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The X-Roads Crime Prevention Program (X-Roads)

Introduction

The X-Roads Crime Prevention Project (X-Roads) provided prevention and intervention activities for Aboriginal children and youth aged 6–18 years and at risk of becoming involved in gang activity in The Pas, Manitoba.

X-Roads was funded by Public Safety Canada between September 2009 and August 2012, and was implemented by The Pas Family Resource Centre with support from community partners.

Goal and Objectives

X-Roads' goal was to see participants in the project gradually integrated into schools and existing systems, community organizations and programs.

The objectives of the project were to:

- Prevent at-risk children and youth from becoming involved with gangs;
- Reduce risk-taking behaviours amongst participating children and youth; and
- Create a sustainable network to share resources and knowledge and address gang prevention and intervention.

Participants

This project reached over 500 children and youth but focused their core activities on 56 of those at the highest risk.

The participants were identified through referrals (from schools, social service and health agencies, RCMP, community organizations), outreach activities (mall walks, going to schools, door to door visits), public relations activities (posters, pamphlet distributions, radio campaigns), incentives to involve the youth, and contact with parents.

Most of the participants were living in conditions of risk socially and economically. Almost all of them were from low income and single parent families, had no sense of future, low literacy levels, were struggling academically, and 75% had additional needs such as mental health needs, learning disabilities, ADHDⁱ, or FASD/ARNDⁱⁱ. These needs were higher than anticipated: 21% had an observed or diagnosed mental health illness, 7% had drug abuse issues, 7% used both drugs and alcohol. Four participants entered X-Roads with an offending history.

It was anticipated that youth aged 13–18 would be the highest risk, but in fact, the highest number of participants identified by referrals were between 6–11 years of age.

The majority of the participants were male, but project activities specific to girls were also developed and implemented to ensure that the diverse needs and interests of all participants were met.

The average length of stay in the program was 95 weeks.

Key Elements of the Program

A detailed assessment of each person in the project was undertaken and individual case management plans were developed. These plans integrated activities and interventions to reduce risk and build on protective factors specific to each participant's situation. Case management drew on resources from law enforcement/juvenile justice, schools, families and the X-Roads project staff. A Case Management Team worked to ensure coordination, integration and access to services. Monthly plan reviews and re-assessments were conducted by the Project service Coordinator and quarterly (or more frequently if required) case management meetings with other providers connected to the participant were held. Regular reviews ensured appropriate implementation and monitoring of the plans and assessment of the effectiveness and impacts along the way.

The activities for participants focused on five main elements: sports and fitness, the arts, character and leadership development, health and life skills, and education. Individual case management placed emphasis on law enforcement/juvenile justice, school, and family. Intervention activities for youth who were in need included—but were not limited to—substance abuse treatment, life skills training and educational support. All activities were informed by Aboriginal culture.

X-Roads also developed and implemented activities, in cooperation with community partners, to increase understanding and awareness in the community of the underlying factors that made involvement in gangs attractive to some children and youth.

Staffing

The project was staffed with 4.5 full time staff (1 Project Coordinator, 1 Case Management Coordinator, 2.5 Project Coaches). Part time, in-kind staffing was provided by the Town of The Pas (Recreation Director), the Manitoba Metis Federation (Community Liaison Worker) and the RCMP (2 part time RCMP personnel).

Given its northern location, the costs and time required to travel made it difficult for staff to access training. However, the staff was able to take part in some training focused on engaging with high-risk youth, gang prevention, risk of sexual exploitation, positive parenting, addictions, as well as cultural training to better understand Aboriginal values, traditions and history.

Partnerships

X-Roads relied on many partners, including:

- The Town of The Pas – provided space for recreational activities, use of equipment and staff involvement;
- Manitoba Housing – provided office and program space;
- RCMP – provided staff to deliver workshops and educational sessions to participate in activities with the participants and to provide mentoring/role modeling with the participants;
- Kelsey School Division/Kelsey Community School – provided use of space and equipment for the project activities as well as staff time;
- Manitoba Metis Federation – The Pas Region – provided space for workshops and education sessions, staff to provide cultural support and to assist with the delivery of project activities;
- Government of Manitoba – *Neighbourhoods Alive!* – provided financial support; and
- Norman Regional Health Authority – provided professional services

A Community Advisory Team, consisting of representatives from these organizations, was established at the start of the project and met quarterly. They discussed all aspects of the project, provided direction and support through sharing information, networking, generating ideas and troubleshooting issues.

Findings

The main findings for the X-Roads pilot project show:

The majority of the participants matched those the community was most concerned about and the project sought to reach.

The high levels of risk and needs of the children and youth required more intensive interventions than anticipated. As a result, the number of participants was lower than planned.

The project fostered numerous protective factors, including:

- increased involvement in pro-social activities and healthy lifestyles;
- increased opportunities for positive engagement with peers and the community;
- increased perception of social support from adults and peers;
- increased healthy lifestyle choices;
- increased social competencies and problem solving skills; and
- increased mobilization and networks within the community of parents, organizations, service agencies, schools, clubs, governmental departments and others with vested interest in the well-being of children and youth.

One of the key accomplishments of the project was to provide a place for the youth that was perceived as safe. Anecdotal evidence from parents and teachers of participants point to the concrete changes for the youth as they participated in the project. Reports of increased respect and cooperation, better focus in class, being more academically receptive and productive, and reductions in risk-taking behaviour were common.

Implementation Lessons Learned

Building and nurturing partnerships is complex and challenging work. The trust placed in the project and staff from members of the community was fundamental for the implementation of the X-Roads Project. It was through these partnerships that activities could be offered and case management plans could be developed and implemented.

Recruitment of staff took longer than anticipated and no applicants emerged in two rounds of advertisements for the X-Roads Coach positions. This is not an uncommon challenge in smaller, more remote communities. New ideas and strategies for recruitment were implemented, such as diversifying the format of the advertisement, including information about the wage, and focusing on spreading the word.

Keeping the older youth (14 to 18 years) engaged in the project was a key challenge. Funding from the Government of Manitoba *Neighbourhoods Alive!* Program supported a separate location for this age group and enabled better participation.

To meet the different developmental needs of boys and girls and older and younger youth, participants were grouped by age and gender for project activities and the intensity and format of program activities varied for each demographic.

Activities and services were delivered in a holistic, inclusive, and culturally sensitive manner. Project activities were also delivered in structured and unstructured formats using innovative and creative techniques. This approach accommodated the diverse learning styles of the participants.

Transportation for participants to attend programming was challenging. The majority of project participants did not own or have access to private vehicles and there was no bus service within the community. Funds were raised to purchase a used van.

To raise community awareness about the project, public relations events were held with the local radio station; pamphlets and door knob hangers were created and left by staff at homes in the community. Project participants took part in local festivals, and won awards in arts and crafts and snow sculptures.

Cost Information

Total cost to implement *X-Roads* was \$973,396 (67% funded by Public Safety Canada).

The main in-kind contributions came from the Town of The Pas, the Manitoba Metis Federation – the Pas Region, Kelsey Community School, Kelsey School Division, Manitoba Housing, the RCMP and The Pas Family Resource Centre.

The Government of Manitoba's *Neighbourhoods Alive!* Program provided financial assistance.

Sponsoring Organization Contact Information

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ⁱ Attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder

ⁱⁱ Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders/ Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder

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