most important thing that would help youth who may want to leave the gang (what would youth like to see done)?

Appendix I – Regional Asset Maps: Current Ways of Working with Gang-Involved Youth

The following tables, separated into one table of common themes across all four former youth justice regions, and four tables that are region-specific, highlight the strengths and assets as well as barriers and limitations in the current way of working with gang-involved youth involved in the criminal justice system. These tables reflect information obtained from all participants (as described in detail in the regional reports) and serve to identify similarities and differences among regions in their capacity and the requirements needed to meet the needs of gang-involved youth in terms of assisting the reintegration of this population into the community.

It should be noted that the following tables are not meant to be comparative or evaluative. They are based on information shared during the various regional data collection activities and are reflective of areas that were most emphasized during those discussions. They are in no way intended to be complete reflections of the current ways of working with gang-involved youth in each youth justice region.

Table 1. Commonalities Across All Former Youth Justice Regions

Identified Strengths and Assets	
General Approach and Focus	Youth-centered, strengths-based, motivational approach
	Target underlying risks, needs and protective factors
Youth Justice Staff and Service Providers	Focus on rapport development, relationship building, establishing trust, one-on-one interaction, personal connection, mentoring
	Identify and address safety concerns when working with gang-involved youth
	Spirit of collaboration, formal and informal partnerships, opportunities to connect with others, different expertise in different areas
Identified Barriers and Limitations	
Other	Inability to address systemic issues in community – isolation and estrangement, poverty, insecurity, inequitable access to support and opportunities, problematic environments

Table 2. Central Region

Identified Strengths and Assets	
General Approach and Focus	Use of a standardized tool to identify and assess risks and needs
Identified Limitations and Barriers	
Gang-Involved Youth Population	Resistance to change – despite successful program participation, youth want to return to gang lifestyle, unwillingness and/or perceived inability to make different choices, reluctance to access services
	Youth do not openly disclose gang affiliation or involvement – makes it difficult to accurately assess, treat and plan

Identified Limitations and Barriers	
General Programming and Resources	Lack of reintegration services and limited support in community
	Lack of gender-specific and culturally relevant programming
Specific Programs and Services	Provision of basic services – providing youth with basic necessities for survival often lies outside the service provider's mandate

Table 3. Eastern Region

Identified Strengths and Assets	
General Approach and Focus	Flexible approach, willing to modify and tailor it to individual youth
Types of Services and Supports Offered	Individualized service plan, case management approach
	Wraparound approach, holistic
	Evidence-based services and supports
Youth Justice Staff and Service Providers	Individuals are highly experienced and dedicated workers, persistence in working with youth beyond stage of resistance
Identified Limitations and Barriers	
Gang-Involved Youth Population	Resistance to change – despite successful program participation, youth want to return to gang lifestyle, unwillingness and/or perceived inability to make different choices, reluctance to access services
	Youth do not openly disclose gang affiliation or involvement – makes it difficult to accurately assess, treat and plan
General Programming and Resources	Rigid program timelines affect engagement and transition processes
	Lack of gender-specific and culturally relevant programming
	Lack of programming for gang-involved youth older than 18 years
	Lack of resources – funding for transition and reintegration plans and long-term community-based supports
	Lack of programming that addresses participants' specific needs
Specific Programs and Services	Education – inadequate and/or inaccessible opportunities
	Employment – making the case for legitimate employment, finding employment for youth with a criminal record, issues of accessibility
	Housing – difficulty finding appropriate housing arrangements, inadequate and/or inaccessible opportunities
	Health and mental health – lack of mental health and addictions services
	Individual counselling – lack of programming
Other	The nature of the operation of the criminal justice system – 'dead time' in detention followed by a short custody sentence allows limited time for reintegration planning

Table 4. Northern Region

Identified Strengths and Assets	
General Approach and Focus	Flexible approach, willing to modify and tailor it to individual youth
Specific Programs and Services	Counselling, recreation programming, spiritual support, culturally-based services
Types of Services and Supports Offered	Individualized service plan, case management approach
	Wraparound approach, holistic
	Gender appropriate and culturally relevant services
Youth Justice Staff and Service Providers	Identifying factors that may increase the risk of youth being lured into the gang – low literacy levels, developmental issues, special needs
Identified Limitations and Barriers	
General Programming and Resources	Lack of reintegration services and limited support in community
	Lack of resources – funding for transition and reintegration plans and long-term community-based supports
Specific Programs and Services	Housing – difficulty finding appropriate housing arrangements, inadequate and/or inaccessible opportunities
	Health and mental health – lack of mental health and addictions services

Table 5. Western Region

Identified Strengths and Assets	
General Approach and Focus	Flexible approach, willing to modify and tailor it to individual youth
Types of Services and Supports Offered	Individualized service plan, case management approach, mentoring
	Gang-specific programming in the community
Identified Limitations and Barriers	
Gang-Involved Youth Population	Resistance to change – despite successful program participation, youth want to return to gang lifestyle, unwillingness and/or perceived inability to make different choices, reluctance to access services
General Programming and Resources	Lack of reintegration services and limited support in community
	Rigid program timelines affect engagement and transition processes
	Lack of gang-specific programs offered to gang-involved youth within the criminal justice system
	Lack of programming for gang-involved youth older than 18 years
Specific Programs and Services	Education – inadequate and/or inaccessible opportunities
	Employment – making the case for legitimate employment, finding employment for youth with a criminal record, issues of accessibility
Other	The nature of the operation of the criminal justice system – ‘dead time’ in detention followed by a short custody sentence allows limited time for reintegration planning

Appendix J – Regional Agency Partners: Overview of Programs and Services

Central Region: Central Toronto Youth Services

Early Psychosis Intervention

New Outlook Early Intervention Program – Provides intensive outreach support and linkage to services for young people aged 15-24 experiencing a first episode of psychosis or at risk of developing a psychotic illness. Involvement may be up to three years and families/caregivers are involved in the recovery and rehabilitation process. Model of service is recovery. Average length of stay is up to three years.

Crisis Intervention

Youth Hostel Outreach Program (YHOP) – Supports youth shelters in Toronto by providing mental health assessments and short term intensive case management to youth age 16-24 who are experiencing serious mental health issues and are homeless. YHOP also provides education to shelters about mental health issues. Model of service is psychosocial rehabilitation.

Counselling and Treatment

Pride and Prejudice (P&P) – Offers unique programs for lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, transgender, transsexual and questioning youth 25 and under. The BOYBOY Collective is a 12-week workshop open to creative queer and transgender boys/men.

Relationship Skills for Violence Prevention (RSVP) – Focuses on offences of youth assault of a parent, sibling or dating partner. Youth (aged 13 to 19) are referred to this program at the discretion of a judge and by court order. The 10-week program involves individual counselling as well as group work. The counselling and the groups are tailored to the needs of the individuals involved. RSVP is designed primarily for young people who are not yet entrenched in the criminal justice system.

Transitions Program – Assists youth (aged 16 to 24) who are completing an open custody sentence. The goal of Transitions is to help youth make a successful adjustment back into the community. Young people enter the program prior to leaving open custody and are supported as they transition back into the community. Services include outreach, individual counselling, advocacy and service brokerage. The goal of this service is to help youth reconnect with their families, their communities and move their lives in a more positive direction.

Community Youth Outreach Program (CYOP) – Provides a multi-disciplinary service to seriously disturbed youth (aged 13 to 18) and their families. The service is provided through intensive outreach support and counselling.

School Outreach – Provides outreach and support to students (youth aged 12 to 17) at schools in Old East York through brief and group counselling.

Group Program – Provides support to youth and adolescents (aged 12 to 17) with various presenting issues, based on the needs of clients ad hoc (activity groups – socialization, life skills, group therapy, anger management; long term support groups).

Case Management

Youth Justice Outreach Program (YJOP) – Provides services to youth (aged 13 to 19) who are bound by a youth probation order and in need of support. These clients often face a myriad of difficulties. YJOP focuses on helping youth learn positive behaviour and social and relationship skills to help them begin piecing their lives back together. YJOP staff work with probation officers to help develop a case management plan for the young person. CTYS workers interact with youth in the community and support them in a range of areas, including going back to school or finding a job. The support can last for the length of the probation or up to a year.

Community Support and Intervention Program (CSI) – Offers intensive short-term case management to young adults aged 16 to 24 who are before the courts or at a high risk of offending and are dealing with serious mental illness. Model of service is recovery.

Community Support Program (CSP) – Offers long term case management to youth aged 16-24 with a serious mental illness. Service includes individualized, flexible and comprehensive planning. Community Support Workers offer individual and group counselling, support, crisis intervention and linkage to other services and assist in providing a seamless transition to adult mental health services. Model of service is recovery.

Diversion and Court Support

Early Release Support Program (ERSP) – Four- to six-month outreach-based program that supports youth (aged 13 to 19) who are awaiting or have been released on bail. ERSP workers offer support to youth as well as their parents. The ERSP program can support youth in obtaining a successful bail application and in maintaining their bail conditions while they are awaiting trial.

Enhanced Extrajudicial Sanctions – Provides case coordination and support for youth (aged 12 to 17) who have received an enhanced extrajudicial sanction through the youth and family court at 311 Jarvis Street, Toronto.

Social Rehabilitation/Recreation

Day Program – Provides life and social skills training, recreation and academic studies (Toronto Board of Education teacher) in a structured and supportive environment for up to 16 clients (youth aged 16 to 21). Groups include creative arts, life and social skills, yoga, and wellness. Model of service is recovery and has an early intervention component. Program is generally full time. Average length of stay is up to two years.

Eastern Region: Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa

Youth Engagement

The YSB supports Youth Advisories that develop leadership skills, give youth a chance to speak out about issues that are important to them, and educate the community about youth issues. The focus of the Youth Advisory Committees (YACs) changes over time.

Purple Sisters Youth Advisory Committee – Educates youth and adults about discrimination, abuse and the rights of young women. They also advocate for fair treatment of young women in the workplace and work to decrease sexism overall.

Sexual Health Advisory Group (SHAG) – Educates youth and adults about safer sex practices, healthy sexuality and STIs, and advocates for greater celebration of sexual diversity in society.

Ethno-cultural Youth Advisory Committees – Educate new immigrant and refugee youth, their families, and people who work with them about the challenges of arriving young in Canada, and how to help youth adapt. Special programs include the Immigrant Youth Employment Program (IYEP) and the West-end Youth Motivators.

Rainbow Youth Advisory Committee – Works to educate about issues in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Trans, Queer and Questioning community, and advocate for equal rights, fair treatment, and justice for all youth, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Mental Health Services

YSB is accredited by Children's Mental Health Ontario and has a team of experienced counsellors, with access to a multidisciplinary team. They offer welcoming, non-judgmental services for youth and families. All services are free and offered in both official languages.

24/7 Crisis Line – Makes sure that youth in crisis (or anyone concerned about them) can talk to someone who understands and wants to help. Offers supportive listening, crisis counselling, referrals and more, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Youth Mental Health Walk-in Clinic – Offers direct access to a single counselling session for youth aged 12 to 20, and/or their parents, without having to make an appointment.

Intensive Family Support – An intensive family- and community-based program that promotes positive behavioural change in youth aged 12 to 18 who are at risk of out-of-home placement because of significant anti-social behaviour.

Youth and Family Counselling – Offers youth aged 12 to 20 and their families the chance to address issues like family conflict, relationships, anxiety, depression, violence, sexual orientation, loss and bereavement. Parents and youth can meet with counsellors for family sessions, or arrange one-on-one counselling.

Wraparound Ottawa – Helps families and individuals up to the age of 20 to create a team of friends, community members and professionals to support them in dealing with complex problems. Families/individuals are referred through the Coordinated Access Committee.

School-Based Programs

YSB offers school-based mental health programs in partnership with the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario and the Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est.

Centre éducatif / Day Treatment – This academic and therapeutic day treatment program is for francophone teens aged 12 to 15 whose behaviours are interfering with their success in school. Referrals for this program are school-driven and managed through the Coordinated Access Committee.

La Relance – This academic and clinical support program helps francophone students return to a regular academic program after expulsion or long-term suspension. Referrals are made by the school authorities.

Repère – Offers youth aged 16 to 18 an alternative way of learning, including involvement in the community and co-op placements. This program is offered in partnership with the Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est.

Community and Housing Services

Community Services

Downtown Services and Drop-In – Youth aged 12 to 20 can drop in for lunch, showers, supplies and access to housing.

Young Women's Space – The Young Women's Drop-in is a weekly group for young women in Ottawa to access the services they need in a casual and welcoming environment.

Youth Health Clinic – Youth aged 16 to 24 can visit this walk-in clinic for easy access to free health care, including dental and sexual health care, addictions counselling and groups offered. No health card needed.

Youth in Transition (YOU-IT) Program – In partnership with CMHA, supports clients over the age of 16 who are street involved, homeless or at risk of losing their homes and who have symptoms of serious mental health issues and addictions.

Ethno-Cultural Community Program – Immigrant youth and families can contact this program for support in a crisis and access to community resources.

HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C (HCV) Prevention Education Program – This program offers workshops and resources to inform youth about HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C (HCV).

Spectrum LGBTQ+ Community Youth Group – Provides workshops, discussion groups, and art collaborations, as well as counselling services, peer mentoring, and primary care resources through the (youth-led) Spectrum group.

Housing and Shelter

Evelyn Horne Young Women's Shelter – Young women's shelter offers safe housing for women aged 12 to 20, 365 days a year.

Young Men's Shelter – Young men's shelter offers safe housing for men aged 12 to 20, 365 days a year.

Transitional Housing Program for Young Women – Offers young women aged 16 to 20 an affordable bachelor apartment for up to one year and support to achieve the skills to live on their own.

Transitional Housing Program for Young Men – Offers young men aged 16 to 20 an affordable bachelor apartment for up to one year and support to achieve the skills to live on their own.

Long-term Housing Program – A stepping-stone to living independently, offering affordable housing and getting the support to make that transition.

Housing Plus and Trusteeship – Helps youth aged 16 to 20 to find and maintain safe housing and know their rights. Trusteeship helps 16 and 17 year olds receive Ontario Works benefits.

Employment Services

YSB's Employment Services help both youth and adults who are looking for work and career opportunities. They provide help with resume writing, preparing for the job market, upgrading skills, job placements, etc. They also work with employers to match job seekers with job opportunities.

Summer Jobs Service – This service is available from April 1 to August 31 and open to students aged 15 to 24 who plan to return to school in the fall.

Youth Opportunities Strategy: Summer Jobs for Youth – This program helps at-risk youth aged 15 to 18 to find a summer work placement and prepare for employment. Youth must come from eligible neighbourhoods, have no previous paid work experience (in Canada) and plan to return to school in the fall.

Youth Justice Services

YSB's youth justice programs provide young men the knowledge, training and counselling they need to make positive life choices. Residential programs at the William E. Hay Centre and Livius Sherwood Detention and Custody Centre help youth in conflict with the law complete high school credits and receive valuable life skills training. The focus is on helping youth make a positive transition back into the community.

William E. Hay Centre – A 40-bed residence for male youth aged 12 to 17 in pre-trial detention or post-trial secure custody.

Livius Sherwood Detention and Custody Centre – An 8-bed residence for male youth aged 12 to 17 in pre-trial detention or post-trial open custody.

One-on-One Anger Management Program – Provides four one-on-one sessions to address the links between anger and action and teach healthy ways to express anger. By referral only.

Youth Mental Health Court Worker – This program redirects youth with mental health issues who are in conflict with the law towards the programs and services they and their families need. By referral only.

Community Reintegration Program – This voluntary program helps youth in custody to create healthier relationships and build a better future. It can include individual, couple and family counselling and access to housing, health and employment services offered by YSB. By referral only.

Northern Region: John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District

Programs

Direct Accountability Program – An alternative to prosecution for adults 18 years and older who have been charged with minor criminal offences. The program involves accused persons being held accountable through relevant and meaningful community based sanctions. Eligibility for the program is determined by the Crown Attorney's office. Sanctions are determined by a Community Justice Worker. Sanctions available through the Direct Accountability Program include restitution, a letter of apology, volunteer work, charitable donation and programming. Program options are delivered at the John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District and are facilitated by the Direct Accountability Program Coordinator. Programs include a Stop Shop Theft Program, Anger Management and Alcohol and Drug Awareness. Through successful completion of the sanctions imposed, individuals are held accountable for their behaviour and charges are withdrawn by the courts. Participation in the program is voluntary. Individuals who do not successfully complete the program will proceed through the formal court process. Direct Accountability is funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Bail Verification and Supervision Program – It serves men and women accused of criminal offences and who are not deemed to be a threat to the community that qualify for bail, but do not have the finances or social ties to meet bail conditions. The Bail Program serves two principles upon which our democratic Justice system is based: the presumption of innocence before conviction and the fair equitable treatment of all people regardless of social and economic background. The program aims to reduce the high numbers of people remanded into correctional facilities while awaiting trial. The services are delivered in partnership with local social service providers to address the non-criminal issues facing the accused such as addiction, mental and physical health, homelessness and unemployment. The Bail Verification and Supervision Program is funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Community Service Order Program – A community based sentencing alternative that allows individuals to make a positive contribution to the community by performing volunteer community work. The CSO program works with clients on an individual basis and matches the client with a placement that best suits the needs of the individual and the agency. The program monitors and oversees the supervision of the offender's community service work through to the completion of the order. Communication with probation and parole officers is maintained in order to ensure that each client receives seamless support and access to information and resources while completing their community service order. To individuals, the program allows them opportunity to become involved with others and develop their self-confidence and obtain a new awareness of their abilities and interests. This program is funded by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Community Maintenance Program – It is a 12-week intensive program for Federal Parolees living in Thunder Bay. This program, created and funded by Correctional Service Canada, targets the risk factors that led individuals to repeatedly committing offenses and challenges criminal thinking that is involved in choices to commit crime. This program assists Federal Parolees in exploring their offense cycle while providing information and opportunity to build positive skills to avoid further involvement in criminal behaviour. Sessions are facilitated by a JHS staff member and are offered on-site in our programming area.

Remote Aboriginal Intervention Program – It works in partnership with First Nation Communities to assist Aboriginal youth in conflict with the law and their families. Funding is provided by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The program is currently being delivered in Eabemetoong First Nation, Weagamow Lake First Nation and Webequie First Nation. Each community has a Remote Intervention Support Worker that works closely with youth to support them through their completion of court ordered sanctions. The Support Workers facilitate culturally appropriate programming and activities that engage youth in addition to promoting positive responses to the challenges faced by the youth in the community.

On-Track Program – Formally known as the School Based Diversion Pilot Project, it is offered at the Gerraldton Composite High School and funded by the Ministry of Children & Youth Services. This program aims to resolve in-school conflicts and issues experienced by students in order to avoid suspension from school, involvement by police, while supporting students experiencing mental health issues. The program encourages youth to take accountability for their behaviour through peer mediation, support services, and provides linkages with needed community services. This program offers support for mental health issues, addiction concerns, and promotes proactive alternatives to suspension to broaden problem solving/conflict resolution skills. Youth attending the high school are trained as Peer Mediators and assist in developing resolution to whatever problem has arisen. The coordinator of this program helps students develop their skills as mediators, as well partners with the greater community to ensure youth get the support that is needed.

Client Services

Community Integration Services – JHS' Community Integration Services are an evolution of two previous programs, Re-Integration & Residential Services and the 'My Own Place' Program. Community Integration Services includes Re-Integration Services, Homeless Outreach and Community Housing Services.

Re-Integration Services (CIS) – Works with both men and women leaving correctional centres and assists them by helping with getting re-established in the community. After individuals have finished their incarceration (sentence), many are in need of support to help meet their basic needs. Through Community Integration Services individuals receive re-integration services and are connected to vital services such as social

assistance, food programs, and clothing assistance. JHS not only provides these services on-site but also refers out to community agencies as well. Additionally to basic needs being met, the Community Integration Services staff work with people to help them develop the skills needed to avoid becoming in conflict with the law any further and develop a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Programming such as Life Skills, Anger Management and Substance Use are offered; these programs teach individuals the necessary skills to cope better as well as targets behaviours which brought them into contact with the law in the first place. These services are funded through the United Way of Thunder Bay.

Homeless Outreach Services (CIS) – A vital component of Community Integration Services includes working with individuals who are at risk or experiencing homelessness. Homeless Outreach Services provide support services to members of the community trying to find and maintain housing in Thunder Bay. The services offered include: client advocacy – ensuring that tenant's rights are upheld; partnering with landlords to inform them of their rights and the rights of their tenants as well as providing mediation between both parties to prevent unnecessary evictions; brief services such as assistance with navigating the different systems of service like the health care and educational systems; support with attaining government identification which is crucial to accessing housing and other much needed services; and Life Skills Workshops which focus on employment readiness – resume building, interview skills, and searching for potential employment opportunities.

Residential Services – Individuals that are coming out of a correctional centre, at risk of homelessness, or going through the court process are offered a room in a safe location – the JHS residence. Each resident has their own room that includes a bed, dresser, fridge and bathroom. The JHS residence is considered to be a supportive-transitional housing model that not only provides individuals with much needed shelter but also helps them build skills needed for successful independent living in the community. Residential Services include a daily breakfast program, weekly food packs (comprised of non-perishable food items donated from the RFDA), and laundry services. Residents are expected to follow rules of residency that outlines behaviour that is appropriate within the residence. Residents are expected to maintain the upkeep of their rooms and participate in monthly resident meetings. The JHS residence offers 46 rooms a month to men and women that would otherwise be homeless in the community of Thunder Bay. This service is funded through rental collection and Correctional Service Canada.

Native Inmate Liaison Services – Native Inmate Liaison Services provide direct support to inmates at the Thunder Bay District Jail and the Thunder Bay Correctional Centre. Cultural and spiritual services are provided on site to promote healing and wellness. Connections to cultural and spiritual services in the community are also made for individuals as they leave both Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services institutions.

Turning Full Circle Program – The Turning Full Circle program has been developed by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services to address the unique needs of Aboriginal men in conflict with the law. The John Howard Society of Thunder Bay & District provides program facilitation on-site at the Thunder Bay Correctional Centre.

Western Region: John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area

Youth Programs

Aggression Management Program (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services) – This is a cognitive skills based program for youth 12-17 years who have interpersonal problems as a result of their aggressive behaviour. The program consists of eight ninety-minute sessions designed to help youth identify their personal aggression patterns, explore alternatives and develop a plan of action to improve how the young person responds to stressful situations. The program is divided into the five components of Anger, Communication, Triggers, Choice Points and Problem Solving. Note: This program is open to internal referrals only through the Extrajudicial Measures and Sanctions programs.

Choices: Cognitive Skills For Youth At Risk (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services) – This is an interactive eight-session program designed for both males and females 12-17 years of age. Choices is offered on a weekly basis, both on and off site, and each session is ninety minutes long. The goal of the program is to provide youth with practical skills that will assist them in making better choices at home, school and with their peers. This program is open to community referrals.

Crime Prevention Program (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services) – This is a short term intervention designed to create greater awareness in participants of the costs of criminal behaviour to their community, as well as, their responsibility to change their own actions to create positive change. The program teaches the young person how to constructively respond to problem situations through the use of various exercises focusing on self-control, conflict, responsibility, stealing, the law, decision making and leisure time. This program serves youth between the ages of 12 to 17 years. Note: This program is open to internal referrals only through the Extrajudicial Measures and Sanctions programs.

Extrajudicial Measures Program (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services) – In partnership with Hamilton Police Services, youth are diverted from the formal youth justice process while holding them accountable for their actions in a community context. The program works with each young person to design a program of measures that addresses their risks and needs as well as the needs of the person(s) harmed and the community. The outcome of each case is reported back to Hamilton Police Services. This program serves youth 12 to 17 years of age.

Extrajudicial Sanctions Program (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services) – In partnership with the Hamilton Crown Attorney's Office and Hamilton Youth Probation Services, this program assists youth through a diversion program as an alternative to the formal court process. The youth is contacted and provided with sanctions (tasks) to complete as a means of holding them accountable for their actions while helping them recognize the impact of their behaviour on the person(s) harmed and

their community. The youth's strengths and needs are targeted to create an individual program with the intention of benefits to both the youth and their community.

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board Cognitive Programming Initiative

(Service Contract with the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board) – A youth worker from the John Howard Society is assigned to the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board to provide the following functions in the Suspension/ Expulsion program.

- Support the work of staff and management, including teachers, teaching assistants, social workers, and in charge principal.
- Liaise and collaborate with other community agencies regarding the delivery of cognitive behavioural programs.
- Provide cognitive skill development facilitation and individual work.
- Provide direct behavioural interventions as required.
- Provide nine hours of direct service hours a week in the classroom

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board Youth Worker Contract for the Grade 12 and 12+ Initiative and the Urban Priorities Initiative

(Service Contract with the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board) – The John Howard Society Hamilton Burlington & Area provides Youth Worker contracted services to these initiatives to support students who are at risk of not completing grade 12 or who have returned to school to complete grade 12. The services support training and facilitation of Restorative Justice to further explore goal development, social and emotional skills and cognitive skill development with the aim of providing support for these students to reach success and graduate Grade 12.

Hamilton Youth Drug Diversion Program (HYDDP) (Supported by a donation from the Newalta Corporation) – This program was initiated by Hamilton Police Services to address the needs of school aged youth 12 to 17 years of age who are arrested for drug offences. Rather than send youth to court for their drug related misdemeanours, the police wanted an alternative that would assess the youth's individual needs, but still hold them accountable for their actions. Youth are referred to the program by a police officer. They are instructed to contact the John Howard Society to arrange a meeting with a youth worker. The youth is scheduled for a screening with a counsellor from Alternatives for Youth and the John Howard Society to determine the youth's substance use level, their motivation to change and any other significant strengths and risks of the youth. The results of these assessments determine the most appropriate intervention, or combination of interventions for the young person. There are three options: 1. Education Day: suitable for a youth who is a casual drug user. 2. Five Session Group: suitable for a youth who is a moderate drug user. 3. Individual Counselling: suitable for a youth who may be struggling with addiction. Every youth and a parent/support person is required to attend the Education Day as a part of their program of measures/sanctions. The HYDDP is a collaborative, comprised of the following agencies: Hamilton Police Services, The John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area, Alternatives for Youth, Good Shepherd Youth Services, and City of Hamilton, Culture and Recreation

Services. Note: This program is open to internal referrals only through the Extrajudicial Measures and Sanctions programs.

Neighbourhood Clean Team Program – This program is run in partnership with The City of Hamilton, Public Works Department and the Hamilton Police Service, Crime Prevention Unit. The program was established as a community service alternative for youth to participate in graffiti removal, litter clean-up and other community beautification activities with the goal of engaging youth in restoring the community by repairing harm done, as well as serve as a meaningful way for youth to take responsibility for graffiti and mischief related offences. This program is open to internal referrals only through the Extrajudicial Measures, Extrajudicial Sanctions, and NRAC program.

Non-Residential Attendance Centre (NRAC) (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services) – The JHS of Hamilton Burlington & Area provides a highly structured intensive community based alternative to custody for youth (ages 12-17) who have come in contact with the law. Youth engage in effective cognitive programming based on prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration. The program provides individualized support for youth to assist them in achieving their program goals, motivate and facilitate change and supports them in becoming positive members of the Hamilton Community.

Project Towards No Drug Abuse (TND) (Funded by Public Safety Canada-Crime Prevention Action Fund – CPAF) – This is an effective, interactive classroom-based substance use prevention program that is based on more than two decades of successful research at the University of Southern California. The program targets youth, ages 14 to 19 focusing on three factors that predict tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use, violence-related behaviours, and other problem behaviours among youth, including: motivation factors, skills and decision making. At the completion of this program, youth will be able to:

- Stop or reduce the use of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana and hard drugs.
- Stop or reduce weapon carrying.
- State accurate information about the consequences of drug use and abuse, including environmental, social, physiological and emotional consequences.
- Demonstrate behavioural and cognitive coping skills.
- Make a personal commitment regarding drug use.

Restorative Justice Project (Collaborative Partnership Initiative, Social Enterprise) – The project is a collaborative partnership between the John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area, Hamilton Police Services, Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board and the City of Hamilton. The project was funded by the Trillium Foundation and now the initiative is sustained through the collaborative. This project is an innovative and creative restorative justice program targeted to youth who are at risk of being expelled from school. The restorative justice approach focuses on the restoration of relationships, being accountable for behaviour and identifying community support and involvement.

This project trains representatives from the partnering agencies to become “train the trainers” in the restorative justice model.

Report Homophobic Violence Period, Safer and Vital Communities Grant (This project has been made possible by a grant from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services) – The Hamilton RHVP (Report Homophobic Violence, Period) targets sexual orientation motivated hate crime and incidents in the Hamilton community. The project will educate and create an awareness of the effects of homophobia and transphobia and will provide education to address, challenge and stop behaviour which could lead to the commission of a hate crime.

Youth Justice Committee (Funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General) – This Committee involves trained community volunteers who meet with victims, young people 12 to 17 years of age accused of minor, non-violent offences, and their parents, to negotiate an appropriate way for the young person to make amends for his or her actions. The Committee may develop and implement alternatives to formal court proceedings, either on referral by police or the Crown. Examples of alternate interventions include community service, restitution and counselling programs. All young people must agree to accept responsibility for their actions, and to apologize to the victim.

Community Support Programs

CAPS (Collaborative Assistance Program Supports) (Funded by the Hamilton Community Foundation) – This program is offered on-site within the McQuesten hub to provide direct support to residents within their own communities. CAPS service provision is comprised of pre-employment and employability supports for McQuesten residents including individual and group programming designed to assist residents to attain and maintain a connection to the labour market, address and reduce barriers to employment through skill development. These supports are available to any interested resident of the community. CAPS also includes an employer support component to encourage and support local employers to encourage and support them to hire McQuesten residents.

Crisis Intervention & Reintegration Services (Funded by the United Way of Burlington & Greater Hamilton) – This program provides short and long term crisis intervention to any member of the community having issues related to the Criminal Justice System or the Youth Justice System. Reintegration services are provided to individuals released from Federal or Provincial correctional centres who receive ongoing support and counselling relating to their identified needs. Crisis Intervention & Reintegration Services can be accessed by an individual who has completed a sanction but who needs or wishes further information regarding community programs or resources.

Family Support Program (Funded by the United Way of Burlington & Greater Hamilton) – This program is designed to provide support, information, early intervention

and referral to other services for parents with youth ages 12 to 17 who are experiencing parenting challenges or parent/child conflicts. Service is strength based, family centered and offered in individual or group formats. The goal is to assist families to find positive solutions to conflicts and concerns by identifying and using family strengths, creating greater understanding between parents and youth and providing a skills building process for parents of youth. Although the topics of the group sessions are participant directed some of the sessions available include: providing effective boundaries, communication strategies, problem solving, negotiation, and conflict resolution. The program is delivered on site and off site throughout Hamilton, Burlington and Area and is open to community referrals.

Transportation Program (Funded by the United Way of Burlington & Greater Hamilton and the John Howard Society of Ontario) – This program offers low cost transportation for visitors to Federal and Provincial institutions. Operated primarily by volunteers, the program allows for direct family contact, which would not ordinarily be possible for families due to financial difficulties.

Employment Programs

State Street Foundation Employment Supports (Funded by the State Street Foundation) – Pre-employment, life skill and employability programming to adults who have previous contact with, or are at risk of contact with the criminal justice system through individual and small group format. Through intake and needs determination assessment, each individual works collaboratively with staff to identify their barriers and develop an action plan to address each barrier. Pre-employment and life skill programming focuses on topics including communication and assertiveness, conflict resolution and problem solving, goal setting and decision making, anger and stress management as well as providing supports around income stability, food security, housing, clothing, addictions, mental health and legal assistance. Employability skills programming focuses on topics including resume and cover letter preparation, interview skills, searching the hidden job market, job search strategies, employer expectations, job readiness and employment maintenance success strategies.

The JHS resource area is staffed by an Employment Counsellor and is open two days per week to offer clients assistance with job search, employment and training related supports. The JHS resource area offers clients a range of services, specific to the goals and needs of each individual.

Services of the JHS resource area include:

- Employment counselling
- Career decision making assessments
- Resume and cover letter development
- Interview preparation
- Job search support

- Assistance with education and training options
- Referrals to community based employment and training support services

Resources include:

- Computers with high speed Internet access
- Access to fax, photocopier, printer and telephones
- Print and electronic resource information (business directories, newspapers, labour market information)
- Information on education, training and apprenticeship opportunities
- Information on community support services related to employment, education, training, housing, food stability, income support, legal supports, pardons and counselling
- Brochures on all JHS Hamilton programs and services