U.S. Department of Justice
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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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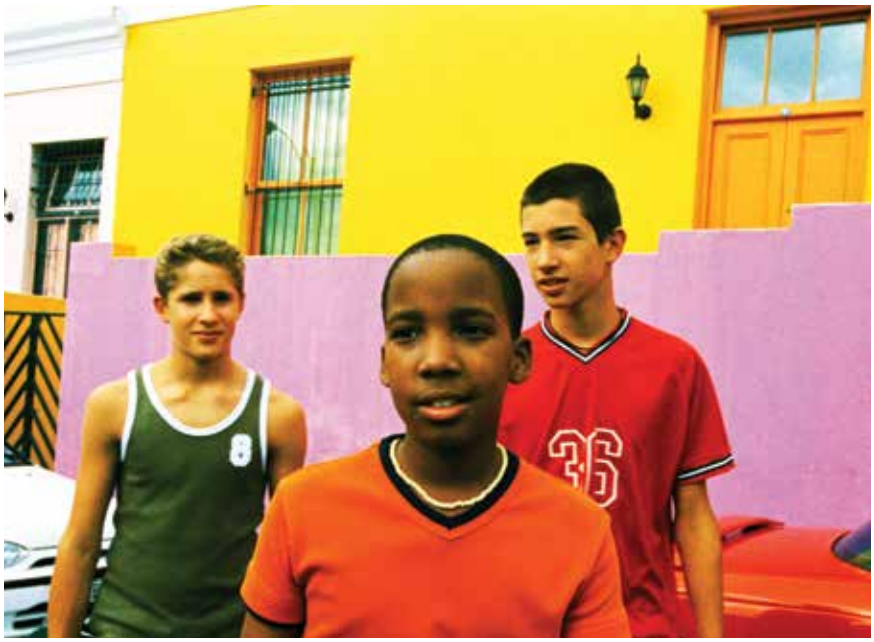
CHANGING COURSE

Preventing Gang Membership



Chapter 8. What Should Be Done in the Community to Prevent Gang-Joining?

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What Should Be Done in the Community to Prevent Gang-Joining?

Jorja Leap

- **There is no need to reinvent the wheel: Communities are rich in resources and strengths that can be inventoried and drawn upon, and existing evidence-based strategies can be used.**
- **Comprehensive approaches that work across disciplines and settings are needed to prevent youth from joining gangs in the first place.**
- **To be successful, community-based gang-membership prevention efforts depend on the collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders; this engagement — reflecting shared involvement and "investment" — builds on a community's strengths and addresses its weaknesses.**
- **Strategies should be designed around core activities such as tutoring, mentoring, life-skills training, case management, parental involvement, connection with schools, supervised recreational activities and community mobilization.**

In Brief

The idea behind a community-based gang-membership prevention strategy is simple: Children and youth safely thrive when the community's members are engaged in their community and invested in the children. This has been well-summarized in the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." But, needless to say, this is only an adage if there are no clear guidelines for just how the village is supposed to get the job done!

This chapter will look at a handful of comprehensive, community-based prevention efforts. It also explores ways of thinking about community-based gang-membership prevention by drawing on principles that are sound, effective and cost-effective. Because youth violence and delinquency can be risk factors for gang-joining (and vice versa), the discussion is not limited to gang-membership prevention, for which, unfortunately, there is a paucity of research. Therefore, the discussion includes examples of innovative efforts in the arenas of violence and delinquency, including program implementation challenges and what policymakers and practitioners need to know about helping communities plan and carry out gang-membership prevention initiatives.

Although some community-based efforts in the United States and Canada are offered as examples, this discussion primarily "reverse-engineers" these programs to examine core concepts — key principles — by answering the question most often asked by practitioners and policymakers: What do we most need to know? Certainly, what decision-makers should know varies across communities, but this chapter offers some basic concepts that are crucial to build on a community's strengths and avoid reinventing the wheel.

Unfortunately, gangs are often thought of as a separate group from the community in which gang members reside. As a result of this thinking, many programs that address gang problems have tended to be deterrence-heavy attempts to move gangs out of the community. More attention must be paid,

however, to strategies that help prevent children from joining gangs in the first place. Such prevention programs are generally implemented in two contexts: In schools, teaching children the dangers of joining gangs and the skills needed to enhance their opportunities and decision-making; and in the community, through prosocial activities and positive role models.

It is critical that these programs take into account the strengths and resources that already exist in a community and that they provide a coordinated approach to addressing youth's needs.

Historically, incorporating community resources and community members in a gang-membership prevention strategy has been overlooked. (Please note that, although the definition of "community" can vary, I use the term to describe a group of people interacting with each other and living in a common, defined location.) Often, gang-membership prevention programs take place outside the community setting and focus on individual children — through education, positive relationships and prosocial activities, for example. But these approaches are often not sufficient to "inoculate" children against the risk factors they face *within* their communities, such as a lack of community activities, cohesion and physical infrastructure; high levels of gang activity or violence; and the availability of drugs and firearms. Children still have to navigate the reality of their communities and may feel that they need to engage in violence or join a gang to survive or to meet their social needs.[1] Attempting to inoculate the individual from his or her environment without addressing the environment itself reduces the likelihood of maintaining emotional and physical health, as even the best treatment cannot succeed if the individual is continually exposed to what is causing the ailment.

Initiatives designed to help prevent youth from joining a gang often do a poor job of building on the strengths of a community, such as positive role models, existing programs and other indigenous resources. To strengthen a community's resilience, it is necessary to look at a range of options, including community mobilization and neighborhood watch groups, media campaigns, graffiti removal, prevention coalitions, and civil remedies such as gang injunctions. Such community-based efforts face significant challenges, however. One of the most significant is a lack of evaluations, which are necessary for the development of evidence-based models.

Why is there such a lack of evidence? Two primary reasons: a lack of funding for formal evaluations, and the complexity of measuring multiple, simultaneously implemented strategies on a communitywide basis. (For more on evaluation, see chapter 11.) That said, a small body of rigorous evaluation research has examined youth-violence and delinquency prevention, and key elements — or principles — in these areas may also be effective in reducing gang-joining. Here are six principles that practitioners and policymakers should keep in mind when adopting prevention strategies with the goal of preventing gang membership:

1. Build a community's prevention operating system.
2. Develop multidisciplinary collaboration to ensure seamlessness.
3. Start early.
4. Take a comprehensive approach.
5. Address core components.
6. Replace and exceed the attraction of gangs.

Build a Community's Prevention Operating System

There are models for providing coalitions of community stakeholders with the training, tools and technical assistance needed to identify gaps and opportunities, select appropriate prevention strategies based on existing evidence, and implement these strategies to maximize beneficial effects.

For example, the Communities That Care (CTC) operating system uses a public health approach to help coalitions prevent a range of negative youth outcomes, including violence, delinquency, school dropout and substance abuse.

The CTC approach provides a practical guide for planning and implementing community-based prevention efforts in five phases:

1. **Getting started:** Identify stakeholders and define the community to be served.
2. **Organizing, introducing and involving:** Engage stakeholders and develop the vision and organizational structure.
3. **Developing a community profile:** Assess protective and risk factors, strengths, challenges, resources and gaps.
4. **Creating an action plan:** Implement new or previously tested effective programs, policies or practices.
5. **Implementing and evaluating the action plan:** Assess what worked and did not work.

The Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington is currently conducting a longitudinal evaluation that has already reported positive outcomes based on a trial in 24 communities in seven states. The latest results — following CTC youth and a control group of non-CTC youth from the fifth grade on — show significantly lower levels of delinquent and violent behaviors among CTC youth through the 10th grade.[2]

Collaborate to Ensure Seamlessness

Multidisciplinary collaboration is a necessary component of an effective prevention operating system. As we have found in programs that reduce juvenile delinquency and youth violence, community-based gang-membership prevention coalitions should be multidisciplinary, including, for example, education, law enforcement, health and social services. Given the complexity of the factors that contribute to gang-joining, it is important for groups focused on prevention to take advantage of principles from criminology, sociology, psychology and public health. Institutions within the community must collaborate to ensure that programs address youth's needs both in school and in the community and — this is important — that the connection between them is seamless. One of the most heartbreaking things I saw in my work in gang-membership prevention occurred when I was evaluating a program called Youth Lead at two major high-risk middle schools in Los Angeles. These middle-school kids were at the point, developmentally, where they could join a gang or stay out. Youth Lead had an innovative in-school program that focused on kids only during class hours. After school, I would walk out with the kids — and instead of parents or siblings, gang members would be waiting to pick them up.

Continuous services are critical to successful prevention: What begins in the classroom should be reinforced in the community and even in juvenile justice institutions. Prevention efforts cannot end with the ringing of the school bell. Strategies aimed at keeping kids out of gangs must be provided seamlessly across the community and even in institutional settings.

It is important to note that programs that reduce gang *activity* within a community are also likely to reduce the *attraction* of gang life for youth who have not yet joined. For example, the Broader Urban Involvement and Leadership Development Program (BUILD) employs multiple, targeted prevention strategies to reduce gang violence in some of Chicago's most economically depressed, crime-impacted neighborhoods. As part of its in-school, after-school and out-of-school activities, BUILD has engaged multiple partners, including the Chicago Police Department, Chicago CeaseFire, and Hargrove Hospital as well as the Post-Secondary Partnership Council, After School Matters, the Exelon Stay in School Initiative, and various community-based partnerships and coalitions. These partnerships are dynamic, constantly responding to the changing needs of youth in the BUILD program. To ensure the connection between school and after-school programs in the community, BUILD's strategies include:

- School-based violence-prevention curricula.
- Trained street workers to do outreach and serve as positive role models.
- Violence-prevention curricula at temporary detention centers.
- After-school sports and recreation.

- Career training, college counseling and financial aid.
- Coordination among corporate sponsors, community leaders, parents and activists in local antiviolence initiatives.

An evaluation of BUILD by Loyola University, conducted in 1999, showed that youth who received BUILD services had significantly lower gang-violence recidivism compared with youth who did not receive BUILD services. In fact, recidivism was linked to the amount of time that youth were exposed to the BUILD curriculum in the classroom: Youth who had less exposure were more likely to relapse into gang activity.[3] Community engagement in a multidisciplinary collaboration allows a program to build acceptance and support; it increases a community's strengths and addresses its weaknesses. Developing community collaborations helps target limited resources and reduces duplication of effort.

Start Early

The concept of *primary prevention* is essential to a gang-membership prevention program. Although many programs focus on getting youth out of gangs or stopping gang violence, more work is needed to stop youth from joining gangs in the first place. Early prevention strategies have the potential to change the path that young children are on by enhancing existing protective factors and by helping them overcome risks. One strategy developed in Canada, the Preventive Treatment Program (PTP), offers a useful example of an early prevention strategy.

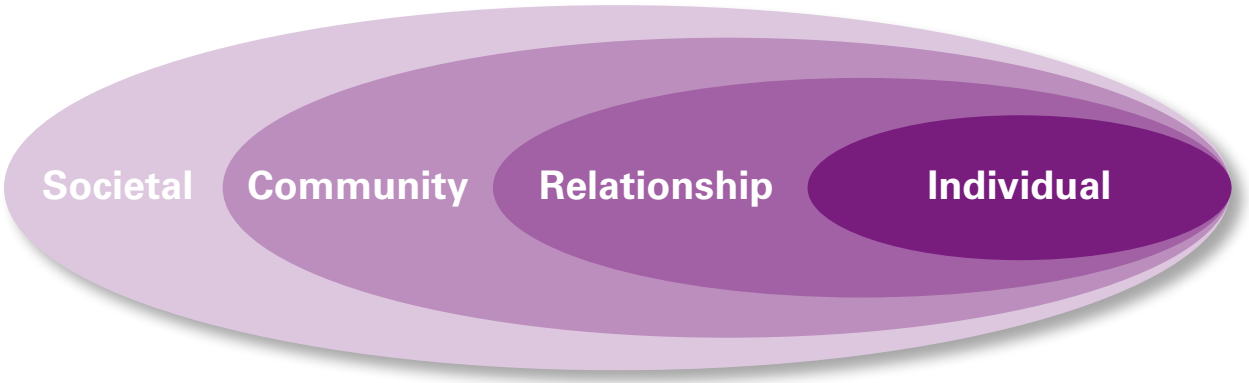
Established in Montreal, PTP was designed to reduce antisocial behavior among low-socioeconomic-status boys from 7 to 9 years old. The program uses training — of boys and their parents — aimed at decreasing delinquency, substance use and gang involvement. Parental training focuses on monitoring children's behavior, offering positive reinforcement for prosocial behavior, using punishment effectively and managing family crises. Training for the boys focuses on improving prosocial skills and self-control through coaching, modeling, reinforcement contingency and role-playing.

A 1995 evaluation of PTP demonstrated short- and long-term effects. Boys who participated in PTP when they were 9 years old were — six years later, at age 15 — less likely to report gang involvement or drug use during the previous 12 months than boys who did not participate in PTP. PTP boys were also less likely to report committing delinquent acts or having friends arrested by the police.[4, 5]

Take a Comprehensive Approach

The social ecological model highlights the potential for prevention strategies to address risk and

Levels of Social Influence on Youth Violence: The Social Ecological Model



SOURCE :Dahlberg LL, Krug EG. Violence — a global public health problem. In: Krug EG, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R, eds., World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2002.

protective factors at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels (see figure, "Levels of Social Influence on Youth Violence: The Social Ecological Model"). Unfortunately, most prevention strategies focus only on the risks present in the "individual" youth. Comprehensive strategies that address the factors within families, peer groups, schools and communities have the potential for broader and more sustained effects.

Project Star — a community-based drug-abuse prevention initiative for adolescents, originally called the Midwestern Prevention Program (MPP) — is an example of a well-evaluated program that uses a comprehensive approach to addressing multiples levels of influence. Project Star/MPP has been selected by the University of Colorado's Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence as a Blueprints Model Program (see description below). Although it does not target gang-joining specifically, some of Project Star's principles provide a useful framework for thinking about delinquency and gang-joining prevention programs. The program integrates both demand- and supply-reduction strategies by combining prevention programming with local school and community policy change. These policy changes are implemented by parents, school administrators and community leaders as part of the parent and community organization programs.

Project Star/MPP bridges networks, builds social capital and increases community investment in youth development by focusing on these components:

- **Mass Media:** Introduces the community to components of the program as they are added, seeking especially to inform residents who have influence over youth.
- **School:** In grade 6 or 7 (the transition years), a program works to increase students' skills to resist using drugs and to change the social acceptance of drugs in school.
- **Parent:** Develops family support for a non-drug-use norm within the family and in the community, including parent education when the child is in middle school.
- **Community:** Government and community leaders are trained to form a community organization to strategically plan and implement drug-abuse prevention services and activities.
- **Health policy:** A government subcommittee — including leaders from the community — is formed to implement policy initiatives that reduce demand and limit the supply of cigarettes, alcohol and illicit drugs.

(NOTE: These components are delivered sequentially, six to 12 months apart, over a five-year period; the mass-media component is used during all five years.)

Researchers began tracking Project Star/MPP students in 1985. They randomly assigned sixth- and seventh-graders from eight public middle schools in the Kansas City area to the program or the control group. Results of the evaluation showed long-lasting decreases in tobacco and marijuana use and an increase in parent-to-youth conversations about drug use.[6, 7]

Another example — which is specific to gang involvement — is the Comprehensive Gang Model, implemented and tested by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). This model (which researchers sometimes refer to as the "Spergel model") involves a coordinated effort of community mobilization, providing opportunities, social intervention, suppression, and organizational development and change. Based on quasi-experimental evaluations of the Comprehensive Gang Model in five sites (Bloomington, IL; Mesa and Tucson, AZ; Riverside, CA; and San Antonio, TX), researchers found that it was successful when implemented correctly — specifically when the program was implemented in conjunction with integrated agency partnerships.[8]

In Riverside, for example, gang activity and drug-related arrests declined among youth who were in the program. In Mesa, there were lower arrest rates among program youth for specific crimes and fewer reported juvenile-perpetrated crimes. Although gang *membership* was not specifically measured, the reduction in gang activity, drug arrests and juvenile crimes would arguably reduce the influence that gang members have in recruiting new members.

It is important to note, however, that there were no changes in three of the sites (Bloomington, Tucson and San Antonio) that did not implement all of the components of the program. With little room for error, the Comprehensive Gang Model

seems to be all-or-nothing in nature; results suggest that only those communities able to accommodate *all* program pieces will see desired results. Also, the model is focused on gang intervention rather than preventing youth from joining gangs. Therefore, it is important for communities to also consider adaptations or other models that include a focus on gang-joining prevention.

Address Core Components of Prevention

Prevention operating systems like CTC can take advantage of what I call a "core menu" of prevention strategies — strategies that can build protective factors within a fragile community and that, in turn, have the potential to help prevent youth from joining a gang. These include a range of positive enhancements such as tutoring, mentoring, life-skills training, case management, increased parental involvement, improving connections with schools, and other opportunities for supervised recreational activities.

These core strategies can work by directly reducing the likelihood of gang involvement or by reinforcing strengths within the family or in the community. Community members and organizations are often more willing to mobilize around prevention efforts, when the focus is on the positive influences that should be enhanced, rather than solely on risks and what is not working. Communities should consider the core activities that are already in place — even if these need improvement or modification — as well as additional activities that are needed to strengthen youth's abilities to avoid gang-joining.

Many existing prevention programs are designed to work by enhancing these types of protective factors. Fortunately, communities can draw from existing evidence-based programs such as those highlighted in the Blueprints review of violence-prevention programs.[9] (For more on Blueprints, see below.) Communities should also think beyond specific programs and consider broader strategies and policies that could be implemented to enhance core protective factors or improve the ability to implement effective programs.

Replacing and Exceeding the Attraction of Gangs

To be effective, a gang-membership prevention strategy should replace — and, indeed, exceed — the attraction that being in a gang has for some youth. An oft-repeated adage in the helping professions is, "Don't take something away without putting something in its place." When urging youth *not* to join gangs, the message should also offer prosocial alternatives. Some of the important but often unrecognized attractions of gangs include the support, sense of belonging, excitement and relationships that youth believe gangs offer. (For more on the attraction of gangs, see chapter 2.)

Relationship-building is a critical component of healthy and prosocial development in youth. The Boys and Girls Clubs Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (GPTTO) program offers one example of this prevention principle. GPTTO reaches at-risk youth ages 6-18 through outreach, referral, relationships with and mentoring by older youth, and exciting activities that increase a sense of belonging. A case-management component assures school attendance and performance and increases participation in the community.

An evaluation of GPTTO has revealed several desired outcomes. In addition to better school performance and attitudes and increased positive peer relationships, youth who attended more GPTTO sessions were less likely to engage in marijuana use and theft in the year after attending the sessions.[10] Looking at whether GPTTO played a role in keeping kids away from gangs, the researchers found that more frequent participation in sessions was associated with:

- Delayed onset of gang-like behavior, such as wearing gang attire.
- Less contact with the juvenile justice system.
- Decrease in delinquent behaviors.
- Improved school performance.
- Better prosocial relationships.

As the GPTTO evaluation showed, positive relationships are a major protective factor for youth who are at risk for gang-joining.

This principle is also integral to Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA). The primary prevention strategy of BBBSA is adult support and mentoring through one-to-one relationships with at-risk 6- to 18-year-olds from single-parent homes. The program maintains standards through volunteer orientation and screening, along with youth and family assessment. Volunteers are required to complete training in mentoring, including relationship-building and how to recognize serious problems. Mentors must attend ongoing training in maintaining supportive relationships. Matches between volunteers and youth are based on the youth's needs — including developmental stage — and on parental preferences and volunteers' abilities. BBBSA offers ongoing supervision and quarterly contact between the agency and the family.

An evaluation of BBBSA has shown positive results. Researchers compared youth from eight BBBSA sites (Houston, TX; San Antonio, TX; Columbus, OH; Minneapolis, MN; Rochester, NY; Phoenix, AZ; Philadelphia, PA; and Wichita, KS) with youth in control-group sites over an 18-month period. The youth in the study were 10-16 years old; 60 percent were male and more than half were members of an ethnic minority. Nearly all lived with one parent in a low-income household, reporting family histories of violence or substance abuse. It is important to note that these are risk factors for gang-joining.

The researchers looked at several outcomes — including drug and alcohol use, conduct problems and violent behaviors. They found that youth who participated in BBBSA for 18 months were 46 percent less likely to start using drugs and 27 percent less likely to start using alcohol than youth in the control group. The evaluation also showed that BBBSA youth were less likely to engage in violent behavior, exhibited better classroom behavior and had higher academic performance.[11] (NOTE: BBBSA also has a *school*-based, in addition to this *community*-based, mentoring program that has shown equally positive results.[12])

Community partnership models such as those used by GPTTO and BBBSA use comprehensive strategies that are grounded in prevention principles. They build on strengths in the community and address the attraction of gangs. Chapter 9's sidebar "In the Spotlight: Female Intervention Team" features one program's "lessons learned" as it developed strategies for gang-membership prevention.

Implementation Challenges With Community-Based Prevention Programs

What do we know about the challenges of establishing a gang-membership prevention program in the community? And what do we know about overcoming them?

Substantial research exists regarding the building of program and community collaborations.[13, 14, 15, 16] Based on these key studies — as well as my own ethnographic and evaluation work in the field — here are nine key strategies:

1. Avoid reinventing the wheel: Build from programs that exist.
2. Develop strategic plans.
3. Identify real and imagined boundaries.
4. Make community participation a priority.
5. Maximize partnerships.
6. Involve a balance of community partners.
7. Ensure that efforts are inclusive and draw on diverse talents.
8. Use training and technical assistance to expand organizational capacity.
9. Ensure sustainability.

Avoid Reinventing the Wheel: Build From Programs That Exist

Perhaps the single biggest misconception in trying to implement a gang-membership prevention initiative or program is that the community must start from scratch in developing a new strategy. This is not true. But how can a community draw

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: HOMEBOY INDUSTRIES

INTERVIEW WITH FATHER GREG BOYLE

"Nothing stops a bullet like a job." That's the motto of Homeboy Industries (HBI), which began with a grass-roots movement in 1988 in the barrios of East Los Angeles. Faced with a gang-violence epidemic, community members, a handful of probation officers and a young Jesuit, Father Greg Boyle, linked arms and energies to provide youngsters with an alternative to gangs. Twenty-four years later, Father Boyle's beard has whitened and Homeboy Industries has grown into the largest anti-gang program in America, moving from an East L.A. storefront to a large, two-story building in the city center. Serving 12,000 kids from every ZIP code in L.A. County, HBI is an excellent example of a community-based program that helps at-risk youth and those already involved in gang activity and violence. "G" — as Father Boyle is called by politicians and homies alike — talked with me about his work.

How did Homeboy Industries begin?

The mothers in the community came together, insisting we had to do something to stop the violence and save their children from gangs. We began with a school because I noticed — when I was a young priest at Dolores Street — that there was no middle school for kids who had gotten in trouble. There was one school with a huge waiting list and nowhere else for kids to go.

How did establishing the school lead to the recognition that something was needed beyond the classroom that would help kids leave gang life or see an option other than joining in the first place?

What was needed was jobs, so we started a jobs program. We involved the whole community. We printed pamphlets, and the mothers in the community actually organized a huge march — families, babies, homies, priests, everyone. We went door to door to all the businesses, asking people to just give one job to a homie or to a kid who had obstacles, who couldn't get a job anywhere else. What began with community mobilization led to the development of a training program, "Jobs for a Future."

How did other programs develop?

As needs presented themselves, programs were born. For example, "F*** the World" was tacked onto Frank's forehead … so tattoo removal was born. I was growing weary of constantly going through my Rolodex for an immigration lawyer here, a child-custody lawyer there … so our legal department was born. It was clear that homies and homegirls were both victims and perpetrators of partner violence … so our domestic violence program was born. People came from the community with their special gifts — yoga, guitar, financial literacy, creative writing — so these programs were born, delivered by folks [who were] already part of our family. Everything that is here — both prevention and intervention — it is all organic and born from this population expressing what they need.

What approaches have you used to try to ensure a connection between school and the streets?

This is always a challenge — making sure folks don't fall between the cracks. We have a charter high school here, with dedicated teachers, where kids can get their G.E.D. or earn their diploma. The idea is that if we get them here for school, they can work part-time at headquarters and also get counseling if they need it. [They can] attend any class that is offered here: anger management, yoga, guitar, writing … whatever they might be interested in. We try to make them allergic to the neighborhood, as if they will get sick if they go near their gang.

How, in your opinion, should successes and outcomes be measured?

Outcomes must be measured in ways that accurately reflect the struggles individuals face in deciding not to join a gang or to leave gang life. Our success is that this population comes here — these individuals show up here, day after day. They are utterly unique, unlike any service population. There is a comfort level — everyone feels the therapeutic elixir present in this building. We are a symbolic representation of hope to all 86,000 gang members in the county … whether they are ready to walk in our doors or not. And we represent hope to the kids who may feel they have to join a gang, but don't want to. No other place can claim this. (See the sidebar, "Evaluating Homeboy Industries.")

on its existing strengths and what has been learned elsewhere?

First, existing programs should be inventoried to understand the community's strengths and gaps. In some communities, often identical prevention programs may be operating within a few blocks of each other, duplicating efforts and dividing limited funding. Therefore, a needs assessment — mapping assets and resources — can help prevent program redundancy. This is a core activity in developing a prevention operating system.

It is important that communities take advantage of existing coalitions and partnerships, including those that are not specifically working on the issue of preventing kids from joining gangs. These may start as an informal coalition of community stakeholders that develop organically over time, like Homeboy Industries, or they may already be more formal partnerships with Memorandums of Understanding between programs and public organizations.

Evaluating Homeboy Industries

The University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) is currently conducting the first formal evaluation of Homeboy Industries (HBI). The five-year longitudinal analysis — which I am conducting along with colleagues Todd Franke and Christine Christie, and which is being funded by the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation and The California Wellness Foundation — is using quantitative and qualitative measures to assess HBI's impact on reducing violent, gang-related activity and increasing prosocial behaviors.

Conducting a scientific evaluation of any community-based organization can be both rewarding and daunting. Data collection, trust-building and the composition of a comparison group can pose significant challenges. A case study, completed during the first year of the HBI evaluation, looked at factors surrounding exiting gang life and re-entering mainstream society.[17] Preliminary findings suggest that participation in HBI may lead to a significant decrease in recidivism and an increase in prosocial behaviors. Final results of the UCLA evaluation, however, are not expected until 2015.

Best practices and promising models should be reviewed to help community coalitions identify core components — or principles — of evidence-based strategies that may be adapted to meet local conditions and cultural needs. Here are some useful resources:

- Communities That Care (see http://www.sdrg.org/ctcresource/) is a community prevention operating system that systematically builds a coalition of stakeholders and helps them to assess local needs and opportunities and then select and implement effective prevention strategies.
- The Strategic Planning Tool for Community Assessment (see http://www.iir.com/nygc/tool) reviews a range of anti-gang programs and offers a protocol to guide community assessment.
- STRYVE (see http://www.SafeYouth.gov) is an initiative sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that provides the latest information, interactive training videos, and customized online workspaces to help communities plan, implement and evaluate an approach to youth-violence prevention that is based on the best available evidence.
- The Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth (UNITY) (see http://www.preventioninstitute.org/unity) is funded by CDC as part of the STRYVE initiative to help large urban centers organize their planning and increase their capacity to address youth violence. The UNITY Roadmap uses nine elements, including political support, policies and plans, organizational structure, resources evaluation, community engagement, communication, prevention programming and capacity-building skills.
- Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development (see http://www.blueprintsprograms.com), at the University of Colorado's Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, provides information on prevention models and promising programs that have been rigorously evaluated and shown to have preventive effects on youth violence or risk factors for violence.
- CrimeSolutions.gov (see http://www.crimesolutions.gov) is sponsored by the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs and provides ratings of the evidence for specific criminal justice strategies, including those focused on gang-membership prevention and intervention.

Develop Strategic Plans

Developing short- and long-term strategic plans that are focused and adaptive is critical to community-based prevention efforts. Strategic planning helps programs adjust to shifts in everything from levels of violence to available funding. It ensures that program infrastructure is premeditated, organized, well-implemented and maintained. Needless to say, however, truly effective strategic planning depends on the active collaboration of involved partners.

It is critical that gang-membership prevention initiatives *avoid planning without having a focus.* Often, communities mobilize in the face of a

tragedy. When gang violence results in the deaths of innocent bystanders, groups may declare that they will "fight gangs 24/7" and insist that the community "do something." Although such devotion is admirable, it is important that communities try to avoid the risk of falling back into the familiar rather than focusing on what will be effective. One way to ensure long-term change is by using a multipronged, multiagency approach that includes proactive, thoughtful planning and action rather than reactive rhetoric without follow-through.

Identify Real and Imagined Boundaries

Programs often exist in silos, focusing on their geographic area or targeted population, but disconnected from other efforts. For example, school-based gang-membership prevention programs often are not linked to community-based after-school programs. This was a factor in a Los Angeles middle-school leadership program in which there was an anti-gang curriculum during school hours but no after-school activities — so, back in the outside world after school, youth were exposed to gang activity. Professional turf issues and bureaucratic obstacles also added to that program's lack of connection and coordination.

Another example is a community-based gang-membership prevention program that required its program director to have a minimum of four years' experience in county programs, but this requirement foreclosed the potential for innovative thinking that may have been brought by someone with relevant experience from outside the county.

To solve such problems, organizations should seek collaboration opportunities and create mechanisms for providing services through partnerships. School-based and community-based prevention efforts should be coherent and continuous, and every effort should be made to tame bureaucratic obstacles so they do not interfere with program growth and community change.

Make Community Participation a Priority

"Community involvement" must be more than just a sound bite. Networks of individuals, businesses and other organizations can help sustain a gang-membership prevention effort. They can build community strengths and bridge social divisions by integrating those who feel socially or economically marginalized. In this regard, however, it is critical to engage all members of a community, including schools, law enforcement and other local government entities, churches, business groups and associations. Community transformation also depends on using new methods of communication — such as texting, email and social networks — alongside homegrown neighborhood grapevines.

It is critical that everyone involved in a prevention initiative — from foundations, experts and stakeholders to management, staff and participants — understand how specific strategies can lead to positive outcomes. This helps everyone involved to take ownership of the effort.

Maximize Partnerships

Collaborative efforts often ignore important partners. Although law enforcement has learned to work across jurisdictions, the same cannot always be said about gang-membership prevention programs. Such programs must learn to blend the local focus with other programs throughout the geographic region — after all, gangs do not respect city or county lines. Gangs tend to be in focused geographical areas, some for 30 to 40 years. Although maximizing partnerships might mean working across jurisdictions, it may also mean focusing resources in the areas with the greatest need.

Sometimes, even local efforts fail to be inclusive. It is important to consider grass-roots movements, faith-based organizations, and understaffed storefront programs when forming a collaboration for a community-based gang-membership prevention effort.

One of the biggest obstacles to effective gang-membership prevention in the community is the competition for funding. Funding is often awarded to organizations that can mobilize resources to respond to a request for proposals. It may be difficult to ensure that money is given to community-based organizations that actually provide services. Often, a large organization acts as a fiscal agent, providing management but no services. Thus, it is important to link financial support to the ability of groups to collaborate and share resources — including money — appropriately. Private

foundations and public funding sources can reinforce this by funding programs and organizations that demonstrate effective collaborations.

Involve a Balance of Community Partners

One of the most critical — and least understood — aspects of effective gang-membership prevention is involving a balance of multidisciplinary community partners. It is important to understand, of course, that "meeting" is *not* "collaborating." Gatherings of organizations and community stakeholders run the risk of being exercises in frustration: long on lip service about "working together" but short on action plans for true partnerships.

There is also a risk that gang-membership prevention activities will end up focusing solely on intervention and be seen primarily as law enforcement activities. Collaborations that become "badge heavy" may run the risk of emphasizing criminal justice approaches and overlooking other models and approaches. This tends to result when primary responsibility for dealing with gangs is assigned to law enforcement. By focusing on early prevention and reducing the likelihood that youth will join gangs in the first place, diverse partners can be engaged and maintained.

Ensure That Efforts Are Inclusive and Draw on Diverse Talents

It is important to draw on the skills of experts — including community leaders and former gang members — when planning and implementing gang-membership prevention programs. Keep in mind, however, that each group poses a challenge to program implementation. Former gang members are frequently met with deep suspicion regarding ongoing gang ties. Practitioners and academics may encounter mistrust over motives and credibility.

To protect the community, there must be both ethical review of and training for diverse types of service providers. For example, former gang members who have completed probation or parole can be required to have drug testing. Professionals can be assessed to ensure sensitivity to community culture, practices and beliefs. Such requirements obviously should be paired with consequences for failing to adhere to expectations. Former gang members who commit crimes and practitioners who demonstrate bias or lack of sensitivity to community norms must be replaced.

Use Training and Technical Assistance to Expand Organizational Capacity

Because gang-membership prevention involves people with varying backgrounds and levels of expertise, ongoing training must be provided and tailored to their needs. For example, one all-too-familiar scenario involves formerly gang-involved adults who are successful as community organizers or youth mentors. They may establish their own programs but, despite their commitment, find it difficult to do the paperwork and other administrative tasks that are involved. Therefore, it is crucial to the success — and accountability — of a program to provide sufficient training and technical assistance. In fact, it may be valuable to have everyone involved in a joint training: former gang members — now mentors — participating alongside administrators, police officers and social workers.

Technical assistance should be used to develop collaborations as well as build knowledge. For example, universities and community colleges can become partners in providing training. Training and technical assistance should be offered in multiple forms: lectures and both virtual and distance-learning initiatives. And don't forget about social networking!

Social networking tools — such as texting, Facebook and Twitter — can play an important role in mobilizing communities in gang-membership prevention efforts and providing links to training opportunities. In considering how these tools might be used to build community involvement, it is important to be aware of how the specific populations in the community use social networking tools.[18]

Ensure Sustainability

Community programs constantly face the challenge of sustainability, in terms of both funding and staff. Also, because of their grass-roots nature, they may depend heavily on a single visionary, charismatic leader, which can further affect sustainability. Homeboy Industries responded to this challenge, for example, by undertaking long-term strategic and succession planning. The

likelihood of sustainability can also be increased by mentoring future leaders and practitioners.

Community-based prevention programs often depend on limited sources, largely public, for financing, using reactive rather than proactive fundraising. Financial sustainability must be pursued with great innovation. Public-private partnerships — combining government, foundation and corporate funding — can offer a good potential for sustaining community-based programs over the long haul. As well-respected gangs researchers Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson say, community-based efforts should have a 10-year plan — "enough to outlast gangs."[19]

Finally, an important factor in sustaining a community-based gang-membership prevention initiative or program is evaluation. Evaluation — measuring outcomes and understanding processes — is essential to short- and long-term planning and funding. (For more on evaluations of programs, see chapter 11.) It is always helpful to present potential funders with evidence that the cost of dealing with gang-involved youth — and their impact on the community — is far greater than the cost of funding programs that prevent kids from joining gangs in the first place.

Policy Issues

What do policymakers and practitioners need to think about when funding and implementing community-based gang-membership prevention strategies? Here are five key principles:

1. Integrate public health and criminal justice approaches.
2. Promote a long-term, comprehensive — rather than "single-solution" — approach.
3. Reinforce prosocial youth-development programs and community strengths.
4. Motivate social involvement.
5. Promote and fund evaluation.

Integrate public health and criminal justice approaches. In the past, many disciplines have led community-based prevention efforts: criminal justice, public health, education and social work. However, particularly in this time of limited fiscal resources, more interdisciplinary collaborations are required. Part of such collaborations, of course, is ensuring that stakeholders, including the public, agree on vocabulary. (For more on the importance of definitions and vocabulary, see Introduction.)

Policymakers and practitioners should meet — informally and often — to talk about what is working and not working. When this is not convenient, a newsletter or social network may do the trick in terms of sharing ideas and innovations.

Promote a long-term, comprehensive — rather than "single-solution" — approach. It is important to avoid a single-solution mentality to keeping kids from joining gangs; rather, a long-term, comprehensive approach should be promoted. Programs that are focused only on high-risk youth or that work with current gang members have thrived because they may be viewed as more cost-effective than communitywide prevention programs; they have also demonstrated short-term effectiveness. However, it makes no sense to try to prevent gang membership using a short time frame because new youth are continually at risk of joining gangs. It is also important that policymakers and practitioners avoid a "one-size-fits-all" mindset. Indeed, this is one of the primary reasons this book presents "principles" rather than individual, prescriptive programs. Areas dealing with emerging gang problems require community organizing and a more broad-based approach. Areas with chronic gang problems require more opportunities, including jobs.[20, 21] The most effective way for a community to figure out what it needs is to inventory its strengths and gaps, and to plan with multiple solutions in mind. Policymakers should consider the benefits of prevention operating systems like CTC for providing long-term, comprehensive prevention activities. Also, programs that address early childhood risks should be a key component. (For more on child development factors that should be considered in gang-joining prevention, see chapter 5.)

Reinforce prosocial youth-development programs and community strengths. Initiatives that emphasize positive youth development have experienced limited but significant success. For example, Geoffrey Canada's much-publicized work in the Harlem Children's Zone exemplifies this approach, as does Los Angeles' "Summer Night Lights" program.[17, 22] At-risk youth, families and neighborhoods possess protective factors that should be reinforced. For example, certain

communities, despite poverty and limited economic options, have growing neighborhood associations and a strong sense of community identity. This type of community involvement should be expanded by collaboration and financial support.

Motivate social involvement. At the community level, programs and organizations are faced with the challenge of doing more with less. This may be one of the strongest arguments for communities to build coalitions and partnerships. Gang-membership prevention efforts can benefit from involving individuals, families, informal networks, grass-roots programs and community organizations; this includes formalizing ways to include former gang members in helping to increase the community's understanding of gang allure and initiations. Also, youth should be included in program planning and implementation.

Promote and fund evaluation. Too often, policymakers do not understand the role that evaluation should play in program design and implementation, particularly when they are considering the funding of an initiative or program. It is crucial that only programs that work are being funded, and the only way to ensure this is through ongoing monitoring and scientific evaluation.

Conclusion

Community-based prevention of gang-joining remains one of the best ways to reduce gang membership and violence. Such efforts offer the chance to empower the people who are most directly affected by gangs — and by the destruction that gangs cause in individual lives, families, communities and society at large.

Based on research, we know that the core components essential to a successful community-based initiative include mentoring, parental involvement, skill-building, and opportunities for prosocial involvement.

It is important to consider the challenges that community-based gang-membership prevention efforts face. Often, for example, programs in the classroom — and strategies taught to parents — are not connected to "the street." True continuity means that strategies aimed at preventing gang-joining do not end at the school door.

Finally, practitioners and policymakers should be aware that communities may reject solutions imposed on them "from the outside." But leaders can help communities to recognize their strengths and to take ownership in gang-joining prevention efforts.

Perhaps Father Greg Boyle of Homeboy Industries described it best:

> What ultimately works are programs "born from below" — conceived and encouraged from within these underserved communities themselves. If we listen to those most impacted by gangs and understand the lethal absence of hope which undergirds it — then add the expertise [of] what works — the chances are good we will meet this challenge.

About the Author

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Jorja Leap is an anthropologist with more than 30 years of research experience that has focused on violence, culture and identity. Dr. Leap's work draws on the life histories of current and former gang members, and she is currently conducting a five-year longitudinal evaluation of the Homeboy Industries gang-intervention program. She has authored numerous evaluation studies. Her most recent book is *Jumped In: What Gangs Taught Me About Violence, Drugs, Love, and Redemption.* Dr. Leap received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles, where she has been on the faculty for 20 years.

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