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# **Process Evaluation of the Saskatoon STR8UP Program: Evaluation Report**

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Process Evaluation of the Saskatoon STR8UP Program: Evaluation Report

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The Evaluation Team consisted of Dr. Steve Wormith, Laura Orton, Giselle Patrick, Terri Cordwell, and Kayla Truswell.

## **PROCESS EVALUATION OF THE SASKATOON STR8UP PROGRAM: EVALUATION REPORT**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report contains the results of a process evaluation of the Saskatoon STR8UP Program. The purpose of the current project was to assess the extent to which their approaches of intervention and prevention assist with the healing and decrease in gang involvement of their members. The evaluation was designed to identify strengths and weaknesses of STR8UP and provide recommendations for the program to address these issues.

#### **Methodology**

The objectives of the evaluation were to: 1) identify the activities that are considered as intervention and prevention; 2) assess the extent to which the activities are being implemented as intended; 3) identify barriers to activities being implemented as they are intended; 4) identify whether incidence of gang activity has decreased over the years of STR8UP's activities of intervention, or number of members have increased; and 5) develop a program logic model for the program. The evaluation was conducted by the Evaluation Team in consultation with the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies and the John Howard Society of Saskatoon.

Interviews of a qualitative and quantitative nature were conducted with STR8UP members and staff members, as well as key community stakeholders such as school staff, students, and police officers. The development of the STR8UP Program Logic Model (Appendix B) facilitated the creation of interview questions and data collection strategies. Data collection included structured interviews, small surveys, non-participatory observation of STR8UP activities, and document reviews of all STR8UP program documentation. The specific data collection activities included the following:

1. A thorough review of STR8UP program information was collected and condensed to form the introduction of this report and evaluation
2. A thorough review of all relevant research pertaining to gang programs across North America, specifically of an intervention or prevention nature or those that had been evaluated, was conducted
3. Members of the Evaluation Team attended and observed STR8UP activities during one month
4. Interviews were conducted with STR8UP members, STR8UP staff members and volunteers, and key community stakeholders
5. The STR8UP Program Logic Model was constructed and designed based on the information given about the program inputs, activities, and various goals

#### **Summary of Results**

Results showed that the STR8UP members have overwhelmingly positive things to say about the program and the staff and volunteers. STR8UP members stated that the program provided help in

the areas of leaving and staying out of gangs, getting help for addictions, becoming a better parent and partner, and receiving further educational training or courses. The members also greatly enjoy the program activities and take pride in the positive effects they are having when speaking with at-risk youth. However, some of the members indicated that some of the members of the program are not truly invested in the program, and are simply using it to their advantage in court-related matters.

The STR8UP staff members and volunteers also provided positive support for the program and the changes they have seen in the members. Concerns were raised about the lack of permanent funding for the program as well as problems with some members that are not committed to the program. The staff members and volunteers also provided many concrete suggestions for the future of STR8UP, in terms of program structure, activities, and the core vision of the program.

School staff and students involved with a specific STR8UP activity for youth with addictions provided positive support for the activity's importance and function in the school. The school staff stated that they very much like the program, what it stands for, and how it is run, although a lack of funding is an on-going issue. The students stated that they had received positive benefits from participating in the program and found it helpful in dealing with their addictions.

Police officers in the Street Gang Unit and the Chief of Police also provided positive support for STR8UP and promoted it as one of the only programs in Saskatoon targeted at adults in need of help getting out of gangs and dealing with their addictions. Police officers suggested that there should be a higher staff to member ratio, in addition to better screening processes for potential members and an independent oversight committee involved with the whole program. The Chief of Police strongly recommended that STR8UP is deserving of funding due to the importance of their work and the population that they serve.

## **Recommendations**

### **Information, Organization, and Planning**

1. It is recommended that the development, evolution, and maturation of the program not only be retroactively documented, but all future plans and strategies for STR8UP be documented in detail.
2. It is recommended that the activities geared towards either prevention or intervention be clearly identified and the process by which those activities lead to the intended outcomes be clearly defined.
3. It is recommended that the specific qualifications and responsibilities of the volunteers and staff members be outlined, as well as the details of the relationship between JHS and STR8UP.
4. It is recommended that a database be created for members containing all relevant personal information, such as demographics, location, active vs. inactive, addictions needs, programs they participate in, stage of recovery, etc. This is meant to facilitate a case management perspective for the STR8UP staff members.
5. It is recommended that proper documentation showing how the objectives are being met be kept from this point on in an effort to allow for these assessments to be possible. It is also recommended that proper documentation of the program's activities be kept to allow

for a more thorough assessment of the program over the years, and how STR8UP is meeting its objectives.

6. In order to assess whether the three goals of STR8UP are indeed being continually fulfilled by its members, it is recommended that this type of information be kept in the member database described above so that staff members can know the progress of each member and where they are in terms of achieving these goals, as well as the health of members, as defined by the program.

#### **Activity Implementation**

7. It is recommended that the monthly schedule for all activities be communicated to all staff and members well in advance to ensure maximum attendance and participation.

#### **Collaboration with the John Howard Society**

8. It is recommended that the relationship between STR8UP and JHS be clearly outlined and documented in terms of roles and responsibilities of each party. In addition, information on the roles and responsibilities of the relationship should be available to all members and staff.
9. It is recommended that a specific mandate or vision statement for STR8UP be created, as well as a short-term and long-term strategy for the program.
10. It is recommended that a format for documenting or recording information discussed at meetings between the individual staff and volunteers, as well as for meetings with STR8UP and JHS individuals be implemented.

#### **Key Stakeholder Satisfaction**

11. It is recommended that a more thorough screening process for members be created. For all individuals who become STR8UP members, they should be assessed more frequently along a pre-determined time interval (e.g. every year) to determine their involvement in the program, how many goals they have achieved, etc. This relates back to the case management perspective and would also be referenced in the member database.
12. It is recommended that STR8UP create an oversight committee or advisory board with input from JHS, STR8UP, addictions centres, youth programs, and the police. This is meant to involve all community stakeholders in the program's progression and implementation to provide insight and collaboration.

#### **Barriers to Implementation**

13. It is recommended that the staff and members make a stronger effort at improving communication between the staff and volunteers, between the individual members, and between the staff and members.

#### **Analysis of Governance Structure**

14. It is recommended that the STR8UP governance structure be defined, documented, and communicated to all staff and members.

## **1.0 A REVIEW OF GANGS AND EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THEM**

### **1.1 Context of the Current Evaluation**

This is an evaluation of the STR8UP program. STR8UP developed from the ground up, and was initially intended to assist a few members of gangs with leaving their gangs and remaining out of them. The program started 12 years ago and since then has developed into a much larger program with over 100 members, two volunteers, two staff members, and an association with the John Howard Society of Saskatoon. The present evaluation was completed at the request of the STR8UP program volunteers and staff with the full cooperation and support of the John Howard Society.

The purpose of the evaluation of STR8UP was to assess the extent to which their approaches of intervention and prevention assist with the healing and decrease in gang involvement of their members. The first phase of the evaluation was an exhaustive literature review initiated by the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Sciences and Justice Studies. This phase was dedicated to the identification of existing research on the topic of gang activity reduction or intervention in general across North America, including research examples from Saskatchewan. Particular focus was paid to programs similar to STR8UP.

The second phase of the evaluation focused on an exhaustive review of STR8UP-specific documentation, as well as discussions with program staff in an effort to understand the information within the documents. An 'action research' approach was employed in this evaluation so that feedback from the program coordinators, as well as stakeholders, could be incorporated into all stages of the evaluation.

The third phase of the evaluation focused on the STR8UP members and the program activities. All available members, staff, volunteers, and stakeholders were interviewed. Stakeholders were determined through conversations with the staff and volunteers of the program as well as through the examination of the program documents.

This report documents all the information and data that was garnered in this study. It is intended that the recommendations within the document be implemented to positively impact the program as well as allow for further evaluation of the program. It is also intended that further evaluations will provide outcome documentation for the program as well as for the John Howard Society of Saskatoon.

### **1.2 Review of Relevant Gang Literature**

In Saskatchewan, a disproportionate number of homicides are gang-related, with 30% of the homicides attributed to gang activity in 2007 (Li, 2008). Furthermore, a concerning number of incarcerated youth in Saskatchewan are gang members. In 2002, Saskatchewan represented the highest youth gang population per capita in Canada, with 1.34 gang members per 1000 individuals (Chettleburgh, 2003). Additionally, in 2007, Saskatchewan had the highest rate of incarcerated youth in all of the provinces in Canada at a rate of 26.2 per 10,000 youth (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009). Saskatchewan also had the highest percentage of

youth on probation, with these youth representing 15.2 % of youth in the province in 2007. While the number of youth involved with gangs and a criminal lifestyle is concerningly high, adolescents do not represent the majority of gang members. Criminal Intelligence Services Saskatchewan reported that in 2005, 70% of identifiable gang members in Saskatoon were 18 years of age and older (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009).

There are notable discrepancies in incarceration rates between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Canada. In 2010, the Correctional Service of Canada reported that the average age for incarceration was lower for Aboriginal offenders than non-Aboriginal offenders. Additionally, the proportion of incarcerated Aboriginal offenders was 11.2% higher than non-Aboriginal offenders in 2010. In Saskatchewan, the majority of gang activity is in Saskatoon and Regina with 13 reported gangs including adult gangs such as Native Syndicate, Redd Alert, Indian Posse, Saskatchewan Warriors, West Side Soldiers, Tribal Brotherz, Mixed Blood, Crazy Cree, and Hells Angels (Tanasichuk, Hogg, Simon, Ferguson, & Wormith, 2010). The youth gangs include Junior Mixed Blood, The Crips, Indian Mafia Crips, and North Central Rough Riderz.

There is some disagreement on the most effective way to deal with Aboriginal street gangs, with some focusing on prevention, some on intervention, and some on suppression. However, there is a trend towards prevention programs building respect for traditional Aboriginal values while giving adolescents opportunities to avoid involvement in gangs.

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) created a program that addresses Aboriginal gangs in Saskatchewan. The FSIN's "Alter-Native to Non-Violence" initiative assumes that Aboriginal youth join gangs due to a sense of necessity and survival and a desire for a sense of belonging (FSIN, 2003). Gang membership is a result of larger community problems (Tanasichuk et al., 2010). Poverty, high unemployment rates, economic and social marginalization, cultural extinction, and traumatic historical events such as residential schools are adversaries that have diminished the ability of First Nations individuals, families, and communities to withstand new pressures and encourage change. Without addressing the social, economic, legal, and political problems, gang membership will only increase. Consequently, the solution to the problem of the over-representative number of First Nations people in Saskatoon gangs is to decrease the number of risk factors for them while increasing the protective factors for aboriginal youth, such as health, cultural awareness, and a sense of belonging (Tanasichuk et al., 2010).

Researchers have shown that culture and language serve as protective factors for at-risk communities (McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009). Culture and language provide a means to convey traditions, values, and spirituality, which in turn can have a positive effect on individuals and communities. Participating in one's culture contributes to a sense of coherence and social identity which enhances pro-social beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviours. However, although some First Nations youth value their culture and language, many are not strongly connected to these important components of their cultural heritage.

The FSIN perspective encourages a restorative justice approach, focusing on the needs of the offenders and victims instead of the desire to achieve justice or exact punishment. The focus is to

bring peace between the victim and the offender and resolve a relationship between the offender and the community. Aboriginal justice is generally community-oriented and concentrates on restoring stability and harmony between the victim, the offender, and their community. This is seen as promoting healing as the offender is typically viewed as someone who is out of balance with their Creator, their family, and themselves. Through the restorative justice approach the accused is held directly accountable to their community and the victim. They are responsible for repairing the social discord and the harm done by their crime (FSIN, 2003).

### **1.3 Prevention Programs**

There are three main categories of prevention programs: (1) primary prevention programs, (2) secondary prevention programs, and (3) tertiary prevention programs. Primary prevention programs work to assist an entire population, such as a school or community to increase the number and strength of protective factors (Lafontaine, Ferguson & Wormith, 2005). Secondary prevention programs work to assist at-risk populations or communities, targeting individuals who are viewed as being more susceptible to gang affiliation. Tertiary prevention programs work to prevent further gang involvement in individuals already affiliated with gang members (Lafontaine et al., 2005). While a large number of gang prevention programs have been implemented in North America, it is outside the scope of this project to provide exhaustive details on all of them (Tanasichuk et al., 2010). As such, the focus here will be on programs that are similar to STR8UP and/or have been evaluated.

#### **1.3.1 GREAT: Gang Resistance Education and Training**

One of the largest gang prevention initiatives in North America is the GREAT program. The primary objective of GREAT is prevention against delinquency, youth violence, and gang membership by providing life skills and problem-solving techniques. The program is taught primarily in middle schools by trained law enforcement officers. The GREAT program is available in cities in all US states and is funded by federal grants through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA; Esbenson et al., 2011). A program evaluation by Esbenson et al. (2011) showed positive results. Analyses found that the youth who completed the program were more likely to report positive attitudes about the police, less positive attitudes about gangs, engagement in more frequent use of refusal skills, greater resistance to peer pressure, and lower rates of gang membership (i.e., 54% reduction in odds of gang membership). At a one year follow-up time after the program, the results were supportive of positive effects.

#### **1.3.2 GPTTO: Gang Prevention through Targeted Outreach**

GPTTO is a gang prevention program targeting youth aged 6 to 18 who are at risk of gang involvement. The youth are referred from school personnel, social service agencies, and police and probation services. The program is operated by the Boys and Girls Club of America and the goal is to engage youth in more pro-social activities. The activities focus on five areas: character and leadership development, health and life skills, the arts, education, and sports, fitness, and recreation. In 2002, an evaluation of the program was completed using 21 locations and 1,338 youth. The results indicated that program attendance was associated with less involvement with the juvenile justice system, fewer delinquent behaviours (e.g., theft and smoking marijuana),



improved grades and a more positive attitude about school, improved levels of peer and family relationships, and delayed onset of certain gang behaviours (e.g., wearing gang colours; Arberton & McClanahan, 2002).

### **1.3.3 GRIP: Gang Resistance is Paramount**

GRIP was implemented in 1982 as a gang prevention program in Paramount, CA. GRIP has four objectives: (1) educate students about the dangers of gangs, (2) discourage youth from joining gangs, (3) educate students' parents about the signs of gang involvement, and (4) provide parents with resources that will help to eliminate gang activities in their homes and neighbourhoods. The program includes a school-based curriculum, neighbourhood meetings with parents, and available counselling for both parents and students. Although several evaluations have been completed on this program, the most recent evaluation (Solis, Schwartz, & Hinton, 2003) utilized a nonrandomized post-test experimental design with grade nine students, some of whom had previously participated in GRIP activities. Results indicated that GRIP participants were less likely to be involved with a gang; however, both groups reported strong anti-gang attitudes (Solis et al., 2003).

### **1.3.4 GAP: Gang Alternative Program**

GAP is based on the GRIP program, and is a gang prevention program that includes a school-based curriculum designed to educate youth on the realities of gang life and alternatives to that lifestyle. A program evaluation was completed in 2007 using surveys (pre-, post-, and delayed post-) with Grade 4 students from six elementary schools in Los Angeles, CA. Results demonstrated that students improved their knowledge of the negative consequences of gang involvement and drug and alcohol use and learned strategies to avoid gang members. All gains were maintained on the delayed post-survey (Vital Research, 2007).

### **1.3.5 Urban Improv**

Urban Improv is a school-based drama program that was started in Boston public schools in 1992. The 27-week program aims to educate students on decision-making, conflict resolution, problem solving, cooperation, and leadership skills. These skills protect against the development of negative and violent behaviour in students (Kisiel et al., 2005). Kisiel et al. (2005) evaluated the program using a quasi-experimental design with a matched control group. Teachers reported that students in the classrooms who participated in the program demonstrated more pro-social behaviours and less hyperactivity (Kisiel et al., 2005). Another evaluation was completed five years later by Zucker et al. (2010) that compared the basic Urban Improv program, the teacher curriculum, the comprehensive program (i.e., both basic and teacher curriculum), and matched controls. Results indicated that the comprehensive program demonstrated an additive effect over the basic Urban Improv program and the teacher curriculum also showed potential as an easily disseminated, stand-alone, youth violence prevention program (Zucker et al., 2010).

### **1.3.6 Wraparound Milwaukee**

The Wraparound Milwaukee approach targets children and youth with serious emotional, behavioural, and mental health needs. Criteria for the children include: a current mental health problem; they are involved in two or more service systems including mental health, child welfare, or juvenile justice; they have been identified for out-of-home placement in a residential treatment centre; and they can be returned to their family sooner with the availability of a Wraparound plan. The goal of the program is to provide personal, community, and professional resources needed by a young person and their family that are “wrapped around” the child and the family. An evaluation of this approach showed large improvements for delinquent youth in terms of their functioning at home, at school, and in their community (Milwaukee County Behavioural Health Division, 2002).

## **1.4 Intervention Programs**

Gang intervention programs work to assist individuals who are already gang members or peripheral members of gangs (Tanasichuk et al., 2010). One way to provide this assistance is to help members find more acceptable ways of obtaining resources that initially provided incentive for the members to join the gang. Many individuals become immersed in a gang lifestyle for financial reasons. Consequently, it is important for intervention programs to assist individuals to obtain adequate employment. This often involves helping individuals obtain education and training in order to be considered for positions that are sustainable. Educational and vocational training for at-risk youth has been demonstrated to result in lower crime rates (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2006). Some intervention programs provide additional assistance through individual and family counselling to develop social/cognitive and communication skills, and to combat the underlying issues of substance abuse, a lack of parenting skills, and anger management. It is also beneficial for such programs to offer individual and family counselling (Lafontaine et al., 2005).

Leaving a gang often also involves consequences such as retribution from other gang members (Lafontaine et al., 2005). Such consequences however, are usually less severe for peripheral members (Spergel, 1995). As a result, some intervention programs may provide assistance and support in leaving a gang safely (Tanasichuk et al., 2010). Providing support may be predominantly important for Aboriginal youth who may be particularly fearful of entering the non-Aboriginal world which they perceive to be unwelcoming (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2003).

### **1.4.1 Pohna: Keepers of the Fire**

Pohna: Keepers of the Fire is a gang intervention and diversion program for at-risk youth in Edmonton, Alberta. The program was created in September, 2009 at the request of the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) for the target population of youth aged 11 to 17 years old who, although not formally connected to street gangs, were involved in criminal (e.g., robberies, assaults, drug-related crimes) and gang-related (e.g., wearing colours, involved in gang-like rituals) activities. Given that the majority of the youth identified were of Aboriginal descent, the Native Counselling Service of Alberta took the lead on developing the program. Thus, the program is

grounded in an Aboriginal-specific theoretical framework, such as the belief that the more connected the youth is to their family, community, and the natural environment, the more resilient they will be. The program works to create a “Circle of Support” around youth, and tailors the supports to the individual (e.g., working with schools to increase attendance, connecting youth to Aboriginal culture, and/or getting the youth involved in recreational activities). As the program has only recently been implemented, no formal evaluation has taken place, although Erickson, LaBoucane-Benson, and Hossack (2011) examined five case studies of youth involved in the program and concluded that the program designers should focus their attention on learning from the youth and frequently adapting the program to better meet the youth’s needs.

#### **1.4.2 GITTO: Gang Intervention through Targeted Outreach**

GITTO emerged as an adaptation of GPTTO with a primary focus on intervention instead of prevention. GITTO’s focus is on increasing access to community resources to decrease the number of youth joining gangs by encouraging membership in clubs and other programs and by providing case management on an individual basis (Arberton & McClanahan, 2002). Following a 12-month period, youth who took part in this program had fewer experiences with the justice system, less gang-associated behaviour (e.g., flashing gang signals, wearing gang colors), fewer negative peers, and more positive school expectations (e.g., graduation; Arberton & McClanahan, 2002).

#### **1.4.3 GAIN: Gang Awareness Intervention Network**

GAIN, formerly known as the Edmonton Native Alliance (ENA), was established in Edmonton, Alberta. The ENA was a grassroots organization, comprised of ex-gang members who used Aboriginal spirituality and outreach practices to connect with Aboriginal adolescents involved in gangs. Ex-gang members are familiar with the gang lifestyle and the needs and issues of gang members. The focus of the program was to bridge the gap between youth and community programs (e.g., safe houses, education, and counselling) that can assist them in exiting the gang life. Additionally, ENA encompassed Aboriginal spirituality, cultural values, and needs that were not targeted in other community programs (John Howard Society of Alberta, 2001). ENA later developed into GAIN, a privately-funded initiative designed to promote a healthier, more constructive, drug-free, family-oriented lifestyle for Aboriginal youth. The objective is to reconnect the youth with their traditional Aboriginal culture and deter them from getting involved in gang activity. Functions of GAIN include drug counselling, court advocacy, and school appearances (Stevens, 2005; Matwychuk, 2005).

#### **1.4.4 Breaking the Cycle (BTC)**

The BTC gang exit program in Toronto, Ontario is a program that provides youth with alternatives to gang membership. The program provides counselling for substance abuse and anger management, support for families, and opportunities to engage in cultural programs and sports. They also provide assistance with obtaining sustainable employment with enough revenue to keep youth from being tempted to sell drugs (Lorinc, 2009). BTC is a program that takes place over 28 weeks and it has graduated over 200 youth. The initial focus is on anger management,

conflict resolution, and drug counselling. Second, the youth set goals for themselves and receive a week of case management. Finally, the majority of the program is focused on connecting the youth to their community and schools which may involve making presentations at various schools or community services. The program provides remuneration equal to 35 hours a week at minimum wage and a \$500 bonus when they graduate from the program. Almost 80% of young people graduate. Program participants have been found to be more likely to succeed in school, training and employment; more likely to resist drugs and alcohol; more likely to resolve conflicts without violence, and more likely to make pro-social life choices (Lorinc, 2009).

#### **1.4.5 RAGS: Regina Anti-Gang Services**

RAGS is a gang-intervention program developed in 2007 for gang-involved Aboriginal youth and young adults, between the ages of 16 and 30 in Regina, SK. The program employs elements of Multi-Systemic Therapy (i.e., focus on the multiple determinants of antisocial behaviour) and the Wraparound Process (i.e., individualized plans of care). The ultimate objective of RAGS is to enable youth to leave gangs successfully by providing them with needed support. In order to meet their objective, RAGS provides four activities: life skills programming for young men, a circle keeper program for young girls, intensive gang exit counselling, and outreach to schools and institutions. An evaluation of the program was completed from March 2008 to January 2011 using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Results indicated changes in the participants' following attitudes: decline in general approval of aggression, decline in approval of retaliation, and increase in the dislike of guns. The program also had a positive impact on reducing gang affiliation and participants' involvement in nonviolent crime (Totten & Dunn, 2011)

### **1.5 Mixed Prevention and Intervention Programs**

Some programs have combined methods from prevention programs and intervention programs in an effort to decrease gang membership and association.

#### **1.5.1 A Second's Chance**

A Second's Chance is part of the Elements program in North Carolina which is a gang prevention, intervention, diversion, and suppression initiative. A Second's Chance is a youth program that allows at-risk youth or established gang members to observe a dramatization of a gunshot victim in a mock emergency department and his subsequent death and the effects on his family. The purpose of the demonstration of gang violence is to raise awareness of the consequences of gang-related activity. The youth also participate in a "debriefing" process, in which gang task force members relate personal accounts of gang experience. An evaluation by Hughes, Griner, Guarino, Drabik-Medeiros, & Williams (2012) utilized questionnaires completed by the youth as well as their parent or guardian. The results showed that 90% of participants reported positive meaningful responses to the significance of intervention. For the 24 students who completed the Elements program, school attendance was above 95% and grades improved in 79% of students. Of the students participating in the program, 52% had active criminal charges, but 87% of those remained free of charges during the program (180 days). The authors noted that although these were preliminary follow-up results, they indicate early success (Hughes et al., 2012).

### **1.5.2 JIPP: Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program**

JIPP is a school-based prevention and intervention program in Los Angeles, CA that targets at-risk youth. The program uses a holistic perspective, which takes into consideration the students' families, education, and communities. JIPP also has four micro-areas of intervention: psychosocial-emotional, academic, bio-behavioural, and family support system. Although no data on changes in involvement in gang activity are available, results from an evaluation of the program indicated reductions in depressive symptomatology, school suspension rates, and improvement in English and math test scores (Koffman et al., 2009).

### **1.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, a number of prevention and intervention strategies have shown to be effective at reducing gang membership and gang-related activities at various levels. Successful strategies include increasing awareness of the devastating impact of gang activity, enhancing access to individualized services and community resources, connecting individuals to educational and vocational programs, school-based programs to improve accessibility for at-risk youth, and increasing cultural awareness. One necessary component of an effective program appears to be consistent funding. With adequate resources, a number of substantial gains have been made on the reduction of gang-related activity in North America.

## **2.0 THE SASKATOON STR8UP PROGRAM**

STR8UP is a program in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan that is designed to intervene with and assist gang members who are considering, or are in the process of leaving their gang. STR8UP is also involved in the prevention of gang membership through youth mentorship programs, school presentations, and workshops in the community. Although the term “program” is often used to describe STR8UP, the staff members consider it to be more of a lifestyle. They feel that the term “lifestyle” more appropriately represents the fact that members will be working on their issues (e.g., addictions, honesty) for the rest of their lives. STR8UP does not proclaim to be “at war” with gangs in Saskatoon, as this approach would likely place staff and members in danger.

There are many challenges that gangs members face when they leave their gang. Some of these challenges include finding adequate housing and employment, upgrading their education, and coping with addictions. STR8UP Outreach Workers work with STR8UP members to reduce the barriers that they struggle to overcome, such as finding employment opportunities, accessing treatment or educational programs, and helping them register for welfare. STR8UP is a unique program, and thus does not duplicate services that are already available in the community. The approaches that STR8UP uses to accomplish their goals are further outlined below.

### **2.1 History and Background**

STR8UP is considered a “ground up” organization. It was created at the request of active gang members who saw a need for assistance, confidence, and support in their desire to abandon their gang lifestyle. These gang members had come to the conclusion that their current lifestyle had become abusive, destructive, dysfunctional, and wanted a better life.

In the mid-1990s, Father Andre Poilievre, the coordinating chaplain of the Saskatoon Correctional Centre (SCC) introduced a program at the SCC. Inmates who qualified for temporary absences and expressed positive attitudes would participate in presentations and workshops in the community (e.g., schools, treatment centres, and youth centres). Other inmates would assist Father Andre with welcoming groups of people and organizations visiting the SCC. The inmates were invited to share their life story and spoke about issues that they felt led to their involvement with the justice system. The theme of discussing past experiences is still evident in STR8UP at the present time.

Another key feature of these workshops was the inclusion of the First Nations Medicine Wheel as a model of “healthy” versus “unhealthy” lifestyles, in the four areas of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. This model’s purpose was twofold. First, it assisted individuals in identifying the origins of their pro-criminal attitudes and addictions. Second, the model defined a process to abandon negative beliefs and embrace a more pro-social, positive lifestyle. Father Andre attributes the positive relationships between himself and the inmates, as well as the support he received from the SCC, to enabling this beneficial program in the beginning stages.

Father Andre retired from the SCC in 2002, although the inmates continued to participate in the presentations in the community. Shortly before he retired, two male gang members approached Father Andre asking for his assistance with abandoning their gang membership. These two men

were the first gang members that Father Andre helped to make better lives for themselves in what would become the STR8UP model. STR8UP grew from the initiative of the gang members who envisioned a better future for themselves and others involved in similar lifestyles, along with Father Andre's dedication to support and help them with their mission. One of their first endeavours occurred when the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) approached Father Andre to assist in planning and implementing a one-week summer camp for at-risk First Nations youth.

The STR8UP staff observed that when the members had the opportunity to be of value to others by sharing their story and helping with presentations or activities, they began to develop their own sense of value and self-worth. As word spread of STR8UP's community presentations, requests and invitations came from treatment centres, inner-city schools, reserves, churches, and various community agencies. STR8UP later became a program under the umbrella of the John Howard Society (JHS), under which they currently operate.

With the help of numerous dedicated people from organizations such as JHS, Affinity Credit Union, the Kinsmen Activity Place (KAP) families, many who have improved their lives dramatically. Although STR8UP has become a more formal organization compared to its beginning, the themes and goals have remained constant through the years.

The local media portrays STR8UP positively. The media portrayal often has focused on anecdotes from members who have credited STR8UP with changing their lives. Other aspects of the program that the media has focused on include the support from community agencies as well as support from Aboriginal organizations and reserves. STR8UP activities have also been positively portrayed in the media, such as the launch of the STR8UP book and other community collaborations.

## **2.2 Current Funding for STR8UP**

Currently STR8UP is funded via multiple sources: JHS, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, the City of Saskatoon, the Saskatoon United Way, and the Corrections and Policing Division under the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice. JHS is funding the two full-time positions through grants. Funding has also been obtained through fundraising events, and the proceeds of which are mainly used for food for members and other means of assistance. In the past, STR8UP received \$8000 from Affinity Credit Union for mentorship as well as \$5000 from the Saskatoon Health Region. In both 2010 and 2011, STR8UP received \$50,000 from the United Way to fund a full-time position.

STR8UP's 2012-2013 annual budget is \$177,850. The program is looking to request funding from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice, Saskatoon Child and Family Services, and housing grants. Securing more consistent funding would allow STR8UP to utilize their resources in a more productive manner (i.e., working on program development as opposed to applying for small grants). They are requesting salaries equivalent to government employee rates to avoid high turnover and superficial relationships.

### **2.3 STR8UP Staff Members**

There are currently two full-time staff members with STR8UP, Dave Stevenson (Coordinator) and Sheilagh Sobry (Caseworker), whose positions are funded through JHS. Father Andre is still a full-time volunteer. Stan Tu’Inukuafe is currently a part-time volunteer with STR8UP but previously was paid by the United Way as an employee for STR8UP. Thus, the program is essentially organized by four people. Although their positions within STR8UP go by different names, all four of the STR8UP facilitators have many responsibilities with STR8UP members.

The responsibilities of the staff and volunteers with STR8UP members vary widely. Support activities entail meeting for coffee with members to talk about current issues, driving members around to ensure they are able to participate in all activities they want to, picking them up once released from incarceration, assisting with housing, ID and even health insurance, providing character references for members in court, obtaining “pro bono” lawyers to defend members, as well as helping out with financial costs such as funerals. The responsibilities of the staff and volunteers are essentially to support the members as much as possible.

### **2.4 STR8UP Members**

STR8UP does not recruit or promote their program; instead, members must reach out to STR8UP on their own. Many of the members find out about STR8UP through other members who share their story with friends and active gang members. Other members find out through legal aid lawyers, staff at the SCC, and the media. While it is not a requirement of the program, the majority of members are Aboriginal.

There are currently 104 members involved in STR8UP, including 77 active members and 27 inactive members. Inactive members have been defined as individuals who have been part of STR8UP activities in the past but have now fallen out of contact with any of the facilitators, and often only regain contact when they need assistance in court or regarding other legal matters. Those individuals are told to contact one of the facilitators after they have been through court to reconnect; those who make an effort get the support they need. In total, there are currently 41 members incarcerated in various institutions throughout the Prairie Provinces, and 63 members in the community, including those living on reserves. STR8UP also works with the members’ partners and families, so these numbers do not reflect the total number of people assisted by the program.

The only financial support STR8UP gives to its members is through the School Youth Mentorship Program, Men’s and Oskayak Sharing Circles, Cultural Camps, or through any honorariums for community presentations they receive. For further assistance, STR8UP members are referred to various community agencies. Some of these agencies include the Saskatoon Tribal Council, Mental Health and Addiction Services from the Saskatoon Health Region, Radius Community Centre, SIAST, SIIT, Calder Treatment Centre, Quint Youth Lodge, and the Salvation Army.

When a member first approaches STR8UP, they are asked to write an autobiography of their life, from both a positive and negative perspective. They are asked not to identify themselves by



name or any specific event that can be personally identifying. Once the autobiography is completed, STR8UP staff members discuss the member's life history, the five conditions for joining STR8UP, and the three main goals of STR8UP.

## **2.5 The Guiding Principles of STR8UP**

There are nine guiding principles of STR8UP that guide their vision for the program, how they support the members, what activities they facilitate, and how they engage in prevention and intervention tactics.

1. It is necessary to offer alternatives to the negative stereotypes the members have been labelled with. In STR8UP, labels of “good people” or “bad people” are not used, and replaced with the idea that people are either on healthy or sick journeys.
2. One of the most important aspects of STR8UP is the positive relationships between the members themselves and between the members and staff or volunteers.
3. The process of healing and recovery must be started by the member and should focus on the stage of healing they are currently at, not from where they want to be. STR8UP identifies the members' present needs and works forward from there.
4. Healing and recovery is the responsibility of the members. STR8UP staff and volunteers walk beside the members in their journey but do not push or pull them in either direction.
5. Healing is a long and difficult process where relapse is bound to occur. Patience, persistence, and years of hard work are required for the members.
6. STR8UP does not duplicate other services available within the community.
7. STR8UP is not at war with gangs and does not actively recruit gang members to leave their gangs for STR8UP.
8. Intervention is accomplished through prevention of gang involvement among the at-risk youth in the community.
9. STR8UP is not a faith-based organization and accepts members from various religions, though spirituality in some manner is encouraged.

## **2.6 Four Stages of Leaving a Gang**

STR8UP members have identified four stages of leaving a gang that have occurred in many of their own paths. The second, third, and fourth phases are accompanied by sayings used by the STR8UP staff and members to characterize that phase.

1. The decision making phase. This phase can last from one day to several years and is often triggered by a serious incident in the life of the gang member, such as a death of a loved one, birth of a child, or becoming tired of a lifetime of harm. This phase is often started while an individual is incarcerated. Following this first thought about leaving their gang, individuals often feel doubt or guilt about leaving their adopted families. These feelings of doubt, guilt, or anxiety are often increased the higher the individual is in their gang. Individuals also experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, and insecurity, although they often seek out people or organizations that can assist them in leaving their gang.
2. The vacuum phase. This phase occurs only after the plan to leave a gang has been made and the individual has gone through the process of leaving, which can include a “beating

out” by other members. During this phase, the individual often feels anxious and isolated in addition to being unsure of how to start a new life. Obtaining safe housing, personal identification, school upgrades, or jobs is particularly challenging. Furthermore, the individual likely has on-going criminal justice issues, such as probation, parole, and dealing with their addictions issues. Individuals are often tempted to return to their gangs and their familiar lifestyles. This is a crucial time for individuals to be in contact with positive support in the form of counsellors, elders, or family and friends. ***“You alone must walk this journey, but it is impossible to walk it alone.”***

3. The reclaiming phase. When an individual reaches this phase they have often dealt with any outstanding court orders or conditions and have completed treatment programs for addictions. More importantly, they are reconnecting with the values of honesty, humility, and respect, in addition to reconnecting with elements of their culture and traditions. Individuals in this phase have accepted the new responsibilities and relationships in their lives, although there are still issues to overcome such as negative feedback or harassment from other people. Individuals are also distancing themselves from harmful and dysfunctional relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. ***“Be strong and your vision of your future will become clear, possible, and attainable.”***
4. The stabilizing phase. Individuals in this phase have acquired the skills they need for secure employment or are engaged in school upgrades or technical courses, in addition to discovering the value of honest work and providing satisfaction for their families. Individuals continue to work on their addictions issues and work on any other issues related to parenting, relationships, or whatever is in need of improvement. ***“If I give up, I will never reach my goal. If I keep at it, I will succeed. Guaranteed.”***

## 2.7 Conditions for Joining STR8UP

There are five conditions that members must adhere to when first joining STR8UP and throughout their involvement in the program:

1. Drop their colours: Each gang may have a different process members must go through in order to leave. STR8UP leaves it up to the individual member to endure the proper process.
2. Deal with their additions: Almost every gang member struggles with an addiction. One of the goals of STR8UP is to encourage members to deal with their addiction (e.g., accessing treatment, attending cultural ceremonies, Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous, or other religious-based programs). The members need to find support for their own recovery.
3. Be honest: Gang members often have lived a life riddled with manipulation and dishonesty. This condition is especially important to STR8UP given that members are expected to be truthful when sharing their story in the community, as well as being honest when dealing with the police in future circumstances.
4. Be humble: STR8UP requires that members get rid of their “street attitude” (i.e., “I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, to whoever I want”). STR8UP believes that having a humble attitude allows members to realize that they may not be able to heal on their own and that it is helpful to ask for assistance.

5. Give four years: Professionals, community agencies, and gang members must appreciate that the recovery process is a slow process. The number four was chosen primarily because it is considered a very symbolic number in First Nation culture (i.e. four directions, four rounds in a sweat, four seasons, etc.). The number also informs interested gang members that it is a large commitment and that it will take time to become healthy.

## **2.8 Goals of STR8UP**

There are three main goals of STR8UP that members are encouraged to work toward during their involvement in the program:

1. Become a responsible citizen: STR8UP members define this term for themselves. It often means finding full-time employment or attending school, in addition to not committing criminal offences.
2. Become a loving parent: Many STR8UP members are parents, although most have not been involved in their children's lives and are trying to reconnect with them.
3. Be a faithful partner: STR8UP members are expected to create and maintain healthy, respectful, and monogamous relationships with their partners.

## **2.9 Objectives of STR8UP**

There are six main objectives of STR8UP that the staff members and volunteers focus on with the members:

1. Support new and active STR8UP members while they are incarcerated.
2. Support and stabilize new and active STR8UP members while they are in the community: This is done through support for housing, addictions treatment, skills training, and day to day personal support.
3. Increase the number, quality, and on-going supports for STR8UP community presentations in cities as well as reserves.
4. Offer a weekly STR8UP sharing circle and a monthly traditional sweat for all members.
5. The continuation and support to the STR8UP youth mentorship program.
6. Create a STR8UP community advisory committee: The purpose of the committee will be to provide ongoing advice, support, and validation to STR8UP and provide the necessary skills and resources to support this program. Potential committee members will include individuals from the Saskatoon Police Integrated Gang Unit, the Saskatoon Tribal Council, Corrections, JHS, and the community.

## **2.10 STR8UP Activities**

A key part of STR8UP is the various prevention and intervention activities they facilitate with their members and prevention groups, specifically at-risk youth. These activities assist the members with working towards the three goals of STR8UP in addition to providing prevention programs for youth that guide them away from participating in gangs or criminal activity.

### **2.10.1 School Presentations**

Presentations are two hours in length. STR8UP has developed a presentation style constructed on the holistic teachings of the Medicine Wheel. During the first hour the facilitator focuses on the “how come” (i.e., why some individuals join gangs and others do not). During the second hour, STR8UP members share their experience of how they got involved in gangs and what they are doing to change. This is followed by a period of questions and answers from the audience.

Any healthy STR8UP members are able to attend, specifically those members who are making an effort to work on their addictions (i.e., attending treatment, visiting with an addiction worker etc.) and are sober. This perspective states that the normal state for humans is to continually grow, change, remake and restore oneself. Whenever that growth and change is stymied or inhibited, sickness follows. The presentations based on positive and normal states of growth help STR8UP members discover what is blocking their growth, as well as their supports and how to develop their healing process. By looking at their past and becoming conscious of their present, their attitudes, and their assumptions, they are able to enter and proceed into their healing process. They become teachers, mentors, and counsellors to one another.

From these presentations STR8UP members begin to develop the necessary skills to help co-facilitate this type of presentation, and are mentored to do so when they feel ready. Eventually they are able to facilitate the presentations on their own without any assistance. Several members have delivered presentations to youth over 50 or even 100 times. There are two main objectives of the presentations:

1. Educate youth and the public about the dangers of gang life and addiction: One of the objectives is to demonstrate to at-risk youth that by telling their story, honestly and humbly, healing and recovery is possible. They become mentors by allowing youth and young adults to be exposed to the transformation of a negative and debilitating life-style to a positive and fulfilling life-style. These STR8UP members are leaders and provide hope, healing and transformation to those still living a negative life-style.
2. Provide an opportunity to look inside and face a member’s own reality: STR8UP believes that sharing one’s story is a form of healing. Thus, presentations give STR8UP members an avenue to share their stories while at the same time allowing them to heal. It is modelled from similar processes and expressions within the Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous programs. It challenges the members’ past experiences of “don’t trust, don’t feel, and don’t talk to others”. It releases STR8UP members from outside control and places full responsibility for their healing and recovery upon the individual member.

### **2.10.2 School Youth Mentorship Program**

STR8UP members who have demonstrated their commitment to the STR8UP conditions and have been approved by the STR8UP staff members can become mentors for at-risk youth. STR8UP members provide leadership skills to youth, often using sports to engage them. The STR8UP mentorship program identifies youth between the ages of 8-12 years of age who have been labelled at-risk for future involvement in gang activity. Referrals to the program come

through parents, school staff, and social services. Currently, STR8UP is involved in mentoring youth at schools in the community including Vincent Massey Elementary, St Mary Elementary, Caswell Elementary, and Princess Alexander Elementary. The mentorship program adds a unique quality to the youth's education, in that the members who participate have experiences that are beyond those of trained professionals and as such may inspire strength and hope in individuals who are feeling discouraged, abandoned, and hopeless. The program runs once a week for approximately two hours each session. The program runs from mid-October to the first week of June, approximately seven to eight months in length.

Potential STR8UP mentors are individuals who are working consistently on their addictions and have become fully responsible in their own lives and relationships. These STR8UP mentors will always be accompanied and supervised by a staff member from JHS who is involved with STR8UP. STR8UP mentors will be provided with training and orientation before the mentorship program begins. They will also be supported by consultation with JHS staff and staff from the schools involved in the program. Currently, there are ten members who act as mentors in the STR8UP mentorship program. There are three main goals of the mentorship program:

1. Teach at-risk youth leadership skills: This goal is accomplished by focusing on the acronym TIPPCCEE (Teamwork, Intuition, Participation, Perseverance, Co-operation, Communication, Empathy, and Enthusiasm). This acronym was taken from the Peace Keepers Program that is currently being offered by JHS and the Saskatoon Police.
2. Provide STR8UP members with work experience and a reference: Each STR8UP member who participates in this program makes a commitment to stay involved for the whole length of the program. Members that are involved in this program are paid every second week. Wages are based on funding provided by donors.
3. Encourage the children to engage in healthy eating: Once a month, STR8UP teaches the youth how to prepare a nutritional meal. Vincent Massey and St Mary are the only schools currently offering this.

### **2.10.3 Cultural Camp Mentorship Program**

The STR8UP Cultural Camp Mentorship Program is for at-risk youth who would like to learn more about their traditional Aboriginal culture. The camps usually last four to five days, and consist of eight to ten youth between 13 and 18 years of age, depending on funding. Two STR8UP members are hired as mentors. The youth are exposed to a variety of activities such as canoeing, fishing, hiking, hunting, trapping, and participating in First Nations ceremonies such as sweats. There have been six camps to date, and they include Wanuskewin (2008), Sturgeon Lake First Nation (2009), Ile- a-la-Crosse (2009), Pelican Lake First Nation (2010), and Pelican Lake First Nation (2010 and 2011).

The Peace Keepers cultural model attempts to create an environment where the individual recognizes values and principles in themselves. At the Cultural Camps, the youth discover the ethical imperatives of honesty, humility, compassion, mutual assistance, and cultural pride. Learning from their Elders, the mentors, and other adults, they see similar values reflected in others. The end result is a growing conviction in their culture and their values, which they hopefully reinforce in their own families. Among the positive elements provided in Cultural

Camps, such as learning cooperation, tolerance, and respect, these camps provide the youth with an experience of positive healthy life-styles and hope for attaining these values in the future. There are four main goals of the Cultural Camp Mentorship Program:

1. Expose at-risk youth to their culture.
2. Expose at-risk youth to new activities: Many of the youth who participate in this program have never left Saskatoon, and many have not had the opportunity to experience activities such as fishing, canoeing, and hunting.
3. Give STR8UP members an opportunity to Mentor and work with at-risk youth.
4. Create Partnerships: Youth that attend these camps are referred by Saskatoon Tribal Council, Reserves, Métis Organization, schools, and other organizations.

#### **2.10.4 Oskayak Addiction Sharing Circle**

STR8UP, in partnership with the Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan Incorporated (MACSI) and Oskayak High School, offer a weekly sharing circle to students who struggle with addictions. This program started in January of 2012, and includes approximately ten to fifteen students each week. The circles are co-facilitated by a staff member from MACSI as well as a STR8UP member who has dealt successfully with their addictions and is considered a valued mentor for youth struggling with addictions.

#### **2.10.5 Weekly Sharing Circle**

The STR8UP weekly sharing circle is open to STR8UP members and individuals who have or are currently experiencing justice-related issues. A STR8UP member facilitates this program with the support of a STR8UP Outreach Worker. The sharing circles began when STR8UP partnered with the Core Neighbourhood Youth Co-op (CNYC) in March, 2011. CNYC provided space, food, and honorariums for the STR8UP facilitator. Unfortunately, that partnership ended in June, 2011 due to a lack of funding. However, in October, 2011, STR8UP received funding from various donors that enabled the weekly sharing circle to be re-established. The circles take place every Friday evening for two hours and are currently being offered at the Kinsmen Activity Place (KAP). However, the KAP is currently running limited programming due to a lack of funding, so the location for the weekly sharing circles may be subject to change.

STR8UP has identified a need to create consistency for this program, and is thus planning to create modules to better articulate and organize the selected topics. STR8UP hopes that instilling a more systematic program may improve attendance. This endeavour is still in the preliminary stages.

#### **2.10.6 Monthly Sharing Circle**

On the last Wednesday of every month, a sharing circle is provided to STR8UP members who are incarcerated at the SCC. All STR8UP members who are incarcerated are invited to attend this group. The facilitator is usually Father Andre or one of the STR8UP staff members. This circle runs for approximately an hour and a half.

The topics discussed vary widely, but have included topics such as struggling with addictions and growing up without a father figure. The circle always begins with a smudge and a prayer. Once the prayer is offered by the facilitator, each STR8UP member has an opportunity to pray. After prayer, STR8UP members have an opportunity to check-in on how they are coping in general and how their last month has been. Once this portion is complete, a discussion is facilitated surrounding issues that are relevant to the STR8UP members.

## **2.11 Community Collaborations with STR8UP**

As STR8UP was created in Saskatoon and its members are largely based within the city, collaborations with community organizations foster support on a local basis. These collaborations utilize local resources to address the needs of the members as they currently exist. These collaborations include creative writing projects in correctional settings and research studies in association with the University of Saskatchewan.

### **2.11.1 4<sup>th</sup> R After-School Program (February 2012)**

The purpose of this project was to teach at-risk youth between 13 and 19 years of age the importance of setting healthy boundaries and creating healthy relationships, in hopes of reducing their negative/risky behaviours. The program took place once a week for approximately two hours, and ran for six weeks in total. Partners included the University of Saskatchewan Aboriginal Graduate Student Program, the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC), JHS, and youth homes (i.e., Cedar House, Pine House). A STR8UP member, staff member, and a volunteer, as well as a staff member from the STC Mediation Program were trained to facilitate the program. There were two groups that were facilitated, one of all boys (15 youth) and one of all girls (10 to 12 youth). The females were either court ordered to attend the group or were personally asked by the STC staff to participate in the program. Additionally, two university students were assigned to both groups to record a weekly evaluation of the program. This program received positive feedback from the participants, and will be offered again in October 2012.

### **2.11.2 Book Project (October 2011 – May 2012)**

The purpose of this project was to give incarcerated STR8UP members an opportunity to create an educational anti-gang book that schools and community agencies that work with at-risk youth can utilize to teach youth about gangs. The book is titled “STR8UP and Gangs: The Untold Stories.” The book was specifically designed to reach students in grades six to eight. There were twelve STR8UP members and one active gang member who assisted with this project. Other partners included Nancy Van Styvendale (Assistant Professor of English), Allison Piche (MA candidate in Native Studies), Diann Block (Corrections Canada Aboriginal Liaison Officer), and Fawn Nielson (Founder of Hear My Heart Books).

### **2.11.3 Where Were the Mothers Project with Linda Duvall (2009)**

This project gave five incarcerated STR8UP members the opportunity to work together with well-known professional artists in Saskatoon and create a song about their mothers. This project explored individuals involved in criminal activity and substance abuse and their relationships

with their mothers. More information on the project can be found at this website:  
<http://www.lindaduvall.ca/bigprojects/Visual%20Art%20Projects/Mothers.html>

#### **2.11.4 Keys to Change Program (K2C; 2011)**

The goal of K2C was to facilitate the connection of 16 unemployed youth who faced barriers to participation in the labour market. These barriers included but are not limited to recent criminal records and/or past gang involvement. K2C provided the necessary job search tools, job coaching, and work experience needed for these youth to make better connections with the labour market and employment opportunities. This program involved a community partnership between the Radius Community Centre, STR8UP, the Kinsmen Activity Place, and the CNYC from August, 2011 to February, 2012.

#### **2.11.5 Tammy Marche Community-Based Research Project (Associate Professor of Psychology – STM College; 2010 – 2012)**

This research project was titled “Community-Based Research: Learning about Attitudes towards the Criminal Justice System.” The purpose of this project was to research the attitudes of STR8UP members towards the Criminal Justice System. Approximately fourteen STR8UP members met with University research assistants and were asked questions regarding how they perceived the Justice System. Partners for this project included St. Thomas Moore College and the Elisabeth Fry Society.

#### **2.11.6 Caroline Tait – The Child Welfare System (Professor of Native Studies Department; 2011)**

Two STR8UP members participated in the creation of a documentary about their experience in the Child Welfare System. The documentary focused on raising awareness and finding solutions to gang involvement and issues with child welfare. STR8UP members provided valuable insight for the documentary and held a silent auction at the public documentary film launch.

#### **2.11.7 PAVED Arts – Healing through the Arts Project (2009)**

PAVED Arts is non-profit community organization in Saskatoon that fosters the education and practice of creative arts, where PAVED stands for photography, audio, video, electronic, and digital. Five STR8UP members participated in a program that taught the members how to use digital technology to create songs and rhythmic beats. Participants met once a week for a period of five weeks for two-hour sessions. At the end of the program, STR8UP members held a community open house forum to showcase what they had learned. The ultimate goal of the program was for the members to educate aspiring at-risk musicians to use the technology. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, the second portion of this project was not completed.



Table 1. Overview of gang prevention, intervention, and mixed programs.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Purpose/Goal</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Evaluation Completed</b>
Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT; Esbenson et al., 2011)	Originally developed in Phoenix, Arizona, and later spread to other U.S. cities	Prevention	Mainly lecture-based curriculum (eight lessons) taught primarily in middle schools by law enforcement officers	Federal grants through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)	Yes
Gang Prevention through Targeted Outreach (GPTTO; Alberton & McClanahan, 2002)	Throughout the U.S.	Prevention	Providing youth with pro-social activities (e.g., sports, leadership development)	Boys and Girls Club of America	Yes
Gang Resistance in Paramount (GRIP; Solis, Schwartz, & Hinton, 2003)	Paramount, CA	Prevention	School-based curriculum, neighbourhood meetings for parents, and counselling	City of Paramount, CA	Yes
Urban Improv (Kisiel et al., 2005)	Boston, MA	Prevention	Interactive, theatre-based program to teach decision-making, impulse control, and conflict resolution	Donations (from corporations, foundations, schools, individuals, etc.)	Yes

<b>Program</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Purpose/Goal</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Evaluation Completed</b>
Wraparound Milwaukee (WP; Milwaukee County Behavioural Health Division, 2002)	Milwaukee, WI	Prevention	Community services and supports are “wrapped around” youth and their families	A combination of several state and local agencies	Yes
Gang Alternatives Program (GAP; Vital Research, 2007)	Los Angeles, CA	Prevention	School-based curriculum to teach elementary school children the realities of gang life and possible alternatives	Various community services and organizations	Yes
Pohna: Keepers of the Fire (Erickson, LaBoucane-Benson, & Hossack, 2011)	Edmonton, Alberta	Intervention and Diversion of at-risk youth	Connect youth with individualized services and support networks	Safe Community Intervention Fund of the Province of Alberta	Yes (Case Studies)
Gang Intervention through Targeted Outreach (GITTO; Arberton & McClanahan, 2002)	Throughout the U.S.A	Intervention	Increasing access to community recourses and decreasing gang membership	Boys and Girls Club of America	Yes
Gang Awareness Intervention Network (GAIN; Stevens, 2005;	Edmonton, AB	Intervention	Ex-gang members use Aboriginal spirituality and outreach practices to connect with Aboriginal adolescents	Private funding	No

<b>Program</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Purpose/Goal</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Evaluation Completed</b>
Matwychuk, 2005)			involved in gangs		
Breaking the Cycle (BTC; Lorinc, 2009)	Toronto, ON	Intervention	Counselling for substance abuse and anger management, support for families, and opportunities for employment and engagement in cultural programs and athletics	Department of Justice Canada Youth Justice Fund	Yes
Regina Anti-Gang Service (RAGS; Totten & Dunn, 2011)	Regina, SK	Intervention	Intensive daily services designed to support youth and young adults in leaving their gang	National Crime Prevention Centre (from 2007-2011)	Yes
A Second's Chance (part of the Elements Program; Hughes et al., 2012)	North Carolina	Prevention, Intervention, Diversion, and Suppression	Observation of a dramatization of gunshot victim	Local county sheriff's office	Yes
Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program (JIPP; Koffman et al., 2009)	Los Angeles, CA	Prevention and Intervention	Holistic perspective, intervening in four areas: psychosocial-emotional, academic, bio-behavioural, and family support system	Various community organizations and corporations	Yes

### **3.0 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Evaluation Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of the evaluation of STR8UP was to assess the extent to which their approaches of intervention and prevention assist with the healing and decrease in gang involvement of their members. The objectives of the evaluation were to: 1) identify the activities that are considered as intervention and prevention; 2) assess the extent to which the activities are being implemented as intended; 3) identify barriers to activities being implemented as they are intended; 4) identify whether incidence of gang activity has decreased over the years of STR8UP's activities of intervention, or number of members have increased; and 5) develop a program logic model for the program.

The evaluation focused on the STR8UP members and the program activities. Due to the delicate relationship and vulnerable nature of the target population, the STR8UP staff members were asked to contact the members for interviews. In addition to interviews, the evaluators attended and observed all possible activities that the program held for the month of June, 2012, with the consent of the members, program coordinators and other participants in the activities. In the case where activities included participants not in the program, where possible, interviews were completed. Interviews were completed with as many persons as possible including persons who had interactions or experience with the program.

The results of this evaluation are expected to increase the communication between the coordinating staff as well as the governing body of the program and the program delivery staff. This evaluation report is also expected to produce cohesive documentation for the program that outlines the activities and goals clearly. The main expected outcome of this evaluation is to determine how the program actually functions.

#### **3.2 Scope of Evaluation**

This process evaluation aimed to address many issues within STR8UP:

1. The development, maturation and evolution of the STR8UP program
2. The implementation of the activities
3. Reasons why any changes were made to the implementation of the activities or why certain activities were not implemented
4. The nature (e.g. roles and responsibilities) and extent of the collaboration between the key stakeholders of STR8UP
5. Key stakeholders satisfaction with the strategy as implemented, including the satisfaction of members within the program
6. Identification of barriers to implementation and descriptions of how they were addressed or overcome
7. An analysis of the program's governance structure including a description of its decision-making and collaboration process as well as strengths and any areas which required improvement
8. The extent to which the goals and objectives of STR8UP have been met

### **3.3 Development of the Program Logic Model**

The Evaluation Team along with the STR8UP staff developed a program logic model to outline the inputs and outputs of the program, as well as the short-term, intermediate, long-term, and ultimate goals of STR8UP (see Appendix B).

### **3.4 Data Collection Activities**

#### **3.4.1 Review of published and unpublished literature**

To form the literature review, a thorough review of both published and unpublished literature was conducted as a starting point for the evaluation. The results of the literature review provided information about appropriate variables to examine for the evaluation.

#### **3.4.2 Review of program-related documents**

All STR8UP-related documents were requested and reviewed. These documents included a list of members, whether they are considered active or not, and whether they are in a custody setting or the community. Other documents examined included previous reports completed to request funding and documentation of the activities and their goals. This review of STR8UP-related documents helped determine interview participants, a methodology strategy to collect data as well as the development of the interview questions.

#### **3.4.3 Non-participatory observation**

A minimum of one member of the Evaluation Team attended all activities for one month. The evaluators did not take part in the activities as much as possible, however due to the characteristics of the target population and the nature of some of the activities, participation was encouraged and welcomed. The formal STR8UP presentations were observed without participation. Participatory observation activities included sharing circles and social activities of the members. These observations gave an inside view to the relations of the members within the program and the STR8UP staff, as well as their interactions with presentation audiences. It must be noted that presentation audiences differed significantly and have included youth with addiction issues, Elders, Youth Corrections professionals, schools, and academics at conferences.

#### **3.4.4 Interviews with STR8UP members**

All interview participants signed a consent form to agree to participate in the interview according to the terms specified (see Appendix C). Interviews were completed with as many members as were available and would consent to be interviewed. Informed consent was also requested for access to their criminal records, initially intended as an objective measure of criminal behaviour before and after the member joined STR8UP. However, too few members consented to having their criminal records be viewed, so this part of the analysis was removed from the evaluation. During the interviews, the members were asked about their gang involvement, why they joined STR8UP, what activities they participate in, and what they like and dislike about the program. The complete interview procedure is included in Appendix D.

### **3.4.5 Interviews with STR8UP staff members and volunteers**

Interviews were also conducted with the STR8UP staff members and volunteers. The program is implemented by four individuals: one full-time volunteer, one part-time volunteer, and two staff who are employed by JHS. During the interviews, the staff members were asked about the governance of the program, the nature of the program, its effectiveness, member and staff relations, as well as recommendations for the continuity of the program. The complete interview procedure is included in Appendix E. Due to Father Andre's unique involvement in STR8UP a separate interview procedure was used for his interview, included in Appendix F.

### **3.4.6 Interviews with school staff and students**

Interviews were then conducted with students and staff who participate in the Sharing Circle program at Oskayak High School. The staff and students were asked about their opinions of the program and if they thought it was important and useful for youth struggling with addictions. The complete interview procedure for staff members is included in Appendix G, and the interview procedure for students is included in Appendix H.

### **3.4.7 Interviews with police officers**

Finally, interviews were also conducted with members of the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS), including members of the Street Gang Unit and the Chief of Police. To maximize anonymity of the officers involved, an electronic version of the interview procedure was made available, as well as an email address and password created specifically for the receipt of those interview transcripts. The email address was available for officers who wished to participate but did not want to conduct an interview in person. The complete interview procedure is included in Appendix I.

## **3.5 Limitations**

As with any research endeavour, there were limitations to this evaluation. First, there is currently limited documentation on the overall program structure as well as the specific activities and target groups that STR8UP focuses on. There is also no formal documentation of the information distributed during the STR8UP presentation, although the same information is distributed in the same way each time. Further, there is no single database of information about the STR8UP members, specifically their locations, which made recruiting members for participation a challenge. As such, the staff members contacted the members themselves to request participation in the interviews.

Additionally, the start of the evaluation coincided with the end of the secondary school year, and therefore it was difficult to recruit staff and students alike for participation. Finally, STR8UP members that were incarcerated in Saskatoon were not able to be interviewed due to the time limit of the evaluation as well as time constraints on the process of receiving approval to access the institutions.

## 4.0 RESULTS

### 4.1 Interviews with STR8UP Members

#### 4.1.1 Demographics

A total of twenty STR8UP members were interviewed for this evaluation, sixteen males and four females. Ages ranged from 19 to 47, with a mean of 29.30 (SD = 7.37). The average age of members when they first joined a gang was 17.63 years old (SD = 5.315; range = 9 – 29), and the average age of members when they first joined STR8UP was 26.60 years old (SD = 7.315; range = 19 – 45). The average number of years the members spent in gangs was 9 years, (SD = 4.978; range = 1 – 19), and the average number of years the members have spent in STR8UP is 3.10 years (SD = 2.075; range = 1 – 8). Five members self-identified as First Nations, seven members as Aboriginal, two members as Status, and member each as Métis, Caucasian, Cree, Native American, Spanish and Cree, and Stoney Cree White mix. During the interview, STR8UP members were asked to self-identify their ethnicities rather than select options from a list. In terms of the highest level of education achieved, one member selected grade 2, one member selected grade 5, five members selected grade 9, two members selected grade 10, three members selected grade 11, four members selected grade 12, one member selected post-secondary education, and one member had achieved a bachelor's degree (two members' information was missing). The overall mean education level was 10.0. Histograms of six demographic variables are included in Appendix J.

#### 4.1.2 Perceptions of STR8UP

We first asked the STR8UP members why they left a gang:

“I wanted to, that lifestyle was more on the street level, we were always on the streets all the time and with that poverty we had no place to stay, always searching around for food, always stealing. I got tired of living like that, I wanted to settle down and go back to school and kind of live in a home with three meals a day and go to school.”

“I wanted to change my life; I didn't like the person I became.”

“What was the last straw for me was I had to go rob this guy for his cap and a hoodie in prison, a bunny hug. They were brand new, you could just tell when he walked in, they were brand new clothes, so I was told to go get them, so I did. Upon approaching this individual, the guy turned around and I realized it was my uncle. So I had no choice, I robbed him for his cap and his hoodie. I went back and I gave that stuff to the higher ups and I said here's your shit. Two days later I went up them I said 'I want out.' They were going to give me a full patch on my back and I told them 'no, I don't want it.'”

“Tired of going to prison, tired of getting locked up; throughout my whole life I've been probably locked up for five years of my life in and out of jail all

together. I just got tired of the rivalry, fighting my own kind, that's mostly all that it was – rivalry with my own kind, Aboriginals. Just got tired of going to prison and I wanted to be there for my children and I was tired of leaving them.”

We then asked the members if they currently encounter any problems from gang members who try to get the members to rejoin their gang or join another:

“Yeah, I do. Other gangs, still, some of them still think I'm still part of my old gang. I have to explain to them that I'm not, that I'm in STR8UP now. Then it seems like the conflict is gone for a while, and then when they're drunk it's the same thing again.”

“Not really problems. I've been asked lots of times, both to join other gangs and to come hang back out with my old gang. They tend to leave me alone, the guys that do know I'm in STR8UP know that I'm changing and stuff, and because they know that I'm involved with STR8UP and whatnot they tend to respect it a bit more than anything, they don't really push. Sometimes they test you a little bit to see if you will but they understand. By test I mean they'll try to get you to come hang out, or do this, do that, kind of thing, but they leave you alone if you say no, because they know that you're in STR8UP.”

“Nope, I've been in STR8UP long enough now that I don't hang around the street gangs or anything.”

“I still have people approaching me, asking me to do favours and stuff like that, but a lot of people know that I'm trying to straighten out my lifestyle, and it's kind of slowing down now, but people do ask. If I want to do it, it is to my benefit if I want. I don't want to do that stuff anymore.”

“Oh, yeah. Before this weekend, I was in jail and that's all that runs the jails, gangs. And because I used to be in this one gang I do run into a lot of rivalry from other gangs. And even though I'm not a part of the gang anymore I do run into a lot of rivalry and people wanting me to join their gang, but I always say, no, STR8UP is a good program.”

Next, we asked the members how difficult it is for them on a day-to-day basis to stay out of a gang. Often, STR8UP's staff and resources helped them with this immense undertaking:

“At times I struggle because when I was gang affiliated it was easy to get the money – it was just easy money. STR8UP has shown me what I really need and want out of life and I don't have my kids with me now and my long term goal is to get my kids back in about another month. I haven't had them for nine years; they kept me on my toes. They give me a feeling of wanting to be a person again instead of wanting to fall back into the same BS we grew up into.”



“Really easy now. I know in some aspects it would be very lucrative for me, but in a lot of other ways I wouldn’t be happy, I wouldn’t get no sleep. I would have to do things again that I didn’t want to do, right. Plus I got kids and want to set a good example, so I can’t be involved in those things.”

“I’ve come a long way in four years. In the beginning that’s all I knew, I was a gang member and a drug addict, and a violent person. Now, four years of growth with this program I don’t go out places I shouldn’t be. Father Andre has personally picked me up from gang violence when I first joined STR8UP, he came to get me after I got jumped; three times I think.”

“It’s been really, really, difficult for me just because that’s all I’ve known my whole life, you know what I mean. I had the skills and the knowhow and the brains to do a lot of stuff, but I preferred to do that, because it was easy, easy money. Easy come, easy go was what my lifestyle was like. I thought I had respect, but fear is not respect – I know that now, but if you’d told me that a couple years ago I wouldn’t have believed you.”

We then asked the members why they decided to join STR8UP:

“I knew Stan about five years ago and then I gave him a call from the correctional, he asked me if I wanted to check out a meeting. I checked out a meeting, and then when I got out I checked out a presentation and they asked me if I wanted to say a few words. And I had just recently gotten out of a gang so I was pretty vulgar in the presentation, kind of rude my first time because I used to swear a lot. And it just seemed like the look on the kids’ faces when they got to see what it’s like to talk to a real gang member that just got out of jail, the questions they asked were kind of deep. And I was like, ‘this is pretty cool, I like this.’ From there on I just decided to get with STR8UP.”

“It was an opportunity to be in touch with people that knew where I was coming from, my background, people that talk to you, people who would understand and support you even though you’ve been involved with some bad stuff in your past. It’s a good outlet to express your feelings and stuff. Their support is just phenomenal, when we have meetings.”

“Father Andre made sense of my life and my situation. He just laid things out in a way that I could understand them. I joined because I went to a presentation, the next day after meeting Father Andre, witnessed his presentation, and realized that this guy was for real, he wasn’t some guy who was trying to take advantage of us like everyone else did. I’ve seen lots of bad things happen from gang life, a lot of my friends have died, and I don’t want to be part of that anymore. I’m probably the one group member that fell into it. I was homeless on the streets, I went to the Métis Family Community Justice Services to try to locate my real family and Father Andre wandered in and took me for coffee and asked me if I wanted to come to a presentation. From that day on I didn’t miss one of them for a year. I

was told that I would have a support network. It was just having support at the beginning, and now I've developed, STR8UP is my family now. The only people that I know who are honest with me; Father Andre and his group, and 90% of my brothers and sisters in the program."

"More support actually, a lot of support. And at first I didn't know what it was, but then after I got out of jail I linked up with the John Howard Society for youth, a youth worker came to see me, and at the time I was on house arrest, and it was just a free ticket for me to get out and go to presentations. But as I started really listening to the presentations and getting involved, I really connected to it. A lot of the brothers and the sisters and I in the group could relate to a lot of the same problems and same issues."

"I would like people to know about my life story, how I am able to speak out now through their program and also my music. As a kid I didn't had anything like that to come out and actually speak to people, give my opinions and whatever. I never had anything like that where I would be able to tell about my life and whatever, how I'm feeling all that so this is a good opportunity to tell people about my life and how it went."

"I heard that they worked with kids, and they worked with people and keep people out of trouble, so I thought I could like take my experience and go forward with them. I thought I could add to them."

"I heard it was a good program from another member and he told me it's a good program and told me what I had to do to get into it. At first I was just going to use it to get out of jail but it eventually latched onto me and I just started going to presentations and saw the positive effects it had on kids, kids were actually listening to us and listening to our stories. I didn't think my story would make such a difference in a kid's life. And that's what drives me."

In general, we asked the members what they thought about the activities:

"It does help if you really want it to because no one has ever really wanted to help before. They don't push you away ever when you struggle with your addiction. They'll give you time, but they won't deny you. They give you support and a helping hand. Motivate you to push you to do better for yourself. They see a lot in all of us, things we don't see ourselves."

"I like them, it's a nice outlet, and you develop a bond with all the STR8UP members. It helps the guys, well in my case anyway because I have addictions problems, it helps me stay sober, more so than day programs. I go to AA and have an addictions counsellor and STR8UP is the most beneficial program out of any of those for me."

“Why aren’t there more people doing what we do? With the youth, I like seeing their walls go down, seeing them go from hard little gangsters to getting the chance to be kids again. STR8UP gave us hope and now we get to pass that on. I’ve had kids come up to me after culture camps and stuff and a month later they’re back in school and they’ll see me go in to do a presentation and they’ll come up and they’ll shake my hand; that’s life changing.”

“I enjoyed them; I thought they were very good. The KAP house is awesome; it really helps us connect with the other members. The one-on-ones with youth are excellent. It’s awesome because it lets youth know they’re not alone in their struggle, and there are others who have been through what they’re going through.”

“They help, because when I was in the system you know if people came in and shared their stories maybe that would have helped me. You know, it gives them a chance, gives us a chance to give back to the kids, not only the kids, but the community, of giving them understanding about what we’re trying to do, give back so that we don’t let the kids do the same thing we did.”

“I like the mentorship program, I like it a lot, and it’s something I’d like to do like full time. For the presentations, I thought, for the correction people I find it really interesting, and as for some of the kids they were like, ‘why is this person trying to tell us this stuff,’ but then again you know some of them it does really touch them, so I think it’s a big factor. I was really nervous, never having done anything like this before, not really ever been really able to open up to people, so it was kind of weird, but I think it was good. It felt good.”

In addition to what the members think about the activities, we asked them what they think the activities are supposed to achieve:

“The youth mentorship program gives an understanding of a better life besides drugs and alcohol and gang banging, gives me a sense of how to deal with high risk attitudes and gaining their trust. It gives me a sense of accomplishment and gratification. We’ve all been where those kids are now; we’ve been abandoned, been hurt, what they’re feeling we’ve already gone through, and we try to give them more hope and to look at a brighter light than what’s dimming on them now.”

“Make the kids aware. Sharing circles is for us personally to build a trust to be able to express freely without judgement, listening ear, support; the things you don’t get in a dysfunctional home, because if you attempted to do that no one would let you.”

“The presentations are another form of outlet, and it feels good to give back to the community when you’re doing presentations to kids and stuff, trying to stop them, or inform them about the dangers and stuff of gang life and addictions. It’s been

support for my addictions and support in abstaining from alcohol and drugs. It's kind of an unexplainable feeling, knowing that there's somebody that you can talk to that has been there, or worse, you know, before, and understands what you're trying to say to them or where you came from, what you've done in your past and whatnot."

"The autobiography is to help me heal and look at how I grew up and acknowledge what has gone wrong in my life and try to fix it. The only word I can think of is healing."

"The presentations are just to help create awareness of gangs, that there are people out there who are struggling with problems that the youth in schools are going through, and that they're not alone, so we're there to create awareness. And for the members, the presentations help with healing, self-healing, encouragement, and just learning how to be open and have self-confidence."

"Hopefully just to change the minds of some younger people so that they don't go the wrong way just to show them from our mistakes hopefully. For me it's actually, it's therapeutic to actually reach some people or just try and reach some people."

"We have Cultural Camps, the one I went to in Manitoba was, you know, most of these kids that grow up in the city, haven't been outside the city, most of them, so most of them only know about the city so when we took these kids out there. A lot of them first time canoeing, first time being away from home, first time being out of the province, first time fishing, first time water skiing, first time eating fish. Give them a chance to do something different and every day you know because they were troubled with alcohol addictions, us mentors would talk about what alcohol and drugs have done for us, where did our family come from, what it was like growing up in our communities. We shared about our life stories with the kids, you know, for us it was like giving them some understanding of if they decide to go this way of lifestyle this is what they're gonna expect. It was like a momentum cultural camp for them us STR8UP members trying to help them."

We then asked the members specifically if and how the various activities have helped them:

"Yeah, if it wasn't for STR8UP, to be honest with you, I probably wouldn't be where I am today. I am in a MACSI day program and graduating next week. It is an addiction program for alcohol. They helped me do my hours because I breached like four months ago. They motivated me to do my fine option – community hours and if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have finished. Andre is a really remarkable guy, a big heart. He's there to help you because he wants to help you, he doesn't do it for the hell of it. STR8UP means everything to me because of Andre and Stan, and the bonds that you have with everybody else with STR8UP. It's like a family I haven't had. They actually care and give us hope. Nobody else gives us hope, but STR8UP."

“Yeah, they help me blow off a lot of steam. It helps me, with the circles it helps me get things off my mind that have been bothering me because I feel more open when I’m around STR8UP members, like I can talk to them and I know they’ll be listening and they’ll give me some feedback that I want to hear, it’s actually support.”

“Yeah, immensely. I went through detox and tried getting sober a few months ago without the help of STR8UP, and I just relapsed for three months and that’s when I reached out to STR8UP and I’ve been sober since.”

“I don’t want to do bad anymore. I thought I was either destined for prison or death and now I’m thinking about owning a house, I’ve got a beautiful family, I’m not on welfare, and I’m here talking to a university student. That shows me nothing but growth. I go to AA and NA. I don’t know what else could change for good.”

“Yep. They help me in a lot of ways, like, before – I was going downhill, I was always putting needles in my arm, drinking and getting high and doing drugs. They helped me a lot; they gave me parenting tips on how to be a mom, because when I had my daughter I was a single parent so they supported me in all of the aspects of parenting. And they helped me put other programs in place, like other things that I could get involved with.”

“Yes. The one-on-ones with youth teach me to be more aware of my surroundings, to be friendlier, to be more open-minded to other people, and to stop and take the time to say hello. Same thing with the sharing circles at the KAP house; they teach me how to be humble, to be caring, and to give back.”

“The mentorship program, yeah. The presentations helped me open up to people and just try to tell my stories to make a change, a change in their life, hopefully it did. Being able to talk to a group of kids, in front of a whole bunch of people it’s really good actually.”

Next, we asked the members what they like most about STR8UP:

“Just that you can be honest and candid about your experiences, and that at the receiving end of your words there’s somebody else that has been there done that, if not worse, and can understand what you’re trying to say. The support that you get from STR8UP for just being honest and trying to work on yourself, what they give back to you just outweighs anything, really.”

“It’s like the opposite of a gang. I have a feeling of belonging, but it’s for all the right reasons. It’s not that I don’t go to jail or I’ve got an alibi, it has nothing to do with that. These people have done more for me in four years than anybody else did for the whole first 16 years of my life. In the four years I’ve been a part of

this, I've gone from homelessness, drug addiction, alcoholism, to today I basically own my own business. I've had the same address for three years. STR8UP has done nothing but benefit me, STR8UP has been my lifesaver. That's all I can say about that, Andre and his whole crew, I can't say enough good things about this."

"That they can relate and one of the workers used to be a STR8UP member so it's really easy to relate to him with our addiction troubles when we're out on the street, people approach us, struggling with raising our children and trying to finish school, stuff like that."

"Just the support I get from the decision I make to not wanting to live that life. The support that I get from Stan and Andre, and seeing all the other ex-gang members there that are doing the same thing I am doing, experiencing the same thing I am, so I don't feel like I'm so much doing it alone and all by myself on this decision right. It feels like somebody else is doing it with me."

"Just the people there. I know that like Andre is there, he is a good person to talk to if I'm struggling or anything like that. He's an inspiration kind of deal, you know, someone that I look up to, if I ever need to talk to him or if I feel like I'm going to slip there are other ways around it. If I ever do slip or sometimes when I do slip I know that he'll help me get into a program where I can get better and stuff like that."

"The kids look up to us and that's a really good thing because we're trying to do positive now and I think that they respect us because of where we came from and how we're trying to change our lives now. I like STR8UP because we're helping a lot of people that have been in our shoes and sort of look up to us."

On the other hand, we also asked the members what they like least about STR8UP. In addition to the comments below, more than half of the members said that there was nothing about the program that they did not like:

"The STR8UP members need to take it more seriously, and not think of it as just a joke."

"The stigma it has, that we're, I don't know, that we're coddled or somehow we use STR8UP as a buffer for our charges. I just don't like how people look at STR8UP, how they judge it rather than, well, this is the first time in four years that I've sat down with somebody trying to say what it's done for us. I've had cops spit in my face because I said I'm with STR8UP and I'm a liar. I'm a living proof that this program works."

"That it is tough to see a lot of the guys struggle with their addictions, there aren't enough healthy guys to hang out with."

“Some of the guys are frontiers, I guess people struggle on their own in their own ways, but some people take advantage of the STR8UP group as a way to get a ‘get out of jail free card’, and not really getting involved in the activities. Once they’re out of jail they’re back doing the same things.”

“We want to do so much but we don’t have the funds for it. We want to expand, we’ve got so much stuff that we want to do that will help expand what we’re doing right now. We’re limited because of the funds. That’s what I don’t like, that we’re limited because of lack of funding.”

We then asked the members what has been most helpful to them from all of STR8UP’s staff and resources:

“The list goes on and on of things that Andre has done for me but for the most part Andre is a good friend, he understands me, he doesn’t lie to me, he tells me the truth and it reflects later on. Initially I would try to BS, but Andre would come out and tell me I am being a certain way and why, and now I can’t BS about my feelings or the way I am acting.”

“They don’t push us, they don’t tell us how to be; they just walk beside us in our journey. And when we fall, they’re there when we get back up. Eventually we don’t fall down so much anymore.”

“I like that they’re not judging me on my past but trying to help me with my future. I guess you could say they believe in me.”

“Probably seeing all the other guys. Like going there and seeing all these other guys that we’ve been ex-gang members just like me and probably lived life in a similar way as I did for such a long time and to see them change and be different nowadays, I find it very helpful to see them. If they can do it, then I can do it.”

“Having a chance to talk at presentations, sharing my story about what it was like, where I come from, and what it’s like today. For me that’s a continuum of healing cleaning out, sharing my story for me that’s healing.”

“The one thing that really made me happy about STR8UP was this time we took about 9 or 10 youth up to Manitoba where there’s a camp up there, and we went over there to a camp for five days and we showed those kids how it was to live a normal life, because they’re living the street life; trying to make money to smoke marijuana and drink and be cool, joining gangs; so we showed them a different path and I felt very happy about that.”

“Having Andre around. Andre is a really swell guy. He’s positive all the time, he’s like an elder. And every time I have questions in this life he always has something positive to say. And that’s what drives me, compels me, to keep doing what I do, it’s Andre. He’s a really positive man. As well as the other members in

the group, they've been through so much and just being around people that actually came from where I came from. You know, poverty, gangs, etc., a messed-up past, let's just say. And I like being around the kind of people that came from where I'm from that are trying to change their lives for the better."

Many of the members talked about how much they like presenting to youth and what it means to them personally:

"Those are my favourite presentations, especially at elementary schools, because they have so many weird questions, and it just makes me laugh. I really like those presentations because it gets them thinking early about what kind of choices they should be making in the future. If I was a kid and these guys did a presentation at my school I probably wouldn't have joined my gang. If I knew that I would end up with addictions I probably wouldn't have even been hanging around with these people. My favourite question I was asked was when I got asked by this really small kid, 'how does it feel to be a gang banger?' I just started smiling; I was like, 'a gang banger? That's the first time I've ever been called that.' It feels like shit, well, I didn't say that, I said, 'it doesn't feel very good, because your family disowns you.' I said to him, 'you love your mother, right?' And he's like, 'yeah.' 'Well, you're gonna need your mom's support, so that's why you don't want to be in a gang.' Or, how did I get in a gang? That's the main question that I've been getting asked by kids."

"I like it, it informs them about dangers of gang life, de-glamourizes gangs, and gives them the real story behind it, shows them that you don't need to be in a gang or anything like that, shows them the problems associated with gang life."

"It gives me a chance to speak about my life and inspire the youth, practically let the youth know there are struggles and challenges but anyone can overcome them, and there is a better way in life rather than doing drugs and alcohol, and being in gang life, being in jail all the time. There's a better way away from that."

"I love talking to kids. They responded to what we say and they ask a lot of questions. If there are 100 kids in a room, and only one kid listens and took what I had to say, that matters."

Next, we asked the members what they see for the future of STR8UP:

"I think they could expand, but Andre doesn't advertise, he is very humble. I think at some point we're going to have to if we want to make a stronger stand against gangs. They will need to eventually create a house for safety for guys with no support and cross-national organisation. I see a lot of good things, I hope at some point. It is not limited to gang activity, some have been asked and live a dysfunctional lifestyle."



“I’m hoping that people who are far enough along can start to help the ones that are coming in. Andre always says this isn’t his group it’s ours, and I want us to start taking more responsibilities and start making this thing grow, because jails aren’t a place for growth. We’ve gone from 20 members from when I joined to now just over 100. You know, even if 75% of them are tries, I’m not saying that everybody in the program is here for the right reasons, there are those that try to use it to their advantage, but there’s a lot more of us here actually trying.”

“Activities for sure, for the mentorship program, and helping the homeless people inside of STR8UP because there are some people who struggle with homelessness so if we had some kind of safe house for these people to transition into their own place, that would be pretty cool. And everybody to be strong after they work on themselves, the people who are in STR8UP to be strong and successful.”

“I’d just like for them to continue to work with the youth, mostly, that’s what I see for them, work with the youth and have more and more youth projects.”

“I’d like to see them expand and become known throughout Canada; hopefully they reach a lot of people that will come out with their testimonies.”

“There are lots of things, like there could be help or stuff, but we’re broke, we don’t have anything to help. If we had money, just like myself I have no ID’s; I’ve got to pay to access schooling. I’d like to go to school but I don’t have money for that, tuition is expensive. And more family stuff, like STR8UP family picnics or something.”

“Continuing to show and share with kids and the community what that lifestyle brings, continue to fight for more funding, expanding not only in Saskatchewan but all over Canada.”

Specifically, one of the members had an idea about creating a safe house for men in the community:

“I want to open a safe house for guys getting into the system and trying to deter them from going in the system, guys in abusive situations, guys who lack support at home, or maybe they don’t even have a home. I think there is a need; there are a lot of things for women and kids, but we need things for men. Guys don’t have the basic tools – waking up, washing up, and paying bills, etc.”

In addition to the interview questions, the members were asked several questions about the staff members and how the program has helped them and in which ways. They were given a 6-point scale for their responses: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree, and 6 = not applicable. Responses of “not applicable” were excluded from analyses to avoid overinflating the means. Sample sizes are given for each question that had “not applicable” responses removed. As shown in Table 2, the

members indicated that they find STR8UP staff very helpful and supportive in many of their endeavours.

Table 2. Questionnaire answers from STR8UP members.

	Mean	SD
STR8UP staff members are helpful to me	4.95	.224
STR8UP staff members are supportive of me	5.00	.000
STR8UP staff members are encouraging of me	5.00	.000
STR8UP has helped me with my drug or alcohol addictions (n = 19)	4.37	.597
STR8UP has helped me to find a job (n = 16)	4.50	.516
STR8UP has helped me to access skills training (n = 18)	4.28	1.018
STR8UP has helped me to access school upgrades or courses (n = 18)	4.11	.963
STR8UP has helped me to find good housing (n = 16)	4.37	.619
STR8UP has helped me to be a good parent (n = 18)	4.78	.548
STR8UP has helped me to be a good partner (n = 16)	4.63	1.025

## 4.2 Interviews with STR8UP Staff

### 4.2.1 Demographics

All four STR8UP staff members were interviewed for this evaluation, three males and one female. Ages ranged from 32 to 75, with a mean of 45.00 (SD = 20.314). The staff members self-identified as Polynesian, Caucasian, First Nations, and French Métis ethnic backgrounds. The staff members have been part of STR8UP from between three months and four and a half years, with the exception of Father Andre.

### 4.2.2 Perceptions of STR8UP

To start, we asked Father Andre how he first got involved with forming STR8UP and how it developed:

“About 12 years ago, two guys came up to me who were active gang members that I had met in jail, and they simply said ‘Andre we want to leave the gang, but we don’t know what to do or how to do it’, and I said ‘I don’t know either but we’ll work at it together’. And that’s where it started, with two guys who eventually of course left the gang, and now are doing pretty well in life. And from two, now we work with over 100 individuals who also have left the gangs.”

We asked how potential members usually proceed with contacting one of the staff members and how they can become a member themselves. As it was mentioned in the interviews with

STR8UP members, there have been some problems in the past of individuals trying to use STR8UP to their advantage without becoming involved in the program:

“Generally, a member either hears about us from a worker or a friend, they call us, then I meet with them, and I say these are the conditions of STR8UP, these are our goals, and this is how we can support you. And if the person is interested, I tell them that the next step that you need to do is write your autobiography. Once you do that then call me. So I never talk to them until they do that. But, that’s not a hard rule in the sense, because, some individuals, they’re serious, I know they’re going to work on the autobiography soon, because I went to coffee with them, I know they want the support, but they’re still working on their autobiography. But we support them in the meantime. There are some guys that I know they just want us, and I can read it, because they want us to go to court and make them look good in court. I’ve done this long enough that I can usually pick those people out of the crowd.”

We then asked for a general description of the staff members’ daily responsibilities and activities with the members:

“The primary activity is for the facilitators, and ourselves when possible, to work with individuals one on one, to help them to identify their needs; if they need a job, help them look for work, so that could be as simple as help them do a resume. If they want to go to addictions help, simply tell them how to do it. Take them to the doctors to get their physicals, if they need medications, that kind of stuff.”

We also asked the staff members what they like most about STR8UP and working with the members:

“I like working with the guys. I like the clientele, they’re not youth, but they’re older. I like the rewards of helping people, even if they don’t notice that they’re giving the rewards; I like to help people. It would be the outreaching part.”

“There are two things that I really enjoy about STR8UP. The first is the philosophy, work from the bottom up. So all of our ideas, everything we do, and it comes from the members themselves. The second thing I like is that the focus of STR8UP is that the individual needs to take accountability for their own healing. So because of that, we’ve got to meet them where they’re at, not where we want them to be.”

“I like how spirituality is the key to recovery, and I believe it is the key to recovery.”

“I like the guys and gals, I like the young people. I think they’re just fantastic people. Yeah, I like them big time. And I like the way we do things – they’re all adults, so they all have to accept responsibility for their lives. I don’t accept responsibility for their healing, they do. And so I like that process.”

We also asked the staff members what they like least about STR8UP:

“I think, today, what I don’t like about STR8UP is how unsure the stability is; the lack of stability of STR8UP. For example, if Andre was to just quit today, and I was to go somewhere, STR8UP will collapse. And that doesn’t have to do with the passion of the other facilitators, because they have passion for it, it has more to do with, they’re just brand new. So there’s no vision. And that’s kind of what worries me the most.”

“How a lot of them still are sick, they’re stuck.”

“What I like the least is their pain and their hurt and their sufferings, in terms of their addictions, and what they would consider their failures. Because it’s a long, long, hard struggle, and that’s what hurts the most, that’s what’s really difficult. It’s not that I hate seeing it happen, it’s just that you hate the pain they go through.”

We then asked the staff members what kinds of changes they have seen in the members, both positive and negative:

“A lot more of the members are working on themselves regarding their addictions because we have the staff to do so. We’ve had two members released from the correctional system who came right back to STR8UP; we used to lose members once they were released into the community when it was just Andre and Stan. Having the bridge between corrections and community helps keep them as members. I haven’t seen any negative changes in the members.”

“Yeah, huge changes. And that can be things like, they broke up an unhealthy relationship, or they’re using less hard drugs – they used to be cocaine addicts and now they’re down to marijuana, or they’re working. It’s different for each person. And yeah, I’ve seen negative changes. The negative is usually a result, I believe, because we’re not able to meet their needs. For example, once a STR8UP member becomes healthy, we can’t keep them around because we have nothing else to offer them, because now they’re looking for work. So our people that are younger, one of our older members was like a role model to them, because they say ‘if this guy can change, then we can change.’ But when you have too many unhealthy people, there are no healthy people they see, so they kind of get stuck. So that’s one negative. And part of that is because, when you go back to your vision, in STR8UP, what’s happening is that our guys get jobs, and by their first pay cheque they don’t go back or they get fired. So there needs to be something in the middle. You can’t go from coming out of jail and never having worked, right to getting a job; you have to have something in the middle. So part of the vision, I think, is that STR8UP needs to have a job opportunity where we provide skills for them and once they show that they come every day and stuff, then we can feed them to employment, everyday businesses.”

Considering these changes and trends seen in the members, we then asked what kind of changes the staff members would want to make to STR8UP:

“It needs to be a little more organized in terms of notes, we don’t have any documentation. In a perfect world I would have JHS back out and have the workers do the work. JHS was approached because Stan was an outreach worker with them and Andre approached Stan, and we had a director of STR8UP who didn’t want control of STR8UP, and now we have a director who does. Two different personalities. Initially it was good because Stan does what he does and he didn’t have to go to the Director for permission to leave the city, who is going, where are they going, and why. Presently these things are occurring.”

“Part of the change, is that soon we’re all going, staff and JHS people, to Wanuskewin to talk about what is the three year vision for STR8UP, where should we be in three years. I kind of wish we had that discussion earlier, so that the facilitators kind of know what they’re working towards, and also, I don’t like how there’s a lack of support, in my feeling, from John Howard as an organization. For example, the reason that John Howard was created in the first place was to support men in the correctional system. Besides STR8UP, John Howard doesn’t offer anything for the men in the correctional system. But STR8UP never came because of a John Howard initiative, it became because I met up with Andre and we started it. And so, I feel that more resources should be given to STR8UP just because we’re actually the only ones meeting their mandate, the primary vision of John Howard.”

“One of the things that we have to reach out to are active gang members, we haven’t done that. One of the other changes that we have to do is to challenge the guys inside the jails, to challenge them to be more serious about STR8UP and not see it as leverage for their court dates and stuff like that. I’d like to see more support from the community, from the municipal, provincial, and federal governments, and from the community at large. We do have quite a bit more support than we did five or six years ago, that’s for sure. And a better working relationship with the police, but that’s come a long way too.”

Further along this line of thought, we also asked the staff members what changes they see for the future of STR8UP and how the program can progress:

“If it was to be a bigger program it would need more workers, and down the road expansion is expected. The perfect person is one of the facilitators who used to be a member to train these guys and employ members who have graduated to be mentors in the program. Also, a house for transitioning between corrections and community would be good.”

“What I would personally like to see in the three year plan is that we need to have an entrepreneur kind of job, where we make money because every funder has strings attached to their funding, but if you can make your own money, there are

no strings attached to that. What I want to see is that in the summertime STR8UP has a landscaping company. It's a skill that's transferable, but at the same time, a guy comes out of jail, you can say, 'hey, start here.' And then that way we can actually keep our healthy STR8UP guys around longer because they're working too. But we need something in the fall; we need something year-round, something that's realistic. So we need to have employment because that meets the financial needs of the members. I think that's our biggest hurdle right now. The activities we have, I want to make them better. Because now we have them, but to make the sharing circles on Fridays better, we need modules. And that's part of the lack of experience from the facilitators; they don't know how to do that. And I think over time maybe we'll get to the point where maybe we work with active gang members, but until you have proper staff we can't really do that right now."

Overall, we also asked the staff members if they thought that STR8UP is contributing positively to society:

"Yes, it is making youth aware of how you can get caught up in that lifestyle but also how you can heal. Once you're there, you can leave; you don't have to stay there."

"Yes. They can help make sick people healthy, and not just people but their families healthy, and then their families are building healthy communities. Yes, for sure."

In addition to the interview questions, the staff members were asked several questions about STR8UP members, training they had received, problems within the program, and their perceptions of the program overall. They were given a 6-point scale for their responses: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree, and 6 = not applicable. Responses of "not applicable" were excluded from analyses to avoid overinflating the means. Sample sizes are given for each question that had "not applicable" responses removed. As shown in Table 3, the staff indicated that most of the program's components are viewed positively, although there are some issues to address related to training and communications.

Table 3. Questionnaire answers from STR8UP staff.

	Mean	SD
All staff members received training for all of the activities (n = 3)	2.67	2.082
I received training for all of the activities (n = 3)	3.33	2.082
I received training for making presentations	4.00	1.414
I received training to be a mentor	2.75	2.062
I received training to be a leader at cultural camp (n = 2)	2.50	2.121
I received training to lead healing and sharing circles (n = 3)	2.33	2.309
Activities are carried out in locations which allow for maximum attendance	4.75	.500
Activities and information are well communicated within staff	4.25	.957
Activities and information are well communicated from staff to members	3.75	1.893
Activities and information are well communicated within members (n = 3)	3.67	2.309

### 4.3 Interviews with School Staff

#### 4.3.1 Demographics

Two female individuals that work with the Oskayak Sharing Circle program and students were interviewed for this evaluation, one teacher and one addictions worker. Ages were between 30 and 54, with a mean of 42.0 (SD = 16.971). These individuals both self-identified as Caucasian.

#### 4.3.2 Perceptions of STR8UP

We first asked one of the school staff who assists with the Sharing Circle program to describe the elements of the program and her past interactions with STR8UP staff and members:

“In the centre here where we’re at, I run a sharing circle for teenagers with one of the members of STR8UP here. It’s open to boys and girls, just trying to get them to understand how decision making can turn bad if we don’t stop those decisions now. The member from STR8UP acts as the gang component that I don’t have, but we really focus on violence in the home, violence on the streets, drugs and alcohol, just poor choices in general. It’s the closest member I’ve had interactions with, like I said I’ve attended their program a few times and I’ve gotten to meet some of them, specifically Father Andre I’ve met a few times as well and have gotten to know him a little bit, as well as the other co-facilitator Stan, I’ve gotten to know quite well and work quite closely with.”

We also asked the school staff what they like most about STR8UP:

“I like the honesty it portrays in regards to what the youth or adults have been involved in. Making the community more aware of what’s actually happening in Saskatoon. Our population of Saskatoon is not aware of the extent of gang activity the criminal activity that is happening within our city and I believe through awareness and education community members will be much more open to change and give support to individuals. I don’t believe any of them outright made a choice to be a gang member or to be a person in society that is not contributing in a positive way. I believe a lot of it has to do with lifestyle family connection and just an upbringing that maybe didn’t have all the basic needs.”

We then asked the school staff what they liked the least about STR8UP:

“There’s nothing I really don’t like about STR8UP because I think it is a program that’s necessary in Saskatoon because of the gang activity and issues. Maybe the least part is how hard they have to work to spread the message within the community. They probably need more corporate support, and some of these individuals still don’t have the basic needs being met which tempt them in regards to addictions and criminal activity. I think if anything the least thing I like is they’re not supported financially.”

“I don’t really know if I can think of anything that I don’t like about STR8UP, actually. I guess I’d like to see targeted younger, younger than adults already, maybe start targeting the teenagers in a teenager way.”

Both school staff stated that they were very pleased with how the program has been run and what the major goals are. However, comments about the lack of current funding and the need for more continued financial aid was a common theme in interviews with the school staff, STR8UP members, STR8UP staff, and police. We then asked what kind of changes they would make to the program:

“I’m quite happy with the way STR8UP is. More funding, maybe. And more involvement specifically from the members, as well, and have them partake in the whole process, and not just the storytelling part of it. I’d like to see them play more of an active role in it.”

“I think it’s working what they’re doing. They have a way of having commitment from their members. Their expectations are clear. They are patient and flexible with working with youth with these adults. I don’t think I’d make any changes. What I like about it is the fact that everything is very clear and that every member or person participating with STR8UP knows exactly what’s expected and is able to evaluate why things have happened or why they have made those choices, that there is a complete desire to get better, to do better.”



One of the school staff made the additional comment that some of the students attending the Sharing Circle program might feel somewhat intimidated by the STR8UP members present.

“The only negative thing is that their target groups [the students] have been intimidated or fearful when they’re actually within the room and that’s just because of their lack of openness or understanding of the individual just the way they dress or present themselves [the STR8UP members]. That’s not something they should change but their target group should be more open or aware of it.”

In addition to the interview questions, the school staff were asked several questions about STR8UP members, the Sharing Circle program, and their perceptions of the program overall. They were given a 6-point scale for their responses: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree, and 6 = not applicable. There were no responses of “not applicable” in this sample. As shown in Table 4, the school staff indicated that they think STR8UP is contributing positively to society and that there have been positive results from the students attending the sharing circle program.

Table 4. Questionnaire answers from school staff.

	Mean	SD
STR8UP is contributing positively to society	5.00	.000
There have been positive changes in students who attend STR8UP presentations	4.50	.707
There have been no changes in students who attend STR8UP presentations	1.50	.707
There have been negative consequences to having STR8UP members present	2.50	2.121
STR8UP members are good role models for youth losing their way	4.50	.707
STR8UP members have good social relations	4.00	.000
I would recommend STR8UP presentations to any youth who want to leave a gang	5.00	.000
Students who have attended STR8UP presentations have a more positive attitude towards authority	3.50	.707
STR8UP should be supported in any way needed	5.00	.000

## 4.4 Interviews with Students

### 4.4.1 Demographics

Three students that participated in the Oskayak Sharing Circle program between January and June, 2012, were interviewed for this evaluation; two females and one male. Ages ranged between 18 and 21, with a mean of 20.0 (SD = 1.732). Two of the students self-identified as First Nations and one as Aboriginal. In terms of education, one student had completed grade 11 and two students had completed grade 12. These students were struggling with addictions such as alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, and other drugs.

### 4.4.2 Perceptions of STR8UP

We first asked the students if they found the Sharing Circles helpful:

“Yes, well they helped me achieve some of my fears so they’ve helped me pretty much and they’ve helped my friends too.”

“Yes. It’s really nice to be in a circle of people where you can share what you want and there’s confidentiality. It’s really helped me to let go during stressful days.”

“Yeah it has, and I gave some sisters of mine some good advice for their lives and they gave me some good advice, practically just helping each other when we go to these circles, and tell each other to look forward to the brighter side of the future instead of the darker side, dwelling on the past things. It’s a pretty good impact on my life so far.”

We also asked the students if they had used any other means to deal with their addictions:

“Pregnancy was a factor in quitting. I go to school now full time, I’m working, I’m a single mother, so there’s just a lot of priorities there where addiction and alcoholism can’t be a part of my life anymore.”

“Basically just go to EGADZ youth centre, chill there and keep me away from drugs and alcohol. Sometimes some friends would come to EGADZ and ask me if I have chip-ins, and I when I did I’d still say no, I’d tell them I had money but I’d say I’m not going to drink, and they would try to be like, ‘oh, why don’t you just come and drink?’ and I’d be like ‘oh, no, no, no, I’m good.’ Just tell them straight.”

We then asked the students if they had ever attended a STR8UP presentation and what they gained from it; however, only one of them had attended a presentation:

“I gained a little bit of knowledge about the gang side because I was talking with some ex-gang members and it turned out that I used to know them, we just forgot each other’s faces. Because when I was a kid I used to live here too and I got

kicked out of the city due to some crimes I did but that was when I was a kid, now I've got it all straightened out, I'm good now. [What he got from talking with the ex-gang members:] About the gang life, what they do and why they did it, basically to survive, and plus they told me not to join gangs.”

One of the students told us that they feel this program is very important and useful at Oskayak for its students:

“It is a very good program especially here too I see kids that are struggling they need to talk to someone about it to listen, so yeah they need it more.”

In addition to the interview questions, the students were asked several questions about STR8UP members, the Sharing Circle program, and their perceptions of the program overall. The students were given a 6-point scale for their responses: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree, and 6 = not applicable. There were no responses of “not applicable” in this sample. As shown in Table 5, the students indicated that they see STR8UP as a program that is contributing positively to society and as a program that has helped them with their own addictions and struggles.

Table 5. Questionnaire answers from students.

	Mean	SD
STR8UP is contributing positively to society	5.00	.000
I have had positive changes after attending STR8UP presentations	5.00	.000
I have had no changes after attending STR8UP presentations	1.00	.000
I have had negative changes after attending STR8UP presentations	1.00	.000
STR8UP members are good role models for youth losing their way	5.00	.000
STR8UP members have good social relations	5.00	.000
I would recommend STR8UP presentations to any youth who want to leave a gang or who struggle with addictions	5.00	.000
I have a more positive attitude towards authority after attending STR8UP presentations	5.00	.000
I think the members of STR8UP are just people who can't make it in a gang anymore	2.33	2.309
STR8UP should be supported in any way needed	5.00	.000

## **4.5 Interviews with Police**

### **4.5.1 Demographics**

Three male police officers were interviewed for this evaluation. One officer gave his age as 40, another as 58, with the third officer declining this information. Two of the officers self-identified as Caucasian and one as Métis. Two of the officers are officers in the Street Gang Unit, while the other was the Chief of Police.

### **4.5.2 Perceptions of STR8UP**

We first asked the officers to describe what STR8UP is and what its overall goal is:

“I believe that STR8UP is a community services directed support group that offers alternative lifestyle choices to gang offenders in hopes of creating a successful gang exit strategy for individuals involved in STR8UP. It also has a goal to denounce gang membership and promote alternative lifestyles where individuals make healthy, good lifestyle choices and includes an educational component which addresses its anti-gang, pro-family and community ethics.”

Next, we asked the officers what kind of information they had received about the program prior to interacting with STR8UP members or staff members:

“I knew about the program being in the gang unit since 2004 so I knew that that program existed through the correctional centre and when they started working more into the community I met Stan and he kind of laid out how the program works.”

“Very little and we have limited contact with them. Ultimately, we don’t deal with STR8UP members until they become involved in police investigations and within Street Gang Unit; that would mean that the STR8UP member was involved in a gang associated crime.”

We then asked the officers about what kind of interactions they have had with STR8UP members:

“On rare occasion, I have had to arrest STR8UP members for outstanding crimes, none of which were attributed to their involvement in STR8UP. We do not have a list of STR8UP members so it would be difficult to truly provide a full, fair and frank answer. It has been my experience that criminals, especially gang associated persons, need a profound incident to occur before they voluntarily accept assistance and want to create the positive lifestyle changes that STR8UP promotes. Have we dealt with STR8UP members? Yes. Do we know they are involved with STR8UP? Not all the time, and that has no bearing on our investigations. STR8UP deals with intervention and diversion for gang exit strategies – although the Saskatoon Police Service is concerned about these

issues, its focus is primarily on prevention and suppression and although we run in the same circles, our paths rarely cross.”

“Lots. I have been in the gang unit since 2004, a lot of them I have had personal contact in terms of arresting them for offences, meeting with them in interviews, talking to them about exit strategies. In the community, a little bit, because I have done some stuff in the community as the Sgt. in charge. I’ve attended stuff or programs that STR8UP has run, like the most recent one there was something at the U of S where Bob Pringle had a video, there was a video shown, the STR8UP members were there and did a presentation, so yeah I have had contact with them at different various community events where they have been at and I’ve attended as well. I know a rough idea of who they have in the program and the successes they’re having.”

It is apparent that the officers in the Street Gang Unit have had more contact with STR8UP staff members, whether that is to determine the location of a STR8UP member, or to discuss the program’s activities in the community and its long-term goals. While the officers all knew of Father Andre through both his reputation in the community and through brief meetings, the officers also stated that they had more contact with Stan more day-to-day inquiries:

“I deal with Stan quite regularly, and at least quarterly I see him. Our meetings, more or less, the last few times it’s been mostly about Stan and dealing with funding and just what he’s trying to roll out the new format of how we wanted STR8UP to establish itself in the community and mostly try to figure out what the police role with STR8UP is and try to determine are we part of that partnership or is there, what role do we need to play with STR8UP, should we be on an advisory board, should a representative from our service be on an Advisory Board to determine whether or not the program is working, what role does STR8UP have with the police. That’s usually what our conversations entail other than incidental stuff with guys that are falling off the program or stuff like that or if one of them is wanted and we need to determine his whereabouts and we have to talk to Stan to see if this individual is still in the program.”

We then asked the officers what they like most about STR8UP:

“They’re targeting a demographic that no other agency targets in our community, so STR8UP targets an age group, really is targeting gang members that don’t have programs for them to get out of the gangs, so yeah, they provide a service that no other agency does provide and a service that we as the police couldn’t provide.”

“I believe that STR8UP has a noble goal in offering support and alternatives to those persons that truly wish to improve their lifestyles through making positive choices, including addressing exit gang strategies and substance abuse issues.”

“It’s an organization that works primarily with adults that need help getting away from gangs, getting away from their addictions, trying to get their life back in

order, and it's the only program I know of that is really working with adults. There are some that are working with youth, but this is one of the few that I know of that are working with adults."

Next, we asked the officers what they like least about STR8UP:

"I don't know if I dislike anything. One of the hardest things for us as a gang unit to deal with is the fact that we understand and we have to tell people that STR8UP programs will have failures. The very nature of who they're trying to get out of the gangs, there's going to be failures within there, and that no person should be held up on a pedestal that this is the shining star coming out of this program because that very person could have through peer pressure, addictions and just social inequality end up back where he started just like that"

"I believe that the ratio of professional staff to STR8UP membership is too skewed in that the membership far out-reaches the staff that are required to address the needs of such a diverse group – yes they were all gang members and may have similar stories, but each individual creates their own path to recovery/reintegration and each has its own unique issues."

"I think that it's still very informal, it's not 100% structured; I think that's what they're working towards. They've got a really good working game plan, a special written prospectus on what they want to do, so they're getting there. But right now, unfortunately it's just been very loosely organized, a lot of volunteer work trying to get it going, they haven't had a lot of money, so I think that's why we went with the government, trying to get funding so they can get on a more solid footing."

We then asked the officers what changes they would make to the program:

"I guess I would just make sure that they have, I don't know how things are with the facilitators now, but I would ensure there is some sort of independent oversight on the group itself on how it's being run, to ensure that the organisation itself doesn't put its clients at risk, doesn't put its staff at risk, doesn't put the program's name at risk, because sometimes a client, because of that person's behaviour, may actually put the credibility of the organisation at risk and the best way to do that is through independent oversight. So that if the organisation is blind to an issue, the independent oversight can say, "listen we're doing something here that's very risky, this person is causing us to put our name at risk, and maybe this person should not continue with the program, maybe we should tell them you're not ready for us, come back when you're ready," that kind of thing. That's my biggest thing because if there are any changes, and those changes may already be in place now, I don't know. I just know that from other programs the ones that do not have independent oversight tend to have troubles or have had issues throughout the country."

“I don’t know enough about the program to recommend changes but the one area that I would address would be having the police as a silent partner as currently we have none. I believe that full, overt involvement of police would affect participation as there will undoubtedly be resentment and trust issues. But if the police were kept to sitting and discussion with the directors/professional members if STR8UP, police could assist with issues such as: 1) because the program is voluntary, is there adequate screening of gang associated persons prior to their inclusion in the group? Putting just one wrong person in the program can cause mass corruption; 2) are there adequate procedures/precautions to ensure the safety of persons within the group and the groups that STR8UP comes in contact with? Often times, if a person has been deeply entrenched in gangs, persons wishing to separate themselves from the gangs can’t simply “walk away” and what would happen if violence erupted at a STR8UP promoted presentation/event where STR8UP members were targeted?; and 3) eventually, perhaps police and members of STR8UP could meet and repair issues of trust and resentment.”

Next, we asked the officers what they see for the future of STR8UP. One of the officers stated that what he most wants is to have exit strategies available to give to gang-related individuals he comes across through his work. As this officer mentioned, and was previously brought up in other interviews, there is also a concern that some individuals approach the program as a means to make themselves look more favourable in front of the courts:

“What I would like to have is a viable exit strategy for our guys, so if I do have someone who says “I want out” I can say here you go, these are some contact numbers. In general, our unit is not exactly the first person that someone is going to run to and say I want out of a gang, and that’s just because we’re the police. That being said, we talk to more gang members than anybody. All of the gangs, every gang member talks to us, there’s none of this idea that you don’t talk to the cops, no, they all talk to us, because that’s how we run our unit; it’s not adversarial, we understand that the reasons why guys get into the jams they do, or they’re in the situations they are whether it’s through addictions, family reasons, social inequality, we’re the first ones that know that because we see that every day, so we know exactly how they ended up where they are. So my answer to that is at the end of the day I just want to have a viable exit strategy, and I know that we’re not going to get a hundred percent of guys out of this stuff, as a matter of fact I’d be happy at 10%, because at the end of the day it is an inherently risky deal. So at 10%, if STR8UP can say they always get 10% of their guys and they’re removing them from the gang life, I’ll buy that. We have referred guys to the STR8UP program before. A lot of times they already bring up the topic that, you know, “I’m looking to go into STR8UP”, stuff like that. Sometimes it’s real, but sometimes it’s for ulterior motives also, so sometimes they’ve got court coming up so they also want to say they’re in the STR8UP program.”

Finally, we asked the Police Chief why STR8UP is especially deserving of funding, as the lack of funding has been a major obstacle to the program:

“Well it’s the only program I know that deal with adults, so if it’s not there there’s nothing. And there are some people that want to get out of the gangs and they need help, and as I mentioned earlier it’s not easy to get out of those gangs, it’s not easy to get out of that lifestyle. And I know that there’s going to be people that fall backwards a little bit and stumble, and we always take a risk when we’re supporting a group like this because if something goes wrong, people say ‘why are you supporting them, look at this,’ but say that they have 10 people and 6 of them get out of the gangs that’s 6 people that aren’t in gangs anymore and they can get on to a healthy lifestyle that will be productive for them and their family. So I think it’s really important. We have to do something; we just can’t sit back and let this continue like it is. It’s the only program I know of in Saskatoon, in the province really, that’s working with adults. I know they’ve got some programs in Regina but they’re more geared towards youth. And the gang strategy that they had in Regina, the funding has been pulled for that for a while, so I don’t know what’s going to happen down there.”

In addition to the interview questions, the officers were asked several questions about STR8UP members and their perceptions of the program overall. The officers were given a 6-point scale for their responses: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree, and 6 = not applicable. There were no responses of “not applicable” in this sample. As shown in Table 6, the officers indicated that they viewed STR8UP as a program that is contributing positively to society and should be supported.



Table 6. Questionnaire answers from police.

	Mean	SD
STR8UP is contributing positively to society	4.33	.577
There have been positive changes in STR8UP members since being in the program	4.67	.577
There have been negative changes in STR8UP members since being in the program	3.00	1.000
There have been no changes in STR8UP members since being in the program	2.00	1.732
STR8UP members are good role models for youth losing their way	3.33	2.082
While on duty, if I were involved in a situation with a STR8UP member, I would be more accommodating	3.00	2.000
I would recommend STR8UP to anyone who needs support leaving a lifestyle of crime or addiction	4.67	.577
I would recommend STR8UP to anyone who wants to leave a gang	4.33	1.155
STR8UP is just another program that claims to intervene or prevent gang-related criminal activity	1.67	.577
STR8UP members have a more positive attitude towards police and corrections	3.33	.577
People join STR8UP just to make themselves look more favourable to police and the justice system	3.33	1.155
STR8UP should be supported in any way needed	4.67	.577
STR8UP is helping to (or will help) reduce the amount of gang-related criminal activity in Saskatoon	3.33	2.082

In response to the question about being more accommodating to an individual who said they were in STR8UP, one officer clarified his response choice by saying:

“No, you know what I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t, I don’t throw favour either way, so that would be a 3, neither disagree or agree. If they’re in the program that’s good for them, but I’m not going to curry them favour, but that being said if you’re not in STR8UP I’m not going to curry them favour either, you’re either an active member and you’re posing risk so I’ve got to weigh your risk.”

Further, one officer reiterated how necessary STR8UP is in Saskatoon as it is the only program of its kind when asked if he thought it was just another program claiming to intervene:

“That’s a funny word, it’s just ‘another’, because it’s the only one. I guess it’s a 2, I somewhat disagree; because it’s not just ‘another’, it is the only one that we

have in Saskatoon. Regina has a program, but in Saskatoon it's the only one we have targeting that age group and that risk of offender or person that's the only program we got so. It isn't, it isn't pathfinders, it isn't 4H, it's it is what it is, STR8UP."

Another officer explained his choice when asked if he would recommend STR8UP to anyone who wants to leave a gang:

"Three, neither agree nor disagree, just based on the fact that it's not on everyone's path. There are some guys that we deal with that would refuse to go to STR8UP and want out, because that's still the same lifestyle, you're still incorporating yourself with these groups of guys and the only way they get out of it is by leaving the city, or leaving the lifestyle or leaving their friend structure and STR8UP still is that group. For some guys they really need people, there are some people that really need to be part of a group, and they're that kind of personality that needs to be part of something and that's originally what drew them into the gangs. But there are also other guys that are very strong and leadership types, they don't need that. To get out means they need to get away, even talking about the gang stuff will bring them back because that's when the bravado and that persona comes out and, you know, it's like the Jekyll and Mr. Hyde kind of thing where they have to be solid and they can't be that other person, so in that case that's why to me it's neither agree or disagree, because it depends on the guy, I can't say I would say yes; whatever that person needs to do I have no say in the matter."

In regards to whether he believed that STR8UP is helping to or will reduce gang-related crime in Saskatoon, one officer explained why he strongly disagreed. While we know that STR8UP has become an invaluable resource for adult gang members trying to make changes in their lives, this officer's answers highlight the fact that because there is so much crime committed by youth in the city, more programs and resources need to be allocated towards youth prevention and intervention tactics:

"Reason being is our most active guys are around 17 or 18 years old there, and they're a small number. Our youth involved in our gangs, the last information I had was that we were actually down to 5%, kids under 18 years old make up around 5 to 8%. Right now in the last month we're at about 5%, but they make up about 40% of our violent crime. Those guys are young and they love being in what they're in. If you just look on the dynamics, a lot of the guys that are in the STR8UP program are peaking out into their mid-twenties, they're kind of coming on the down side of the age. You don't see a lot of 16 year old guys running into the STR8UP program, or I don't anyway, maybe they are but I don't see those, and the last time I was at a STR8UP presentation, the guys on the stage, they were in their mid-twenties, some of them older than that, they've gotten past that stage of violence, so no, there's going to be a reduction, but it's not going to affect that bulk of young guys that are really active, and you know that statistically I don't think it's going to. You're going to see that number, but like I said 10%, if they're

getting 10% out and there's another 10% that's just walking away, that means 20% of them are leaving, I'll take that every day."

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

The present evaluation was both a process and outcome evaluation of the STR8UP program. The process evaluation assessed the extent to which the program is implemented as intended (Posavac & Carey, 2003; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). The outcome evaluation assessed the impact of the program activities on the members in the context of the stated objectives as well as any unintended outcomes.

### 5.1 Process Issues

#### 5.1.1 Development, Evolution, and Maturation of STR8UP

The evolution of STR8UP and changes that were made was examined in an effort to understand the program's evolution. Due to the ground-up development of the program, there was little documentation of the program. The information that was garnered about the program in terms of development, evolution, and maturation was mostly anecdotally based through discussions with the staff members. It is important to note that Father Andre takes no responsibility for the development, evolution or maturation of the program, attributing all of this to the members themselves. This gives the impression that there was no real outline of how the program was to function.

**It is therefore recommended that the development, evolution, and maturation of the program not only be retroactively documented, but all future plans and strategies for STR8UP should be documented in detail.**

Primarily an intervention program at its start, STR8UP was first initiated by gang members who wanted to leave their gangs, assisted along by Father Andre. Since then, it has matured into an intervention and prevention program with different activities geared towards the two strategies of the program.

**As such, it is recommended that the activities geared towards either prevention or intervention should be clearly identified and the process by which those activities lead to the intended outcomes be clearly defined.**

STR8UP has evolved into a program with two volunteers and two paid staff members employed by the John Howard Society of Saskatoon. Although the increased number of program facilitators has been a great advantage for the members and activities, there is currently no clear documentation explaining the relationship between JHS and STR8UP, nor are there clear descriptions of the roles of the facilitators.

**It is therefore recommended that the specific qualifications and responsibilities of the volunteers and staff members be outlined, as well as the details of the relationship between JHS and STR8UP.**

### 5.1.2 The Five Conditions of Joining STR8UP

There are five conditions all potential members must meet before joining STR8UP. In order to be considered a member of STR8UP, an individual has to drop their colours, deal with their addictions, be honest and humble, and give four years of their life to the program. Overall, all members interviewed had indeed met these conditions prior to becoming a member. One member interviewed was in the preliminary stages of joining and was still in the process of writing their autobiography. That member was not presently dealing with their addictions, but it was expected that they would proceed to this step after completing their autobiography and becoming a full member. This was important to note, as the conditions stated in presentations came across as either something that has been done or has not been done, not as a long process. This member's integration into STR8UP highlights the importance of trust on the part of the program staff in helping the members.

The five conditions of being a member are not static and in their application, they do allow for relapse, which is more the rule than the exception. As was seen from the interviews with the members, one of the most valuable features of the program is the unconditional support from the staff and volunteers. However, some might say this is problematic because members might not necessarily adhere to the five conditions at all times. This negative perception of the program, specifically not understanding that change is a process, can have the effect of undermining the name that the program has worked so hard to build, which could eventually lead to an inability to garner financial and social support in the community.

**It is therefore recommended that a database be created for members containing all relevant personal information, such as demographics, location, active vs. inactive, addictions needs, programs they participate in, stage of recovery, etc. This is meant to facilitate a case management perspective for the STR8UP staff members.**

### 5.1.3 The Six Objectives of STR8UP

The six objectives of STR8UP are to support new and active members while incarcerated or in the community; increase the number, quality and ongoing supports for STR8UP presentations; offer weekly sharing circles in the community; continuation and support of the STR8UP youth mentorship program; and to create a STR8UP community advisory committee to provide ongoing advice, support and validation to STR8UP. It is important to note that the evaluation was not able to address all of these objectives due to the scope of the evaluation and availability of resources. From the evaluation observations, there is clear support for the members in the community that show engaged participation in the program's objectives and activities. The evaluation was not able to determine the amount of support for incarcerated members as access to those members was not obtained.

Weekly sharing circles are currently being offered in the community, although issues related to available locations may hinder the facilitation of the sharing circles. For the incarcerated members, one sharing circle per month is run by a staff member or volunteer at the SCC. There have been no problems as of yet to find available space for these sharing circles. Furthermore,

the four-month timeframe for the evaluation was not enough time to fully evaluate the objective of increasing the number, quality and ongoing support for STR8UP presentations.

**It is therefore recommended that proper documentation showing how the objectives are being met be kept from this point on in an effort to allow for these assessments to be possible. It is also recommended that proper documentation of the program's activities be kept to allow for a more thorough assessment of the program over the years, and how STR8UP is meeting its objectives.**

#### **5.1.4 The Three Goals of STR8UP**

The three goals of STR8UP are for their members to become loving parents, loyal partners, and become responsible citizens. STR8UP's view of a being responsible citizen has many facets, such as seeking or maintaining employment, attending school, as well as no longer committing crimes. Members who meet these goals are considered healthy but the staff and other members. All of the STR8UP members are parents, and those that were interviewed stated that STR8UP was helping them in all three aspects and as such, it is apparent that the three goals are being met by the program.

**In order to assess whether the three goals of STR8UP are indeed being continually fulfilled by its members, it is recommended that this type of information should be kept in the member database described above so that staff members can know the progress of each member and where they are in terms of achieving these goals, as well as the health of members, as defined by the program.**

#### **5.1.5 Activity Implementation**

Many of the activities of STR8UP are as a result of collaborations with the University of Saskatchewan as well as with other external agencies. These activities should fit in with the target population and the goals of STR8UP before they are taken on. Additionally, consideration should be taken in regards to staff member or volunteer availability to run the activities and ensuring that the activities contain specific aspects and intended outcomes that will assist the members achieve their goals and become healthier.

Implementation of activities appears to be based on not only funding, but the organization skills of a few specific staff members. Presentations are conducted on the basis of requests from agencies or schools and are dependent on the availability of members to speak at them. Activities such as sharing circles, the mentorship program, and the cultural camps should be organized on an annual basis to provide as much time as possible for planning and allocating resources, specifically the involvement of members and staff members. In the interviews with the members, it was clear that not all members were aware of all activities available in a month or over a larger period, and that not all members were aware of the reasons why some activities were no longer available.

The availability of certain activities is largely dependent upon certain staff or members, and thus if the regular facilitators for an activity are unable to attend the activity will most likely just be

cancelled. This is a very inefficient allocation of STR8UP resources. If the program is to offer activities to assist its members, then they should occur as regularly as possible; lack of communication about the activity and lack of facilitator availability are unacceptable reasons for the activities not to occur.

**It is therefore recommended that the monthly schedule for all activities be communicated to all staff and members well in advance to ensure maximum attendance and participation.**

#### **5.1.6 Collaboration with the John Howard Society**

The role and extent of involvement of the John Howard Society of Saskatoon (JHS) is not known as there is currently no formal documentation of the relationship between STR8UP and JHS. It is not clear how much JHS collaborates with STR8UP or is aware of STR8UP activities. The only evidence to the involvement of JHS with STR8UP was seen in interviews where it was noted that JHS was viewed as a governing body that was not invested in STR8UP and instead treated it as a project that needs to be watched to ensure it does not overspend.

**It is therefore recommended that the relationship between STR8UP and JHS be clearly outlined and documented in terms of roles and responsibilities of each party.**

In addition, information on the roles and responsibilities of the relationship should be available to all members and staff.

**Furthermore, it is recommended that a specific mandate or vision statement for STR8UP be created, as well as a short-term and long-term strategy for the program.**

**It is also recommended that there should be a format for documenting or recording information discussed at meetings between the individual staff and volunteers, as well as for meetings with STR8UP and JHS individuals.**

#### **5.1.7 Key Stakeholder Satisfaction**

Through interviews and interactions with the members, it is clear that they are satisfied with the program as is. Certain issues noted by members and staff was the lack of funding and the perceived lenient screening for potential and current members, as there were indications in the interviews that some members are not truly invested in the program and use it to their advantage.

**It is therefore recommended that a more thorough screening process for members be created. For all individuals who become STR8UP members, they should be assessed more frequently along a pre-determined time interval (e.g. every year) to determine their involvement in the program, how many goals they have achieved, etc. This relates back to the case management perspective and would also be referenced in the member database.**

The school staff and students interviewed also demonstrated support for STR8UP, although there were only a small number of individuals interviewed. Staff members on a whole were also satisfied with the program, stating only the lack of understanding of the role of JHS with

STR8UP as being an issue. Through interviews with police officers, they appeared to be mixed in their satisfaction with STR8UP, stating they were pleased and supportive of the program but not sure if it would necessarily make a difference in terms of their own work with gangs and gang activity.

**Following the suggestions from the police officers interviewed, it is recommended that STR8UP should create an oversight committee or advisory board with input from JHS, STR8UP, addictions centres, youth programs, and the police. This is meant to involve all community stakeholders in the program's progression and implementation to provide insight and collaboration.**

### **5.1.8 Barriers to Implementation**

Current barriers to implementation are a lack of consistent funding and a lack of organization between staff and members. Funding is constantly being sought and the recommendations of this report, once implemented should assist with the procurement of funds. In terms of the lack of organization and communication, these need to be addressed in order to streamline the efficiency of the program and its activities as well as to increase the efficacy of the program.

**It is therefore recommended that the staff and members make a stronger effort at improving communication between the staff and volunteers, between the individual members, and between the staff and members.**

### **5.1.9 Analysis of Governance Structure**

The governance structure of the organization was determined through observation; however, no documentation exists to explain this other than anecdotal evidence. Currently, STR8UP rests almost fully on the shoulders of two volunteers to the program. Should a volunteer go on vacation, the program will run much less smoothly, as was experienced during the current evaluation. This is an unacceptable and inefficient model for a program such as STR8UP, as it is not supposed to rest solely on a few individuals within the program. A program dealing with a vulnerable population that is in need of constant support needs to have several persons who can assist with the smooth running of all activities.

**It is therefore recommended that the STR8UP governance structure needs to be defined, documented, and communicated to all staff and members.**

## **5.2 Outcome Issues**

The goals of STR8UP are for members to become healthy which is defined as becoming a responsible citizen, a loving parent, and a good partner. Based on interviews with members, they members generally agree that they are on the path to becoming healthy. However, the concept of "healthy" is more dynamic and changeable than static, in most cases due to the addiction problems all the members have in common. In this case, relapse is more the rule than the exception, but what is stressed to members is that the most important thing is to continue working on becoming healthy despite their setbacks. Individual members' opinions on how



healthy they are will likely depend on their personal goals, differing from a more quantitative outsider perspective of having met or not met a certain number of objectives. Overall, the preliminary outcomes of STR8UP members suggest that the program is effective.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

As it stands, there is reasonable evidence suggesting that STR8UP is effective. However, it is important that the program be properly documented so that a more in-depth evaluation can be completed with a larger focus on outcomes. In addition, it would be beneficial to evaluate the program again in the next few years after the recommendations have been enacted and when there is sufficient documentation of specific details such as: 1) The governance structure, as well as mission statement of STR8UP; 2) The number of activities per year, including the type, target population, facilitators, and how many members in attendance; 3) A member database containing all important information related to goals set, goals met, and individual treatment needs; 4) A clear definition of active vs. inactive members, and which members have left STR8UP completely; and 5) Specific duties on a weekly basis for all staff members.

Clear evidence as to the efficacy of the program will be very useful and necessary for the continued funding of the program, such as information on members' desistance from crime and meeting the STR8UP goals. Stronger, objective evidence is needed to support the work that STR8UP does with its members and the community, and documentation is the best way to facilitate this evidence accumulation.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Information, Organization, and Planning**

1. It is recommended that the development, evolution, and maturation of the program not only be retroactively documented, but all future plans and strategies for STR8UP be documented in detail.
2. It is recommended that the activities geared towards either prevention or intervention be clearly identified and the process by which those activities lead to the intended outcomes be clearly outlined. To assist in this endeavor, a program logic model for prevention and one for intervention should be developed in an effort to assist with the clarification of activities and outcomes that are specific to the two sections of the program. This will also allow for planning of future activities, as the usefulness and fit within the models can be evaluated before they are implemented.
3. It is recommended that the specific qualifications and responsibilities of the volunteers and staff members be outlined, as well as the details of the relationship between JHS and STR8UP.
4. It is recommended that a database be created for members containing all relevant personal information, such as demographics, location, active vs. inactive, addictions needs, programs they participate in, stage of recovery, etc. This is meant to facilitate a case management perspective for the STR8UP staff members. It is important to note that due to the vulnerability of the members, the information in this database would be general, such as indicating if they are accessing addictions treatment by a “yes or no” format, or indicating how many years they have been in the program. This information collecting is not aimed at making the members feel as if their personal lives are being documented, and it is not aimed at damaging the relationships that the members have with the staff and volunteers that support the program.
5. It is recommended that proper documentation showing how the objectives are being met be kept from this point on in an effort to allow for these assessments to be possible. It is also recommended that proper documentation of the program’s activities be kept to allow for a more thorough assessment of the program over the years, and how STR8UP is meeting its objectives.
6. In order to assess whether the three goals of STR8UP are indeed being continually fulfilled by its members, it is recommended that this type of information be kept in the member database described above so that staff members can know the progress of each member and where they are in terms of achieving these goals, as well as the health of members, as defined by the program.

### **6.2 Activity Implementation**

7. It is recommended that the monthly schedule for all activities be communicated to all staff and members well in advance to ensure maximum attendance and participation. It is important to note that the distribution of the information should be done in a fashion that is most convenient for the members themselves, whether in person or online.

### **6.3 Collaboration with the John Howard Society**

8. It is recommended that the relationship between STR8UP and JHS be clearly outlined and documented in terms of roles and responsibilities of each party. In addition, information on the roles and responsibilities of the relationship should be available to all members and staff.
9. It is recommended that a specific mandate or vision statement for STR8UP be created, as well as a short-term and long-term strategy for the program.
10. It is recommended that a format for documenting or recording information discussed at meetings between the individual staff and volunteers, as well as for meetings with STR8UP and JHS individuals be implemented.

### **6.4 Key Stakeholder Satisfaction**

11. It is recommended that a more thorough screening process for members be created. For all individuals who become STR8UP members, they should be assessed more frequently along a pre-determined time interval (e.g. every year) to determine their involvement in the program, how many goals they have achieved, etc. This relates back to the case management perspective and would also be referenced in the member database. Due to trust and vulnerability issues which is inherent with a group of ex-gang members, it is important that this screening process be carried out as an evaluation of the member in terms of their healing; are they accessing treatment, have they participated in activities, and other factors which are associated with health.
12. It is recommended that STR8UP create an oversight committee or advisory board with input from JHS, STR8UP, addictions centres, youth programs, and the police. This is meant to involve all community stakeholders in the program's progression and implementation to provide insight and collaboration.

### **6.5 Barriers to Implementation**

13. It is recommended that the staff and members make a stronger effort at improving communication between the staff and volunteers, between the individual members, and between the staff and members.

### **6.6 Analysis of Governance Structure**

14. It is recommended that the STR8UP governance structure needs to be defined, documented, and communicated to all staff and members.

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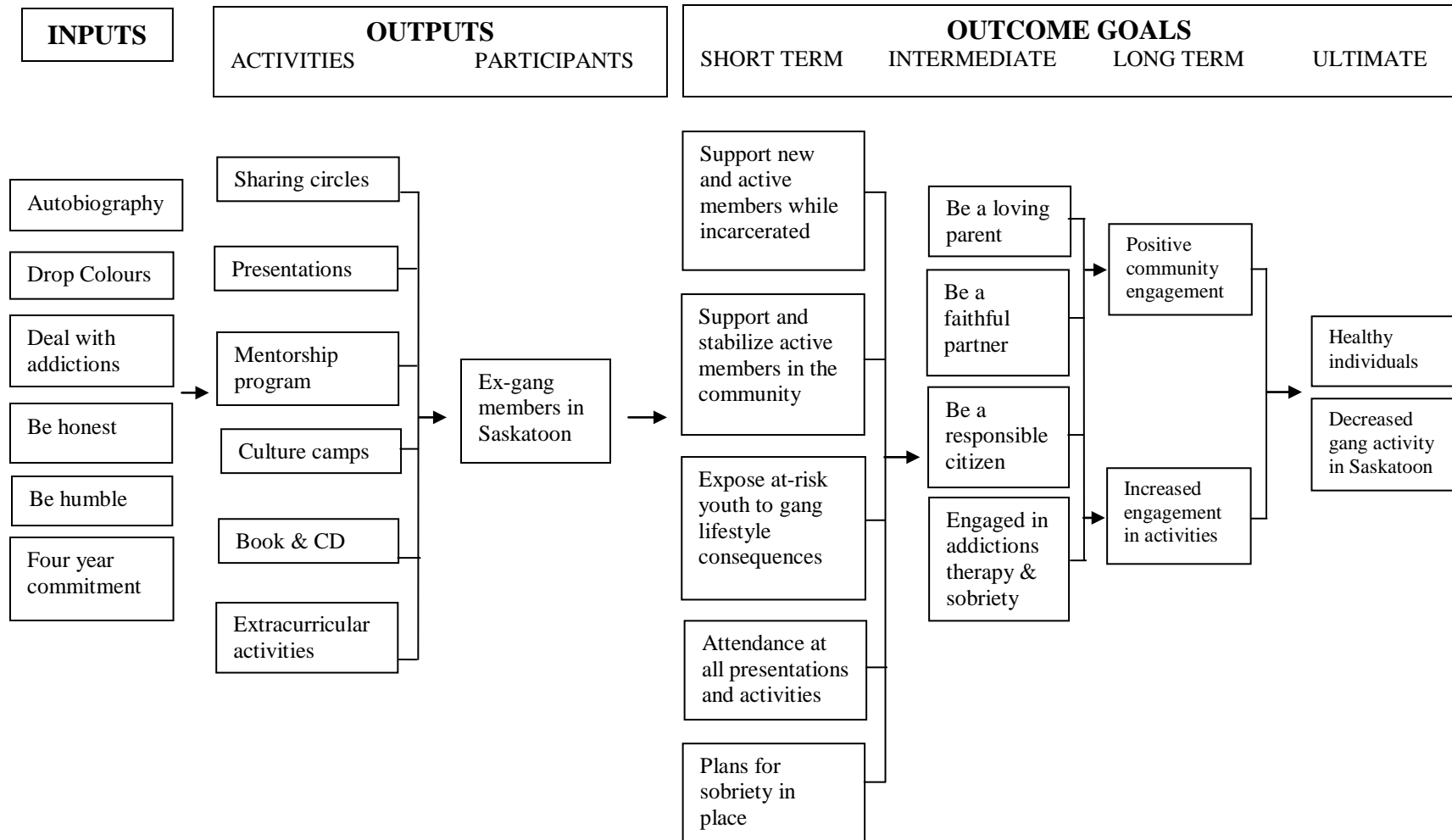
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## **Appendix A: Acronyms Used Throughout the Report**

**AA:** Alcoholics Anonymous  
**BTC:** Breaking the Cycle  
**CNYC:** Core Neighbourhood Youth Co-op  
**ENA:** Edmonton Native Alliance  
**EPS:** Edmonton Police Service  
**FSIN:** Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations  
**GAIN:** Gang Awareness Intervention Network  
**GAP:** Gang Alternative Program  
**GITTO:** Gang Intervention through Targeted Outreach  
**GPTTO:** Gang Prevention through Targeted Outreach  
**GREAT:** Gang Resistance Education and Training  
**GRIP:** Gang Resistance is Paramount  
**JHS:** John Howard Society  
**JIPP:** Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program  
**K2C:** Keys to Change  
**KAP:** Kinsmen Activity Place  
**MACSI:** Metis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan, Inc.  
**NA:** Narcotics Anonymous  
**RAGS:** Regina Anti-Gang Services  
**SCC:** Saskatoon Correctional Centre  
**SIAST:** Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology  
**SIIT:** Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies  
**SPS:** Saskatoon Police Service  
**STC:** Saskatoon Tribal Council  
**TIPPCCEE:** Teamwork, Intuition, Participation, Perseverance, Co-operation, Communication, Empathy, and Enthusiasm

**Appendix B: Program Logic Model**

**GANG PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION IN SASKATOON: THE STR8UP PROGRAM**





## **Appendix C: Participant Consent Form**

### **Project Title:**

A Process Evaluation of the Saskatoon STR8UP Program

### **Researchers:**

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### **Purpose and Objectives of the Research:**

The purpose of this research is to see if the STR8UP program is doing what it was designed to do. This will involve gathering information and interviewing current and past STR8UP members, as well as people from different organizations in the community, such as schools, social services, probation and police. This research will benefit the program by giving feedback to STR8UP leaders and to other organizations that are interested to learn about how successful STR8UP might be. The study may assist leaders from STR8UP to seek funding in order to continue or expand the program.

### **Procedures:**

Because of your knowledge about STR8UP, we would like to ask you some questions about it. The interview may include questions regarding your length of time in the STR8UP program, what resources you have used from the program, what you find most useful, and how the program has helped to change your life. While one researcher is asking the interview questions, the other researcher will be recording your answers word for word on a computer. During the interview, please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

### **Funding:**

This research study is being funded by The Centre for Forensic Behavioural Sciences and Justice Studies at the University of Saskatchewan.

**Potential Risks:**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw at any time. Although sensitive information will be discussed, all information received will be kept completely confidential.

**Potential Benefits:**

As a result of your participation, you will contribute to the understanding of how the STR8UP program is run, what kind of activities are available, and how the program is working to change the lives of its members. An additional benefit of your participation is that it will give you the opportunity to explain the good things about STR8UP for its members, which may help to find financial support for STR8UP to continue or expand its services.

**Confidentiality:**

No personal identifying information will be linked to you or any other research participant. All research information gained from this research project, including your taped interview, will be held confidential by all Research Supervisors and Student Researchers. Data will be stored securely in the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Sciences and Justice Studies. Only overall results, rather than individual data, will be reported in the future uses of agency reports, journal articles or conference presentations.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. Should you wish to withdraw, we will terminate the interview and discard all previously obtained information. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until results have been disseminated by way of a written report. After this date, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Follow up:**

To obtain results from the study, please contact Dr. Steve Wormith at [s.wormith@usask.ca](mailto:s.wormith@usask.ca).

**Questions or Concerns:**

This project has been submitted for ethical approval from the University and it was exempt from the ethics review process. Regardless, all information will be collected and treated in an ethical and confidential manner. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca). You may also contact the Research Supervisor at [s.wormith@usask.ca](mailto:s.wormith@usask.ca), or the researchers at [laura.orton@usask.ca](mailto:laura.orton@usask.ca) or [giselle.patrick@usask.ca](mailto:giselle.patrick@usask.ca).

**Consent:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project and have my interview tape recorded. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

---

Name of Participant

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Researcher

---

Signature

---

Date

*A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.*

## Appendix D: Interview Questions for STR8UP Members

### Section A

1. Date of interview:
2. Participant Number:
3. Location:
4. DOB:
5. Ethnicity:
6. Gender:
7. Highest level of education achieved:
8. What gang were you a member of?
9. How old were you (include year) when you joined a gang?
10. What were your reasons for joining a gang?
11. Were you involved in criminal behaviour before joining your gang?
12. What role did you play in the gang you left?
13. Did you have a problem with alcohol or drugs before joining a gang?
14. Did you have a problem with alcohol or drugs when you were in your gang?
15. Do you have a problem with alcohol or drugs now?
16. Were you involved in criminal behaviour as a youth?
17. What were your reasons for leaving your gang?
  - a. Were there any repercussions for leaving the gang?
  - b. Do you currently encounter problems from any gang members? (Probe: do they ask to re-join your ex-gang or join a different gang?)
  - c. How difficult is it on a day to day basis to stay out of a gang?
18. What were your reasons for joining STR8UP?
19. When you first approached Stan or Father Andre about joining the program, how were you informed about the program, and what information were you told about it?
20. How many years have you been in the program? (1, 2, 3, 4, or graduate)
  - a. If you have graduated, what year did you graduate?
21. Did you serve a prison sentence for a crime related to gang involvement?
22. If you were in prison, did you participate in STR8UP activities?
  - a. What were they called?
  - b. What were they supposed to achieve?
  - c. How often did you go?
  - d. What did you think about them?
  - e. Did they help you?
  - f. Did you ever give any presentations while in prison?
23. Have you been re-arrested since joining STR8UP?
  - a. If yes, would you mind explaining the circumstances surrounding the event? I.e. your point of view about how it happened, why, what did you do next, etc.
24. What STR8UP program activities do you currently participate in while in the community?
  - a. What are they called?
  - b. What are they supposed to achieve?
  - c. How often do you go?
  - d. What do you think about them?

- e. Have they helped you?
- 25. Have you ever made school presentations to youths?
- 26. Have you ever given presentations to any other groups? (Reserves, corrections, etc.)
- 27. What do you like the most about STR8UP?
- 28. What do you feel has been most helpful from STR8UP in trying to lead a different life?
- 29. What do you like the least about STR8UP?
- 30. What do you see for the future of STR8UP? (for example, different types of activities, different target groups for prevention)
- 31. Do you have a spouse or significant other?
- 32. Do you have any children?
  - a. If yes to either, have they been supportive of you leaving the gang?
  - b. Were either of them a motivation to you for leaving the gang?

### Section B

Please indicate, using the below scale, how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 6 = Not applicable

- 33. STR8UP staff members are helpful to me:
- 34. STR8UP staff members are supportive of me:
- 35. STR8UP staff members are encouraging of me:
- 36. STR8UP has helped me with my drug or alcohol addictions:
- 37. STR8UP has helped me to find a job:
- 38. STR8UP has helped me to access skills training:
- 39. STR8UP has helped me to access school upgrades or courses:
- 40. STR8UP has helped me to find good housing:
- 41. STR8UP has helped me to be a good parent:
- 42. STR8UP has helped me to be a good partner:

## Appendix E: Interview Questions for STR8UP Staff

### Section A

1. Date of Interview:
2. Participant Number:
3. DOB:
4. Gender:
5. Ethnicity:
6. How long have you worked with STR8UP?
7. What is the overall goal of STR8UP?
8. What is the target population of STR8UP?
9. List the different activities that STR8UP administers as well as their accompanying target populations and goal:

Activity	Target Population	Goal

10. Are there any obstacles that exist to stop the implementation of specific activities or prevent members from accessing/using activities?
11. When you are first approached by a potential member, how are they informed about the program?
12. What do you like the most about STR8UP?
13. What do you like the least about STR8UP?
14. What changes would you make to the program?
15. Have you seen changes in the members of the program?
  - a. If yes, what kinds of changes have you seen? (Positive or negative)
16. What do you envision for the future of STR8UP? (for example, different types of activities, different target groups for prevention)
17. Do you think the program is contributing positively to society?
18. Are different versions of the same activities administered to different groups of clients?
  - a. If so, why?

## Section B

Please indicate, using the below scale, how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 6 = Not applicable

- 19. All staff members receive training for all of the activities:
- 20. I received training for all of the activities:
- 21. I received training for making presentations:
- 22. I received training to be a mentor:
- 23. I received training to be a leader at cultural camp:
- 24. I received training to lead healing and sharing circles:
- 25. Activities are carried out in locations which allow for maximum attendance:
- 26. Activities and information are well communicated within staff:
- 27. Activities and information are well communicated from staff to members:
- 28. Activities and information are well communicated within members:

## **Appendix F: Interview Questions for Father Andre**

### Section A

1. Date of interview:
2. Participant Number:
3. DOB:
4. Gender:
5. Ethnicity:
6. What is STR8UP?
7. What is the overall goal of STR8UP?
8. What is the target population of STR8UP?
9. How did you first get involved with creating and facilitating STR8UP?
10. What do you like the most about STR8UP?
11. What do you like the least about STR8UP?
12. What changes would you make to the program?
13. What do you envision for the future of STR8UP? (for example, different types of activities, different target groups for prevention)
14. What part of STR8UP do you think the members benefit most from?

### Section B

Please indicate, using the below scale, how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 6 = Not applicable

15. STR8UP is contributing positively to society:
16. There have been positive changes in STR8UP members:
17. There have been no changes in STR8UP members:
18. There have been negative changes to STR8UP members:
19. STR8UP members have better family relations since being a member:
20. STR8UP members have better social relations since being a member:
21. I would recommend STR8UP to anyone who wants to leave a gang:
22. STR8UP members have a more positive attitude towards police/corrections:
23. STR8UP should be supported in anyway needed:



## Appendix G: Interview Questions for School Staff

### Section A

1. Date of interview:
2. Institution:
3. Participant Number:
4. DOB:
5. Ethnicity:
6. Gender:
7. What is STR8UP and what is its overall goal?
8. What is the target population of STR8UP?
9. What kind of information did you receive prior to interacting with STR8UP members?
10. What kind of interactions have you had with STR8UP members?
11. What kind of interactions have you had with STR8UP staff?
12. What do you like the most about STR8UP?
13. What do you like the least about STR8UP?
14. What changes would you make to STR8UP?
15. What do you envision for the future of STR8UP? (For example, different types of activities, different target groups for prevention)

### Section B

Please indicate, using the below scale, how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 6 = Not applicable

16. STR8UP is contributing positively to society:
17. There have been positive changes in students who attend STR8UP presentations:
18. There have been no changes in students who attend STR8UP presentations:
19. There have been negative consequences to having STR8UP members present:
20. STR8UP members are good role models for youth losing their way:
21. STR8UP members have good social relations:
22. I would recommend STR8UP presentations to any youth who wants to leave a gang:
23. Students who have attended STR8UP presentations have a more positive attitude towards authority:
24. STR8UP should be supported in anyway needed:

## Appendix H: Interview Questions for Students

### Section A

1. Date of interview:
2. Participant Number:
3. Location:
4. DOB:
5. Ethnicity:
6. Gender:
7. Highest level of education achieved:
8. Do you attend addiction circles with STR8UP?
  - a. How many?
  - b. How often?
  - c. When did you start?
9. Have they helped?
10. What addictions are you struggling with?
11. Have you used other means to deal with your addictions?
12. Have you ever attended any STR8UP presentations?
  - a. How many?
  - b. What do you get from them?
13. What kind of interactions have you had with STR8UP members?
14. What kind of interactions have you had with STR8UP staff?

### Section B

Please indicate, using the below scale, how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 6 = Not applicable

15. STR8UP is contributing positively to society:
16. I have had positive changes after attending STR8UP presentations:
17. I have had no change after attending STR8UP presentations:
18. I have had negative changes after attending STR8UP presentations:
19. STR8UP members are good role models for youth losing their way:
20. STR8UP members have good social relations:
21. I would recommend STR8UP presentations to any youth who want to leave a gang or struggle with addictions:
22. I have a more positive attitude towards authority after attending STR8UP presentations:
23. I think the members of STR8UP are just people who can't make it in a gang anymore:
24. STR8UP should be supported in anyway needed:

## Appendix I: Interview Questions for Police

### Section A

1. Date of interview:
2. Participant Number:
3. Date Of Birth:
4. Gender:
5. Ethnicity:
6. How did you first hear about or come in contact with STR8UP?
7. What is STR8UP and its overall goal?
8. What is the target population of STR8UP?
9. What kind of information did you receive prior to interacting with STR8UP members?
10. What kind of interactions have you had with STR8UP members?
11. What kind of interactions have you had with STR8UP staff?
12. What do you like the most about STR8UP?
13. What do you like the least about STR8UP?
14. What changes would you make to the program?
15. What do you envision for the future of STR8UP? (For example: different types of activities, different target groups for prevention)

### Section B

Please indicate, using the below scale, how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

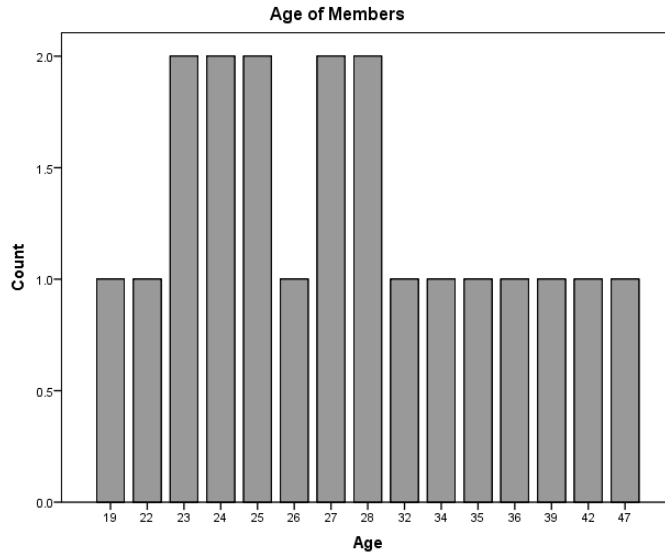
- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Somewhat Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 6 = Not applicable

24. STR8UP is contributing positively to society:
25. There have been positive changes in STR8UP members since being in the program:
26. There have been negative changes to STR8UP members since being in the program:
27. There have been no changes in STR8UP members since being in the program:
28. STR8UP members are good role models for youth losing their way:
29. While on duty, if I were involved in a situation with a STR8UP member, I would be more accommodating:
30. I would recommend STR8UP to anyone who needs support leaving a lifestyle of crime or addiction:
31. I would recommend STR8UP to anyone who wants to leave a gang:
32. STR8UP is just another program that claims to intervene or prevent gang-related criminal activity:
33. STR8UP members have a more positive attitude towards police and corrections:

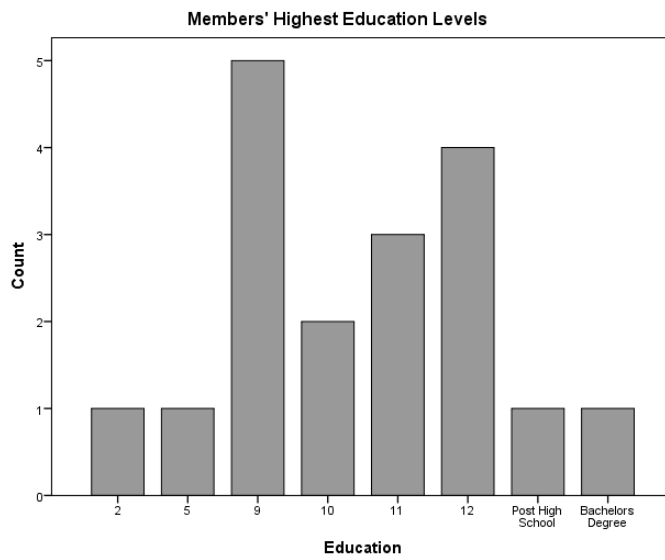
34. People join STR8UP just to make themselves look more favourable to police and the justice system:
35. STR8UP should be supported in anyway needed:
36. STR8UP is helping to (or will help) reduce the amount of gang-related criminal activity in Saskatoon:

### Appendix J: STR8UP Member Frequency Graphs

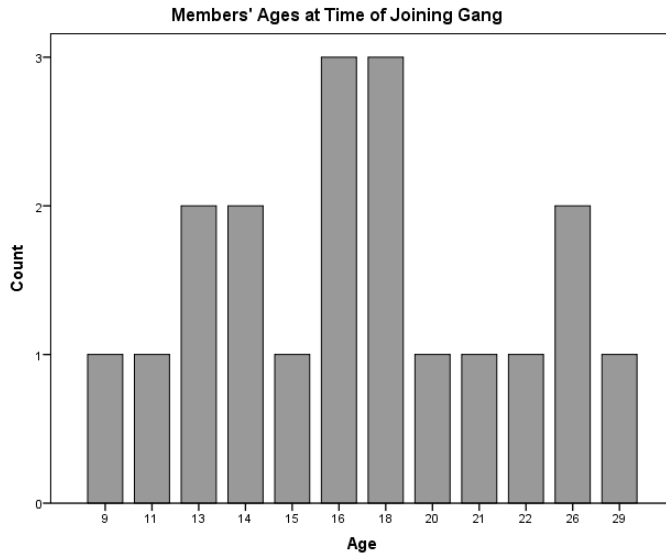
Frequencies of STR8UP members' ages at time of evaluation.



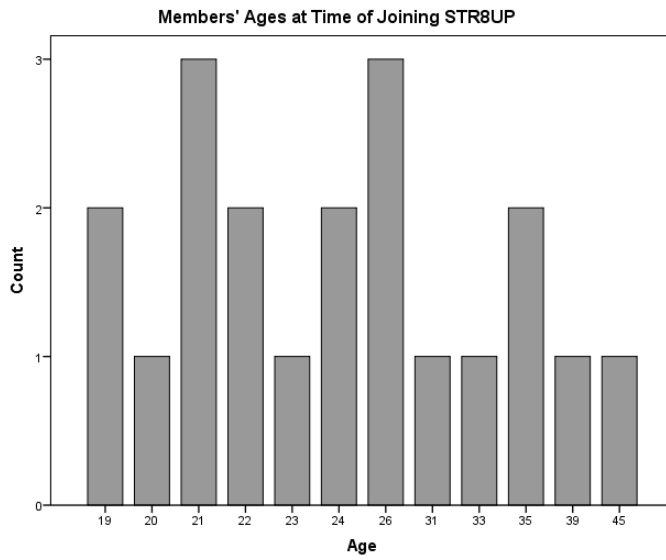
Frequencies of STR8UP members' education levels at time of evaluation.



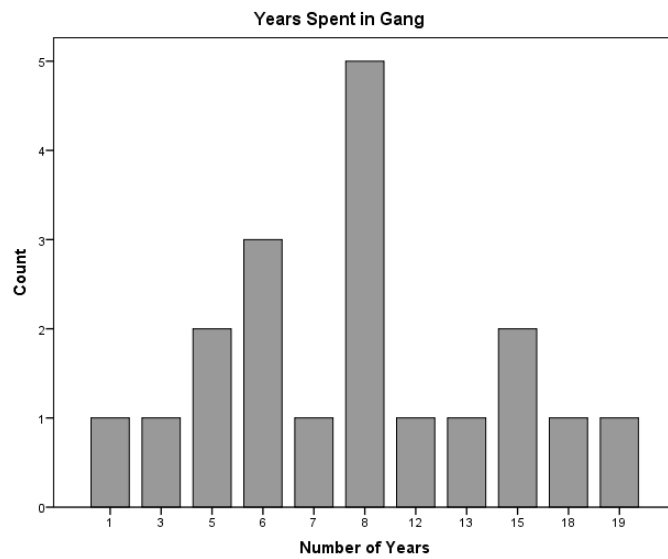
Frequencies of STR8UP members' ages at the time of first joining a gang.



Frequencies of STR8UP members' ages at the time of first joining STR8UP.



Frequencies of the number of years STR8UP members spent in gangs.



Frequencies of the number of years STR8UP members have been in STR8UP.

