



**Crime Prevention in Action**  
Crime Prevention Action Fund

CPA-20

## MY REGENT PARK

The MY Regent Park project (Mentoring, Mobilizing Youth in Regent Park) works towards the reduction and prevention of gang activity in the Regent Park community of downtown Toronto. The project works with community organizations, families and individuals to assess and understand issues related to gang activity and to design and implement appropriate interventions. Youth aged 12-17 years who are already active in gangs or at risk of becoming involved are provided with intensive support to move away from the gang lifestyle. The MY Regent Park project is supported by [Public Safety Canada](#), National Crime Prevention Centre's [Crime Prevention Action Fund](#) and is delivered by [Dixon Hall](#). The project began in September 2009 and will be piloted and evaluated through March 2013.

Regent Park is made up of predominantly subsidized housing built in the 1940's. In 2008, the neighbourhood was identified by the [Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy](#) as experiencing a high and increasing level of gang criminal activity.<sup>1</sup> Additional Toronto Police officers were assigned to Regent Park as part of the Strategy to reduce and prevent this activity. The Toronto Police Service has been working with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation to curb gang activity and criminal involvement through building closer relationships in the community and paying attention to environmental design.

The MY Regent Park project is bringing together a broad spectrum of people from a variety of experiences and perspectives to more fully address the gang issues in Regent Park. The project works with gang-involved youth, youth at risk of gang involvement, families of these youth, and the Regent Park community. The project focuses on addressing known risk factors for gang involvement including associations with delinquent peers, the presence of externalizing behaviours, negative influences in the youth's life, limited attachment to the community, poor parental supervision, and poor education or employment potential.

### The Evidence Base

The MY Regent Park project used evidence from the OJJDP Comprehensive or Spergel Model to develop its interventions and approaches.

#### *OJJDP Comprehensive Gang (or "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 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.

## My Regent Park Project

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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 five 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 use of youth 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>2</sup>.

### Program Participants

This project works with youth 12-17 years of age who are at risk of joining gangs or already gang involved. Up to 240 youth and their families will be involved over the life of the project.

### Key Partners

The MY Regent Park project involves many organizations in the community. Some of the key partners include:

- Toronto Christian Resource Centre
- The Salvation Army 614
- Regent Park Focus Youth Media Arts
- Toronto Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs
- Regent Park Community Health Centre
- Toronto Police Service

### Program Components

Youth referred to the project undergo a detailed assessment to determine their needs and the risk and protective factors in their lives. Care plans that identify the activities to be undertaken to address the specific risks and needs of a youth are developed and include a list of family and community supports and resources that will be accessed. Trained professionals provide assessments and help to set psycho-social goals for youth and their family members. The program involves the following seven key elements:

#### *Community Mobilization*

The Project Steering Committee develops, engages and supports members of the Regent Park community to take active roles in the work to reduce and prevent gang activity. The main goal for this committee is to increase knowledge of available gang reduction resources for the community and families so everyone is working together to solve the problems.

#### *Social Intervention*

The project provides individual programming based on the education, social and vocational needs of youth participants. Each youth is paired with a Mentor for pro-social sessions (individual/group) five

hours weekly. The youth also participate in 14 hours of weekly programming that incorporates a number of training and life skills activities.

### *Grief Counselling / Resiliency Training*

Each of the youth involved in the program receives resiliency training. This training deals with issues such as disenfranchised grief and multiple losses. Grief counselling is also available for youth participating in the project and families of youth have access to six grief counselling sessions. Project staff receive 50 hours of resiliency training as part of their employment which allows them to provide training sessions for community residents on topics related to gang prevention, community and individual resiliency.

### *Parenting Skills*

Families of youth participants receive up to 130 hours of training on effective parenting skills. Families are often referred by parenting networks both within and outside of Regent Park. Parents also build their skills and connections to others through opportunities as members of program committees, such as the Steering Committee.

### *Suppression*

Project staff work with police and probation organizations to help with ongoing monitoring of youth who are meeting probation requirements. Project and community agency staff receive about 10 hours of training on gang behaviours and activities in order to identify any concerns with youth behaviour very early on to ensure they are addressed and probation is successful.

### *Opportunities Provision*

Each youth is responsible for implementing an individual program that often includes employment placements. Project staff facilitate five hours of weekly academic support for youth who are in school, including extracurricular outings that promote learning and civic engagement.

### *Organizational Change and Development*

Six community agencies have signed memorandums of understanding with the project. These six agencies have developed policies specific to offering programming for gang involved youth. Community agency staff (approximately 30 staff) will receive 50 hours of training on gang behaviours and activities to help them better understand this area. In addition, 30 volunteer members of partner agencies have received 10 hours of training on gang prevention and intervention models.

## **Evaluation Design**

A project monitoring system to collect, on an ongoing basis, data on youth involvement and progress is in place. The data is reviewed on a frequent basis in order to assess the need for changes to the activities and approaches. An evaluation to determine the extent to which the project was implemented as planned will also be undertaken. The process evaluation will use project monitoring data, questionnaires, focus groups and administrative records to address the following process evaluation questions:

- To what extent did the project reach its target population?
- Were the project activities implemented as planned?
- Did the project produce the expected outputs?
- Did the project work effectively with partner organizations?
- Were staff selection practices, training, and skills adequate for the intervention?

### **Implementation Observations**

#### *High Functioning Project Steering Committee*

The Project Steering Committee includes a variety of stakeholders from the community including youth justice system representatives, community partners, families and staff. Much of the success has been due to the collaboration and functioning of this committee to guide the programming of the project through its development and implementation stages.

#### *Partner Process*

The framework established for organizational accountability between project partners has been a success. Each community agency that has partnered with the project has developed a memorandum of understanding. This document clearly illustrates the objectives, activities and responsibilities of the six agencies.

#### *Recruitment and Training of Staff*

The recruitment of frontline staff for the MY Regent Park project has been a highly collaborative process and all partner agencies participated in selecting staff for the project. Emphasis has been placed on providing a highly comprehensive training program for intervention team staff during their orientation.

For further information on this project please contact:

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<sup>1</sup> For more information please visit <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/tavis/>

<sup>2</sup> For more information visit: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/2008-pcpp-eng.aspx>