




Draft Strategic Plan
for Fostering Multi-
Agency
Collaboration to
Address Street
Gangs and their
Activity in the City
of Winnipeg

Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, Inc.

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Overview

Government and non-government organizations tend to address the problems of gangs from their own unique position. This draft strategic plan describes the efforts of the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg's (ACWI) efforts to develop a coordinated, unified "gang strategy." It does so by addressing commonly accepted approaches: prevention, intervention and suppression and by describing a theoretical background and environmental context in which this initiative was developed. Some of the activities emanating from this initiative and progress to date are described. These included "focus groups and a community event".

DRAFT

Introduction

Combating gang problems is a serious challenge faced by the City of Winnipeg. Research indicates that gang phenomena are extremely complex in their origin and functioning, in which socio-economic, psychological, family-related, personal factors, to name just a few, contribute to youths' creating, joining and remaining in gangs. It would be naïve to think that the problem can be solved without addressing these underlying issues.

Empirical evidence has shown that community mobilization is one of the most effective strategies in addressing gang problems. This implies garnering support and full participation of neighbourhood residents - both young and adult, educational/social/outreach agencies in both urban and rural communities, in all socio-economic levels and both racially homogeneous and diverse neighbourhoods that are affected. Community mobilization and strengthening, and sharing resources at the grassroots level, need to be integrated with long-term prevention strategies in any gang-reduction program. Intervention for youth already involved in gang activities and targeted suppression of hard-core gang members known for their repeated serious crimes will also be required under some circumstances. However, a thorough and accurate assessment of the City of Winnipeg's gang problem needs to be undertaken as a first step to plan, develop and implement appropriate strategies. Research also points out the effectiveness of a multi-faceted, multi-partner, comprehensive, and balanced strategy to prevent, reduce and combat gang problems. The Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg (ACWI) is very interested in establishing and sustaining these partnerships to address gang related issues in Winnipeg.

Statistics

In 2002, the results of the Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs estimated the number of youth gangs in Canada at 434 with a total membership of 7,071. Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia had the highest percentage of jurisdictions reporting active youth gangs.

It is estimated that there are between 800 – 1000 active First Nations/Aboriginal gang members in the Prairie Provinces (CSC, 2001). In Canada, almost all young gang members are male; almost half are 17 years old or younger (CISC, 2004; Edmonton Police Service, 2005; Gordon and Foley, 1998). Most gang members are African Canadian/Black (25%), followed by Aboriginal (22%) and 18% are Caucasian/White (Totten, 2003; Gordon, 2000; CSC, 2004). Over one-third of gangs in Canada are composed of two or more ethno-racial groups (hybrid gangs). Street gangs in Winnipeg appear to be the most homogeneous (Aboriginal). Nationally, 40% of Canadian police forces believe that the return of adult or youth gang member inmates to the community has a negative influence on street gangs on

the outside, particularly those young males on the periphery and those who are in the process of being tested out for membership.

There are many myths perpetuated by the media and the general public which contribute to a social panic about youth gangs. In reality, the vast majority of Manitoba youth are healthy, contributing members of society; less than 0.5% belong to gangs. It is important to understand that most gangs in Canada are adult, not youth gangs. Further, the large majority of youth who are mistakenly classified as 'gang members' are instead involved in anti-social behaviours which, although serious nonetheless, are not gang-related. Anti-gang strategies therefore must address these negative stereotypes, particularly the ones that promote racist beliefs about the prevalence of gang cultures within certain ethno-racial groups, particularly the Aboriginal community of Winnipeg.

Criminal Activity is Learned

Research has focused on the fact that most criminal behaviour, like other realms of endeavour, is learned. This is not new. Rather, it has been a popular notion for at least the last seventy-five years, one that has been tested and validated on numerous occasions. Beginning with Edwin Sutherland in 1939, with his differential association theory (Sutherland and Cressey, 1978) and then moving to Albert Bandura (1977) and social learning theory, to the more recent perspective of Donald Andrews' (Andrews & Bonta, 2004) Personal, Interpersonal, Community - Reinforcement (PIC-R) model and others, there is now quite an extensive and historical appreciation of crime as learned behaviour.

If crime is learned, then gangs play an important role in the acquisition of that learned behaviour. At the risk of sounding complimentary, gang membership, gang affiliation and gang activity formalize the learning process in a very efficient way. Essentially, they offer the bricks and mortar, the teachers, and the course content for crime and delinquency.

During an ACWI focus group held with ex-gang members, participants raised three issues and spoke of how one, it was "cool to be in a gang. Now people respect me." Two, they raised the interpersonal responses of intimate gang peers. "You done good. We will protect you." Finally, three, consider the broader community reaction to gang membership. "Don't mess with him or you will have the whole gang after you." Under the right circumstances, who would not want to join such a prestigious organization?.

The following factors pertaining to gang life/activity have also been identified:

1. Criminal history is itself synonymous with street gangs in that gangs are comprised primarily of adjudicated offenders and their *raison d'être* is various kinds of criminal activity: drugs, prostitution, intimidation and dealing in stolen property.

2. Gang activity is incompatible with education and employment in the traditional job market, such that holding down a job or being able to make progress in an academic program may be close to impossible for youths involved in street gangs.
3. Gang involvement wreaks havoc with the traditional family and the support that it can provide to an offender in less serious circumstances.
4. Leisure and recreational time for the gang member, such as it is, is devoted to criminal gang activity.
5. Perhaps the most endemic criminogenic need to the street gang is the collection of criminal friends, peers and even rivals with whom one is destined to associate and the erosion of any links with noncriminal associates.
6. Substance abuse, both alcohol and drugs, are key elements of most street gangs, representing a central theme of their socialization activities and “business” opportunities.
7. Gang membership requires a procriminal attitude first to gain entry into the gang and then it is positively reinforced through talk and action as long as one remains in a gang.
8. Finally, the antisocial lifestyle of the gang compliments the antisocial behavioural pattern and personality of the entrenched offender, reinforcing it to the extent that it becomes particularly engrained and difficult to eradicate.

Aboriginal Gangs

There are any number of operational definitions used by law enforcement, correctional agencies and researchers to describe what a gang is, and they may or may not coincide, but there lies the question about what makes Aboriginal gangs unique. There are superficial differences that distinguish Aboriginal gangs from others. Expressions in language, signs, art, graffiti and music are often local or unique to Aboriginal gangs, but so are they to other ethnic and racially based gangs, be they Asian, African-American or eastern European.

The development of gang culture within the Aboriginal community must be contextualized through the historical lens of the destruction of Aboriginal identity and culture. The intergenerational footprint of this colonization and forced assimilation is found in the minority of youth who join gangs. The grandparents and parents of today’s Aboriginal gang members were stripped of their parenting capacity. Sheer survival – a sense of family, an identity, protection, steady income – are all key reasons why Aboriginal youth join gangs (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, 2003). These youth, substantially younger than any other ethno-racial group involved in Canadian youth gangs, are recruited both on the street and in justice facilities. School bonding and family attachment cannot prevent gang involvement for these youth. Many adopt an African American hyper-sexualized violent masculinity, copied from rap artists and U.S. gangs. In a cruel twist of

irony, they become alienated from their communities and lose their identity as a Cree, Ojibway, Dakota, Dene, or Métis, for example. This is the modern version of forced assimilation –only the gangs are doing the removal instead of the Canadian government.

It is in this climate in Winnipeg that the ACWI sees the need to work with multiple agencies and government departments on a strategy to confront gangs and the harm and destruction that they bestow on the local community.

Context and Structure of the Winnipeg Gang Prevention Strategy

In November 2010, the Department of Justice Canada put out a call for proposals under their Youth Justice Fund - Guns, Gangs and Drugs Component giving priority to supporting approaches that bring together stakeholders with an interest in youth in conflict with the law, and involved or at risk of involvement in gangs, to develop collaborative responses to youth gangs. These initiatives could be local, regional or national in scope.

The Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg responded to this call for proposal submission and submitted a project that would initiate partnerships among youth-serving agencies, cultural or Aboriginal communities, criminal justice personnel, researchers and/or youth to collaborate in coordinating services for youth in the criminal justice system and involved or at risk of involvement in gangs, and/or sharing knowledge of promising practices and models.

From the ACWI's perspective there seemed to be a need to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the City of Winnipeg's current Aboriginal gang problem and determine how to create a foundation for a comprehensive Aboriginal Gang Prevention Strategy that has targeted results for those youth involved in gangs or are at risk of being involved in gang activity. Keys steps to this foundation building are communication and collaboration.

The Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg wished to mobilize the community to address the current Aboriginal Gang problem in Winnipeg. This was to be done through the establishment of a Steering Committee which would include involvement of local citizens, including former gang-involved youth, law enforcement, corrections, probations, schools, employment programs, faith based organizations, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community agencies and the private sector. The Steering Committee would be broken down into three working subcommittees: prevention, intervention, and suppression. The subcommittees would identify gaps in community services and make recommendations on how to assess the local Aboriginal gang problem. Participation by these groups would allow for greater input from the community and a commitment to seeing a more comprehensive approach taken to tackle the Aboriginal Gang issue in Winnipeg. Information would then be used to initiate a Strategic Plan and identify next steps to the development of a

Comprehensive Gang Strategy. Letters were sent to various agencies and government departments and forty-five people responded to participate. Meetings were held on a bi-weekly basis as time was of the essence to get work done by March 31, 2011.

At an initial meeting held by the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, it was discovered that there were already a number of a multi-agency group of municipal government, provincial and federal government and nongovernmental agencies (NGOs) in place that were meeting to discuss Gang Issues and Gang Prevention in the City of Winnipeg. It was quickly suggested that a coordinated effort was required at the local level to mobilize the community and its member agencies to a multifaceted response to local gangs.

In response, the Aboriginal Council has now agreed to participate in the Gang Action Interagency Network (GAIN) – a committee with approximately twenty-five members and assist in moving that process forward rather than create a new one. As well the ACWI will continue to engage with any other gang prevention networks//agencies locally, regionally and nationally.

The purpose of this document is to outline the original proposal framework submitted to Justice Canada as well as the recommendations garnered through discussion during the various meetings and workshops so that it may be used to generate further dialogue on the gang situation in Winnipeg and hopefully build and sustain partnerships.

The ACWI proposal framework outline three subcommittees that will reflect the multi-pronged efforts that are described in the gang research literature with appropriate agencies taking part in one or more of these subcommittees as described in Table 1. The networks of organizations that are participating in the strategy come from a number of different kinds of agencies, plus the creation of a research team. They are distributed across the Steering Committee, the three subcommittees representing each of the three strategies or ‘pillars’ (Prevention, Intervention and Suppression), and an evaluation subcommittee, all according to their expertise, capacity and will to participate. All committees are to meet monthly.

The *prevention* subcomponent includes those activities that are aimed at preventing gang formation through improved public knowledge as well as increased resources aimed at underlying risk factors associated with involvement in gangs. The *intervention* subcomponent includes those activities that target individuals associated with gangs and that assist them to leave the gang lifestyle. Finally, the *suppression* subcomponent includes those activities that incapacitate gangs through police operations aimed at crippling gangs and suppression of gang paraphernalia.

Under these three pillars, the ACWI draft Winnipeg Gang Strategy identified four overarching goals:

- A. Increase community engagement in gang prevention strategy
- B. Decrease gang entry by addressing personal and community factors
- C. Increase gang exit by addressing personal and community factors
- D. Decrease gang-related crime

The subcommittees were formed in accordance with the three pillars to address the goals and objectives unique to their focus. Each subcommittee has two goals for which they are responsible.

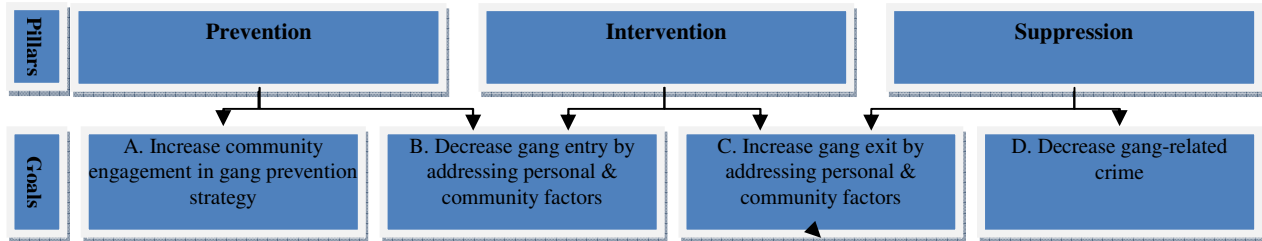
Table 1

A Three-Pronged, Multi-Agency Approach to Creating a Municipally-Based Gang Strategy

Organizations	Strategies				
	Steering Committee	1. Prevention Committee	2. Intervention Committee	3. Suppression Committee	Evaluation Committee
Winnipeg Police Service	Member	Member		Chair	Member
RCMP	Member	Member		Member	
City	Member	Chair			Member
Justice	Member				Corporate Member
Public Prosecutions	Member			Member	
Corrections (Youth)	Co-chair		Member (Secure, Open Custody)	Member	Co-Chair
Corrections (Adult)	Member		Member	Member (Prob. & Institutions)	Corporate Member
Social Services	Member	Member	Member		
Aboriginal Agencies	Co-chair	Member	Member		
Mental Health Child & Youth	Member		Chair		
Education	Member	Public/Faith based School Boards			
Other Agencies	Regional Intersectoral Coordinator	Mediat. Serv;	John Howard Society Elizabeth Fry Society	CSC Parole	
Academic					

Research	Member	Observer	Observer	Observer	Co-Chair
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Figure 1
The Pillars, Goals and Committees of the draft Winnipeg Gang Strategy



Goal A is to increase community engagement in a gang prevention strategy. This is the responsibility of the Prevention subcommittee. The specific objectives of this goal are:

1. To identify gang issues and formulate responses to gang-related concerns that are identified by community organizations/agencies,
2. To produce a more coordinated approach to gang-related concerns among community agencies, and
3. To increase public knowledge about gangs and their prevention in the community.

Goal B is to decrease gang entry by addressing personal and community factors. This is the responsibility of both the prevention and intervention subcommittees. The specific objectives of this goal are:

1. To increase access to prosocial activities and environments in the community,
2. To increase support to youth and adults at risk for gang membership to abide by the law,
3. To decrease perception of gang profitability, and
4. To decrease gang recruitment.

Goal C is to increase gang exit by addressing personal and community factors. This is the responsibility of both the intervention and suppression subcommittees. The specific objectives are:

1. To increase the number of gang members involved in prosocial activities,
2. To increase pressure on gang members to abide by the law,
3. To decrease and interrupt profitability of gang membership,
4. To increase the number of gang members in intervention programs, and
5. To decrease the risk of gang exit.

Goal D is to decrease gang-related crime. This is the responsibility of the suppression subcommittee. The specific objectives are:

1. To increase gang member and emerging gang member supervision and surveillance, and
2. To dismantle and disrupt gang communication and relationships.

A series of specific activities was then developed to guide the subcommittees in their task of addressing each of these objectives. For example:

- To address Objective A.2 it is recommended that the community establish a network of organizations/agencies that address gang-related risk factors amongst children and families to coordinate their respective initiatives.
- To address Objective B.2 it is recommended that the community develop a Community Connections Model to provide enhanced risk-management support to 10-15 high risk youth.
- To address Objective C.2 and C.3, it is recommended that the community improve communications between Corrections and Public Safety, Winnipeg Police Service, and Crown Prosecutors when new gang-related information is identified or when an identified gang affiliated youth or adult is non-compliant with court orders.
- To address Objectives D.1 and D.2, it was decided to review SHOCAP and BECAP for possibility of addressing gang-related crime.

One particular activity that was designed to address a number of objectives was to hold a community forum on gang issues in Winnipeg and this was done on March 23, 2011 at the Radisson Hotel.

Focus Groups with Ex – Gang Members and The Community Event: Sample Activities of the ACWI Gang Prevention Strategy

1. Focus Groups

On Thursday, February 4, 2011 and Thursday, February 11, focus group meetings were held with twelve ex-gang members and a number of people from the Gang Prevention Strategy Committee. Background was provided to inform the attendees as to how this community consultation process was initiated and why they (being the ex-gang members) were invited to the table as it was suggested that if the urban Aboriginal community wanted to work on a strategy that works for the community, they needed to bring people to the table that have lived that experience. Importance was stressed on the need to bring together and honour those individuals and their voice and that was the impetus of this forum.

Initial discussion focused on some reasons as to why youth join gangs and these include factors relating to racism, colonization, marginalization and dispossession; the loss of land, traditional culture, spirituality and values; and the breakdown of family and community kinship.

During the roundtable, several of the ex-gang members shared their personal stories as to how they got involved in gangs and the reasons why they stayed. These included:

- Getting 'jumped in' by their own family members
- Wanting to make money and live a great lifestyle as seen on TV/videos
- They are 2nd/3rd generation gang members – family heavily involved – see no other option for themselves
- Lack of self/cultural identity –didn't know how they fit in anywhere

They spoke to the fact that recruiting seems to be a key issue to address because how do you get between these young kids and their family members? A point was also raised that many of these youth are FAS/FAE and are easily manipulated. They spoke of how these particular youth feel alone and "run in blindly because they see a wing to hide under".

The ex-gang members asked the question if there are so many programs out there for gang prevention then why is the problem persisting. It would seem that many of these programs have staff sitting behind desks when they should be out in the community. Regardless, the focus group participants spoke to the fact that the federal government seems intent on 'warehousing' Aboriginal people by announcing \$2 Billion in funding for new jails or regional complexes that the federal government has announced in their '*Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety*'.

The following are themes and comments gathered from the focus group:

Lack of integrated community structure/infrastructure.

Focus group participants identified the inadequacy of services designed to meet the particular needs of Aboriginal people both within and outside correctional facilities and the lack of an integrated service delivery network among Aboriginal urban agencies. These agencies, too often rather than working together, are overburdened, in competition with one another for scarce government funding, and hobbled by the narrow government mandates which are attached to their funding. Gang members and youth at risk, unfortunately, tend to be multi-problem, multi-need, and sometimes high-risk individuals who are not good at accessing services, are impatient with delays and complexities, and harbour suspicions of people who want to "help" them. This is hardly an ideal fit.

It seems axiomatic that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers need to work closely and cooperatively together to create the best, most comprehensive response possible to the gang problem that is growing in Winnipeg. Against this backdrop, the more specific issues can be addressed.

Staff selection.

The focus group discussion clearly reflects the truism that good personnel can make all the difference in terms of initially "reaching" a gang member/youth at risk and subsequently guiding him/her towards the right path. It was heavily stressed that staff of urban Aboriginal correctional/gang prevention programs should have lots of "life experience" and, by virtue of that, would have the skills in understanding and talking to people with problems relating to addictions, life skills, grief, social isolation, and so on. Other things do not come quite so easily to everyone, and working within the framework of the justice system can be confusing, frustrating, painful, difficult and exhausting. Many of the focus group participants noted that they have the experience and insight on how to address the challenges faced by these individuals who wish to leave the gang life or who are at risk of joining.

Unmet needs of correctional clients.

Discussions have shown that the current federal and provincial penal institutions are not addressing the idea of 'rehabilitation' and as such Aboriginal gang members currently incarcerated who wish to turn their lives around are grossly underserved.

Funding issues.

Funding issues for Aboriginal gang prevention programs are on at least two levels. First, there is the question of whether funding levels are globally adequate to provide a high-quality, comprehensive service to those who would benefit from access to it. This question includes both existing and potential gang prevention services which would be desirable. It may be time to re-examine the impact of some of the programs as it would seem the problem of gangs is not going away but rather becoming an even more critical issue. Clearly, both federal and provincial governments would need to form part of this discussion.

Aboriginal Culture and Spirituality.

Focus group participants stressed the paramount importance of Aboriginal spirituality and teachings underpinning intervention. The availability, presence and guidance of Elders, and the use of traditional practices, such as sweat lodges and talking circles, within institutions,

halfway houses and on an individual basis were viewed as critical ingredients for success. They identified the need for and importance of programs designed to meet the specific needs and cultures of Aboriginal people. The importance of this principle extended to the administration of gang prevention strategies, halfway houses and other services *by and for* Aboriginal people.

Final Thoughts

Focus group participants also noted dollars spent on increasing the Winnipeg Police Service by fifty-six new officers, a new helicopter to patrol the streets and all the new staffing that would be required to work in these new jails. It was noted that Aboriginal people are ‘big business’ and it seems evident that no one wants to work themselves out of a job.

2. Community Event

The Gang Strategy Community Event was an initiative by the ACWI. Their staff organized the event, which was headed by the Executive Director of the ACWI. The ACWI Gang Prevention Strategy Working Group met to in order to plan and organize the community.

The Community event was designed to accomplish the following: one, to provide some brief information in a presentation format on the work done to date by the Committee, two, to encourage attendees to share information or concerns regarding the services available for at-risk and gang involved youth and their families; three, to discuss what is working well; and four, to identify gaps in services, so that strategies to fill those gaps may be developed in the future. The event was also designed to provide ample opportunities for networking. To encourage attendance, there was no cost to attend the event, and lunch was provided. Approximately 240 people attended this event.

The invitation to the Community Forum was sent out by the ACWI to NGO’s and government departments during the month of March 2011 and recipients were encouraged to post the invitation in their respective organizations or forward on to relevant contacts. Initially, approximately 100 people were expected to attend. As the date of the forum neared, there was a lot of interest as demonstrated by many RSVPs, and up to 175 people were expected as the forum date approached. However, at the actual forum, 240 names were collected on sign-in sheets, while there were still an unknown number of additional undeclared attendees.

The Community Event may be an important first step in achieving the goals of the Prevention Subcommittee. In particular, the community event may have contributed to Goal A – to increase community engagement in gang prevention strategy. Though more

research is needed to determine whether this goal was achieved, the community event contributed to Objective A.1 (identify gang issues and formulate responses to gang-related concerns that are identified by community organizations/agencies) by inviting members of community organizations/agencies to the event to discuss gang-related issues. Though responses were not formulated at the event, they may be in the future as a result of the community event.

The event also contributed to Objective A.2 (produce a more coordinated approach to gang-related concerns among community agencies), again by bringing service providers together to network, share information regarding the services they provide, and identify service gaps. Finally, the community event also contributed to Objective A.3 (increase public knowledge about gangs and their prevention in our community) through the presentations.

Conclusion and (Interim) Recommendations

The following comments and recommendations have been provided based on the gang research literature and observations of the ACWI gang strategy activities to date. These comments target the three pillars and their related subcommittees, the comprehensive approach to a gang strategy and the multi-agency model that is being suggested to implement it.

Gang Prevention:

- Typically these programs are more successful at reducing gang-related crime and behaviour rather than reducing gang membership.
- Many of these programs focus on short-term goals such as increasing school attendance, increasing prosocial activities and relationships, and changing perceptions of gangs (i.e., intermediate targets).
- These short-term goals are usually attempts at reducing risk factors for gang membership.
- There are four general categories of risk factors: (1) Individual risk factors, (2) Family risk factors, (3) Community risk factors, and (4) School risk factors.

Gang Intervention:

- These programs focus on individuals who are already gang members or gang associated.
- It is important that intervention services address the individual's needs that may have led to gang membership, such as a lack of education and/or employment.
- It is beneficial for intervention programs to offer family and individual counselling.

- Intervention programs may also assist in exiting a gang, as gang exit is associated with several risks to the individual's safety.

Gang Suppression:

- An aggressive suppression strategy is the most typical response to gang-related problems from law enforcement agencies.
- Programs that merely increase arrest rates are ineffective. The results are more promising when these programs include a strong deterrent component.
- Anti-gang legislation is another method of suppression. In Canada, Bill C-24 was passed in 2007 and amended the *Canadian Criminal Code* to include knowingly participating in a criminal organization (including a gang) as a criminal offence.
- Due to Bill C-24, it is an offence to use violence to intimidate people involved in the criminal justice system or a member of their family with the intention of impeding the administration of justice.
- Bill C-24 also expands the proceeds of crime provisions so that they apply to most indictable offences and provides police agencies with increased powers in their fight against organized crime groups.

Using a Comprehensive Approach:

- Programs that blend prevention, intervention, and suppression are the most effective.
- The core elements of this approach are community mobilization of resources, social intervention, provision of academic, economic, and social opportunities, suppression, and organizational change and development.
- An important aspect of this approach is the collaborative nature in which individuals, families, agencies, organizations, and the community as a whole are involved in the fight against gangs.
- An assessment of demonstration projects revealed that proper program implementation was a key to success. In projects characterized by poor program implementation and a lack of successful multi-agency collaborations, no significant effects were found.

Multi-Agency Collaboration:

- All agencies involved should have a common goal or vision, which values should be created and agreed upon by all parties.

- Members of the collaboration must be willing to set aside some of their organizational goals to accomplish the collaborative goals and should feel that the benefits of membership outweigh the costs.
- The collaboration should be perceived to have a positive organizational climate.
- Members of the collaboration should accomplish more by working together than they would alone.
- Collaborations should use members' time, financial resources, and in-kind resources effectively and assign members roles that correspond to their interests and strengths.
- Multi-agency partnerships can lead to frustration as they require skills that have not been needed historically in the way certain professions were carried out.
- Other problems may include difficulties with coordination, cooperation, and conflict avoidance/resolution.
- The roles, duties, and responsibilities of the different agencies should be clearly mapped out to ensure an accountability structure is in place and expectations are clear.

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