



The Surrey Wraparound: A Youth Driven Plan for Gang Violence Prevention

1. Introduction¹

The crime rate in Surrey has traditionally been higher than it is in the rest of British Columbia. In 2009, the Surrey crime rate was 99.4 incidents per 1,000 population compared to the provincial average of 90.1².

In response to increased gang activity and youth crime, the City of Surrey developed anti-gang/crime prevention strategies aimed at working with at-risk youth and their families. These strategies were developed to maximize public safety, curb violence, and curtail criminal activity.

One such strategy was the Surrey Wraparound: A Youth Driven Comprehensive Plan for Gang Violence Prevention (Surrey Wrap). In 2008, the National Crime Prevention Centre's Youth Gang Prevention Fund awarded \$808,000 to Surrey School District #36 to implement the Surrey Wrap program. The program ran from October 2008 until March 2011. It was recently extended to March 2013.

2. Program Description

The Surrey Wrap was delivered through a partnership between the Surrey School Board and the Surrey RCMP. The overall goal was to prevent gang-related crime in the Surrey community through the development and application of a wraparound approach³ for supporting youth at risk of gang involvement, youth displaying gang-associated behaviours, and those currently in gangs.

The Surrey Wrap adopted the wraparound “philosophy of care,” a set of core concepts and principles including: voice and choice; team-based; natural supports; collaboration; community-based; culturally competent; individualized; strength-based; and persistence. In Wraparound, a referred young person works with a facilitator to collaborate and establish a wraparound team.

The intent is that the young person is at the centre of his/her care planning, aided by a facilitator and a team of individuals (the wraparound team), who support and engage in the well-being of the participant. Collaboratively they develop the young person's care plan.

¹ This synthesis note is based on the NCPC's research and evaluation team review and analysis of the final evaluation report prepared by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., An Evaluation of the Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention and Surrey Anti-Gang Wraparound projects. 2011 (Surrey: 6710-B1 and Abbotsford: 6310-A12).

² As cited in evaluation report: Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General Police Services Division. B.C. Policing Jurisdiction Crime Trends, 2000 to 2009. Online Article: http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/police_services/publications/statistics/2009policejurisdictioncrimetrends.pdf. Last Accessed: May 24, 2011.

³ As cited in evaluation report: Goldman, S.K. (1999). The conceptual framework for wraparound: Definition, values, essential elements, and requirements for practice. In B. J. Burns and S. K. Goldman (Eds.), *Systems of Care: Promising practices in children's mental health*, 1998 series: Volume IV. Promising practices in Wraparound for children with severe emotional disorders and their families. Washington, DC: Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, American Institutes for Research.

The planning process allows the youth to have a voice and choice throughout the entire process, and includes a case management component. The care plan can include activities in education, health or recreation as well as group activities or family activities.

Wraparound meetings can take one of three approaches depending on the needs of the participant. In this way, the wraparound process was implemented on a continuum from one-on-one mini wraps to quick wraps to full-wraps⁴.

A mini or quick wrap meeting would engage 2 to 3 members of the wraparound team versus a full wrap meeting which could be much larger. Many youth were resistant to the larger meetings, finding them overwhelming and uncomfortable.

Participants could be referred from a wide variety of sources, though the majority were referred by school staff or the RCMP. A referral form was completed in consultation with the program staff. The Surrey referral form collected information on indicators related to five domains of the youth's life (individual, peers, family, community, and school).

Specific elements were assessed using a scale of 1 (not at risk) to 5 (entrenched in the behaviour). The referral form did not generate a total score, but provided the wraparound team with an overview of the main risk factors for the youth and allowed the supervisor to determine if the student was a likely candidate for the wraparound program.

Three assessments were administered at intake:

- The Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), a validated risk assessment tool was administered to determine eligibility for the wraparound program and establish the risk level of the youth (n = 38);
- The Risk Assessment Tool (RAT), a tool developed by the program (that has not been validated) was administered to address non-traditional risk factors. These included, being the first-born son or the only son in the family, whether or not the family owned their own business, and whether or not the youth's peer group is uni- or multi-ethnic. The scoring for the RAT was whether the particular element was not present, present, or unknown;
- The Surrey Gang Entrenchment Scale was also developed by the program to determine whether participants were gang affiliated/gang members and/or associated with gang members (n = 46).

Other data used in the assessment include information collected from the RCMP and school records, such as criminal records, school attendance, school performance and other information available.

Program Participants

The Surrey Wrap targeted youth, 11 to 17 years old, enrolled in School District #36 who were either involved in or at risk of becoming involved in gang or gang activity. The program targeted two distinct groups of youth. The first was 'traditional' at-risk youth who experience poverty, substance abuse and unstable home situations. The second were youth who were predominantly South Asian, middle class, with families who worked long hours, often in a family business.

Almost 95% of participants were classified as moderate or high-risk on the YLS/CMI. The majority of the participants had high-risk factor results for family circumstance and education/employment. Substance abuse problems were experienced by the majority of the participants.

From January 2009 to March 2011, 132 participants had been admitted to the program, approximately 60 annually. The ratio was approximately 10 participants to one staff (10:1). The average participant age was 14

⁴ As noted in the Evaluation report: Debicki, A., and Cailleaux, M. (2009). Wraparound Facilitator Certification Four Day Training. Sponsored by Atira Women's Resource Society and Wrap Canada.

years; 84% were male and 16% were female; 60% were visible minority; 13% were Aboriginal and 27% were Caucasian/other.

Based on observations from the Surrey program staff, it could take up to 12 months for a young person to 'stabilize'. Staff reported that the most significant progress was made after about six months of participation at which point the young person would 'plateau'. Sixteen participants had been awarded alumni status meaning they had 'plateaued' and their contact with staff became casual/incidental.

Throughout the program, there were seven participants who dropped out either due to their own or their family's decision not to participate.

3. Evaluation of the Program

The impact evaluation ran from January 2009 to June 2011. The following four objectives were identified at the beginning of the evaluation:

- Assess the extent to which each program was implemented as intended;
- Assess whether the intended outcomes were achieved;
- Provide a descriptive cost analysis of each program;
- Identify lessons learned, explore what has and what has not worked well in the program, and make recommendations to strengthen the programs for the benefit of others interested in implementing or supporting programs of this nature in the future.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation methodology was a quasi-experimental matched comparison group design that incorporated multiple lines of evidence. Pre- and post-testing was used to assess the net impact of the program on the criminal activity of the participants.

A matched comparison group of 20 youth drawn from the wait list was established. They were matched on gender, age and ethnicity (only data on their negative police contacts was available). The youth on the wait list were originally taken off the wait list on a first-come-first-served basis.

During the program this was changed and youth were taken off the wait list and accepted into the program based on highest-risk first. To ensure the wait-listed youth could still serve as a comparison group, the evaluators compared the two groups using propensity scoring. Through this technique, it was confirmed the groups were similar and comparable.

The Surrey Wrap evaluators used the following instruments and data collection methods:

- Questionnaires – The YLS/CMI, the RAT and the Gang Entrenchment Scale were administered to participants at intake;
- Qualitative interviews with school, police, program management, facilitators and two program graduates;
- File review of police data on negative police contacts, and limited school administrative data.

Standard qualitative analysis techniques were used for the key informant interviews. Inductive content analysis was used to determine themes from within the information shared. The evaluation data was triangulated to validate statistical findings and strengthen the findings.

4. Evaluation Findings

Process Findings

Target group

The Surrey Wrap was successful in reaching its targeted population. As noted above, almost 95% of participants were classified as moderate- or high-risk on the YLS/CMI. In addition, 53% were determined to be gang affiliated (n = 45) according to the Surrey Gang Entrenchment Scale.

Program fidelity

It was not possible to formally assess the fidelity of the program as the wraparound assessment tools are designed to be used by individuals with specific Wraparound training. Surrey staff did not receive this training. However, according to staff interviews, it was felt the program did follow a wraparound approach and philosophy of care.

Program start-up

The Surrey Wrap staff felt they did not have adequate time to learn and plan the program and roll it out properly. It was felt that a few more months of planning time would have resulted in better information sharing with referral sources, more appropriate initial referrals and improved administrative processes.

Program implementation

The Surrey Wrap was implemented largely as planned with four changes. First, the RCMP officers working with the program moved from the Integrated Gang Task Force to the Surrey detachment. At this point, the school staff and RCMP members were no longer co-located. This was not felt to be detrimental to the program because their joint working relationships had been well established, and the profile of the program had increased within the Surrey detachment.

Second, an Executive Committee was established to support program decision-making. Third, wait-listed youth were triaged rather than taken into the program on a first come-first served basis. Finally, it was decided that the wraparound meetings were best implemented as 'quick' or 'mini' wrap versus the full wraparound team meetings.

Administrative support

The Surrey Wrap had limited administrative support. Staff felt time pressure in balancing participants and administrative tasks, which resulted in decisions such as not re-administering the YLS/CMI. It was felt that more support would have eased the burden of data collection needs of the program and the evaluation and provided staff with more time to work with participants.

Program location

Part way through the program, they moved from the Surrey School District Office to a portable classroom on the grounds of Princess Margaret School. This was seen as an improvement that allowed the staff to be in closer contact with students and staff, increasing their visibility and ability to promote the program.

Outcome Findings

Awareness

Increased awareness among school staff

Qualitative evidence indicated there was an increase in the level of awareness of the wraparound amongst school principals and guidance counsellors interviewed. The Surrey Wrap developed several knowledge products, made multiple presentations to the community and to school personnel, and was the subject of several media stories.

Increased awareness among RCMP members

The move of the RCMP officers into the Surrey Detachment and the school staff to Princess Margaret School grounds raised the profile of the program amongst the police and school staff. Since the program had been co-located initially, the school and RCMP partners had been able to establish a joint working relationship. When they moved to separate locations they were able to promote the program in the new locations.

These qualitative results suggest that there was increased awareness on the part of partners who were involved in the project, in particular police and school personnel. However, there is no data to suggest that there was increased awareness in the Surrey community at large.

Behaviours

Decreased negative police contacts

The evaluation showed a significant decline in the negative police contacts of the participant group relative to the comparison group. Specifically, it showed a 67% decrease in the negative police contacts among Surrey program participants (n = 45).

Negative police contacts began to decline from the time of entry to the program with the average number of negative contacts reduced from 0.42 to 0.14 per month. There was a statistically significant difference between the pre-program average ($M = 0.42$, $SD = .39113$) and the post-program average ($M = 0.14$, $SD = 0.23519$) for the participant group ($t(44) = -6.268$, $p < .001$). In contrast, the comparison group showed an increase in negative police contacts, from 0.46 to 0.70 per month.

Gang prevention

The interview data showed that the Surrey Wrap team successfully stopped gang formation on at least one occasion. When the Surrey Wrap school staff moved to the grounds of Princess Margaret School, an additional benefit was the ability of staff to have on-the-ground intelligence of gang-related activities in and around the school.

School

The results indicated that the program had limited impact on absenteeism and tardiness; the trend for both remained constant among participants ($n=18$ - 2009-2010 data only). The key informant interviews indicated that positive school attendance was actually sometimes linked to gang involvement, where gang members attended school to associate with each other.

Cost Analysis

NCPC provided \$808,000 or 70% of the funding to the Surrey Wrap. Based on 132 participants over the evaluation period, the average cost per participant was \$8,786. The evaluation suggests that the program was cost-effective. More specifically, the cost per participant is significantly less than the cost of having a young person in care or in custody⁵.

Evaluation Limitations

The evaluation employed research methods that, according to NCPC standards⁶ would be considered 'notable', given the use of a comparison group and the validated tool for participant selection.

Pre-post tests were done on negative police contacts but were not available for other variables. Although the reader can have a reasonable level of confidence in the evaluation findings, it is important to consider that the results of the Surrey analysis are, in some instances, based on incomplete data. Caution is advised in terms of generalizing the results to the full program participant group or to the population at large.

Other important considerations include:

- The YLS/CMI is a validated assessment tool and a high degree of confidence can be assumed that it reliably measured the level of risk of participants. The remaining tools are not validated and therefore, their reliability is less certain. However, the RAT, the Surrey Gang Entrenchment Scale and the YLS/CMI demonstrate similar results regarding the referred participants. As well, the evaluation used a triangulated process including, official records and interviews, to corroborate the survey results.
- Youth on the wait list attended the same schools as the participants and may have inadvertently been impacted by program elements due to contact with participants. This would result in the program effect appearing smaller when the two groups are compared.
- The normal maturing process can sometimes account for changes in youth. Maturation could not be controlled for, except for the net impact of the program on negative police contacts. In this instance the comparison group was able to mitigate maturation as a factor.
- After using the YLS/CMI at intake, the program staff felt it took too much time away from program delivery and they did not re-administer it. It is possible that the evaluation could miss some of the impacts of the program as the participants were not re-assessed with the initial assessment tool at exit or as part of a follow-up.

⁵ Approximately \$120,000 per youth per year or \$10,000 per youth per month; Canadian Psychological Association, 2008.

⁶ National Crime Prevention Centre (2007). Evaluation Standards. Ottawa, Ontario.

5. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Program Delivery

Planning and start-up time

Surrey's initial referrals were not appropriate matches for the program. With increased time for planning and promotion, referral sources could have had more knowledge about the program, in particular which youth were most suited to participate. School staff referrals became more accurate over time as a result of outreach and training.

Administrative burden

Allocation of sufficient resources to data collection and input tasks would be especially helpful to program staff. This is especially crucial when hard copies of files must be copied, reviewed and shared with the evaluators. When staff have full caseloads, evaluation-related time is difficult to prioritize at the expense of dedicating time to participants.

Program exit

Program staff found that options for post-program supports were not always available to participants as they reached 'alumni' status. At this point, alumni continued to contact the wraparound facilitators unofficially, inflating their caseloads. It was recommended by the program that they build more links to other agencies to facilitate the transition of participants out of the program to other services as needed.

Evaluation

Information management system

The Surrey Wrap had an information management system which could not download data to the evaluators. This significantly inhibited their access to participant information. Establishing an information system at the outset that could be accessed by evaluators would increase the variables that could be evaluated and decrease the time and effort required by Program staff to share hard copy information. Additional guidance from NCPC was recommended as a starting point for implementing software solutions.

Validated tools and repeated administration

The YLS/CMI risk assessment tool did not always fully capture the unique risk factors of the target population identified for this study. However, when the YLS/CMI measure is combined with other data, such as the Risk Assessment Tool and the Surrey Gang Entrenchment Scale used in this study, it provides a more accurate depiction of risk level.

There would have been benefit to re-administering the measurement tools, at a minimum at exit, to capture changes in behaviours, attitudes and risk factors in the participants. Repeated measures for the treatment group and the comparison group would have significantly increased the likelihood of attributing outcomes to the program.

Collaboration on the evaluation

Ongoing collaboration and communication between the program staff and evaluators is vital for a successful evaluation. Evaluators and program staff cooperation helps to ensure good quality data and sufficient data collection. These discussions should take place at the beginning of the evaluation so that potential data collection issues can be identified and mitigating strategies can be developed in a collaborative manner.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the evaluation results show that the Surrey Wrap program is an effective school-RCMP partnership response to youth who are at risk of joining gangs or who are gang-involved. It would also appear that the program is a cost-effective means of addressing youth gangs. The cost per participant and reported reductions in negative police contacts indicate potential for significant savings to the criminal justice system. Finally, the program partners affirmed that the Surrey Wrap gave them more resources and tools for addressing youth gangs and youth violence in their neighbourhood.

For more information or to receive a copy of the final evaluation report, please contact the National Crime Prevention Centre by e-mail at prevention@ps-sp.gc.ca.

If you wish to register for the NCPC mailing list to receive information from the Centre, please visit the subscription page at: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/ml/index-eng.aspx>