



The Breaking the Cycle Youth Gang Exit and Ambassador Leadership Program

The Breaking the Cycle Youth Gang Exit and Ambassador Leadership Program (hereinafter referred to as BTC) is operated by the Canadian Training Institute (CTI) in the communities of Rexdale (Jamestown) and Scarborough, both deemed by the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario as “priority”, high-risk communities from the perspective of gang activity. The BTC is designed to address risk factors for youth at risk of joining gangs and gang involved youth. The program works with youth for a total of approximately 1000 hours over a twenty-eight week period.

The program consists of a two week intensive personal development program, a one week case management program and a twenty-five week Youth Ambassador Leadership Employment program. During the intervention, the case manager focuses on promoting social, cognitive, behavioral and moral competencies.

The expected outcomes of the BTC program include:

- Reduced gang membership in the targeted communities.
- Reduced risk factors such as aggression, substance abuse, employment, peer relations etc., which contribute to potential gang involvement.
- Increased labor force participation amongst the participants.
- Increased pro-social community participation amongst the participants.

Evaluability Assessment Objectives

The purpose of the evaluability assessment (EA) was to assess and make a determination of whether the BTC program was in a state of program readiness to undergo a rigorous impact and cost-effectiveness evaluation. The EA objectives were to:

1. Provide a detailed description of the project, identifying required dosage for achieving outcomes.
2. Develop a program logic model and a narrative that specifies the theory of change.
3. Develop SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) program outcomes.
4. Determine the program’s fit with other promising gang prevention programs.
5. Develop an evaluation plan including the evaluation design, instruments, indicators, frequency of measurements and a statistical analytical plan.
6. Develop a draft intake/risk assessment tool to help the program systematically identify the appropriate target group.

Evaluability Assessment Methods

To achieve the EA objectives, a document review (n=190), a key informant on-line survey (n=29), key informant interviews (n=27) and a literature review were used to substantiate the findings and recommendations in the study.

Findings

1. **Target Group:** Stakeholders felt strongly that BTC was reaching the appropriate target group (those at risk of gang involvement and gang affiliated/involved youth). Findings from the document review indicated that just under half of the participants were either previously gang affiliated (32.6%), or currently gang affiliated (17.9%). Just under two-thirds were previously arrested/charged (32.6%), on probation (20.5%) or awaiting trial/sentencing (15.3%). The Principal Investigator also reviewed the various intake assessment tools and found that there were many different tools used over the years that potentially increased the inconsistent identification of the appropriate target group.
2. **Clarity of Intervention:** The EA documented 3 distinct phases in the BTC program and was able to identify a breakdown of the specific activities, their frequency and the overall time period required for participants to complete the program and graduate. However, a minimum dosage (at minimum, what number of hours, weeks and type of activities had to be completed to be considered completing the program) still needed to be articulated prior to a rigorous evaluation.
3. **Theory of Change:** The EA provided a logic model and a clear theory of change for the program, confirming that the intensity of the interventions had strong potential to contribute to the key immediate and intermediate outcomes.

All of the BTC program activities were reviewed against activities of promising/model gang projects. BTC had 90% of the same activities as those used in the promising/model gang projects such as Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire, Boys and Girls Club of America Gang Prevention through Targeted Outreach, The Spergel Model and Gang Reduction Partnership.

4. **Data collection/Documentation:** The file reviews indicated that attendance information, case notes regarding program activities and intensity, proof of program completion, outcome data, and reasons for attrition were some key items that were inconsistently identified in the records. This area was flagged as needing the most attention prior to conducting a rigorous evaluation.

Key Recommendations

To increase the program's readiness for evaluation, the following key recommendations should be addressed to accurately attribute BTC initiatives to the stated outcomes of interest:

1. Adopt the use of one standardized risk assessment tool. Utilize an evidence-based risk assessment tool to ensure the appropriate target group is reached. Clarify the project's agreed upon definition of "gang" and incorporate into the risk assessment tool.
2. Create a comprehensive operating manual and resource guide to ensure that the core activities are clear and are consistently implemented as planned.
3. Allocate funding to enhance record keeping and data collection activities with a focus on strengthening the monitoring of key activities and their frequency.
4. Utilize the newly developed logic model as a blueprint for program implementation and as a communication tool.
5. Adopt the revised outcomes in the logic model to ensure the program is measurable. Utilize the priority system in the logic model to ensure that objectives that are most likely to be addressed by the program are given priority.
6. Continue to strengthen protocols with police, schools and health units to be able to verify self-reported changes among participants.
7. Continue to solicit funding from the appropriate sources to increase program stability and to help plan for a rigorous impact and cost-effectiveness evaluation.

Overall Conclusions

The EA resulted in useful program delivery tools and recommendations that, if implemented, would make the BTC program more amenable to an impact evaluation. BTC could be more accurately evaluated if the program focused on consistent program documentation, use of a comprehensive manual, adopting the logic model, utilizing SMART outcomes, and using a standardized risk assessment tool. The BTC program is in line with other model and promising gang prevention programs and therefore has the potential to realize similar outcomes.

Conducting an impact and cost-effectiveness analysis would contribute significantly to the body of knowledge of “what works” in gang prevention interventions in Canada.

For more information or to receive a copy of the final evaluation report please contact the National Crime Prevention Centre at 1-877-302-6272 or visit our website at: www.PublicSafety.gc.ca/NCPC

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