

It is critical to expand, coordinate and sustain services geared toward positive youth development

Several collaborative efforts to curb violence on the North Side have been successful at convening community residents and decision makers around the issues of youth and gang violence, including the Blueprint for Action on Youth Violence Executive Committee, the Youth Violence Prevention Taskforce of the Minneapolis Public Schools, collaboration among religious leaders, Hawthorne Huddle, and the Peace Foundation. These efforts have resulted in increased attention on curbing gang violence and positive youth development. However, a perception persists that existing efforts lack unity and collaboration, particularly related to coordination and provision of services.

In particular, a lack of focus on long-term sustainability of positive youth development efforts in the assessment area results in a lack of uniform, positive, community-level messages to counter the pressures to join gangs. Programs become short-lived, and relationships between agencies, organizations, youth service providers, parents and youth are not sustained.

Community residents and service providers acknowledge the essential role of government but are generally dissatisfied with government agencies' response to the needs of youth and families in the community. Most emphasize that how government gets involved in the community is more important. They point to the need to improve relationships between police and the local community related to responsiveness and community policing, to increase the role of government in the service of gang-entrenched youth and families, and to counter-balance the politics of youth and gang violence prevention with increased action and investment at the community level.

After-school programs, youth development and family services programs exist and are available to residents of the assessment area neighborhoods. Specific gaps in gang prevention that emerged from the assessment include: structured programs for youth that prepare them to deal with pressure to join gangs, culturally appropriate

WHAT GIVES ME PRIDE?

Being Able to Provide
For my Family
No Felony Diploma

programs at all levels of prevention, and trusted adults interacting and mentoring youth in the community.

Services are especially needed for youth and families who are already involved with gangs or exhibiting risk factors. These include: employment opportunities for ex-offenders at the point of re-entry; support services in schools before and during administrative transfers; expanded approaches to involving community residents in prevention of and response to violent incidents; local support and resources for minor parents, especially those struggling with addiction; and partnerships with local colleges and universities in youth and gang violence prevention and intervention efforts and initiatives.

An assessment conducted in the North Minneapolis neighborhoods of Folwell, Hawthorne, Jordan, and McKinley



Youth Gang Crime and Prevention Services

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

A focus on four neighborhoods

Four neighborhoods were selected for a comprehensive assessment of the gang problem due to their disproportionately high rates of youth and young adult homicides. In 2008, one-third of all Minneapolis homicides occurred within the Folwell, Hawthorne, Jordan and McKinley neighborhoods. The neighborhoods have a diverse population which, according to the 2000 census, was 47 percent black or African-American, 27 percent white, 16 percent Asian, 4 percent Hispanic, 2 percent American Indian and 8 percent of other races. The assessment was a key component of the Minneapolis Gang Prevention and Intervention Coordination Initiative, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile

Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Minneapolis was one of 12 recipients of this competitive grant award in late 2008.

The assessment included reviews of available data, interviews with representatives of youth-serving community organizations located in the assessment area, and focus groups with young men and parents who live there. The young men were recruited through informal community leaders and community-based youth programs. Most were African-American, and their exposure to gangs ranged from gang-entrenched to gang-affiliated to unaffiliated, but nonetheless exposed to gangs through family or friends or in the community. The parents, most of whom were African-

American, were recruited through community-based organizations and covered a similar spectrum of exposure to gangs.

The findings of the assessment are anticipated to build upon current levels of awareness among residents, community-based organizations, and government agencies about the issues surrounding gangs and the gang problem. They can be used in developing intentional strategies to counter the negative effects of gangs and to work with families and youth of varying levels of exposure to gangs. They can also be used to guide fundraising and investment strategies in gang prevention and positive youth development resources.

FINDINGS

Social and economic factors directly and indirectly contribute to the gang problem

Demographic shifts over the last 30 years rapidly transformed the assessment area. When protective factors (such as employment, social services and youth programs) do not keep pace with the extent of demographic transition such as what the assessment area neighborhoods experienced, a community can experience instability. This instability can directly or indirectly contribute to a gang problem. Hawthorne neighborhood provides an example of the extent of demographic transition that occurred in the assessment neighborhoods. The white population dropped from 85 percent of the population

in 1980 to 19 percent in 2000. During that same time period, the black population increased from 5 percent to 50 percent, and the Asian population grew from less than 1 percent to 17 percent. The proportion of children and adolescents – of both very young and school age – also increased dramatically.

Poverty and unemployment are prevalent in these neighborhoods. The assessment area includes four of the five neighborhoods in Minneapolis with the greatest percentage of families with incomes below the poverty level.

Unemployment in this area is well above the unemployment rate for the city overall. In addition, the recent housing crisis has left many homes in these neighborhoods empty and in foreclosure.

Homelessness and high mobility among students have an adverse impact on young residents. Schools with the highest numbers of homeless and highly mobile students are located in some of the most gang-affected areas of the city. Academic performance was lowest in schools located within or near the assessment area.

WHO IS MY FAMILY?

My Family Are Many
People birth family &
Foster parent who has
giving me The knoweledge
and some what support
to bring me where I
am today



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The YWCA of Minneapolis worked with 28 Minneapolis youth at Matthews Park during the summer of 2007 to create a social action project focused on improving their community. Youth created murals, now on display at the Midtown YWCA, that gave voice to the ideas they wished to share. The mural above depicts community at the intersection of love and peace and represents their dreams for the city of Minneapolis.

Characteristics of gangs in the city have changed

Of the gangs, cliques or sets that have a high degree of contact with law enforcement, half are highly structured, generational organizations that have been in Minneapolis for quite some time, and are likely to remain. One common characteristic of these gangs, with a few exceptions, is their ability to recruit members across all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The other half of gangs, sets or cliques are less organized, relatively recent developments or arrivals. How long they will remain or how well established they will become is unknown. These more recent gangs, cliques or sets appear to recruit membership within a single racial or ethnic category, such as African-American, Hmong, American Indian or Somali. Younger affiliates tend to transfer loyalty from one gang, clique or set to another and could belong to several over time. In the past, loyalty to one gang was more common.

WHAT GIVES ME RESPECT?



Gang involvement or affiliation among young people has perceived benefits and risks

A desire for protection, a sense of belonging, and being born into a gang were consistently identified as reasons for gang affiliation and involvement by the neighborhood service providers who were interviewed and the young men and parents in focus groups. Young men identified other attractions to gang life: gaining respect, money, power and popularity. All assessment participants recognized that the perceived benefits of gang life were countered by the constant threat of injury, death or incarceration.

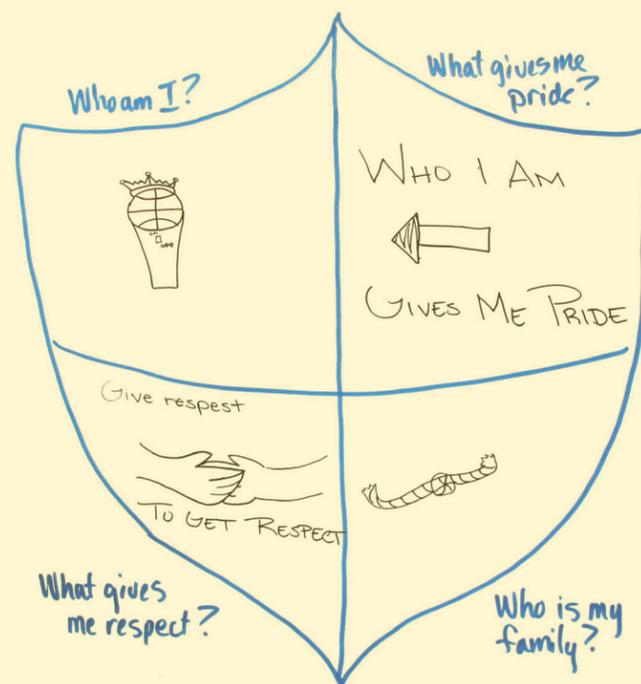
Gang involvement or affiliation can start at young ages

Ages of affiliation and involvement ranged from birth to 40 years. When children are not born into the gang lifestyle but get involved later, boys tend to get involved between fourth and seventh grades, and girls tend to get involved in eighth and ninth grades. Parents expressed concerns that older gang members are targeting children and girls to carry out gang-related activity because of a perceived lower risk of detection and less serious consequences if caught.

For males, the real “hard hitters” were perceived to be 17 and older. An analysis of firearm-related injuries for the 55411 and 55412 zip codes (that overlap with the assessment area) revealed that firearm-related injuries begin to occur in the 10- to 14-year-old age group, increase among 15- to 17-year-olds, and increase further among 18- to 24-year-olds.

MY SHIELD EXERCISE

As an introduction to the focus groups with the young men, the facilitator used an adaptation of an icebreaker called “My Shield.” The young men were given a large drawing of a shield divided into four quadrants. Each quadrant had a heading in the form of a question. The questions were: who am I? what makes me proud? what gives me respect? and who is my family? The young men were allowed to draw or write their responses to the four questions on the shield and then presented their shields to the entire group. This exercise was very important for learning about where youth were coming from and for building trust.



Gang affiliation among girls and young women

Girls and young women who affiliate with gangs are often believed to do so primarily through their boyfriends, but violence among girl groups is believed to have escalated. The perception voiced by community members is that gang affiliation and violence are increasing among girls. However, police department data does not corroborate a high number of girl gang members. It may be that police officers are not noting gang-related circumstances in contacts with girls as readily as they do with boys, partly because women and girls historically have not been targets of law enforcement for gang activity.

The victims of gang members' crimes are a diverse group

Whereas gang membership is primarily composed of men (98 percent, according to Minneapolis Police Department arrest data), victims of gang members' crimes are split almost evenly between males and females and were racially diverse. Among victims of gang members' crimes in 2009 in Minneapolis, 55 percent were black, 22 percent white, 5 percent American Indian, 4 percent Hispanic and 14 percent of other races or unknown. Most victims were adults: 82 percent were over 18. This translates into pervasive fear among adults of the young people in their neighborhoods. Among gang members' crimes that involved victims, more than half were violent crimes. Nearly a quarter involved domestic assaults, including child abuse.

Gang members' crimes include a wide variety of offenses

To more deeply explore the question of the types of crimes being committed by gang members as well as individual characteristics, an analysis was conducted of arrests involving individuals who were known by Minneapolis Police Department to be gang members or affiliates. The data included all arrests of known gang members or affiliates in 2009, regardless of whether the offense was gang-related. Among gang members and affiliates arrested in 2009 in Minneapolis, 83 percent were black, 6 percent American Indian, 3 percent white, 3 percent Asian and 5 percent other or unknown. The majority (63 percent) of arrests consisted of: narcotics (16 percent), arrests of individuals with warrants (12 percent), loitering (10 percent), trespassing (5 percent), curfew (4 percent), disorderly conduct (4 percent), carrying a weapon without a permit (3 percent), recovered stolen vehicle (3 percent), assaults with a weapon (3 percent), and fleeing on foot (3 percent).

Arrest data alone does not accurately describe the extent of the gang problem among crimes that involve a high proportion of unnamed or unknown suspects and that, consequently, might not culminate in arrest. Estimates of the proportion of robberies and non-domestic, aggravated assaults that were likely to have been committed by gang members or affiliates were calculated. Estimates showed that in 2009 up to half (52 percent) of robberies and one-third (34 percent) of non-domestic, aggravated assaults may have been committed by gang members or affiliates.

Residents describe how gangs have affected their communities

In the assessment process, parents and young men in the focus groups described the target neighborhoods as being characterized by a normalization of violence.

Community members identified factors that contributed to or resulted from the gang problem.

- Families that are known to be involved with gangs not being able to access services, programs, and jobs in the community
- Elders and adults being afraid to communicate and interact with young people in the community
- A lack of a sense of community, where people do not know their neighbors and do not feel that they and their children can be outside without being harassed by someone
- A perceived need to get out or move out of the community in order to be safe or to have fun
- A need to improve the physical environment of the neighborhoods by removing garbage and litter, dealing with vacant and dilapidated buildings, and increasing the visibility of art
- Cyber-banging, cyber-bullying, set tripping online and sexting on the phone exacerbate the problem and raise security concerns for service providers, parents and youth