



Waterloo Regional Gang Prevention Project

The Waterloo Regional Gang Prevention Project is implementing a comprehensive and integrated strategy to address and prevent gang activity among youth in the Waterloo Region. The Project is supported by [Public Safety Canada](#), National Crime Prevention Centre's [Crime Prevention Action Fund](#) and is delivered by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo Social Services, Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration Division. The project began in July 2008 and will be piloted and evaluated until May 2011.

The Waterloo Regional Police Service estimates that 300 – 400 youth are involved in street gangs in the Region of Waterloo.¹ When associate gang members are included, the estimate of youth gang participation increases to 1000.² Ten years ago only one known youth gang was operating in the area. Currently, there are approximately 20 active street gangs identified within the Region of Waterloo.³ Similar to information available on gangs in other parts of Canada, those in Waterloo Region involve youth from various cultural backgrounds and members are predominantly males under the age of 18.⁴

Gang recruitment and intimidation graffiti is clearly visible within neighbourhoods in Waterloo, especially near residential and homeless shelters for youth. In these areas youth involved in counselling report being recruited into gangs as young as Grade 8.⁵

The Waterloo Regional Gang Prevention Project provides prevention and intervention activities for children and youth 13 - 24 years of age who are at risk of being recruited into gangs. To increase effectiveness, all activities have been developed to address known risk and protective factors and age and gender are key considerations in the approach.

The Evidence Base

The Waterloo Regional Gang Prevention Project activities were developed and designed by combining evidence from the Office of Juvenile Justice Comprehensive Gang (or "Spergel") Model and the Milwaukee Wraparound approach.

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. The main goal of the Spergel Model is to reduce and prevent gang crime and violence.

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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 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 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.⁶

Milwaukee Wraparound

The [Milwaukee Wraparound](#) is a comprehensive program that focuses on delivering strength-based, individualized care to delinquent youth and their families. It was designed to reduce the number of youth being institutionalized by providing family-based treatment and programs within the community. The program targets youth ages 13 to 24 with serious emotional, behavioural, and mental health needs and their families.

The goals of Wraparound Milwaukee are to:

- reduce anti-social behaviour;
- help families access available services;
- increase association with pro-social peers;
- increase family cohesion; and
- minimize out-of-home placements.

Evaluation has demonstrated that youth who received interventions from Wraparound Milwaukee had significant reductions in recidivism rates. They had significant decreases in felony referrals, misdemeanour referrals. They also committed fewer sex offences, property offences, assault offences, and weapons offences.⁷

Program Participants

The project works with youth, aged 13 – 24 years old, who are at-risk of engaging in gang activity.

Program Components

Based on staff knowledge of youth involved in street lifestyle in the Waterloo Region, and the evidence of what works in addressing their needs, the Waterloo Regional Gang Prevention Project has developed the following five key components:

Social Intervention

Social intervention involves street outreach, counselling and individual case management. Staff spend time on the streets and in the community where youth gather. The goal of outreach workers is to get to know who the youth at risk are and to begin providing them with assistance to meet basic needs. As relationships develop, Outreach Workers assess barriers the youth are facing and identify which youth are involved or at highest risk of involvement in gang activity. This knowledge allows Outreach Workers to develop individual service plans designed to assist each youth and to accommodate particular needs such as literacy and social skills.

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Provision of Opportunities

Youth participate in designated activities according to their age and the risk factors identified. Activities are meaningful and directly related to the issues and barriers the youth are facing. Examples of activities include building employment skills through education and training, increasing health and life skills through sports & fitness, the arts and leadership development.

Community Mobilization

The community mobilization component of the program engages the community in the development and delivery of activities for youth. Project staff identify and work with a variety of community partners who have mandates to assist youth at-risk. The project staff also facilitate meetings and workshops designed to provide education about gang activity, opportunities for open discussion and guidance for how people in different parts of the community can take action to help prevent youth from being recruited in to the gangs.

Suppression

Supporting the [Waterloo Regional Police Service](#) with its gang strategy is also a major component of the Project. The project staff use their knowledge and community connections to help the Police devise and implement culturally responsive suppression 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 youth, including newcomers to Canada. They provide individual assistance to organizations to increase their knowledge of the gang phenomenon in Waterloo 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 are made to improve access in the areas of education, family support, social services and recreation.

Key Partners

Many community organizations are involved in the delivery of program activities. Some of the key partners include:

- Region of Waterloo
- Waterloo Regional Police Department
- Lutherwood
- Mental Health and Employment Services
- ROOF
- Working Centre
- St. Mary's Drug and Alcohol Assessment
- Multicultural Centre
- School Boards
- Community based justice services
- Neighbourhood associations

Evaluation Design

A comprehensive evaluation of the project is being conducted by a third party evaluator. The purpose of the evaluation is to thoroughly document the Waterloo Regional Gang Prevention Project implementation and impacts, in order to contribute to the knowledge of what project components work best to prevent or reduce gang involvement.

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The evaluation will address the outcomes from each of the components of the project. The evaluators will implement a pre/post test design to collect baseline data as well as outcome measures. Follow up will be done with youth participants at the six month and one year time periods 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 Assessment and Response

Over the past few years, people in the Waterloo Region have recognized that youth gangs and the issues associated with them are real concerns. This awareness and general consensus that something needs to be done has led to new and productive collaboration among youth service providers to adjust services where possible to better meet the needs of youth at risk and to identify gaps in services. As a result, the Waterloo Gang Prevention Project has strong support from people in the community and this gives the work momentum and a strong foundation for delivery that would otherwise have to be built.

Developmental Resources of the Project

Given the community interest in addressing youth gang issues, the project development stages have been labour-intensive and have taken more resources than anticipated. The benefits of lots of interest lead to challenges as well! One of the challenges is the coordination of 6 different systems with community partners and the related administrative requirements.

For more information on this project please contact:

Waterloo Regional gang Prevention Project

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¹ For more information please contact the project sponsor.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For more information visit: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/2008-pcpp-eng.aspx>

⁷ Ibid.