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On Good Authority is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice program evaluation. This report was written by Irving A. Spergel, Ph.D., and Kwai Ming Wa, M.S., of the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration Gang Research, Evaluation and Technical Assistance Projects. It is a summary of a program evaluation of the Gang Violence Reduction Project administered by the Chicago Police Department. The evaluation was conducted by the University of Chicago under the direction of Dr. Spergel.

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Combating gang violence in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood

The Gang Violence Reduction Project (GVRP) in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood was one of a series of recent initiatives in Illinois and nationally to address the youth gang problem. The Chicago Police Department administered the project between 1992 and 1997 with federal funds provided by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

The implementation of the project required that it be based on a set of interrelated strategies: community mobilization, social intervention, provision of social opportunities, suppression, and organizational change and development. The project targeted 200 male gang members ages 14 to 24 (Sample sizes differ throughout this summary due to the variety of statistical measures used and varied availability of criminal history information.). These youths were involved in two gangs, the Latin Kings and the Two Six, which were in conflict with each other.

The gang violence problem in Little Village, a predominantly Mexican-American community of 60,000 residents (1990 U.S. Census), was one of the most chronic in Chicago. The Latin Kings, with an estimated 1,200 members, and the Two Six, with about 800 members, accounted for 75 percent of gang-related homicides, aggravated batteries, and aggravated assaults in the six police beats targeted in Little Village.

The project team included a part-time neighborhood relations sergeant, a part-time clerical officer, and two full-time tactical officers from the Chicago Police Department. A full-time probation supervisor and two full-time probation officers from the Cook County Department of Adult Probation, a youth outreach supervisor, and three full-time (equivalent) youth outreach workers, some of whom were former gang members, also were part of the team. In addition, community group Neighbors Against Gang Violence (NAGV) assisted the families of youths involved in the project with various efforts and services.

The project was supervised by the 10th District commander and directed by the Chicago Police Department Research and Development Division. University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration Professor Irving Spergel designed the project and became its coordinator over time.

Services and contacts

Project team members operated in close relationship with each other while fulfilling their specific agency mission functions. A range of control efforts and services was provided to 191 gang members targeted for the project.

Counseling and advice was the principal service provided to targeted youths, mainly on the streets and often at night and on weekends. Each team member provided this service, with youth

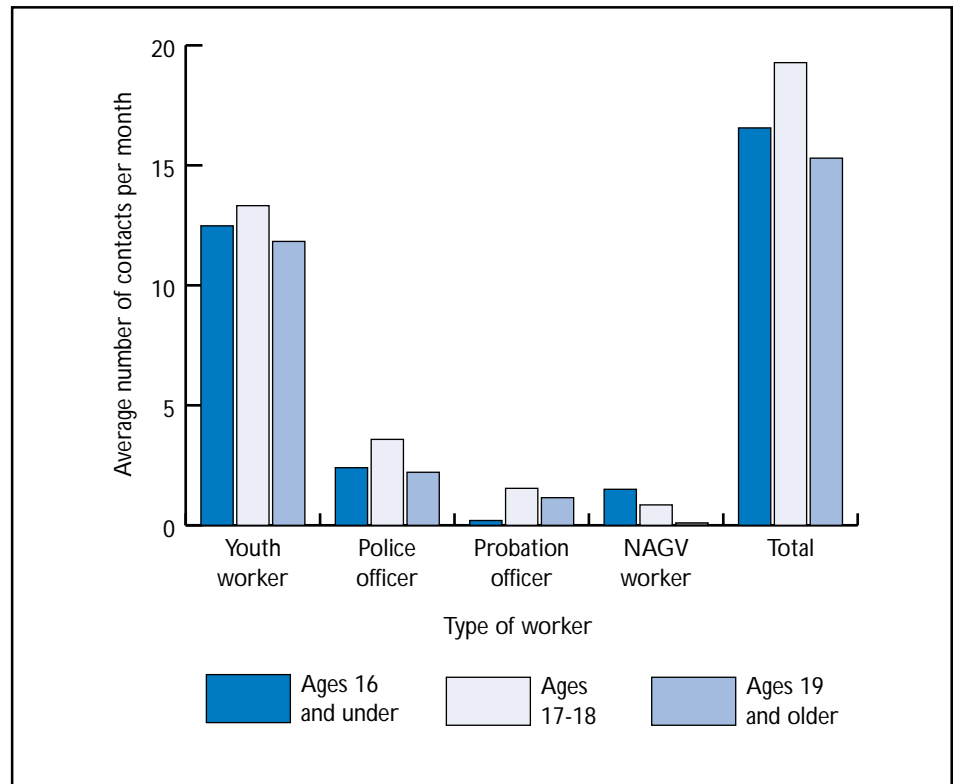
outreach workers providing counseling to 91 percent of their project caseloads, police officers to almost 65 percent of their caseloads, and probation officers to 78 percent of their caseloads. The neighborhood organizer provided counseling to 92 percent of her caseload.

Targeted youths were served by an average of 2.4 different workers four times per week for about 29 months during the 5-year project. Youth outreach workers served 178 gang members, the largest group of project participants. The project tactical officers contacted 58 targeted gang members, and probation officers contacted 20 targeted gang members. The NAGV neighborhood organizer contacted 25 project participants, coordinated a parent group, and planned community meetings for residents and representatives of local organizations. Figure 1 shows the average number of contacts per youth per month by the various members of the project team.

About half of the 191 gang members received home visits and were provided family counseling. Home visits were made by all of the workers. Almost 40 percent of targeted youths were provided with school referrals and special educational programs. Project police, probation officers, youth outreach workers, and the neighborhood organizer made school contacts on behalf of gang members involved in the project. About 60 percent of the participants were given job referrals and job placement assistance. Targeted gang members and their families received referrals and contacts for medical, drug, and mental health treatment, the military, and public aid. In addition, targeted youths, their families, and sometimes their friends, were given justice system referrals to address fears of gang retaliation or other gang-related conflict.

Youth outreach workers met with groups of targeted gang members on the streets almost every day or night of the week. GVRP staff meetings were conducted weekly or bi-weekly to discuss the gang situation and progress of each youth participating in the program. Athletic events structured to include members of both gangs were held with

Figure 1
Youth contacts



youth workers, police, and probation officers present. In addition, graffiti removal campaigns were conducted, and project staff attended NAGV Advisory Board meetings.

Findings

School and employment

Based on 127 gang member survey responses over three annual interview periods between their first and third year of involvement in the project, the number of Latin King school dropouts decreased from 52 percent to 35 percent. Two Six school dropouts decreased from 44 percent to 26 percent. The number of gang members who achieved a general equivalence degree or graduated high school increased over three annual interview periods from 52 percent to 70 percent. While almost 36 percent of targeted Latin Kings were employed during the first interview period, 48 percent were employed by the third interview period. Concurrently, about 31 percent of targeted Two Six members were employed during the first interview

period and about 63 percent were employed by the third interview.

Crime reduction

The level of crime and the number of targeted gang members involved in different categories of crime based on self-reports and worker observations declined significantly during the project period. Of the 195 targeted gang members in the interview sample, 85 percent had histories of police arrests, court contact, and adjudication. Targeted gang members with justice system records were matched with 208 non-served, equivalent fellow gang members who had been arrested with the youths involved in the project. The police records of the two groups were compared for different offenses over 4-and-one-half years before the project was implemented and 4-and-one-half years during the project using a variety of statistical controls, including age categories, prior records, and prison or detention time.

There was little to distinguish the targeted and comparison gang members in terms of arrests. There was a slight overall increase in arrests for each

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sample. In general, across the two samples, gang members that were 16 and under increased their arrests. While the targeted group of 17- and 18-year-olds had fewer arrests than the comparison age group, targeted gang members 16 and under fared worse. None of these differences were statistically significant.

Differences were marked for serious violence and total violence arrests. Gang members targeted by the GVRP reduced their level of arrests for serious violence more than the comparison group for each age category. These differences were generally statistically significant. In subgroup comparisons, the reduction in arrests among the most seriously violent targeted youth was 60 percent greater than the reduction for equivalent non-project subgroups. This pattern of reduction also was evident in the total number of arrests for homicide, aggravated battery, aggravated assault, simple assault and battery, and weapons possession.

The difference was even greater when the record of drug crime arrests was examined. Drug crime arrests, based on official police data, declined among GVRP youths and increased for the comparison sample during the project period. The differences were statistically significant.

When the variables that predicted reduced levels of gang violence arrests during the third interview period were examined, the highly statistically significant variables were:

- Obtaining a high school diploma or general equivalency degree.
- Becoming more realistic in terms of career aspirations and expectations.
- Associating with friends that are not affiliated with a gang.

- Satisfaction with the community.

When the variables that produced lower levels of drug crime arrests were examined, the most significant variables were:

- Employment during the first and third interview periods.
- Marriage plans.
- A larger number of employed individuals in a youth's household.
- A larger number of household members who had been incarcerated.

Project variables that contributed to changes in the life or circumstances of targeted gang members also were examined. These variables significantly predicted reduced levels of crime:

Suppression. Project police suppression, including surveillance, warnings, arrests, and holding gang members accountable for probation violations, contributed to youths changing their status from active gang member to former gang member. Suppression also helped close the gap between high and realistic monetary expectations.

Counseling contact. Counseling, particularly that provided through GVRP's youth outreach component, helped targeted gang members get along better with their peers, decrease the number of close gang friends, and decrease the gap between career aspirations and expectations. Furthermore, school contacts contributed to the greater likelihood that youths involved in the project would graduate from high school or get a general equivalency degree. Job referral and placement also contributed to youths spending more time with peers that were not gang-affiliated.

A combination of counseling and suppression involving police, probation

officers, and youth workers was particularly successful in reducing the level of violence for more serious offenders, especially those 17 and 18 years of age. Counseling, mainly by youth outreach workers, was relatively more effective with younger gang members who had less extensive criminal histories.

Aggregate-level community change

Evaluators expected the project to have some community or aggregate-level effects in reducing gang violence since the objective was to target the most violent members of the community's two dominant gang. Changes were examined in the targeted Little Village police beats and compared to beats with similarly high levels of gang violence in predominantly Latino communities between the five-year pre-project and five-year project periods. Communities in six other Chicago police districts were studied. All seven districts experienced increases in the number of serious gang violence incidents and offenders. The increase was smallest in Little Village over the first three years, but edged up during the last two years. However, when relative changes were compared across districts year by year, the targeted beats in Little Village showed the most consistent gradual decline over the five-year period.

A spatial analysis of the location and concentration of gang violence in Little Village compared to that in Pilsen, an almost identical nearby community, showed almost no change in the five years before and five years during the project. There was some tendency toward greater dispersion of crime "hot spots", or locations of gang violence arrests, in Little Village, however.

Changes in serious gang violence rates also were examined among 17- to 25-year-olds in Little Village and Pilsen

over the first three years of the project. The changes were compared to the three-year pre-project period using 1990 U.S. Census data. Serious gang violence rates rose in both communities, but the increase was 56 percent greater in Pilsen than in Little Village.

Finally, community surveys of 200 residents and 100 local organization representatives were conducted to determine changes in perception of the gang problem in the highest gang crime areas of Little Village and Pilsen at the beginning of the first year and in the third year of the GVRP. In Little Village, residents perceived an increase in safety, less fear of walking the streets, decreased worry of victimization, and a greater reduction of gang-related violence and property crime, while Pilsen residents surveyed did not. These differences were generally statistically significant. Also, while Little Village residents perceived that police were more effective in controlling gang activity, Pilsen residents did not.

Conclusion

In general, findings on the effectiveness of the Little Village project were consistent across different data sets using a variety of instruments and analyses. The evaluation showed that the project contributed to significant reductions in crime committed by targeted gang members, particularly violence and drug offenses among targeted youths. The collaborative cross-agency, community-based approach was more effective than traditional approaches emphasizing singular strategies, such as prevention, social intervention, or suppression.

However, a combined yet differential and interrelated approach involving police, probation, youth outreach workers, and a neighborhood organizer working together was difficult to implement and sustain. Working with high-risk employees created difficulties within the youth outreach component of the project. In addition, the Chicago Police Department struggled to staff the GVRP with

prior commitments to citywide community policing programs and mounting a domestic violence initiative.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has invested more than \$15 million to implement anti-gang initiatives based on the model described in this *On Good Authority* in urban and rural sites throughout the country. ♦

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