

Research Driven, Community Based
Juvenile Gang and Violence Reduction Programs

Policy Discussion White Paper

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Executive Summary

"The chief problem in any community cursed with crime is not the punishment of the criminals but the preventing of the young from being trained to crime."

W.E.B. Dubois,
The Souls of Black Folk, 1903

Oklahoma's gang problem has seeped from its traditional haunts in urban, high-crime areas to suburban and rural sections of the state, placing ever-growing demands on a juvenile justice system already stretched to its breaking point by inadequate funding and increasingly violent gang behavior.

Gangs certainly are nothing new to Oklahoma's big cities, but a recent drop in the total number of youth referred to the juvenile justice system might indicate that the problem is gradually fading into the Oklahoma sunset. Nothing could be further from the truth. Youngsters who show up in our delinquency courts today, many of them following their siblings and other family members into a seemingly endless cycle of crime and violence, are plagued by intense and complicated behavioral and emotional problems that at one time were rare but are now all too common. Their plight, and that of our juvenile justice system, is exacerbated by drug and alcohol abuse and lack of family support. Additionally, research has shown that here in Oklahoma, youth that have received services through the Office of Juvenile Affairs, that are also **gang involved are 4 times more likely to enter the Department of Corrections than non-gang involved youth that have received services through OJA**. We have reached a crisis.

Oklahoma's situation is unusual and especially dangerous because our juvenile justice system is being strained **both** in rural and urban areas. If we fail to address this critically important issue inside and outside our metropolitan areas, we will continue to lose our children to crime and violence. Our gang problems stretch across the political landscape and touch every corner of the state. All legislators and their constituents, regardless of their political affiliation or geographical location, should agree that solving this problem must be a priority.

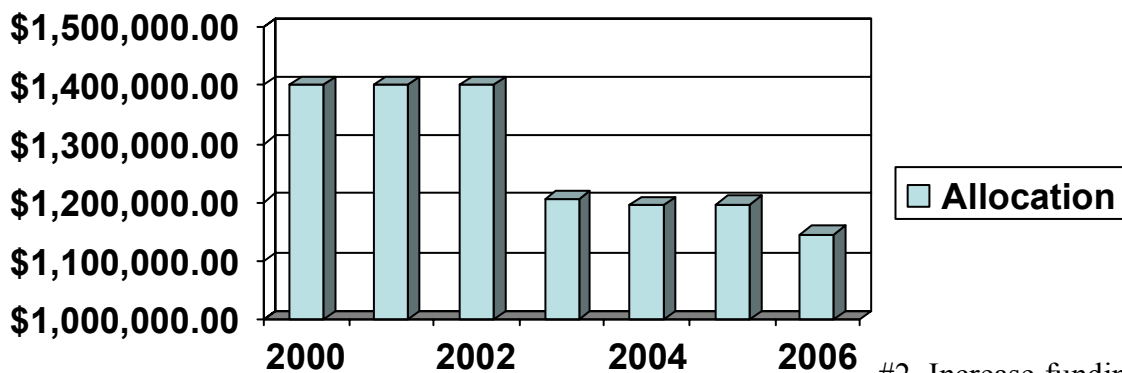
The good news is that there are solutions to our gang problems. Structures, methods and clinical approaches have been proven successful in treating juvenile offenders, and this knowledge base has created a platform for successful intervention. The purpose of this paper is to describe what we can do to solve our gang problem, promote a rationale for the political necessity to support these recommendations and provide a plan of action. Finally, this paper will present a formal request for legislative appropriations designed to solve these problems and promote a healthier Oklahoma, whether rural or urban, regardless of cultural differences, using research-based programs and interventions.

Legislative Priorities for 2007 Oklahoma Legislature

#1. Increase the Gang Intervention Program appropriations to expand existing Gang Intervention Programs based on the nationally-recognized Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention model for gang intervention. This request involves increased funding for **both urban and rural areas**, including increased funding for current gang intervention programs. The request should include a minimum of \$2.5 million which represents the FY 2000 funding plus \$1.1 million to adjust for program expansion and inflation

Utilizing data from an Office of Juvenile Affairs study of youth served by OJA from 1999 and 2005. During that time, OJA served 47,467 juveniles and 4,265 (9.0%) were later sentenced to the Department of Corrections as adults. Between 1999 and 2005, OJA served 1,156 juveniles identified as gang members and 427 (36.9%) were later sentenced to DOC as adults. This difference of sentencing to the Department of Corrections (**36.9% versus 9%**) for the overall population as opposed to gang involved youth is a stark glimpse into the risk levels of gang involved youth and their continued cost to society. To state this in a different manner, **only 1 out of every 41 youth served by OJA were identified as gang involved, but gang involved youth represented 1 out of every 10 youth** sentenced to the Department of Corrections. Finally, nearly 4 out of every 10 gang involved youth were later sentenced to the Department of Corrections.

The legislative allocation for gang intervention programs has been reduced from its high point in FY 2000 of \$1.4 million to the current funding of \$1.196 million, as shown in the following chart:



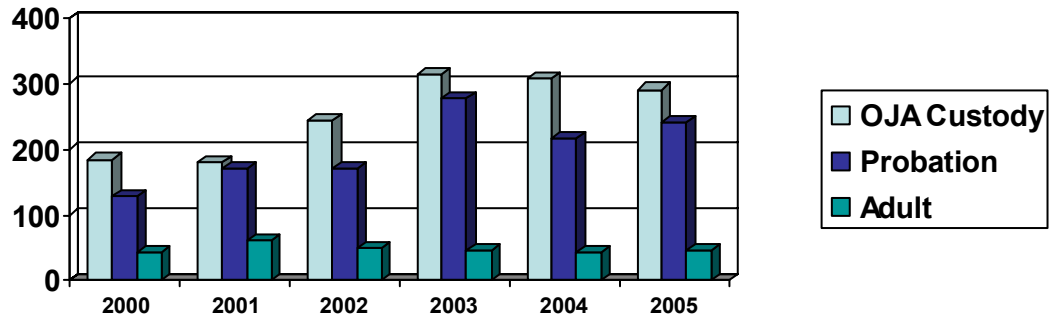
#2. Increase funding for programs like the ETI Youth and Family Support Program designed to reduce juvenile delinquency **in** the targeted client as well as **in** other siblings and family members. The number one recruit for a gang is the brother or sister of an existing gang member. Additionally, the program is designed to improve the family situation of youth in the custody of the Office of Juvenile Affairs and the probation departments in an effort to reduce delinquency.

ETI's program provides mental health treatment services and juvenile delinquency intervention services for juveniles in the custody of the Office of Juvenile Affairs, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, families of those youth, and youth who are at-risk for violence and gang involvement across the state.

Our vision, which calls for mentally healthy, crime-free children and responsible families living in safe, caring and inclusive communities, is supported by the following considerations:

- Oklahoma's children are our foundation for the future; therefore, they must be primary beneficiaries of Oklahoma's resources.
- The family is central to the provision of care for their children.
- Individuals, families, communities and governments share responsibility and accountability for achieving the optimal development and growth of our children.
- The depth and duration of juvenile delinquency can be reduced through prevention, early identification and intervention, thereby reducing personal costs and costs to society.
- Children who are involved in or are at-risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system and their families should have access to timely, effective and culturally appropriate treatment and support.

#3. Develop and support a targeted community-based intensive after-care program for violent and gang-involved youth when they leave the Office of Juvenile Affairs and youth involved in probation services. As the following chart shows, more than 2,315 young people have been placed in OJA custody or on formal probation for violent offenses since 2000.



The traditional youth services have developed extensive prevention services but are not equipped to serve this ever-growing population. These violent youth are returning to our communities and need specialized services from agencies that have developed a track record of working with this population.

Introduction and General Overview

Youth street gangs have been a growing problem in Oklahoma for more than 20 years, but we are witnessing an ever-increasing level of violence spreading from Northeast Oklahoma City, South Oklahoma City and the Mid-Del areas into other parts of the Oklahoma City area, highlighted by the recent violence in Bricktown and at the State Fair. We have also seen a huge jump in gang activity in the Tulsa area, specifically in North Tulsa. Across the state, gangs have exploded into mid-sized cities such as Shawnee, Lawton, Muskogee, McAlester, Claremore, Sapulpa and Woodward. Even smaller communities have seen an influx of gangs that have strained their juvenile justice systems.

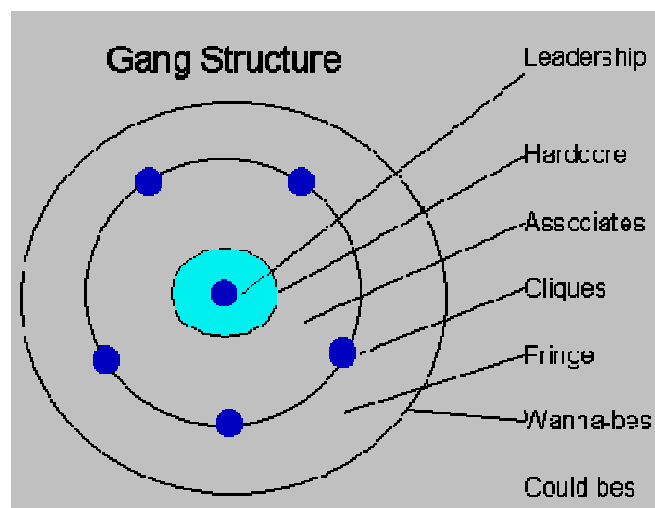
The process of youth searching for a sense of closeness and connectedness to their peers is not new or exclusive to the widely spreading numbers of youth gangs across our state. Unfortunately, delinquent and downright criminal activity in the name of their “set” has developed into a problem that must be addressed by our entire community. Youth who use poverty, poor education and social inequality as the justification for engaging in unlawful acts are sorely mistaken. These social issues impact thousands of young people across our state and nation, but the vast majority of them are not involved in gang activity. This paper sets out to answer several basic questions related to gang involvement:

- What is a youth street gang?
- Why do certain youth participate in gang activity?
- How have youth gangs grown?
- Do gang-involved youth have mental health issues?

- How do we identify those youth at the highest risk of gang involvement?
- In Oklahoma, who is serving these types of youth and their families?
- Do these youth need to be specifically targeted for gang-specific services?
- What can be done to improve these services across the entire state of Oklahoma?

What is a youth street gang?

The proliferation of youth gangs since 1980 has fueled public concern about them. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention defines a youth gang as a group of individuals involved in a pattern of criminal acts. These groups are typically comprised only of juveniles but may include young adults. Many types of youth participate at some level in gang activity. Each gang at its core has its leadership structure, which usually includes adults. Surrounding the leadership core are hard-core members, associates, cliques, fringe members and wanna-bes. The most outlying group involve youth categorized as “could-bes.”



The leaders of a gang determine at what level of criminal activity the gang will function. Characteristics of the leader(s) are reflected in the day- to-day activities of the gang. The leader is all-powerful. The hard-core gang members are usually the older members, the individuals who are culturally and criminally enmeshed in the gang and are at-risk of being so for life. Most violent gang activity emanates from the hard-core gang members, who usually make up about 10 percent of gang membership.

The associate gang member has usually made a personal commitment to the gang culture and is dedicated to achieving the level of recognition needed to attain hard-core status.

The fringe gang member is still able to function outside of the gang structure and has not made a commitment to a life in the criminal gang culture. This type of member drifts in and out of the gang and seems to lack direction.

Wanna-bes are not actually gang members. They are youth who view the gang as an exciting place to be, a place where they could become "somebody." Wanna-bes may emulate gang dress, graffiti, hand signs and other gang cultural symbols, and they may associate with known gang members, but they have not yet been accepted into the gang.

The gang is seldom at full strength. Exceptions, of course, would be times of conflict or possibly at social functions. What is most often seen as "the gang" is usually a clique from within the larger gang. The clique is a group of associate, fringe and, often, wanna-be gang members who gravitate around one or more of the hard-core gang members. This somewhat resembles a gang within a gang.

What is it that prompts certain youth to participate in gang activity?

Though a variety of theories have been advanced to explain the origins and dynamics of adolescent gangs, no single theory adequately explains what brings members to the gang and keeps them connected. It is quite possible that the images adolescents have of gangs and gang lifestyles are radically different from those held by adult outsiders, especially researchers. Just as there are multiple theories intended to explain the purpose and dynamics of adolescent gangs, there are many attempts to answer the questions of why adolescents are motivated to join gangs and how they achieve membership.

Goldstein (1993) notes that even the definitions of gangs have varied with time and place, in response to political and economic conditions as expressed by police and private citizen concerns. Because of the absence of a consistent definition, the literature has been plagued with the mixing and matching of incongruent concepts. The most common pattern has been to equate adolescent gangs with violence, juvenile delinquency and antisocial behavior. Although these features are often a part of the gang scene, it would be overly simplistic to claim that they explain the totality of gang life.

The preoccupation with the disruptive and violent aspects of gangs seems to be related to the fact that these are the features of gang life most often reported by the media and most likely to provoke public concern and even outrage. Other dimensions to gang life have escaped media and scholarly exploration, including, for example, the blind allegiance that many members develop toward the gang, even in the face of personal danger and the risk of death – allegiance that could potentially compromise the rest of their lives. Likewise, young people who spend their adolescence within the constricted confines of a

gang may limit their opportunities for the exploratory behavior psychologically appropriate for adolescence. They instead find themselves in a state of foreclosure from which they may spend the rest of their lives attempting to escape. Unfortunately, many never succeed. Confusion among scholars concerning what to study and how to approach it has contributed to a limited understanding of gangs and their roles in the lives of some adolescents.

Most of the early research on adolescent gangs was sociological, focused primarily on describing the conditions that gave rise to gangs and highlighting social and economic conditions as the major causes. Goldstein (1993) provides a detailed overview of the early theories of adolescent gangs (concerned mostly with the aggression and violence dimensions of gang life). In the area of criminal justice, there has been a comparable development of interest in adolescent gangs, with an expected emphasis on crime.

Since the 1960s, researchers have been very active in describing the law enforcement efforts waged to contain the illegal behaviors of gangs, most notably drugs sales and homicide. Major contributors to this research are Huff (1990) and Spergel (1967). These authors offer valuable insights into the severity of the problem of violence and antisocial behavior among young people, gang members in particular, but they provide little insight into the psychological evolution or dynamics of gang-affiliated youths.

Jankowski (1991), a sociologist, claims that there has been no comprehensive theory of adolescent gangs. He attributes this to a historic pattern of equating gangs with delinquency and violence. He offers another interpretation, suggesting that gangs are social organizations that can be described as meeting economic needs of individuals and communities. Technically, this might be characterized as economic-gain theory. Jankowski

also points out that researchers should take care to distinguish between gangs acting collectively and gang members acting on their own behest.

Balk (1995) groups theories explaining youth gangs into three categories: strain theory, cultural deviance theory and dysfunctional family theory. Strain theory suggests that youths in an impoverished underclass strive to solve the problem of their economic oppression. "Finding no doors opening on the world of economic advancement, the youth strain to overcome obstacles preventing attainment of their economic aspirations" (p. 479). The gang provides an opportunity for youths to move out of the state of economic disenfranchisement. Once youths join a gang, they exhibit little or no regard for the legality of the gang's revenue-producing activities. Selling drugs and other commodities, stealing cars and prostitution are activities often pursued by gangs. Evidence of this theoretical orientation is found in Jankowski (1991) and Knox (1991).

Cultural deviance theory attributes participation in adolescent gangs to an environment that encourages cultural defiance and antisocial behavior, traits that are validated and find expression within the gang. Proponents of this viewpoint often subscribe to the position that many gang members are conduct-disordered or highly marginalized in their larger communities. These theorists contend that it is only within the context of the gang that its members are able to function with few or no reprisals for their behavior.

According to the dysfunctional family theory (Bing, 1991; Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1958), the negative impact of psychologically impoverished families drives youngsters to join gangs. Knox (1991) notes that many gang members claim that the gang is "like a family." A similar observation is also made by Jankowski (1991). Inherent in this theoretical notion is the idea that gang members are seeking relief from less-than-satisfying

relationships in their family of origin by joining the gang, irrespective of what the gang may require of them to remain in good standing.

An unnamed theory of adolescent gangs is one of psychological affiliation. According to this theory, many adolescents who join gangs do so in a quest to have their needs for affiliation and social validation met, even if it means running afoul of the law and placing themselves in great danger. A sprinkling of evidence supports this position in the writings of gang researchers who note that many gang members report that they join in an attempt to find a sense of belonging and purpose (Branch, 1995; Campbell, 1984; Goldstein, 1993; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Jankowski, 1991; Knox, 1991). The participation in antisocial activities may be secondary to the fulfillment of a more basic need, that of finding psychological validation. This dynamic holds true even for flagrantly conduct-disordered individuals with limited capacity for connectedness to others. In their case, the gang serves as a forum for fleeting, perhaps shallow, short-term relationships.

How have youth gangs grown?

As stated in the 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment, from the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations, "Once found principally in large cities, violent street gangs now affect public safety, community image and quality of life in communities of all sizes in urban, suburban and rural areas. No region of the United States or of the state of Oklahoma is untouched by gangs. Gangs affect society at all levels, causing heightened fears for safety, violence and economic costs."

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention developed a comprehensive analysis of gang growth in its 2001 report, "*The Growth of Youth Gang Problems in the United States: 1970-98.*" This seminal report on gang growth across the

United States lists the number of gang counties in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia during three periods—the 1970s, the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. New gang problems were reported for 73 counties in the 1970s, 174 in the 1980s and 459 between 1990 and 1995. By 1995, 706 counties had reported gang problems in one or more cities, towns or villages within their limits. This number represents about one-quarter of all U.S. counties, with a population accounting for more than three-quarters of the national population. The report also provided a map of gang counties by state that divided the lower 48 states into six categories according to the number of gang counties in each state. Based on these categories, the four states in the highest category (more than 25 gang counties) are all located in the West or Midwest and form a rough triangle, with California at the left or west, Illinois at the right or east, and Texas and Oklahoma at the bottom or south. The top three states in both rankings are California, Illinois and Texas, but in the city rankings, California leads the nation, while Texas ranks first in the number of gang counties. Of the remaining seven states, three (Florida, Ohio, and **Oklahoma**) appear in both lists and eight in only one list (New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan and Washington are only in the city list; Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama and Indiana are only in the county list).

Finally, epidemiology studies – nationally and in Oklahoma – show that from 2000 to 2005, juvenile arrests declined. In Oklahoma, the total numbers of juveniles referred to the Juvenile justice system showed a 14 percent drop from 19,314 to 16,785, but the percentage of youth that actually entered the system has increased during that same time frame, from 65 percent to 71 percent. Additionally, the number of juveniles adjudicated as Youthful Offenders has recently increased, the number of juveniles adjudicated as Delinquent has recently increased and the number of juveniles adjudicated Delinquent for

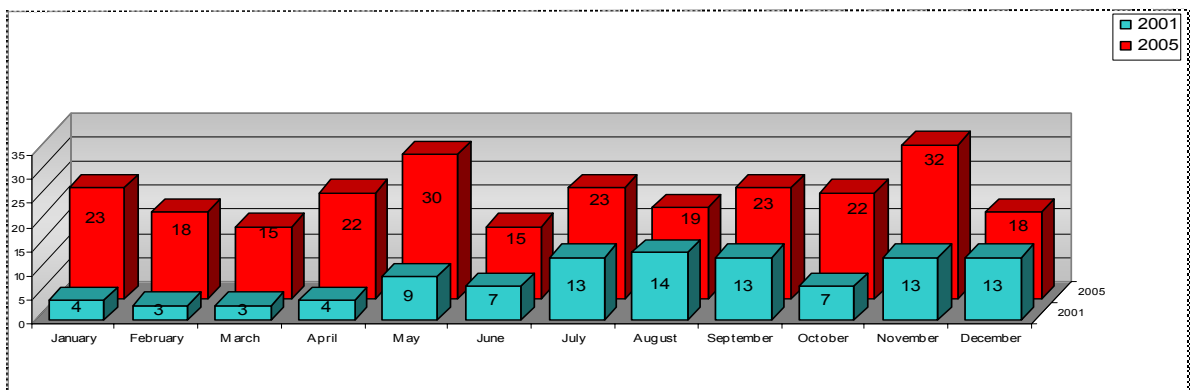
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Juvenile Gang and Violence Reduction Programs

violent offenses has also recently increased. Results from the 2000 National Youth Gang Survey indicate that the characteristics of gang-related violent crime varied according to jurisdictional size. More than half of the larger areas reported that the majority of their gang-related violent crime was committed against members of other gangs, whereas more than half of the smaller areas reported that the majority of their gang-related violent crime was committed against individuals not involved in gangs. More than half of all agencies reported that individual members acting alone or with a few other gang members committed the majority of the gang-related violent crime, and gang members returning from prison were reported to have affected local gang problems in a large number of areas.

Gangs and Oklahoma

In Oklahoma City, gang activity has seen a distinct spike in recent years. There has been no widely accepted scientific analysis of gang activity in our state, but individual jurisdictions have provided data that supports our contention that not only are gangs growing and becoming more active in Oklahoma but are also becoming more organized and more violent. As the following chart shows, drive-by shootings, a specific gang related crime, has jumped from 2001 to 2005.



These differences are indicative of the greater use of violence as a tactic designed to acquire, control and maintain neighborhoods and specific territory. Unfortunately, 2005 was not an anomaly. Through October 2006, Oklahoma City has seen 205 drive-by shootings, which is just behind the 2005 pace.

	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001
January	22	23	9	7	12	4
February	18	18	10	6	13	3
March	25	15	16	12	8	3
April	23	22	12	9	24	4
May	24	30	13	13	8	9
June	12	15	13	21	7	7
July	25	23	12	15	15	13
August	17	19	25	23	12	14
September	21	23	16	6	6	13
October	18	22	25	7	12	7
November		32	25	4	5	13
December		18	16	6	2	13

A well-known corollary to gang life is that Oklahoma youth gangs are strongly tied to the transport, distribution, sale and use of illegal drugs. Gangs throughout Oklahoma are responsible for many of the major drugs that are available and abused in our state. According to the 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA), 5.1 percent of Oklahoma residents abused an illicit drug at least once in the month prior to the survey. Oklahoma residents aged 18 to 25 represented the largest group of current users, with 12.1 percent reporting use in the past month. According to a survey conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services during the 1999-2000 school

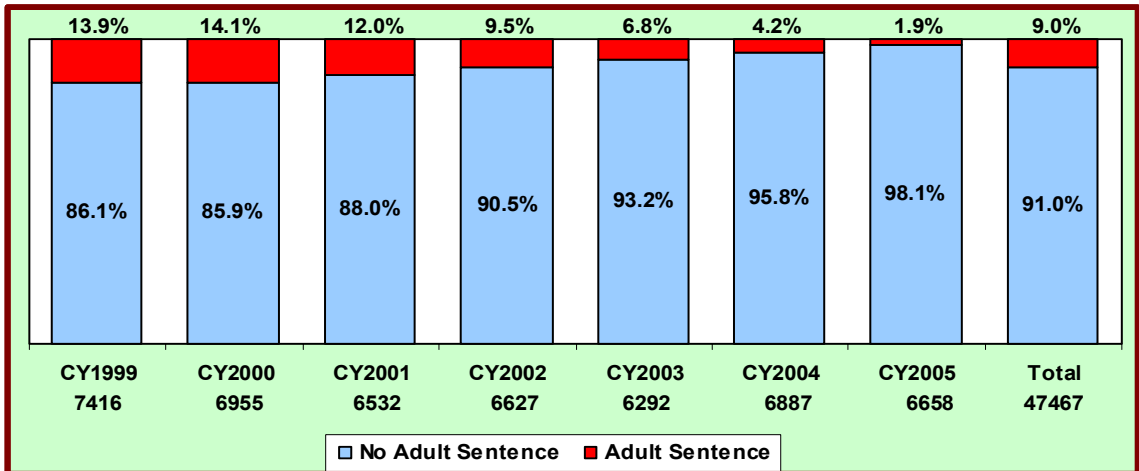
year, drug abuse is a continuing problem among Oklahoma high school students. Of 10,179 students surveyed, 44.7 percent reported using marijuana during their lifetime, 11.5 percent reported using methamphetamine, 9.2 percent reported using cocaine and 2.4 percent reported using heroin. In addition, 12.0 percent of students surveyed reported that they had used inhalants during their lifetime, and 4.7 percent reported steroid use.

Drug-related arrests are high in Oklahoma. In 2000 there were 22,114 arrests for drug-related violations; 9.4 percent were individuals under the age of 18, according to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI). In addition, Oklahoma was one of 10 states identified as having the highest rates of incarceration in the nation from 1985 through 1998. In 1993, only Texas had a higher incarceration rate. Each year from 1994 through 1998, Oklahoma ranked third behind Texas and Louisiana. Reasons for the high rate of incarceration include increases in drug-related offenses, new anti-drug laws with harsher penalties and increased apprehension and adjudication efforts.

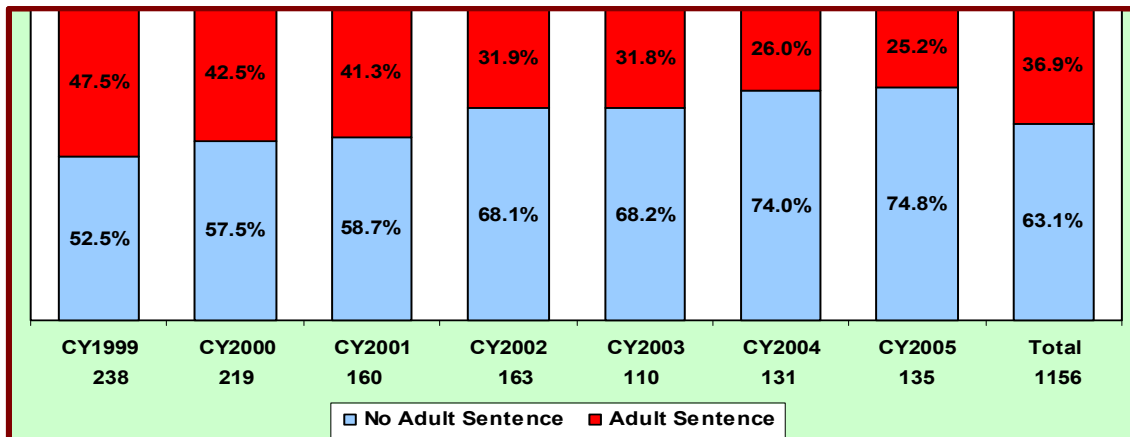
Youth Gangs and their Transition to the Department of Corrections

Senate Joint Resolution 13 (SJA 13) in 1975 directed DHS and the Oklahoma Supreme Court to enter into an agreement known as the Interlocal Cooperation Act (74 O.S. 1971, § 1101, et seq.). The agreement provided for the provision of intake, probation and parole services for district courts. OJA is responsible for providing intake, probation and parole services for every county except those that have juvenile bureaus (Canadian, Comanche, Oklahoma, and Tulsa Counties). In the juvenile bureau counties, intake and probation services are provided by the juvenile bureaus and custody and parole services are provided by OJA.

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This difference of sentencing to the Department of Corrections (**36.9% versus 9%**) for the overall population as opposed to gang involved youth is a stark glimpse into the risk levels of gang involved youth and their continued cost to society. To state this in a

different manner, **only 1 out of every 41 youth served by OJA were identified as gang involved, but gang involved youth represented 1 out of every 10 youth** sentenced to the Department of Corrections. Finally, nearly 4 out of every 10 gang involved youth were later sentenced to the Department of Corrections.

Living in Distressed Neighborhoods/Living in Poverty

According to Kids Count Report on Census 2000 (The Growing Number of Kids in Severely Distressed Neighborhoods: Evidence from the 2000 Census) by William O'Hare and Mark Mather: "The neighborhood in which a child lives determines his or her choice of peers and playmates, the quality of schools and the availability of amenities such as parks, playgrounds and libraries. The neighborhood has a major impact on the role models a child sees on a regular basis. Neighborhood norms can help launch a child toward college and a stable work life or increase the likelihood that he or she will commit a crime or become a teenage parent. This common-sense understanding is also reflected in empirical studies that show the importance of neighborhoods in shaping children's lives."

School Failure, Dropout Rates, and Gang Impact

Oklahoma County has the largest population of school-aged youth and ranks next to last out of all counties in the state (with a 7.2 percent dropout rate). Per the **Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Fact book 2001**, nearly one out of every five students in Oklahoma who starts high school as a freshman does not earn a high school diploma. In the Oklahoma City school district, one out of every 45.6 youth was charged with a criminal offense during the 2001 school year. Of those charged, each averaged 2.1 offenses within the District. Many of the youth are from low-income families and are eligible for free or

reduced lunch (73.1 percent poverty per federal guidelines), have parents that may have dropped out of school (25 percent) and require additional supportive services.

Youth gangs are linked with serious crime problems in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. A report issued by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (Chandler et al., 1998) found that the percentage of students reporting the presence of gangs at school nearly doubled between 1989 and 1995. This report also found a strong correlation between the presence of gangs and both guns and drugs in school. Higher percentages of students reported knowing a student who brought a gun to school when gangs were present at the school (25 percent) than when gangs were not present (8 percent). In addition, gang presence increased the likelihood of seeing a student with a gun at school: 12 percent of the students surveyed reported having seen a student with a gun in school when gangs were present, compared with 3 percent when gangs were not present. Students who reported that drugs (marijuana, cocaine, crack or uppers/downers) were readily available at school were much more likely to report gangs at their school (35 percent) than those who said that no drugs were available (14 percent). The presence of gangs more than doubled the likelihood of violent victimization at school (nearly 8 percent, compared with 3 percent).

Gangs are prevalent in schools. More than one-third (37 percent) of the students surveyed in the 1995 SCS reported gangs in their schools. This number included nearly two-thirds of Hispanic students, almost one-half of black students and one-third of white students. Students in middle to late adolescence who lived in households with incomes of less than \$7,500 and who had been victimized personally were most likely to report gang presence. These students were most likely to attend public schools that they (or their

parents or guardians) had chosen in cities with populations between 100,000 and 1 million. These largely urban schools employed a large number of security measures, had high rates of victimization and were places where drugs were readily available. The most criminally active gangs were reported by 15- to 17-year-old students of either gender.

The students reported that most of the gangs they see at school are actively involved in criminal activities. About two-thirds of the students reported that gangs are involved in none or only one of three types of criminal acts: violence, drug sales or carrying guns. Nevertheless, students said that a small proportion of gangs in schools (8 percent) are involved in all three types of crimes, and these gangs are probably responsible for the most disruption and violent victimization in and around schools. Only three types of crimes—violence, drug sales and carrying guns—were included in this study. Data from the National Youth Gang Surveys (National Youth Gang Center, 1999a and b) and studies of representative urban samples of adolescents (see Thornberry, 1998, for a summary of four major studies) show that youth gangs are actively involved in a wide variety of offenses not analyzed in this section.

Many of the gangs in and around schools that are not actively involved in the criminal activities discussed in this section may not be actively involved in serious crimes. These gangs may be qualitatively different from typical youth gangs that have a large proportion of adult members and are fully committed to a criminal orientation. Thus, it is very important for school officials, working in collaboration with law enforcement and others in the community, to assess the extent of gang involvement in criminal activity so that resources can be directed toward efforts that address the most criminally active and disruptive gangs.

The presence of gangs is correlated with criminal activity and the use of self-protective measures that indicate an atmosphere of perceived danger in the school environment. It is not clear, however, that gangs are a direct cause of criminal victimization at school. Belonging to gangs may be a type of self-protection employed by students in response to threatening school and community environments. In the original report on the SCS, the study team noted that "various types of problems tended to co-exist. For instance, student reports of drug availability, gang presence and gun presence at school were all related to student reports of having experienced violent victimization at school" (Chandler et al., 1998, p. 12). The analyses presented in this Bulletin found a high correlation between student victimization of all types and gang presence. Both gangs and criminal victimization in schools are products of disorder in schools (see Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1985; Welsh, Green, and Jenkins, 1999) and a host of other factors in the school, family, community, peer group and individual domains (Hill et al., 1999; Loeber and Farrington, 1998). This could account for the positive relationship between gang presence and the use of self-protective security measures in schools.

An analysis of gang arrests reported by 22 law enforcement agencies throughout Orange County, CA, showed that violent gang crimes began to escalate early in the school day and peaked early in the afternoon and again long after the school day ended (Wiebe, Meeker and Vila, in press). In contrast, overall juvenile violence has been found to peak immediately after the end of the school day (Sickmund, Snyder, and Poe-Yamagata, 1997). The Orange County data suggest that schools and surrounding communities need to implement gang intervention measures throughout the school day to prevent and reduce gang violence. The school security measures analyzed in this study do not appear to be

solutions in and of themselves to gang problems. Other interventions need to be implemented along with school security measures to combat gangs in schools (see Howell, 2000; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1999, for promising and effective interventions).

It is an unfortunate fact that many school districts are not adequately prepared to respond to serious and unforeseen events, including gang activity. The Oklahoma City Public School District has 76 schools and five alternative centers with just 23 school psychologists to serve nearly 40,000 students. High schools and middle schools are fortunate to have a counselor on site every day of the week. However, most are not trained in the rudimentary aspects of crisis or gang counseling because their days are more likely filled with academic counseling and other less-intrusive aspects of counseling. Elementary schools have a licensed counselor only one or two days of the week, which is nearly a 1,250:1 ratio; and no school has a full-time on-site psychologist.

Local law enforcement is present at all Oklahoma City high and middle schools during regular school hours. However, elementary schools only have access to officers on an emergency basis, and the officers at the secondary schools only have enough funding to stay during the actual hours that school is in session. Lack of funding prohibits the districts from contracting with law enforcement for evening events and other community based events that take place at the schools.

Risk Factors of Minority Youth

There is extensive data that ties a person's ethnic status to either increase positive or negative outcomes in life. Currently, the statistics show that Black youth and Hispanic youth experience the following negatives:

- 21 percent (Black) and 58 percent (Hispanic) – do not have a high school diploma.
- 32.4 percent (Black) and 30.7 percent (Hispanic) – live below the poverty rate.
- 43.4 percent (Black) and 38.8 percent (Hispanic) – children live below the poverty rate.
- 34.7 percent (Black) and 12.6 percent (Hispanic) – live in single mother households on public assistance.

(Source: U. S. Census Bureau, CDC – Health Statistics, and the FBI).

The traditional thought of gang-involved youth being a problem in just the African American and Latino communities is also changing. Law enforcement officers and social workers say the picture is changing regarding Native American youth and involvement with street gangs. Max Benson, guidance counselor at Lloyd Rader Center in Sand Springs, OK, said when he first started working with youth at the juvenile detention center, "maybe three out of all the number of young people we had were Indian." "Now we have Indian kids in every unit," said Benson, a Pawnee tribal member. Police in Tulsa are also alarmed by the apparent increase in gang activity among Indian youth. "Three years ago we didn't know of a Native American gang," said Cpl. Al Wilson of the Tulsa Police. "We had Native Americans in gangs, but now we have more than one gang that is strictly Native American." Wilson said Indian gangs are similar to gangs in Los Angeles and other urban areas where membership falls along racial lines. Gang members often commit

crimes in urban areas and flee to tribal land to hide, which tribal leaders would like to see stopped. (Abstracted from AP 11/21/94, Tulsa, OK "American Indian Youngsters Increasingly Joining Gangs")

Do gang-involved youth have mental health issues?

Research studies have determined that many gang-involved youth live in a constant sense of “trauma” that includes poverty, lack of family structure, lack of appropriate activities, inability to function in the traditional school system and the lure of criminal and gang activity. The following sections provide a brief overview of the risk factors involved with living in a gang community and living in an environment that creates a constant state of “arousal.”

Oklahoma has a large number of youth who are exposed to violence, criminal activity and gang activity on a daily basis. The peer pressure to join in these activities is overwhelming and is quite often physically intimidating. There is a vast history of literature discussing post-traumatic stress disorder in adults, specifically those returning from combat or dealing with large-scale emergencies. Research has also shown that following exposure to a trauma-inducing incident (including gang activity and criminal/delinquent activity) youthful survivors may become frozen in an “activated state of arousal.” Arousal refers to a heightened state of alert or a persistent fear for one's safety. Grief advocates understand how difficult it is for a victim to process information while in an anxious (arousal) state and recommend that young people are provided direct support, including clinical support, alternative activities, properly trained school personnel and additional safety and security measures.

Short-term and prolonged arousal can affect cognitive and behavioral functions. Cognitive deficits such as poor problem solving (unable to think things out or make sense of what is happening), low self-esteem (how one thinks of oneself – victim-thinking) and hopelessness (loss of future orientation) have all been clearly linked to negative (traumatic) life events (Yang and Clum, 2000). Trauma has been shown to significantly compromise cognitive development (Trickett, McBride and Chang, 1995). Yang and Clum (2000) using a series of structured equation analysis, showed that “early negative life events” have a strong impact on cognitive deficits, which are now related to have a strong impact on suicidal behavior as well (183).

Cognitive alterations following trauma can take place at any age. Main (1996) observes that the ability to regulate one's response to stress can be negatively altered when a child is exposed to negative environmental influences such as violence or suicide. Schore (2001) concurs and Hopkins and Butterworth (1990) support these and similar findings that appropriate responses to external changes (stress/crisis) can be altered by activation of the arousal state – the heightened state of fear induced by traumatic exposure.

In the arousal state, changes in the brain are triggered by a variety of stress-related functions (van der Kolk, 1996). Perry (2000) and others have found that while in the arousal state, it becomes difficult to process information because of the altered physiological functioning. If a child/student who has been traumatized remains in an aroused state of fear and finds it difficult to process information, it then becomes difficult to follow directions, to recall what was heard and to make sense out of what is being said. Focusing, attending, retaining and recalling verbal information becomes very difficult. These are primary learning functions that can be altered during or immediately following traumatic exposure and continue unrecognized for long periods for certain persons,

specifically children. These altered learning functions become a primary issue in the learning environment of those directly impacted by the external trauma and then negatively affects other youth, also.

At some point, trauma victims must begin or have help to think differently about what they experienced, how they view themselves and the world. For many trauma victims, increased arousal keeps them frozen, thinking as a “victim”– powerless, hopeless and under constant threat. The reduction of arousal is essential to restore a sense of hope, power and safety for all affected youth. Such intervention can be applied in school settings the weeks and months following trauma-inducing incidents that impact school students and staff. Interventions must help trauma victims become survivors by helping them change their thought processes. However, cognitive intervention can only be successful when the sensory experience to trauma is altered. Following September 11, for example, Americans were repeatedly reassured (cognitively) they were safe, but this could not be accepted until they first felt safe – a sensory experience. Parents who saw uniformed police officers in the parking lot when they arrived at their child’s school felt safer than those who saw no visible sign of safety. What was seen communicated a greater sense of safety than what was heard. Understanding trauma as a sensory experience is also critical to understanding the levels of intervention necessary to restore cognitive functioning, as well as behavioral appropriateness (Steele, 2002).

The fact that an increasing number of gang-involved and violent youth in the juvenile justice system have mental health issues is confirmed in recent descriptive research that demonstrates the empirical link between mental health needs and delinquency. This includes such studies as:

- Steiner & Cauffman, 1998 – showing that a large percentage of youth in the juvenile justice system have mental health needs.
- Stiffman, Chen, Elze, Dore, Cheng, 1997 – reporting the juvenile justice providers report that their clients have significant mental health needs.
- Timmons-Mitchell, Brown, Schultz, Webster, Underwood & Semple, 1997, reporting, in a limited epidemiology study, that more than 50 percent of the youth in detention have diagnosable psychiatric disorders.
- Weirson, Forehand & Frame, 1992 – suggesting, as one of several studies, similarities between youth in the juvenile justice system and youth served in the public mental health system.
- Vander Stoep, Even & Taub, 1997 – documenting that youth served in the public mental health system are involved in the juvenile justice system at a rate three times that of the general population.

This body of literature – in addition to consistently demonstrating the link between delinquent behavior and psychological disorders – shows that multi-problem youth need to be identified and served in specific settings geared to their issues and cognizant of their delinquent and potentially violent nature. In Oklahoma, this is often driven more by what services are locally available than by a rational system for intervention. These findings highlight the importance of continuing systematic assessment and response in combating youth gang problems.

Finally, the clinical epidemiology establishes the need for treatment and support services for gang-involved and violent youth with serious emotional disturbance who are involved in the juvenile justice system. For juvenile offenders in community settings, 50

percent of youth demonstrated a level of need consistent with a serious emotional disorder (SED). In corrections, 66 percent of youth demonstrated this level of need, and in residential treatment centers, nearly 100 percent of youth exhibited this level of need. A further exploration in the same study identified the risks associated with increased likelihood of expensive institutional placement. These were the:

- clinical needs of the youth (e.g., greater elopement risk, greater peer dysfunction, poorer adjustment to trauma or abuse or more multi-system needs);
- behavioral risk of the youth (e.g., greater elopement risk);
- caregiver knowledge and capacity.

There is a clear and pressing need for the juvenile justice system to make dispositions which respond to *clinical problems*, *behavioral risk* and *caregiver capacity* as part of balanced and restorative justice.

Who is serving these types of youth and their families?

In our state, the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA) has taken the leadership in combating those societal, family and individual risk factors associated with gang involvement. The Office of Juvenile Affairs funds targeted intervention and prevention programs to work with youth at-risk for or already involved in gang activity. In Oklahoma County, the designated youth services agency that is responsible for gang intervention is Effective Transitions, Inc. Effective Transitions and the Office of Juvenile Affairs have adopted the National Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention model for gang intervention programs.

Using the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model, ETI and its community partners work to alleviate some of the gang activity in targeted areas. The OJJDP Model holds that

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

Community Mobilization: Involvement of local citizens (including former gang youth and community groups and agencies) and the coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.

Provision of Opportunities: The development of a variety of specific education, training and employment programs targeted at gang-involved youth.

Social Intervention: Youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, police and other criminal justice organizations reaching out and acting as links between gang-involved youth (and their families) and the conventional world and its needed services.

Suppression: Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision or monitoring of gang youth by agencies of the criminal justice system and also by community-based agencies, schools and grassroots groups.

Organizational Change and Development: Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources within and across agencies to better address the gang problem.

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

Suppression by our law enforcement community is a necessary process: youth that are dangers to other community members must be dealt with through the juvenile justice process. Our community police have worked well together developing the Gang Intervention Unit and participating in the Oklahoma Gang Investigation Association. Unfortunately, suppression alone is not an effective strategy: We must provide support to our designated community agencies that specialize in the prevention and reduction of youth gangs in our community. It is important to remember that while youth gang members must be held accountable for their criminal acts, they also must be provided with services for their academic, economic and social needs. Gang members must be encouraged to control their behavior and to participate in legitimate, mainstream activities.

At the same time, external controls on gang and gang-member behavior must be exercised. For some gang members, secure confinement will be necessary. For others, graduated degrees of community-based supervision, ranging from continuous sight or electronic supervision to incarceration, will be appropriate. It is important that youth understand that they will face consequences if they do not follow rules, laws, conditions or reasonable expectations of the program. It also may be important to develop a set of incentives for compliance with the program. Thus, a range of services and sanctions is required, often in some interactive way. To be effective in this approach, an understanding of how a youth's family, peers and others are involved is important.

This approach is consistent with community policing, which promotes and supports organizational strategies to address and reduce the fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and community/police partnerships. In this Model, gang unit, community policing or other officers are involved in the problem-solving process at the street level, while senior officers work with the policy-makers.

The work of the collaborating agencies is overseen by a Steering Committee of policy or decision makers from agencies and organizations that have an interest in or responsibility for addressing the community's gang problem. In Oklahoma County, the ETI Steering Committee is made up of the Juvenile Justice judges for our county, representatives from the Office of Juvenile Affairs, the Oklahoma County Juvenile Bureau, the Oklahoma County District Attorney's Office, the Oklahoma City Police Department, the Oklahoma City Public Schools District, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, representatives from several neighborhood associations, and other community members. These representatives not only set gang intervention policy and oversee the overall

direction of the gang program but also take responsibility for spearheading efforts in their own organizations to remove barriers to services and social and economic opportunities. They develop effective criminal justice, school and social agency procedures and promote policies that will further the goals of the gang strategy.

In summary, The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model espouses a multifaceted, multilayered approach that includes eight critical elements:

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

Successful Strategies

Targeted Prevention

Effective Transitions, Inc. believes that more activities, programs and youth centers would be the best prevention for youth involvement in gangs. Youth have consistently requested alternative activities, specifically sports and jobs. Because gangs themselves offer sports alternatives, however, jobs have a greater appeal as a preventive tool. Education is also a positive alternative. Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast ages or developmental stages in which a program can target youth that are at-risk for gang involvement. Therefore, programs must be flexible and be able to serve youth of all ages, socio-economic background, culture and family situation. There are some basic tenets that one must follow in developing and implementing an effective prevention program:

- Offer programs that encourage them to talk to ex-gang members. Offer new alternatives.
- Have more programs that involve people who have been there and can tell kids how they will end up if they keep getting in trouble.
- Offer positive things that are not gang-related for gang members to do. Choices that are legal.
- Provide support to traditional educational systems in an effort to involve at-risk youth in non-gang-related activities.

Ideally, gang prevention efforts will divert at-risk youths from joining gangs. Many experts believe that once a youth is involved with a gang, the chances for disengagement are highly reduced. Youth who have been involved in gang life know that risk for gang

involvement does not end when a young person leaves a gang. These youth require a strong support network and skills to help them build a mainstream life. Expert recommendations for prevention and intervention will make sense only if the gang members themselves believe in the proposed alternatives. In their book *Life in the Gang: Family, Friends, and Violence* (1996), Scott Decker and Barrick Van Winkle determined a consensus from gang members about how to prevent someone from joining a gang. The majority of gang members said the best way to stop individuals from joining gangs was to talk with them about the *risks of membership*. One emphatic point is the violence that saturates the life of a gang member, though even this does not affect those who are strongly determined to join a gang.

ETI has developed two programs: “De-mystifying Gangs” and “What is in the Mind of a Gang-banger?” Based on more than 12 years of success working with at-risk youth, these programs are developed to be provided one-on-one or in small groups and provide the youth a viewpoint into the negative aspects of gang involvement. These services are provided in the client’s schools, community centers and homes, if required.

Another preventive measure requires more effective *sanctions* for gang membership. Parents and caregivers have an important role here, because they are the first-line authority figures to watch and discipline their children. This option, of course, requires parents to have an ongoing commitment to supervise and monitor their children's activities. Effective Transitions, Inc. has partnered with the District Attorney and the Juvenile Courts to strengthen the sanctioning process of early gang offenders, specifically the “wanna-bes” and the “could-bes.”

Individual and Group Intervention

There are youths involved in gangs, however, who need help now. For them, Effective Transitions, Inc. will provide a direct *interventions* that we feel has the best chance for success. One-on-one intervention requires an appropriate connection between, and resolution of, the contributing familial problems, the promises of the gang to resolve those issues and the most likely reasons for disengagement.

These factors must be matched for each youth. Stereotyping will not work. The purpose is to identify specifically what will induce a particular youth to disengage, considering the individual reasons for his or her gang involvement and the payoffs that gang membership has ensured, then offer a substitute that provides the member with a greater promise or incentive than gang membership.

For example, a youth who joins a gang because of abuse in his home (familial condition) will look to the gang for empowerment (payoff). The gang offers this sense of power, through violence, and the fear it inflicts in others (specific behavior). As the sense of empowerment grows, the youth gang member develops a greater involvement with his gang (level of commitment). To disengage this youth, appropriate matching and alternatives are critical.

- Volunteer programs and more job openings for teenagers;
- Build a place for teenagers to go and hang out during the weekends;
- Have wholesome activities and safe areas for kids to have fun;
- Give them after-school activities to help keep them off the street;

- Have that person talk to a former gang member to learn how he got out.

Effective Transitions, Inc. recognizes that disengagement is a difficult step for a gang member. Its success depends on a team effort – the youth, the family and others with special skills to help with the disengagement process. Effective Transitions, Inc. has adopted an eight-point strategy to help disengage youths from gangs.

1. **Appoint a street outreach worker.** Often, parents are not able to formulate a strategy because of their emotional involvement, lack of knowledge about the issue and other barriers. An effective street *outreach worker* can identify and answer the basic questions about the youth's gang involvement and come up with ideas to approach the troubled child. This person should have common sense and calmness under pressure, be able to understand the particular issues, have a balanced perspective, have the ability to relate to young people and have the skill to design a short-term disengagement plan.
2. **Establish effective communication.** Foremost, the street outreach worker must be able to build trust with the youth. This will help develop a style of communication between them, which will require the strategist to speak the language of the youth.
3. **Examine the facts.** The street outreach worker first must determine if the youth is a gang member. Once this is known, the street outreach worker must discern the reasons for membership, the alleged gang payoff, the nature of activities and the level of involvement. It is crucial to gather all the facts related to gang membership as soon as possible. This will help the street outreach worker in recommending action and diverting anxiety.

4. **Develop a preliminary strategy for resolving the problem.** This strategy needs to reduce the danger to the youth or other affected youths. It should also establish communication with the youth. In addition, it is essential that the plan identify reasons for the youth to disengage from the gang.
5. **Implement and fine-tune a long-term strategy.** This should achieve several long-term goals:
 - Permanent removal of the threat of harm to the youth and others;
 - Identification and resolution of the reasons the youth felt compelled him or her to join the gang;
 - Strengthening of healthy family relationships;
 - Positive alternatives to gang activity and involvement;
 - Effective discipline when necessary;
 - Guidance to help the youth plan a long-term future.
6. **Utilize a system of checks and balances.** Sometimes it is helpful for the people involved to have input from unaffected people or people who are not directly involved with the disengagement.
7. **Ask for professional help when needed.** Professionals such as mental health workers, law enforcement officers and school counselors are often the first ones to spot negative youth trends. Based on their experience, they can be helpful when the situation goes beyond what the outreach worker and others involved can handle alone.

8. **Employ necessary follow-up.** Families and other supporters need to provide ongoing monitoring. This is critical to help the youth maintain a gang-free life and grow a productive future.

Mental Health Services and Family Support Programs

The ETI Youth and Family Support Program is designed to reduce the levels of juvenile delinquency in the targeted client as well as in siblings and family members. Additionally, the program is designed to improve the family conditions of youth in the custody of the Office of Juvenile Affairs and the probation departments in an effort to reduce delinquency. ETI envisions mental health treatment services and juvenile delinquency intervention services for juveniles within the custody of the Office of Juvenile Affairs, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, families of those youth and youth at-risk for violence and gang involvement across the state.

Our vision, which calls for mentally healthy, crime-free children and responsible families living in safe, caring and inclusive communities, is supported by the following considerations:

- Oklahoma's children are our foundation for the future; therefore, they must be primary beneficiaries of Oklahoma's resources.
- The family is central to the provision of care for their children.
- Individuals, families, communities and governments share responsibility and accountability for achieving the optimal development and growth of our children.
- The depth and duration of juvenile delinquency can be reduced through prevention, early identification and intervention, thereby reducing personal and costs to society.

- Children who are involved or are at-risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system and their families should have access to timely, effective and culturally appropriate treatment and support.

The ETI Parents' Support Group Program is designed for parents and other concerned adults to participate in parenting training workshops, field trips, family projects, special presentations and community events. The purpose of these sessions is to empower adults who are faced with dealing with gang-involved youth to provide them strategies, ideas and actionable steps to support the process of reducing gang activity and juvenile delinquency in their community.

These services specifically tie into the Gang Intervention and Violence reduction process by identifying youth who have entered the juvenile justice system and have some form mental illness or cognitive process issues. By identifying the youth as early in the process as possible, appropriate services can be initiated to provide the juvenile justice system with a reliable option to secure detention and removal from the home just because of the child's lack of treatment. By remaining community-based, these appropriate services are more cost-effective and allow the youth to develop better coping systems in a more "real-world" context," all while being monitored by the service provider and the county or state agency charged with supervision.

These serves include working with siblings and other family members who are emulating the behaviors of the gang-involved youth at a very early age. This program provides a mental health intervention, a social services intervention and an educational intervention for currently involved youth, but, most importantly, serves as an early prevention program for younger siblings and family members.

For More Information, or to Receive a
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