



Crime Prevention in Action Youth Gang Prevention Fund

CPA-2

Durham Youth Gang Strategy

The Durham Youth Gang Strategy (DYGS) works with youth aged 12–18 who are involved or at risk of involvement in gangs. Through a comprehensive approach, the project focuses on decreasing risk factors for youth most at risk of gang involvement. The DYGS is supported by [Public Safety Canada](#), National Crime Prevention Centre, Youth Gang Prevention Fund and is delivered through a partnership between the Durham Family Court Clinic ([DFCC](#)) and the Murray McKinnon Foundation ([MMF](#)). The Project began in July 2007 and will be piloted and evaluated under the YGPF until March, 2011.

The Durham Regional Police Services 2006 Annual Report stated that the number of youth gangs in the Durham area is growing.¹ The report identified the Durham Region as home to at least 10 street gangs, and noted that 21 Toronto-based street gangs have members who live in the Durham Region. From small neighbourhood gangs to internationally connected criminal organizations like the Hell's Angels, gang activity remains a concern for police across the Greater Toronto Area, including Durham.²

In reaction to the Boxing Day shooting of Jane Creba in 2005, extensive consultations between service providers, governments, schools and police were undertaken in the Durham region. The focus of the discussions was on youth gang issues and how to work towards resolving them. The limited number of resources for gang involved youth was highlighted. DYGS emerged from these consultations to:

- provide intensive one to one support for high risk youth;
- develop gang awareness support for parents and guardians;
- facilitate Youth and Gang Forums for service providers; and
- deliver school based gang awareness workshops.

The Evidence Base

The DYGS comprehensive model is based on evidence from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model (or "Spergel Model").

OJJDP Comprehensive Gang (or "Spergel") Model

The Spergel Model is a balanced, three-pronged approach that encompasses prevention, intervention and suppression activities. The model presumes that gangs become chronic and serious problems in communities where key organizations are inadequately integrated and sufficient resources are not available to target gang-involved youth.³

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To address these problems, the Spergel Model calls for community institutions - including law enforcement, social welfare agencies, and grass roots organizations - to work together to achieve a more integrated, team-oriented approach. The main goal of the Spergel Model is to reduce and prevent gang crime and violence.

The model was piloted in the Little Village neighbourhood of Chicago, Illinois, starting in 1992. With some subsequent modifications, this design gave rise to the OJJDP Comprehensive Community-Wide Gang Model in 1995 and has been implemented and tested in 5 sites across the United States. The evaluation concluded that:

- serious gang violence among the targeted gang members was lower than among members of comparable gangs in the area. Specifically, there were fewer arrests for serious gang crimes (especially aggravated batteries and aggravated assaults) involving members of targeted gangs in comparison with a control group of youths from the same gangs and members of other gangs in Little Village;
- using a combination of various social interventions involving youth outreach workers and suppression tactics, was more effective for more-violent youths, while the sole use of youth workers was more effective for less-violent youths;
- the project was apparently most effective in assisting older youths to significantly reduce their criminal activities (particularly violence) more quickly than would have been the case if no project services had been provided; and
- the project was particularly successful in reducing drug arrests for program youth compared to comparison and quasi-program youth, who showed increased drug arrests.⁴

Program Participants

The DYGS works with youth 12 to 18 years old who have been identified as being at risk of gang involvement or already involved in gangs.

Key Partners

The DYGS project involves many partnerships in the community. In addition to the two sponsoring organizations, Durham Family Court Clinic and the Murray McKinnon Foundation, some of the key organizations involved in the project include:

- Durham Regional Police Service
- Ministry of Child and Youth Services Partners
- Vocational Pathways
- YMCA Employment Program
- Durham City Basketball Association
- John Howard Society
- Extreme Fitness
- Durham Alternative Secondary School
- Durham District School Board & Durham Catholic District School Board
- Toronto District School Board
- REACT Outreach Program
- Durham Youth Housing and Support Services
- Region of Durham – Social Services
- Durham Regional Transit

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Program Components

Consistent with the Spergel approach, the DYGS consists of the following five core components:

Community Mobilization

The project brings local residents, youth, community groups, civic leaders and agencies together to identify and strengthen existing, or create new linkages to organizations providing services for gang-involved and at-risk youth. It also coordinates programs and services, and the functions of staff within and across agencies. Activities include Community Youth Gang Forums, - to engage local residents, community groups, civic leaders, and agencies - and workshops held in schools where youth at high risk of gang activity have been identified.

Social Intervention

Programs and services are provided for youth involved in gangs and those at high-risk of gang involvement. Youth requiring one to one support are identified through partnerships with existing agencies and networks already serving 'at-risk' youth in the Durham Region. Referrals are made by Probation Services, the Durham Regional Police Service, Durham Region Public and Catholic School Boards, community service providers, Murray McKinnon Foundation and the Durham Family Court Clinic. Agencies provide referrals and disseminate information on DYGS services in order to reach at risk youth in the places they live and socialize.

Although both youth at risk of gang involvement and youth involved in gangs enter into the program at a central referral point, these two groups are treated with distinction during the referral process and in service planning. The determination of "at risk" or "involved" influences the intensity of services a youth will receive in the program. The intervention plans for both youth at risk of gangs and youth involved in gangs are for one year with bi-weekly attendance.

Parent/guardian education sessions have also been developed to increase knowledge about identifying youth who may be at risk or already involved in gang activities. Information is provided on the resources available to youth and family members and on various parenting strategies designed to promote pro-social teen decision-making. Key goals of these sessions are to improve communication between parents and their teens, and to prevent other siblings from becoming involved in gangs.

Opportunities Provision

Access to education, training and employment programs is organized for youth participants. The DYGS workers assist youth by assessing aptitudes and identifying opportunities. The staff make referrals and accompany the youth to initial appointments, coach them on interview techniques and follow up with organizing tutoring, homework support, skills development and work place support as required.

Suppression

Suppression activities including close supervision of youth involved in gangs by criminal justice agencies and community-based agencies, schools and grass-roots groups are supported through the project. Although suppression activities are not a primary function of the DYGS project, the DYGS staff work closely with the police, probation case managers, child protection workers, and other service providers to provide youth with close support and encouragement.

Organizational Change and Development

The DYGS project facilitates organizational change and development to help community agencies better address gang problems. Team problem-solving, development and implementation of policies

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and processes that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources within and across agencies are examples of this type of work. Community Youth and Gang Forums have been developed to both provide knowledge of issues relevant to youth gangs in the Durham Region and to change attitudes and activities. A key goal is to see transformation at the community level so that factors that contribute to gang involvement are increasingly addressed through a community-based approach.

Evaluation Design

A comprehensive evaluation of the project is being conducted by a third party evaluator. The purpose of the evaluation is to thoroughly document the DYGS project implementation and impacts in order to contribute to the knowledge of what project components work best to prevent or reduce gang involvement.

A single group repeated measures design (pre and post intervention with a minimum 12 month follow up) will explore whether the DYGS interventions specifically geared for high risk youth and community members can help to improve knowledge and awareness, as well as decrease risk behaviours associated with youth at risk of gang involvement and youth involved in gangs. Evaluation data will be gathered using the administration of questionnaire packages and focus groups to youth participants, parents/guardians, and community service providers.

Preliminary Results

Based on the baseline data collected for the evaluation, appropriate youth are being referred to DYGS. In total, 21 of the participants (89%) that attended the program were identified as males between the ages of 13-18. The majority of referrals (50%) were for youth between 17 and 18 years of age.

The majority (61.1%) of youths surveyed were attending school, and of that group 80% had missed at least 3 days of school per month. The vast majority (40%) had missed between 3 to 9 days of school, and another significant percentage (20%) reported that they missed more than 23 days of school which would suggest that they are enrolled but not attending school.

Three quarters of the youth (78%) had been charged with a criminal offence. When youth were asked how many charges they had, there was a wide range of answers, from 1 charge (23.1% of those charged) to 15 charges (7.7% of those charged). A large percentage of those charged were accused of committing robbery related offences with 42.9% of those charged for break and entry and 14.3% for unarmed robbery. Assaults were the second highest offence (21.4% of those charged), and when asked if they were under the influence of drugs at the time of the crime, 28.6% reported they were.

The pre-test results also indicated that 67% of youth involved in DYGS have at least moderate affiliations with gangs, and that 23% of the participants are considered to have high gang affiliation.

Youth Gang Awareness Forums were held in February 2008 and October 2008. Both registrations were full with over 100 community members on the waiting list. Durham Youth and Gangs Forums have provided community agency members with increased knowledge about the risk factors associated with gangs. The majority of forum participants indicated that they could better recognize the indicators of youth gang involvement; they had a better understanding of risk factors associated with why youth join gangs, they had better knowledge about how to identify several local gangs in Durham, and they had increased their ability to identify gang symbols and graffiti.⁵

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Implementation Observations

Program Exposure

Lower than expected initial levels of referral of youth to the program were a result of lack of exposure in the community. Time and effort was dedicated to staff contacting and educating referral sources about the program, and this resulted in increased referrals. DYGS staff are sought after speakers at community events and meetings, and continue to make the most of opportunities to raise awareness in the community about the project.

There is a high level of cooperation from staff at the Ministry for Children and Youth Services, Probation Services, Police Services, Schools and other community agencies, as well as a general acknowledgment in the community of the need for the DYGS services. DYGS staff note that a big part of their job is continually maintaining and building their network of contacts in order to help youth gain access to education, employment, housing and other services.

Identification/Assessment/Screening Tools

The DYGS has developed a specific youth gang definition, and with community partners has developed a comprehensive profile of youth at risk of gang involvement and youth involved in gangs. This helps ensure that the right population is being referred to the program. This work has resulted in different assessment tools for those youth identified as at risk for gang activity, and those identified as involved in gang activity.

Voluntary Participation

To increase the variety of participants, project staff are exploring ways to increase the referrals and participation of non-mandated youth. This includes looking at meaningful incentives for youth to be part of the program on a voluntary basis.

Youth at risk are often transient, moving from Durham to Toronto, and in and out of incarceration. This presents challenges for consistent voluntary participation by youth in the project. DYGS workers have found that rather than limiting contact to the DYGS offices, visiting the youth directly at their school, home, the office of a service provider, or their favourite hang-out, are effective ways to keep youth connected to the project.

Lifestyle Changes

Families of gang involved youth often have financial dependence on gang related criminal activities. DYGS staff were initially concerned that the project would not be able to find ways to compensate for the money, safety, prestige and lifestyle gangs offer. They have found that providing opportunities for team sports and social activities are genuinely attractive to youth. DYGS participants have also expressed their interest in real alternatives to the gang life and what it has to offer, such as education and job opportunities. Currently, a number of DYGS youth are employed, pursuing their education, or involved in specific work training.

Engaging Parents/Guardians

Engaging parents/guardians of high risk youth is difficult. Outreach efforts designed to connect DYGS workers with parents has had limited success. Further exploration has revealed there may be fear of intimidation or reprisal for attending program activities. In particular, use of the term 'gang' can be problematic. Youth, parents and teachers report that by referring youth into a gang prevention program, such as DYGS, they fear the youth will be stigmatized, and that there may be negative ramifications that would outweigh any positive results from participating in the project.

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To counteract this, the creation of a safe environment for parents and community members to participate in gang awareness sessions is paramount. In marketing the program, emphasis is placed on DYGS as a program that will reduce and prevent criminal related activity in general. More work is also being done to educate parents on the benefits of their children being involved in the DYGS programs. There has been an increase in the number of parents of youth involved with the project asking for support and coping strategies.

Data Collection

A central method of data collection has been developed to streamline and ensure information on all project work is documented. This is essential for the comprehensive project evaluation.

For more information on this project please contact:

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If you wish to register to receive crime prevention information please visit the subscription page at:
<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/ml/index-eng.aspx>.

¹ Durham Regional Police Service. 2006. *2006 Annual Report*. Retrieved from
http://www.drps.ca/annual_report/2006/2006%20annual%20report.pdf

² Ibid.

³ For more information visit: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/2008-pcpp-eng.aspx>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For information contact the project sponsor.