

Chapter 6. Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression

The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model initially focused primarily on intervention and suppression activities. It was understood that prevention activities were necessary to address community gang problems, but the model strategies did not include prevention.

However, communities that have implemented the Model have quickly realized that there is a need for strategies to address the risk factors that affect the community as a whole, as well as targeted prevention programming that assists local youth who are experiencing multiple risk factors for gang involvement. It is recommended that the community confront the most serious problems first: alleviating fear and intimidation within the community and addressing gang crime. As strategies begin to show effects, prevention programming should be selected and implemented.

Prevention

Two levels of prevention strategies should be considered in conjunction with the Model: primary and secondary prevention. Primary prevention strategies focus on the entire population of high-crime, high-risk communities. Programs that effectively reduce community risk factors or provide protective factors for community members are considered primary prevention. Secondary prevention strategies are activities and services targeting young people, primarily between the ages of 7–14, who are at high risk of joining gangs. Selected prevention strategies should have a direct connection to the problems identified in the assessment process and should be specific to gang issues.

Primary prevention activities might include:

- Conducting workshops and trainings to increase community awareness about gangs.
- Working to change conditions contributing to gang involvement within the targeted community.
- Creating a one-stop center that facilitates effective distribution of health and support services.
- Creating procedures for community members to report crimes.

Sample Primary Prevention Strategy—School Safety Zone Partnership

The Pittsburgh Youth Intervention Project created an effective primary prevention strategy called “School Safety Zone Partnership” in conjunction with its implementation of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model. In this initiative, assessments of community conditions were conducted within a 1,000-foot radius of each school in the target area. Problem areas of the community such as high-crime zones, abandoned dwellings, abandoned vehicles, and overgrown and dangerous vacant lots that served as dumping zones for construction waste were identified by community members. Key partners such as law enforcement, city code enforcement, city parks and recreation, the Urban League, and others were enlisted to respond to the problems identified in the assessment. Pockets of crime were dealt with by law enforcement initiatives to reduce crime in these areas. Abandoned properties were identified by code enforcement and were razed or cleaned at owner expense. Almost 6,000 tons of construction waste were removed from vacant lots in areas adjoining the schools. In some instances, these dangerous properties were replaced with community gardens where neighbors could grow fresh produce and flowers. Community members were able to see immediate results from these collaborative responses to local problems.

Secondary prevention programming is often focused on the families, siblings, or associates of intervention targets. The Steering Committee may identify a need to increase access to secondary prevention programming or to expand the types of services available after project implementation begins as a result of gaps in services, extended service waiting periods, and changes in community dynamics. To avoid duplication, a survey of existing resources should be undertaken to identify available prevention activities and services.

Some examples of secondary prevention activities include:

- Tutoring.
- Mentoring.
- After-school programming.
- Recreational activities that incorporate service provision.

Sample Secondary Prevention Strategy—The Story Project

The Los Angeles Gang Reduction Project partnered with the Story Project of Los Angeles. The Story Project is a multimedia project that focuses on developing reading, writing, and communication skills among middle school, at-risk youth using professional “Hollywood” storytellers who mentor the youth to discover self-expression in an artistic, on site, after-school setting. The primary aim is to increase reading and communication skills and encourage school attendance. The project in the Los Angeles GRP area is conducted at the GRP One-Stop service center in the targeted community.

Both primary and secondary prevention service providers should understand the gang culture and possess experience working with at-risk youth and their families. When selecting prevention strategies, the Steering Committee should rely on the risk factor data from the assessment, along with knowledge of the unique cultural, familial, economic, and historical factors affecting the target community. Prevention programs should target multiple risk factors identified by the community assessment. A Strategic Planning Tool designed for matching promising and proven programs with specific risk factors can be found online at <http://www.iir.com/nygc/tool/default.htm>.

Since resources are limited in every community, the Steering Committee should be careful to define the most serious risks and respond to them efficiently. Prevention services should always incorporate a skill-building component that includes social intervention- and/or opportunities-provision elements.

Intervention

Within the framework of the Model, the Intervention Team is the primary mechanism for delivering intervention services. These intervention strategies are delivered in a comprehensive way to a certain number of individuals identified based on the data collected during the assessment. Services that the Intervention Team should plan to provide include:

- Drug and alcohol treatment.
- Mental health and anger-management counseling.
- Job training and placement.
- Transportation assistance.
- Tattoo removal.
- Legal assistance.
- Transitional/reentry services.

- Mentoring by outreach staff to develop skills and to provide the target youth with positive adult relationships and role models.

The intervention plans developed by the team should also focus on ways of attracting target youth to this project, including access to recreational and art programming, field trips, and other desirable activities in which youth want to participate. These activities, however, are the means to an end, and not the end in themselves. They allow outreach and other project staff the opportunity to develop youth social skills, counsel youths on crucial life decisions, persuade youth to take advantage of programs to deal with substance abuse or anger-management issues, and so on.

Sample Intervention Strategy—On-the-Job Training Program

In response to a lack of jobs in the target area, the Miami Gang-Free Schools Program (Project MPACT) partnered with an alternative high school and a local builder to create a construction trades training program. The program served gang-involved clients in the target population who were already receiving services from the Intervention Team and included the following components:

1. Clients received two hours per day of construction trades education at the local high school, in conjunction with weekly life skills sessions. The classes were taught by an experienced tradesman and were incorporated into the normal school day. Clients were required to attend school regularly, maintain drug- and alcohol-free lifestyles (and submit to regular drug testing), attend and participate in the construction classes, and remain free of additional criminal or delinquent charges.
2. After several weeks of participating in classroom work, students were placed on job sites working as part of a construction crew to obtain on-the-job experience. A portion of their pay was provided by a local workforce improvement grant.
3. After completing the program, clients were placed in construction trades jobs.

During the OJT program, outreach workers maintained regular contact with clients to support and mentor them. Clients built strong relationships with the employers and work-site foremen and received other services from social service providers and the Intervention Team to supplement their job training experiences.

Reentry activities also are handled within the context of the Intervention Team. Because gang members are frequently in and out of custody for varying periods of time, the Intervention Team continues to serve these clients during their incarceration, maintaining regular contacts with the clients and then planning for their release back into the community. The Intervention Team, in conjunction with the Steering Committee, should develop a policy for serving incarcerated clients. The length and location of the incarceration may affect the project's ability to maintain contact. In general, clients serving sentences of one year or less should receive at least monthly contacts from outreach workers and other agency staff. Depending on the policies of the facility where a client is incarcerated, these contacts may take place face to face, by phone, or by letter/postcard.

The Intervention Team may consider putting clients serving long-term sentences on inactive status, but even a low level of contact with incarcerated clients can create positive change. As an incarcerated individual nears his or her release date, the Intervention Team should begin planning for that individual's return to the community. This planning should begin 1–3 months prior to release to ensure a smooth

transition back into the community. At this point, face-to-face meetings with the client to involve him/her in the reentry plan are essential. Preplanning can help clients avoid reoffending and can help them more successfully follow the conditions of parole. This type of intensive support from several key agencies is essential to helping gang members transition out of gangs, instead of being reabsorbed back into the gang lifestyle.

Beyond maintaining intervention clients, it is recommended that project staff be aware of the influence of incarcerated gang members returning to the community and develop policies to address these individuals. For instance, the project may want to establish a relationship with probation/parole authorities, and also with corrections personnel, to identify gang members who are due to be released. Outreach staff can visit these inmates prior to release to help develop a supportive plan for their return to the community and to recruit them into the project.

Probation/parole representatives who serve on the Intervention Team can also ensure that clients receive needed services and supervision. Probation and parole officers are familiar with reentry services within the community and can educate the team members on available services. Projects may want to augment existing services in communities where reentry programs are inadequate for the target population or are scarce.

Refer to Chapters 7–9 for an in-depth discussion of intervention program components.

Suppression

Law enforcement plays a key role in suppression, but within the context of the Model suppression also is referred to as “social control.” Ideally, all project partners work together to hold the targeted gang members accountable. Gang crime data should drive gang suppression strategies used in the target community. These strategies should be viewed as part of a larger whole, rather than as one-time-only activities. Some examples of successful suppression strategies include:

- Participating in joint police/probation activities, including conducting probation searches of homes, vehicles, and gang-involved probationers.
- Targeting enforcement to the times, places, and events in which data and historic gang enforcement patterns indicate that gangs are active.
- Designing investigative strategies to address specific gang-related crimes.
- Executing directed patrols of locations where gang members congregate.
- Conducting community forums to address incidents.
- Establishing community prosecution and/or vertical prosecution strategies to prosecute gang crime more effectively.
- Making informal contacts with targeted youth and their families.

Project partners should work together with law enforcement to enforce community norms for youth behavior. These activities may be used in concert with suppression strategies to address less serious antisocial, gang-related behavior. Examples of ways that other partner agencies can assist with suppressing gang activity include:

- Use of in- and out-of-school suspensions, when needed.
- Tracking and reporting of attendance/grades to the Intervention Team and probation/parole.
- Tracking of project participation.
- Being aware of and supporting conditions of probation/parole.

- Reinforcing project requirements and supporting other programs' rules.

In the most successful projects, suppression has been integrated with service providers. Even outreach workers can play a significant role in addressing negative behaviors with project clients and requiring accountability.

As communities begin to select programs and activities, they may wish to consider using the online OJJDP Strategic Planning Tool (www.iir.com/nygc/tool) to assist in planning strategies to deal with their gang problems. The four components of the tool are described below.

(1) Community Resource Inventory

A community resource inventory is an essential step in assessing a community's gang problem. This inventory allows the user to record information about community organizations, programs, services, and activities that could be incorporated into a collaborative, comprehensive approach to gangs. Templates are provided to guide the collection and manual recording of this information. The information can subsequently be entered into a searchable database. Once the database is populated, the user can produce a matrix that answers the questions, What does our community have in place? and What do we need that is missing?

(2) Planning and Implementation

After a user has answered the questions above, a second function of the tool permits the user to access a database containing descriptions of numerous gang prevention, intervention, and suppression programs, strategies, and activities, as well as juvenile delinquency prevention and intervention programs. Programs in the database were reviewed using several criteria and designated as effective or promising. The user is offered options, cross-referenced by age of the intended target population and linked to risk factors in five domains. These programs, strategies, and practices can be selected to fill gaps in service coverage.

(3) Risk Factors

The tool also contains a description of research-based risk factors for delinquency by age (developmental) periods, and risk factors that are correlated to gang behavior are annotated. Empirical indicators and data sources are shown for community-level measurement of risk factor prevalence.

(4) Program Matrix

This matrix allows users to view the age range of clients served by each program in the database. Users are able to examine a description of each program and to form a continuum of promising and effective programs by age range of clients served. Each program description contains contact information.