



## Winnipeg Youth Gang Prevention Fund

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Gangs are part of Winnipeg's social landscape, with long-standing and well established gangs operating in defined territories throughout the city. For many youth in Winnipeg, gangs are part of life.

Winnipeg youth who are involved with gangs or at risk of gang involvement face a complexity of issues and risk factors. According to the literature, they are most likely to be male, from marginalized communities and to live in poverty. Because of the entrenchment of certain gangs in the city, some youth gang involvement is inter-generational. Programs, services and support for youth who are gang-involved or at-risk have to respond to these varied needs. The proposal for the Winnipeg projects was developed in this context.

In 2007, Public Safety Canada's National Crime Prevention Centre provided, through its Youth Gang Prevention Fund (YGPF), \$2,192,857 in funding to five community-based projects in Winnipeg to deliver services and support to gang-involved youth and those at risk of gang involvement over a three-year period ending March 31, 2011. The projects were renewed for one more year. However, the evaluation and its findings reported here only cover the period 2008 (actual start dates varied by project) to December 31, 2010.

### 2. Program Description

The objectives of the Winnipeg YGPF projects were to:

- Address specific risk and protective factors associated with youth violence and gang membership
- Mitigate risk of gun violence and gang activity
- Provide alternatives to gangs to help youth develop pro-social competencies and attitudes
- Prevent gang-related crime and victimization

Each project addressed a unique neighbourhood, community and clientele. The following are brief descriptions of the five projects.

#### **Circle of Courage (COC) delivered by Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.**

Located in Winnipeg's inner city Centennial Neighbourhood, Circle of Courage used an intensive approach focused on providing male Aboriginal youth aged 12 to 17 with opportunities and social interventions to develop skills and resiliency, and to become leaders in their families and communities. Accomplished through cultural reclamation programming, education, counseling and support, and advocacy, the project aimed to build community, and enhance skills and independence. The Circle of Courage programming model sought to instill pride in being Aboriginal, combined with knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture.

<sup>1</sup> This synthesis note is based on the NCPC's Evaluation Team's review and analysis of the Final Evaluation Report prepared by Larry Bremner of Proactive Information Services Inc.

**Just TV (Broadway Neighbourhood Community Centre)**

Just TV focused on youth in the West Broadway neighbourhood. This project recruited youth through an outreach worker who provides links with social support services. The focus was on creative self-expression by giving youth a voice in the issues that affect them. Just TV participants (N = 47) created and presented videos to communities on gang life, substance abuse, and abandonment, while stressing the importance of positive messages. Just TV also supported youth towards achieving their goals by helping with resumes and job applications, accessing housing, and connecting with substance abuse support.

**Project OASIS (New Directions for Children, Youth, Adults and Families)**

Project OASIS supported newcomer youth and their families who come from countries of political strife. Refugee youth were considered at risk of youth gang involvement. The project specifically worked with youth who were in contact with the criminal justice system. Youth were assessed and selected for services specific to their needs. These included wraparound resources, mental health assessment and possible treatment, and connection to education, employment and recreation resources. Youth also participated in life skills training and recreation.

**Turning the Tides (Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc.)**

Criminally involved youth in Winnipeg's North End were the focus of Turning the Tides, a community-led gang prevention through mentorship program. The project was divided into two parts. In Part A, youth built skills and a sense of belonging by engaging in community service at the Ndinawe Youth Resource Centre. Some youth then moved on to Part B, where they were supported in paid employment for 10 hours per week. In Part B, Turning the Tides recruited and trained individuals who had healed from a history of criminal behavior, to be mentors for youth leaving Correctional Services. The project delivered services to a total of 52 youth.

**West Central Youth Outreach (WCYO) (Spence Neighbourhood Association)**

In the West End and Spence Neighbourhood, the West Central Youth Outreach project provided intensive intervention through Youth Outreach Worker mentorship and a street outreach approach. The project created segues for 41 youth to community resources in schools, employment, and/or recreation.

The project worked with youth in two capacities. Fifteen youth, considered a priority group, were provided with more intensive support with WCYO outreach workers acting as mentors. They provided one-on-one support by providing them with recreation opportunities, support for school, or crisis intervention. While the focus of mentorship support was on youth, supporting families was also a component of WCYO. The remaining youth were supported in a less intensive way through street outreach.

**Program Participants**

In total, the Winnipeg YGPF projects served 250 youth and 165 families. The majority of the participants were male (84%). Only two projects were intended for youth of a certain ethnic origin, Aboriginal youth for Circle of Courage and Project OASIS for African immigrant youth. The majority of participants in all five projects were Aboriginal (80%). Approximately 16% were African immigrants.

**Risk Factors**

The Winnipeg YGPF projects mainly served gang-involved and at-risk youth. At intake, 46% of youth involved in the projects lived with a lone parent, while 20% lived in a foster or group home. Youth were transient, with 38% living at the same place for six months or less. Almost half (46%) of youth had been in the care of Child and Family Services at some point. The majority (72%) of participants was gang-involved or at moderate to high risk of gang involvement, 49% had been convicted of an offence, 67% had friends in a gang, and 66% had family members or someone close to them who had been in a gang. Finally, 56% of the participants reported a problem with tobacco use while 27% indicated that they had an alcohol or drug use problem.

**Program Participation**

On average, youth were involved in the projects for approximately 44 weeks. Youth in the Winnipeg YGPF projects most frequently participated in recreational activities (n = 191), life skills training (n = 189), mentoring (n = 179), and counseling (n = 133).

All projects sought to foster youths' participation in pro-social activities, such as life skills training (n = 189), pre-employment training (n = 115), attending school (n = 123), and literacy/numeracy training (n = 73).

While 100 youth were employed at some point during their participation in the Winnipeg YGPF projects, 106 also volunteered in the community.

Positive activities such as recreation (n = 191), cultural activities and traditional learning (n = 105) were also provided by all five Winnipeg YGPF projects. As of December 31, 2010, 144 had completed the program.

### 3. Evaluation of the Program

The objectives of the evaluation were to describe and assess program implementation, identifying any challenges and issues to be addressed in order to increase the likelihood of achieving the anticipated outcomes and to assess the effectiveness of the projects in achieving their outcomes.

The evaluation of the Winnipeg YGPF projects used a mixed method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative data. A pre-posttest design with no comparison group was used to measure change over two time periods: at intake and either at six or twelve months.

The evaluation used a variety of data collection methods. A case study was undertaken for each project to highlight a unique story or aspect of the projects. It also allowed for an exploration of the context for each project.

In addition to case studies, data collection methods included:

- A review of the intake forms, activity tracking records for youth and families, partnership records, and financial records
- Interviews and focus groups with youth, staff, family partners, and community members
- Exit interviews with youth.

Instruments used with the youth were developed specifically for the projects, but included the use of questions tested on Eurogangs<sup>2</sup>. The instruments underwent an intensive pilot testing process, which helped support validity.

### 4. Evaluation Findings

#### Process Findings

As of December 31st, 2010, the five Winnipeg YGPF projects had formed 321 partnerships, which included 275 unique partners. Partnerships were described as reciprocal and mutually beneficial for the Winnipeg projects and the partner organizations. Partners provided services to the projects, referral sources, employment and training, advocacy, contributions to the projects advisory committees, and funding.

Youth interviewed indicated they had benefited from participation in the projects. Generally, youth spoke of their attachment to the project staff, their increased sense of safety and belonging, the skills they had acquired, the opportunities they had been given and the new things they had experienced. Many spoke of how, without the program, they would be 'on the streets' continuing to follow a gang lifestyle, engaging in illegal activities.

While families were appreciative of the practical and social supports they had received, they were more emphatic in their appreciation for the support their children had received. In particular, families were grateful that the projects provided youth with a place of safety where they could engage pro-socially, and where youth could receive social/emotional support through counseling, mentoring, or by 'just being there.'

<sup>2</sup> Weerman, F. & Decker, S. (2005). European Street Gangs and Troublesome Youth Groups: Findings from the Eurogang Research Program. *European Street Gangs and Troublesome Youth Groups*. Oxford: AltaMira Press.

There were a number of factors that contributed to the successful implementation of the Winnipeg YGPF projects, including:

- Host agency/organization with a well-established and demonstrated capacity to support what the project was trying to accomplish with youth
- Qualified, experienced, and understanding staff
- Low staff turnover
- Flexible program and service delivery to meet the individual needs of youth
- Taking the time to build trusting relationships with youth
- Operating from a learning focus and capacity building perspective as a project and with youth
- Successfully connecting with families
- Having supportive families who facilitated pro-social changes in youth
- A strong network of partnerships that facilitated youth support, including working as a team with other community agencies
- Support from funders.

Some of the implementation challenges included:

### **High need youth**

Some participating youth had high needs, and projects struggled to provide them with the level of support required. Accessing services for diagnosis and support of youth with high needs, particularly those with potential mental illness and/or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), was also a challenge.

### **Safety**

Some youth had to travel through rival gang territories in order to attend programming and some carried weapons for protection. Most Winnipeg YGPF projects were located in high crime neighbourhoods, making them vulnerable to break-ins and vandalism.

### **Demand for service**

All Winnipeg YGPF projects were at capacity throughout the life of the projects, some with waiting lists.

### **Transportation**

Many youth required transportation to avoid the danger of traveling through particular gang 'territory'. It was difficult for projects to find sufficient funding to support their transportation needs.

## **Outcome Findings**

### **Behavior**

#### **Pro-social behavior**

Pro-social behavior was measured using the Pro-Social Behavior Scale. It measured youths' involvement in pro-social activities such as attachment to team sports or clubs, volunteering in the community and participation in cultural activities.

The percentage of youth moving from low to moderate and high levels on the Pro-Social Behavior Scale increased after six months of participation in the project. However, the percentages were larger for the group of youth assessed at intake and at 12 months (low risk – from 71% to 35%; moderate risk – from 25% to 52%, and high risk – from 4% to 13%).

Results indicate that it may take time for youth to demonstrate pro-social behaviors, which staff have observed and reported. The longer youth remain connected to the project, (e.g., 12 months), the more likely they are to score in the moderate and/or high level on the Pro-Social Behavior Scale.

#### **Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

Results of analyses reveal mixed findings on the indices of problem alcohol and/or other drug use (defined by use of once a week or more) over time. Problem alcohol use increased from intake to six months later (from 25% to 30%) and from intake to 12 months (from 26% to 34%). That is, youth were consuming more alcohol. Problem drug use increased (from 31% to 36%) for youth who were assessed at six months, but remained stable for youth assessed at 12 months (from 31% to 31%).

### **Gang Affiliation**

Regarding the desired outcome of a reduction in gang affiliation, it was initially hoped that a scale based on a modification of the Eurogang items could be used. However, too many missing items invalidated use of this scale. Regardless, the results indicate that the projects did not move youth further away from gang affiliation; there was no significant change.

### **Protective Factor**

#### **Social Support and Family Support**

Supporting the development of pro-social behaviors was facilitated by youth's social and family supports. Results show a non-significant decrease in low social support from intake to six months later (36% to 32%), or from intake to twelve months (33% to 22%), and an increase in moderate to high levels of support at either six or twelve months.

Another indicator of youth developing healthy supports was the level to which parents/guardians were involved in their youths' lives. Analyses at six or 12 months of participation reveals little change in family support.

### **Cost Analysis Findings**

NCPC funding to the projects represented 58% of project revenue, with a percentage per project range of between 35% and 80%. The cost per participant ranged from \$10,417 to \$24,242, with an average per participant cost of \$15,251.

#### **Cost Analysis by Project**

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Total Operational Cost</b>	<b>Average Cost per Participant</b>
Circle of Courage	\$791,696	\$10,417
Just TV	\$606,941	\$12,914
Project OASIS	\$824,228	\$24,242
Turning the Tides	\$808,308	\$15,544
West Central Youth Outreach	\$538,747	\$13,140

### **Evaluation Limitations**

Besides the lack of any comparison group, other threats to validity limit the ability to determine program effects on youth's outcomes. The following threats should be considered when interpreting the results:

#### **Low sample size**

The sample size by project was very small. There were 124 youth who completed the post-test at six months. The largest group for one project was 32. There were 56 youth who completed the post-test at twelve months. The largest group from one project was 15. In a number of cases, there were a number of missing responses on either the pre-test or the post-test, rendering comparisons more difficult.

#### **Instrumentation**

Challenged with trust issues, the evaluator did not collect the data, but staff from all five projects did. This may have introduced variability in data collection across projects and between time periods within each project. In an attempt to get youth to complete the surveys, the intake instruments were completed in several sessions, over a four-week period. Staff members were also reluctant to ask youth to answer some questions for fear of negatively labeling them. Finally, the reliability of the scales used to measure outcomes has not been reported.

#### **Construct validity**

Some of the items used to measure outcomes, particularly tobacco use, may have included an inherent cultural bias. For example, tobacco is used in Aboriginal cultural ceremonies. Since 80% of participants were Aboriginal, it is believed that respondents may not have perceived tobacco use as a risky behavior. Furthermore, the majority of participants in Project OASIS were Muslim. As Muslims do not consume alcohol, alcohol consumption may have been an unlikely risk factor for this group.

Therefore, results should be interpreted with caution as program attribution cannot be ascertained.

## 5. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

### Program Delivery

As noted above, the Winnipeg YGPF projects were challenged by many implementation issues. The evaluation offered the following recommendations to prevent or diminish the impact of these issues.

#### **Complexity of issues facing youth**

Youth involved in the Winnipeg YGPF projects faced a plurality of issues. The majority of these youth were coping with complex trauma, such as neurological trauma stemming from exposure to toxins (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or FASD), abandonment, violence, grief, and homelessness. Holistic culturally-based approaches are recommended to support youth and families.

#### **Individualization**

Each project-involved youth had unique issues requiring an individualized approach to services. Projects seeking to support gang-involved or at-risk youth should allow for the individualization of interventions based on needs. Flexibility in approaches would facilitate supporting youth.

#### **Developing pro-social behaviors takes time**

More consideration should be given to the time element in programming. Longer term interventions (at least 12 months) are likely to be more effective in supporting youth toward making more pro-social choices as staff needed time to build and maintain trust with at-risk or gang-involved youth.

#### **Engaging families**

Necessity of engaging families in support of youth is critical. Like approaches to youth, supports to families should be individualized, strength-based, flexible, and based on trust.

#### **Substance abuse is a deep issue**

None of the five Winnipeg projects included providing extensive substance abuse support. It was acknowledged, however, that youth needed more intensive, sustained, and specialized supports in order to deal with substance abuse issues. Approaches to supporting at-risk or gang-involved youth should include a substance abuse support component or a strong partner who can provide the necessary interventions.

#### **Youth voice**

The Winnipeg projects showcased youth who were vocal in telling their stories and talking about the issues they faced. When possible, youth should be consulted in program planning, implementation and knowledge dissemination.

## 6. Conclusion

The Winnipeg Youth Gang Prevention Fund projects were successful in increasing pro-social behaviours among youth, particularly at 12 months of participation, and more so for younger youth and for youth who had been exposed to higher levels of programming. However, youth's social and family support remained stable or only marginally higher after 6 and 12 months of participation. Participation in the Winnipeg YGPF projects did not significantly influence problem alcohol or drug use. There is no evidence that participation in the projects reduced youth's gang affiliation or involvement.

*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](mailto:prevention@ps-sp.gc.ca).*

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