



## Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime

The Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime Prevention Project provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and reducing the involvement of immigrant youth in gang criminal activity in Calgary. Key elements of the program include community mobilization, provision of social intervention and opportunities, suppression, social control, and organizational development and change. The Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime Prevention Project is supported by [Public Safety Canada](#), National Crime Prevention Centre's [Crime Prevention Action Fund](#) and is delivered by [Calgary Mennonite Centre for Newcomers](#) (Centre for Newcomers). The project began in July 2009 and will be piloted and evaluated through December 2011.

The involvement of immigrant youth in criminal gangs in Calgary has been reported by the media since 1980<sup>1</sup>. A disproportionate number of immigrant youth with ties to street gangs are in the justice system and increases in the level of violence, substance abuse and gang activity among this population is a growing concern in Calgary<sup>2</sup>. Several community studies conducted over the past five to six years have described and called attention to the issues of criminal gang involvement among immigrant youth and consultations with immigrant youth, families, probation, police, researchers and community workers have confirmed the seriousness and escalation of the involvement of immigrant youth in gangs<sup>3</sup>.

Additional studies have also noted a lack of coordinated, comprehensive and culturally responsive services for immigrant youth and recommended increased support and assistance to organizations to develop culturally competent services<sup>4</sup>.

The Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime project emerged in response to this growing community awareness, the desire for action to address the needs of immigrant youth and to find ways to divert them from youth gang criminal involvement. The initiative builds on existing work in Calgary and enhances efforts in place to address gang issues.

### **The Evidence Base**

The Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime Project activities were developed and designed based on the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Comprehensive Gang Model also known as the 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. To address these problems, the Comprehensive Gang Model

## Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime Prevention Project

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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 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 social 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.
- The project was particularly successful in reducing drug arrests for program youth compared to comparison and quasi-program youth, who showed increased drug arrests<sup>5</sup>.

### Program Components

The Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime includes the following activities:

#### *Community Mobilization*

The project staff provide outreach to a variety of institutions, service providers, networks and grassroots community groups. They share information regarding the specific risk factors, protective factors, and pathways of immigrant youth involved in gangs and assist the organizations to develop action plans that increase their capacity and responsiveness to meet the needs of vulnerable immigrant youth. As part of the community mobilization, a multi-sector Steering Committee advises on the development of a city wide action plan to support gang-involved and high-risk immigrant youth. The connections made with people, especially those knowledgeable about culture and how to provide services in culturally competent and relevant ways has created a strong network for the development and implementation of direct interventions with immigrant youth.

#### *Provision of Social Interventions and Opportunities*

Targeted intervention services and leadership development is provided to gang involved and high-risk immigrant youth. Youth are referred from a number of sources including police, probation, youth services and through individuals in the community. An in-depth assessment to identify their specific risks and protective factors is then conducted and based on these factors personal action plans are developed. Activities include coaching, counselling and referral to appropriate resources and services. Dealing with needs that are unique to immigrant youth is primary and these include intergenerational conflict, racism, discrimination and cultural understanding of systems such as education and criminal justice.

At the group level, youth are involved in a life skills/ pre-employment program and are provided connections to supported employment. Group interventions include programming five half-days per week for a three to six month period, with up to three field trips for community activities, such as outdoor challenge and community services. Participation is re-evaluated after a three month period to ensure activities are still relevant and appropriate and progress is being made. Project staff focus initially on individual support for the youth participants in order to prepare them for group programming.

## Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime Prevention Project

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The project collaborates with the [Coalition for Equal Access to Education](#) to provide leadership training for up to 20 immigrant youth who have been in contact with the law and are no longer under parole/probationary supervision. Bi-weekly seminars over three months help the youth develop skills in community organization, mentorship, and organizational and project management. Under the supervision of program staff, these youth then develop and implement initiatives to educate stakeholders and the public about gang issues. The project also includes a mentor program that focuses on high-risk immigrant youth.

### *Suppression & Control*

Supporting the [Calgary Police Service](#) with its gang strategy is a major component of the Project. The Project staff use their knowledge and community connections to help the Police devise and implement culturally responsive plans. They assist in the coordination of suppression activities, including: arrest, warning, behaviour modeling, crisis intervention, neighbour patrol, reporting of criminal activities and parole/probation compliance.

### *Organizational Change and Development*

Project staff provide outreach and support to institutions, public services, service providers and community based organizations to develop cultural and organizational competencies to work effectively with gang involved and high risk immigrant youth. They provide individual assistance to approximately 30 organizations and work to increase knowledge of the gang phenomenon in Calgary and guide them through a process of institutional change. A systematic review of the policies, programs and services of each participating organization is conducted and recommendations made to improve access in the areas of education, family support, social services and recreation.

## **Program Participants**

The project works with young immigrant adults aged 18-27 who are currently involved in gangs; immigrant youth aged 12-17 who are at high risk of joining gangs; and young immigrant adults aged 18-27 who have been incarcerated on gang related offenses and are no longer under correctional jurisdiction. On the organizational front, the project works with a wide variety of community organizations to provide support for culturally appropriate services to immigrant youth and their families.

## **Key Partners**

The Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime involves many partnerships in the community, including:

- Calgary Police Services
- City of Calgary – Calgary Neighbourhood Services
- Coalition for Equal Access to Education
- CARE Strategy for Children and Youth of Immigrant Families of the Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary
- University of Calgary – Faculty of Social Work
- Calgary Young Offender Centre
- Calgary Board of Education
- Calgary Catholic School Board
- Calgary Health Region
- Service Canada

## **Evaluation Design**

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

## Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime Prevention Project

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The evaluation will implement a pre/post test to measure the outcomes following the intervention. Follow up at six months and one year will occur with youth participants as well as with a matched control group of youth not receiving services/interventions. The evaluation will include: participant assessments, participant and family interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and stakeholder interviews (including community members, schools, service providers, police and advisory committee members), review of police reports/files, and school/activity attendance sheets.

### Implementation Observations

#### *Community Organizational Engagement*

All of the organizational partners are involved in a collaborative inquiry network where they have been consulted regarding their participation in the strategy. As a result of this network approach, many partners are effectively engaged in the implementation of the program.

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>.

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<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive assessment of multicultural youth in the East Calgary area (Community and Neighbourhood Services, City of Calgary, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Conversation for Change: an Overview of Services for Immigrant Children and Youth in Calgary (Herlock, McCullagh and Schissel, 2004); Immigrant Children and Youth in Focus (Ngo, 2004)

<sup>5</sup> For more information visit: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/2008-pcpp-eng.aspx>