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## Tribal Youth Gangs: Do We Know What Works?

Palm Springs, California September, 2013

Center for Court Innovation



**Center for Court Innovation** 

**Demonstration Projects** 

**Technical Assistance** 

#### GOALS:

- Reduce Crime
  - Aid Victims
- Strengthen Communities
- Improve Public Trust in Justice

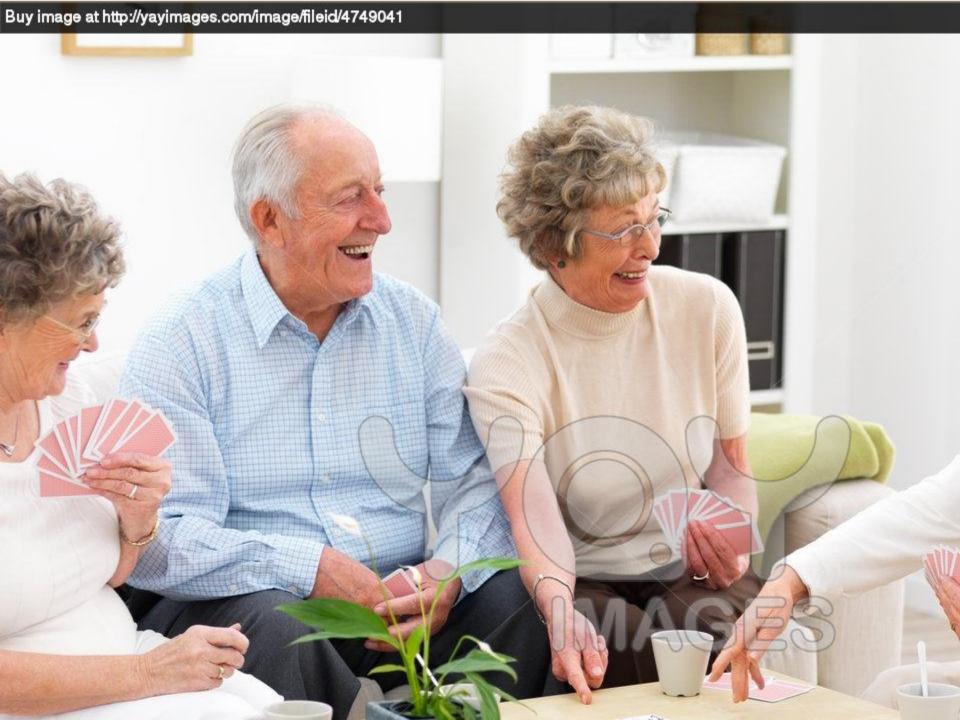
#### **Demonstration Projects**

## The Center has helped to create dozens of problem-solving courts

Drug Court
Drug Court
Domestic Violence Court
Reentry Court
Juvenile Intervention Court
Family Treatment Court
Youth Court
Mental Health Court
Integrated Domestic Violence Court

## What Is a Gang?

A group of people, united in purpose which involves criminal intent?



## What is a gang?

- Hard to fix a problem you can't really define...
- There is no one definition agreed upon.
- There are agreed upon characteristics:
  - Group of three or more
  - Sense of identity (names, signs, colors)
  - Criminal activity
  - Young people

- Street gang- territorial. May be part of their name. "Main Street Maniacs"
- Youth gang- tends to be interchangeable with street gang, but with obvious focus on the age of the members

 Racial/ethnic gangs- a gang's racial or ethnic make-up will tend to mirror its community. However, most gangs, even ones identified by race (Bloods, Crips) will contain members of other races/ethnicities

- Hybrid gangs- for membership purposes, race and gender are not leading factors.
   For example, money-making gangs that sell drugs want salespeople regardless of race, gender etc.
- Female gangs- females tend to play a dual role. They can be both auxiliary members of male gangs and also form their own gangs made up of just females

- Female gang membership (and female crime in general) on the rise.
- Caveat- girls involved in criminal activity were not always taken seriously.
- Gang organization ranges from nearly corporate structure (CEO, CFO, regional managers, middle management, low level workers) to no organizational structure (no leader or the leader changes frequently).

 Researchers do not agree on the prevalence of the "initiation rituals." It appears young people "grow into" the gang, while older people who want to join after a while, have to go through a ritual. The ritual can be violent (getting beaten or beating someone else), criminal (having to steal a car), embarrassing or, for women, sexual.

## Why do youth join gangs?

- Born into it.
- Family- support, structure, belonging
- Money/poverty- hard to convince a young person to go work for \$5/hour, assuming that job even existed, when he can make \$100 in 20 minutes
- Racism
- Safety/protection/survival skills (sometimes from the gang itself)

## Why do youth join gangs?

- Boredom (girls in particular)
- Socializing- parties, excitement
- Access to drugs/alcohol
- Rebellion
- Boosts self-esteem- older gang members give younger members responsibility, like carrying a weapon or selling drugsulterior motives

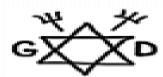
## Why do youth join gangs?

- Most significant risk factors:
  - Availability of marijuana- how does this bode for places legalizing marijuana?
  - Early marijuana use
  - Early violence
  - Learning disabled
  - Low academic achievement

# How youth gangs identify themselves

- Gang names-
  - can represent an area (referring to a street, town or city) or a housing project ("Parkside)"
  - Can refer to lawlessness ("the Outlaws")
  - Animal names ("Cobras", "Tigers")
  - Royal titles ("Latin Kings")
  - Religion ("The Popes and Disciples")
- Symbols- logos or symbols they create (6 pointed star, 3 dots)

#### Graffiti VIA/Street Gang Symbols



Gangster Disciples (GD)



New Broad Black Gangsters LLL - Love, Life, Loyalty T - Third Disciple Nation



Gangster Disciples (GD) with (BOS) for Brothers of the Struggle, incarcerated Gangster Disciples



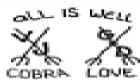
Orchestra Albany



Latin Kings use 3 or 5 pointed crowns



Lettin Disciplios



Cobra Stones putting down Gangeter Disciples



Ambrose putting down people and party people



Latin Souls putting down Latin Kings, and Vice Lords



**Vice Lords** 



Maniac Latin Disciples (MLD)



Ambrose



DARE



La Raza putting down Latin Kings



Vice Lord Factions Putting Down Gangster Disciples



Lattin Saints



Provided by the Illinois State Police

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# How youth gangs identify themselves

- Clothing- encompasses style (bandanas, denim jackets, hats) and color (Red = Bloods)
- Communication styles
  - Hand signals- modified from sign language
  - Graffiti- "newspapers of the street" (upside down gang name)
    - Gang graffiti vs. "tagging"
  - Tattoos- meant to show affiliation, intimidate, brag, identify, keep track













- Large number of native youth joining gangs
- Ages range from 9-30, but largest group are teens
- Tribal youth gang members experience poverty, family violence, social isolation, drug/alcohol abuse- all risk factors for gang activity

- Cultural influences undermined/lack of cultural champion
- Break down of family structure
- Gang culture can enter a reservation by a returning gang member or through schools that have tribal and non-tribal students
- Can result in being hybrid gangs (not just Tribal members- Latinos, African Americans)

- Tribal youth gang members are 30% more likely to be referred to juvenile justice system after arrest than non-gang members
- Tribal youth gang members are 50% more likely to receive the most serious sanctions than non-gang members (such as removal from the home)

 Should a youth involved in a gang receive harsher treatment than one who commits the same act but isn't in a gang?

 States and the federal government have tried to outlaw gangs, but it's not easy to do- remember the discussion about definition? 1st Amendment- freedom of association. Originally religion-based, but...

- 34% of tribes feel that tribal gang activity is on the rise
- Larger communities are much more likely to report gang activity
- More than 75% of tribal youth gang members are under 18
- Most common tribal youth gang crime is property crime, however over 20% is drug selling and 15% serious assault

 Gang members who commit crime tend to commit crimes both individually and collectively

#### Myths debunked

- Most youth gangs are loosely organized, shortlived and cause few problems. The bulk of gang crime is caused by a small group.
- For most young people, gang involvement is short lived. Few who enter a gang stay involved for more than a year.
- Most victims of gang violence are other gang members.
- Leaving a gang not a life/death proposition (but can still be complicated)

# So, we now know the problem...

#### What's the solution?

- Step 1: Identification
- Find out the gang prevalence in your community. Not that hard to do. Just ask
- Most gang members are taught to be proud of their gang membership and will tell you. Facebook. Twitter

#### **Identification**

- Look for gang graffiti. If you see graffiti
  that makes no sense to you, but still looks
  like "something" (more than just scribbles)
  chances are it's gang graffiti--marking
  territory, sending messages or threats
- Police (or others) can get trained on how to read and interpret gang graffiti, hand signals, tattoos
- Ask teachers

#### **Solutions**

- Prevention
- Intervention
- Suppression

#### Prevention

- Perhaps biggest risk factor is familyrelated. Kids tend not to run to something, they run from something
- Focus on parents. Early intervention.
   Substance abuse counseling. DV intervention. Parenting skills classes.
   "Strengthening Families"
- Take delinquent behavior seriously

#### Prevention

- Pro social activities. Midnight basketball.
   Community service
- "Not about us without us." Ask the youth- what can be done? They will have suggestionsmaybe good ones...
- Make it hard for gangs to recruit--keep the kids busy, disallow gang colors
- Get police involved in the community. Not as just law enforcement- coaches, mentors, classroom presenters

#### Prevention

- As soon as someone becomes aware a child is even associating with a gang member, tell the parents immediately
- DARE and GREAT- very effective at getting children to not fear police
- Intergenerational cultural activities
- Institute curfews
- Talk to the kids!

#### Intervention

- Act quickly--as soon as you learn a youth is becoming gang involved
- Sudden truancy can be a sign. It's a sign of something. Address immediately with school and family
- Provide a resource (hotline) for gang members who want to leave a gang--it can be a complicated process. Offer counseling, GED classes, tattoo removal

#### Intervention

 Family, family, family. Don't forget to assist the family. All the great work you do with a teenager goes out the window if when he gets home his older brother throws up a gang sign

## Suppression

- Police must be trained in gang recognition and gang suppression techniques
- Sweeps, focusing on hot spots, saturation policing, truancy and curfew enforcement
- Education--all grades and parents.
   Causes and outcomes of gang activity
- Access available resources, including FBI or other federal agencies if appropriate-they have anti-gang task forces

## Suppression

- Create gang units and task forces
- Community policing/positive police interactions
- Neighborhood/community patrols
- School resource officers
- Tribal council leadership to mobilize resources and make gangs a priority

#### Suppression

- Creating stiff gang-related legal penalties (complicated)
- Using civil lawsuits (i.e. injunctions)
- DO NOT WAIT

#### **New Research**

#### OJJDP Tribal Youth Gang Study

- Being conducted by Center for Court Innovation and Tribal Judicial Institute
- Will help understand the scope of tribal youth gang activity
- Identify promising strategies
- Study is ongoing—will be completed in about 2 years

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