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## **The Research Base for Youth Intervention Programs** ***The Recruitment, Enrichment, Empowerment Model***

Youth Intervention Programs (YIP) were designed to engage youth who are in gangs or are at risk of becoming part of a gang. Experts nationwide agree that just like adults, youth strive for a sense of belonging, protection, economic gain, status, respect and social ranking. YIP uses this understanding to attract youth, by providing them with constructive, acceptable ways of meeting these needs. YIP also serves as a powerful form of outreach and collaboration within the community. The success of the YIP sites can be attributed to the user-friendly design of the model and to the fact that the program's presence can have an impact on the surrounding community. The target age range for Youth Intervention Program (YIP) participants is 13 through 19 years old. The three-tiered structure (or phases) includes Recruitment, Enrichment and Empowerment.

**Recruitment Phase.** This phase includes the process by which the young person is introduced to the concept of a positive group. The key to successful recruitment is to demonstrate to the youth that a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and identity can be attained through participation in a positive group, the Youth Intervention Program site. The Youth Intervention Program group demonstrates positive values that the new participant begins to incorporate. He or she begins to participate in the positive group. Once the individual is recruited and has bonded with the group, the youth is encouraged to bring his or her friends and associates to the site.

The initial engagement or recruitment process begins with a one-on-one assessment, gathering information such as educational history, family history, social service needs, legal history and other pertinent information. The Youth Intervention Program coordinator must have the ability to understand and empathize with youth and the challenges they face; e.g., expulsion from school, conflict with family members, poverty or isolation from mainstream society. This phase fills the need for acceptance, fellowship and protection. Intensive recruitment methods include in addition to peer recruitment, linkages with the juvenile justice system and police department. Recruitment also includes going into the community and talking with young people on the streets, in schools, or in their homes. The use of traditional, cultural, athletic and recreational activities are effective tools for recruiting and keeping youth engaged as well as building group cohesion. These activities are mainstays of the program during the recruitment phase.

**Enrichment Phase.** In this phase of Youth Intervention Programs, youth are provided with the opportunity to learn new skills. The behavior and skills initially exhibited and possessed by participants are often developed as a response to extremely adverse social and economic conditions causing them to be labeled as problem youth or troublemakers. As such, they are often excluded from school, youth centers and other traditional programs. The Enrichment phase focuses on promoting the development of social skills, which enable young people to function, be successful, and contribute to mainstream society. The role modeling offered by the Youth Intervention Program coordinators and other adults are a part of both the Enrichment and Empowerment phases. Periodic contact with successful adults helps build healthy relationships between Youth Intervention Program participants and the world around them.

Participants are encouraged to develop a strong sense of self. Many participants are unaware of their individual capacity to be successful. By focusing on information concerning their value, participants begin to understand the need to make healthy choices. During this phase, the Youth Intervention Program engages the youth in as many different experiences as possible. Many Youth Intervention Program participants have never been camping, to a museum or even to the zoo. Individuals participate in new, positive experiences within the safety of the positive group. Throughout this phase, inappropriate behavior is confronted and new group norms are established as acceptable. The Youth Intervention Program participants develop a strong sense of self-concept and begin to realize they can function positively in a wide variety of social situations.

Throughout this phase, as youth are challenged to identify inappropriate behavior, positive activities offer alternatives to negative activities associated with negative groups; offer a means to teach and practice acceptable behavior; and offer a means to build self-reliance. The advanced stage of this phase should incorporate seminars, workshops, retreats, etc. as methods of teaching. In the Enrichment phase, as in each phase of the Youth Intervention Program, emphasis should be placed on school improvement, (both academically and behaviorally), regular attendance, regular study periods, and tutoring. Positive peer pressure is used as a motivation for individual growth and learning.

Providing off-site activities—library visits, attending lectures, and other educational and cultural activities—will strengthen this component. Linkages and collaborations utilizing volunteers, teachers/professional instructors, participation of community members, other youth-service professionals, and community organizations are critical to ensure provision of needed services. The use of group discussions and group dynamics builds strong communication skills, offers useful information, and emphasizes positive values among group members. Topics should include conflict resolution, violence prevention and drug/alcohol abuse, as well as a more diverse range of concerns, such as social development, male/female responsibility, sexually transmitted diseases, economic empowerment, racism, academic achievement, family violence, and healthy relationships.

The lack of employment is regularly identified by Youth Intervention Program participants as one of the main barriers to leading a productive life. Most participants express a desire for work but lack the skills necessary to find and keep a job. Simple activities including conducting a job search, following a schedule, being punctual and completing a job application can greatly enhance participants' ability to find and keep a job. The Youth Intervention Program Coordinator should work with community resources including the City's Summer Employment Initiative to provide job skills training and introductory employment opportunities for participants.

Intensive involvement is a critical piece of the Enrichment component through which Youth Intervention Program coordinators deliberately and constructively become involved in the lives of the participants. Providing access to a supportive adult assists in replacing negative influences as the youth's support system. The case management element includes direct intervention by coordinators and referrals to agencies for services not provided by the Youth Intervention Program.

In summary, each Youth Intervention Program site must address the following areas to build a foundation for success during the Enrichment phase:

- Socialization—rites of passage, self-esteem, decision-making, goal setting
- Education—tutoring, school attendance, GED preparation, interest assessment
- Employability—job search, application completion, interview preparation, skill and interest assessment; working effectively with supervisors and co-workers.
- Health—nutrition, exercise, sexuality, substance abuse
- Conflict Resolution—peer mediation, negotiation skills, de-escalation

**Empowerment Phase.** The final phase of the program, *Empowerment*, focuses on personal accountability and a new awareness of self in relationship to a career path. It solidifies a youth's connection with mainstream society by linking him or her to educational and economic institutions and opportunities. This Youth Intervention Program component offers assistance to youth in obtaining steady employment, education, and vocational training. It also emphasizes the importance of being a constructive and contributing society member. The Empowerment phase highlights the benefits of reinvestment in the community.

Empowerment is evident when a young person can identify his or her needs and meet those needs in constructive ways. The empowered participant will set goals, develop a plan and follow through. Holding a job, enrolling in school or post-secondary education, and speaking to others about what they have learned are examples of what a young person in the empowerment phase should be able to do. Leading others to invest in their neighborhoods and the broader community is an example of this phase. Empowerment is an ongoing process which will continue as the participant ages out of the day to day involvement at the Youth Intervention Program site.

### **Research Base for Youth Intervention Programs**

The model described above is based in some of the earliest gang prevention and intervention efforts in the country. The Chicago Area Project (CAP) (Sorrentino and Whittaker, 1994) was started in 1934 and designed to utilize community-based, neighborhood-based groups and organizations to engage young people involved in gangs through community development activities. CAP also utilized the detached worker program. This effort used individuals from the community to serve as mentors for youth in gangs or at great risk of becoming involved in gangs. The CAP detached workers developed positive activities for their youth. CAP workers also advocated for their youth if they became involved in the juvenile justice system and helped them access employment, health care and educational assistance. The focus of the CAP workers was to turn an antisocial group to a prosocial group.

Numerous gang prevention and intervention initiatives have been developed around the CAP model. One well regarded effort that is similar in structure to the Youth Intervention Programs is Boys & Girls Clubs of America's Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach and the related Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach. The first effort is designed to engage youth before they become involved in gangs and the second works with youth who are already gang involved. Both initiatives, like YIP, mobilize community resources to engage participants in positive youth development activities and match them with a positive adult who provides advocacy at school, with their family, and if they become involved in the juvenile justice system.

Public/Private Ventures completed an extensive analysis of these gang prevention and intervention efforts (Arbreton and McClanahan, 2002). Results were analyzed for over 1,000 youth engaged at 24 different Boys & Girls Clubs organizations. For youth involved in the Gang Prevention initiative, more frequent attendance was related to delayed onset of gang behavior, more involvement in positive activities outside school, more positive peer relationships, and better family relationships. For youth involved in the Gang Intervention effort, more frequent attendance was associated with disengagement from gang activities and gang-associated peers, less contact with the juvenile justice system and more positive school engagement. The models represented by Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach and Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach are recognized by the U. S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as promising programs to keep young people out of gangs (Howell, 2010).

For more than 30 years the City of Little Rock has implemented Youth Intervention Programs. Since 1997, over 3,000 Little Rock youth have participated in more than 2,000,000 hours of positive programming contact through the City's YIP sites. These YIP sites are based on gang prevention and intervention models that are theoretically sound and supported by quality research. The models are also recommended by the federal government as effective ways to reduce gang activity and associated violence.

## Reference

Arbreton, A.J.A. and McClanahan, W. (2002). *Targeted Outreach: Boys & Girls Clubs of America's Approach to Gang Prevention and Intervention*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

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Sorrentino, A. and Whittaker, D. W. (1994). The Chicago Area Project: Addressing the gang problem. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 63 (5): 8-12.