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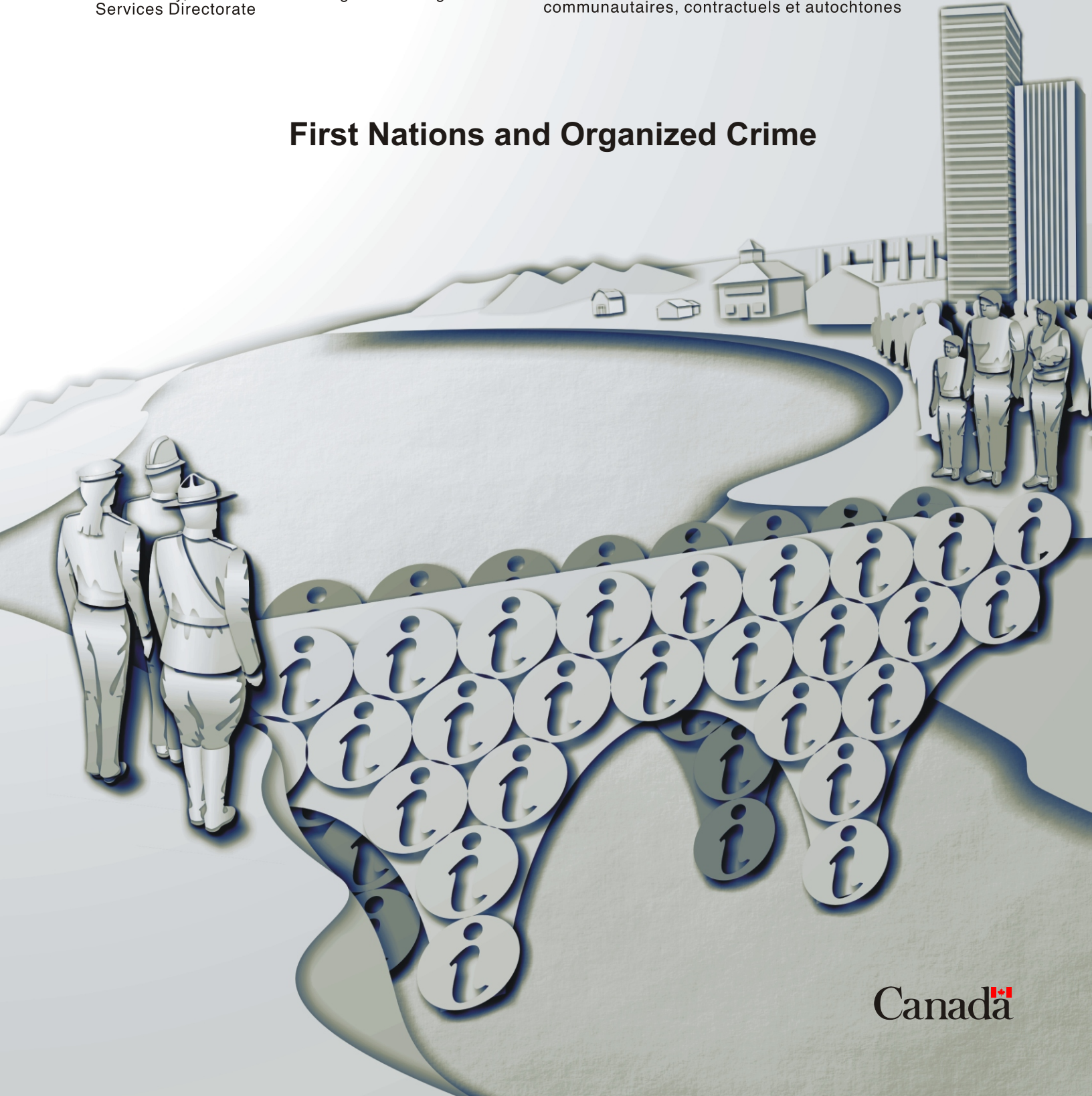
**Research and Evaluation** Branch

Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing  
Services Directorate

Sous-direction  
**Recherche et Évaluation**

Direction des services de police  
communautaires, contractuels et autochtones

# First Nations and Organized Crime



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by

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Ottawa

2005

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Catalogue No.: PS64-25/2006F-PDF  
ISBN 0-662-70784-2

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## **Executive Summary**

Aboriginal gangs are prevalent in Manitoba, both in urban areas as well as in First Nation communities. While they are involved in numerous illegal activities, they are not as organized as Outlaw Motorcycle gangs; rather, these gangs tend to be engaged in numerous social, as opposed to criminal, activities. However, they do engage in criminal activities, and their actions are a reason for concern for both law enforcement authorities and residents of communities.

While understanding adult gangs is important for gaining a comprehensive picture of Aboriginal gangs in Manitoba, much of this project ended up focusing upon youths. This is largely due to the fact that community residents themselves indicated that this was a central problem with the longevity and continuation of gangs in their communities – they wanted to have prevention and intervention programs for youths prior to them becoming asked to join a gang, or where they are marginal members of gangs, how to best intervene in their lives to end their association with gangs. This is because (1) there is a significant influence of gangs upon the level of serious crime and especially violent crime in communities. Second, this influence of gang membership on crime, in particular violent crime, has a long lasting impact. Third, gang membership has a significant negative impact upon the developmental growth of youths, thereby negatively influencing the community. And finally, there is a high degree of overlap between gang membership and serious, violent and chronic offending.

Future work in this area should study the nature of all aspects of these Aboriginal gangs, particularly as they operate in First Nations communities and how they are connected to gangs in urban areas. A social network analysis of their operations could lead to a greater understanding of their operations and the key players involved, which could lead to more successful crime reduction programs.

## Introduction

During the past 20 to 25 years, gang activity among Aboriginals in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba has changed in terms of incidents, geography, age of membership, degree of criminal involvement and level of violence. In response, criminal justice agencies have increased their efforts in an attempt to better combat gang activities. Some of their efforts have focused upon crime reduction and intelligence gathering activities. Yet Aboriginal gang activity and its associated problems continue to grow, regardless of the efforts made to suppress them by the criminal justice system.

One way to deal with gangs is to categorize them in a way that enables individuals and groups to better understand and deal with the sources of the gang(s) in their area and to design appropriate and more effective responses. One such categorization is between 'organized' and 'disorganized' gangs.

Gangs have been viewed as both disorganized and organized since the first studies into their operation were first published over 70 years ago. When discussing gangs, it is important to note that there are varieties of gang types and that one of the major ways to distinguish gangs is to identify their structure. While researching this paper, the most common references made by those interviewed about their knowledge of gangs commonly described two different types of structures of gangs involved in criminal activity. First were organized gangs (i.e., possessing a structured hierarchy and role specialization. They are largely involved with the distribution and selling of drugs, such as outlaw motorcycle gangs, or OMG). The second type were disorganized gangs, identified as loosely structured gangs that do not possess the same type of hierarchical structure or role specialization.

One common distinguishing characteristic involves the degree of organization found within an organized criminal gang. An 'organized' criminal gang has been described as

“primarily ... adults who (a) interact frequently with one another; (b) are frequently and deliberately involved in illegal activities directed toward

economic gain, primarily through the provision of illegal goods and services; and (c) generally have a better defined leadership and organization structure (Huff, 1993:4).

In contrast to the view that gangs are organized is the perception that disorganized gangs are neither particularly cohesive groups nor highly organized. This perspective characterizes gangs as possessing weak friendship ties and lack of organizational characteristics commonly attributed to them by law enforcement agencies or, for example, the media. In some cases, these gangs are fluid entities, with open membership, no membership requirements, no leader or distinct hierarchy that might pull all of the members into a coherent, tightly run organization. Other reasons why the 'disorganized' label has some validity are that it has been found that most individuals, especially youths, do not stay members in a gang for very long, particularly in those locations where gangs are a relatively recent phenomenon. The loosely knit or disorganized characterization of gangs refers to process, that is, they 'possess' little permanence, have diffuse role definitions, limited cohesion, shifting membership, limited expectations from the members, minimal group goals, and group norms not unlike those held by the surrounding residents in the community.

This is not to say that disorganized gangs cannot or do not possess characteristics similar to the 'organized' gangs, but they typically possess a different structure. For example, some of these groups are constantly forming, then disbanding (possibly due to internal disputes) only to reform into different organizations in the future, and start the same cycle all over again. They are also heavily involved with for-profit activities, a characteristic they share with organized gangs.

It is entirely possible that both descriptions are valid when attempting to understand Aboriginal gangs. They are viewed as both loosely knit and somewhat organized. Members of police services, especially those in large urban centers, who were interviewed for this paper described Aboriginal gangs as being "more disorganized than organized." In this context, they were comparing Aboriginal gangs to the highly

organized criminal gangs located in the same urban center, such as the outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMG).

In comparison, First Nations residents, when asked about Aboriginal organized gangs in their communities, described them as being organized, with recruitment processes and possessing some form of hierarchal structure. These residents didn't agree with the view that the operation of Aboriginal criminal gangs in their communities was disorganized, instead taking the view that these were groups with strong ties and connections throughout the community as well as the potential to engage in illegal activities and potentially commit violent crimes against other individuals (whether these victims were members of another gang or not) at a moment's notice in the name of their gang.

Gangs can be differentiated on the basis of other criteria, which may be distinct or may overlap. Examples of differentiating criteria among gangs and their members can include age (youths, adults), gender composition (male, female, or 'mixed'), geographical setting (street, prison, urban or rural), type of activity (criminal or 'for-profit', social, violent), purpose of gang activity (drugs, protecting a certain territory), degree of criminality (major or minor types of criminal activity), level of organization (organized, disorganized, vertical, horizontal) and group function (drugs, weapons, protection) (Spergel: 1990:60).

From the information received during this research project, the organized criminal gangs operating in Manitoba are characterized by a separate territory (although there may be competition among them for distributing drugs, as has been the case in between OMG in both Alberta and Manitoba), age graded, sex (usually all male), and race (Caucasian, Asian or Aboriginal). These groups are seen as 'vertical' in the sense that they usually have associate groups or have distinct age groupings. Adolescents can 'graduate' into an adult Aboriginal organized gang such as the AG2 and AG3 as they age.

In some cases, researchers have preferred to stay away from the organized/disorganized gang dichotomy. These individuals conclude that it makes more sense to view gangs as



providing more of a social network to their members than a tightly run criminal organization, giving out orders to compliant members (Fleischer, 2002). This is because gang members often join for social reasons and to engage in acts that are defined as ‘thrilling’ and difficult to accomplish by a single person as well as receiving protection from other youths (e.g. bullies) and receiving illicit services (e.g., alcohol or other substances). In terms whether or not individuals identified themselves as a core member of a gang, researchers (e.g., Lynskey et al., 2000) have reported that only 20 percent of the youths they interviewed defined themselves as a ‘core’ member of a gang. And less than one-half (43 percent) of the members considered themselves to be either within the inner core or at a higher level of the gang structure itself.

In one of the most definitive studies conducted into the type of gang organization, Decker et al. (1998) compared two gangs in Chicago, Illinois with two gangs operating in San Diego, California. While law enforcement agencies had clearly described all four of these gangs as organized, the researchers reported that none of them possessed an extremely high level of organization.

Making any clear distinction of gangs problematic is the contemporary growth of what is referred to as ‘hybrid’ gangs. Hybrid gangs are, as Starbuck et al. (2001) report, different from other categorizations of gangs. They differ from other types of gangs as most typically the membership consists of a racial or ethnic mix of individuals. In addition, membership in the gang is often open to both sexes. These types of gangs often possess unclear gang codes of conduct, may use mixed symbols to identify themselves, and may participate in joint activities with members of other gangs. Members of ‘hybrid’ gangs may also ‘cut and paste’ various aspects of idealized and well organized gangs into their own local gangs, making it very difficult to classify them.

One key distinction between organized and/or disorganized gangs still has to be made; between those classified as youth gangs and those considered to be to adult organized gangs. Despite the fact that some individuals view youth gangs as separate from adult gang criminal organizations, it is important to have an understanding of the degree of

organization found in both of these types of gangs. Another reason why this distinction is important is because many of the residents of the First Nations communities we talked to made a distinction on the basis of age, although the individuals they were talking about belonged to the same gang.

Adult gangs are usually distinguished from similar types of youth organizations as the former consist of individuals who come together largely for the purpose of committing criminal acts. In contrast, youths involved with criminal organizations are seen as having three distinguishing characteristics (Moore, 1998). The first is *self-definition*, which relates to the fact that not only do group members define themselves as a gang, but also that the group has a social structure and group-determined norms that are not controlled by adults in any way. The second characteristic, *street socialization*, means that unsupervised youths are socialized by each other (and sometimes by older youth) far more effectively than by conventional socializing agents such as schools, families, religious organizations, etc. The third characteristic, *quasi-institutionalization*, refers to the fact that gangs are constantly recruiting.

According to Moore, the existence of youth gangs has important implications for prevention and suppression strategies (see below). One is that conventional socializing agents must be ineffective. Second, youths must have large amounts of free time during which they have relatively little to do. Since their free time is not consumed with activities, they are able to engage with other gang members. Finally, for a gang to become established and continue over the generations, there must be few appealing conventional career paths.

### **A Brief History of Aboriginal Gangs in Manitoba**

This section summarizes the evidence obtained during this research project on the extent of Aboriginal gang activity as well as those individuals involved with these gangs and their participation in criminal activities. Although the data sources used in this report are diverse and reliability varies, substantive information is available, allowing the

development of a reasonable basis for forming conclusions about these issues. It should be noted that those interviewed for this project, whether members of the RCMP or municipal police services, Elders, personnel employed with Manitoba Justice, Aboriginal community leaders and residents, all recognized that Aboriginal gang activity is both serious and potentially destructive of communities. And, with the exception of municipal police officers whose job is within the 'operations' area, all respondents agreed that preventive and intervention programs for Aboriginal organized gang members (especially for youths) are needed to deal with this issue in First Nations communities.

About 20 years ago, the first organized gangs among Aboriginal peoples living in urban centers were formed (such organizations in First Nations communities were nonexistent at the time). All of those interviewed who possessed a working knowledge of gangs in Manitoba made the observation that organized Aboriginal gangs first appeared in the larger urban centers, such as Winnipeg. The first Aboriginal gang to appear was called the AG1, which was formed in about 1985. This gang operated exclusively at the street level. The members of this gang went on to be founding members and/or leaders of future Aboriginal street gangs, such as the AG2 and AG3, both of which appeared approximately a decade later. Throughout their history, street level activities continue to be the mainstay of Aboriginal organized criminal gang activities, regardless of their operating territory (e.g., First Nations communities or small urban centers).

These Aboriginal organized criminal gangs, regardless of size or location, can be described as sharing certain actions with gangs such as OMG. These include 'for profit' activities such as selling drugs, but they also engage in activities specifically related to First Nations communities, such as 'trafficking' in banned substances such as alcohol and hair spray into 'dry' First Nations communities. In addition, they also share with their non-Aboriginal counterparts the potential of engaging in violent criminal activity (see below). Sometimes the organized Aboriginal gangs found in the smaller urban centers and in First Nations communities share names with gangs located in larger urban areas (such as AG2 and AG3), but usually they are referred to as 'hybrid' gangs, that is, they have contacts and connections with the major urban Aboriginal organized criminal gangs

from the larger centers but prefer to operate with different names and with a substantial degree of local autonomy.

Aboriginal organized gangs are age graded, with most members being above the age of majority (i.e., over the age of 18). In one First Nations community, two gangs were identified by the majority of residents. We were informed that the first of these groups to appear did so more than 20 years ago, and that the members have largely grown older together, with the oldest being 40 years of age. Approximately 10 years later, another gang appeared, organized by younger residents of the community. The oldest members of this gang are now 30 years old. Community members stated that the youngest members of each gang are now 18 years old. Both of these gangs are actively involved in the recruitment of new members. One of the interviewees who estimated the lowest age of the members of each gang at 18 proceeded to tell us that his son, who is 10 years old, has recently been asked to join one of these gangs. In another community, we heard a similar story from a resident. Both residents informed us that protection and support were the main reasons why youths joined gangs. According to an RCMP officer, other reasons for youths joining gangs at an early age included the stability and structure of the gangs, a significant factor for many youths given the experiences with family dysfunction. The type of recruitment used was neither coercive nor duty-bound (also referred to as obligatory) but followed more closely the 'fraternity' type of recruitment. In this type of recruitment, youths identified as potential members are invited to a gang party, where they are given illicit substances, money, and information about the benefits of membership. The youth may join then or later, but it was explained that youths typically did not engage in criminal style activities for awhile, and then, at a later date, were told to get involved in illegal activities such as selling drugs, getting involved in violent acts, etc.

Recruitment appears to be community-specific. While First Nations communities may be geographically close to each other, local gangs tend to be organized on a community-by-community basis as opposed to having one or two gangs controlling all of the illegal activities within a specific region. In addition, residents of First Nations communities in close geographical proximity to each other provided different information (such as the

names, history, etc.) about the Aboriginal organized gangs operating within their local communities. There was no agreement among the individuals interviewed that gangs operating in one community had any substantial ties with the gangs found in nearby communities. In support of this, different gang graffiti was clearly evident in the communities visited. Kinship affiliations were also explored to see if gangs operated on the basis of a broader kinship network, since it was thought that broader family kinship affiliations might provide connections between First Nations communities. This idea was not supported by the residents. Instead, they noted that a number of families living in one First Nations community had brothers involved with different gangs, necessitating the parents to coordinate visits home by their sons (both of whom lived outside the community in urban areas) in order to avoid possible conflicts between them.

It is difficult to provide any estimate of the number of members in Aboriginal organized crime groups, either in urban areas or in First Nations communities, given their structure and the lack of a clear organizational structure. But it is known that they are a force to be recognized in any urban center or in any First Nations community. We were told of a violent gang incident (referred to as a 'swarming') where a youth was attacked by the members of one gang, leading directly to the death of the youth. This 'swarming' of youths (whether members of another gang or not) by gang members does occur, at least on one First Nations community.

Whatever the final estimate of the membership of Aboriginal organized gangs, these groups are significant. In one of the First Nations communities visited, with a total population of less than 5,000 persons, the residents easily pointed to the existence of at least two local organized gangs, both of which were involved in similar illegal activities. These activities included the transportation and selling of a variety of illegal substances such as drugs, alcohol, and hair spray, all of which are sold to local residents at huge profits. While many of these products enter into this First Nations community by winter roads, they are also being sent via air transportation and the mail throughout the year.

In the largest urban areas of Manitoba, the presence of Aboriginal gangs varies. They have been and continue to have a significant presence in the Winnipeg area in terms of the distribution and selling of drugs. While the numbers of individuals who belong to these gangs is not large in terms of permanent numbers (the average number of gang members is usually thought to be about 25 members, although even that number can fluctuate depending on the amount of drugs that have to be moved or if gang 'business' has to be conducted), their activities can involve minor to serious violent crimes as they attempt to protect their drug networks.

A different picture emerges in other urban areas in Manitoba. These areas have experienced very different patterns of Aboriginal gang activity during the past few years. The presence of Aboriginal gangs is much weaker compared to Winnipeg. Aboriginal gangs tend to be small and work in 'cells', controlled by individuals who have 'strong personalities' as compared to large networks. Once these individuals are arrested or move back to their First Nation community, the 'cells' tend to disappear or become inactive until another person with leadership qualities appears. A main source of gang members is the local provincial correctional facility, an institution where contacts are made and relationships started. As a result, when individuals are released from the facility, they often reside in the locale for a certain length of time, engaging in gang activities (mostly the selling of drugs) until they move on.

It should briefly be mentioned that, as a result of the relatively successful prosecution of members of the Manitoba Warriors in 1998 during 'Operation Northern Snow,' a number of gang members were sent to federal and provincial correctional facilities. As the presence of gangs within these correctional facilities increased, there was a notable increase in gang recruitment and activities. When some of these individuals were released, they resided in the local area, maintaining their contacts with gang members and working within local networks selling illegal substances.

## **Antigang Actions: Gang Prevention, Intervention and Suppression**

In order to develop and implement programs that can be successful against gangs (whether adult, youth or hybrid), various types of programs have to be introduced most typically at the community level. While they can be implemented as single entities, it is probably most effective to use them in conjunction. There are three types of activities that can be used: prevention, intervention, and suppression.

Prevention: these strategies focus upon preventing individuals from joining gangs in the first place. One of the most used prevention program is G.R.E.A.T. (i.e., Gang Resistance Education and Training), a cognitive-behavioral approach (discussed below).

Intervention: these strategies attempt to divert those individuals involved in gangs through the use of programs that provide alternatives. Examples of prevention programs include employment training and opportunities as well as organized and structured programs, such as recreational activities.

Suppression: these include police and other law enforcement activities, such as the identification, punishment and removal of gang members from a community.

### **Community-Based Strategies**

A First Nations Tribal Council (which consists of four communities) in Manitoba was visited during this research project. The Executive Director of another Tribal Council (consisting of seven communities) located in Manitoba was also interviewed. In addition, a number of RCMP officers also offered their knowledge of First Nations communities and Aboriginal organized gang activity. While some of them had different suggestions about possible interventions, they all agreed (without hesitation) that, as a first step to reducing organized criminal activity, community-based programs had to be implemented, specifically prevention and intervention programs which target school age children and youths.

The profile of one First Nations Tribal Council area with visible gang activity perhaps illustrates how gangs begin to emerge and then become a dominant force, since it appears that there is little effort to counter gang activity, with the exception of police suppression techniques. In this particular community, there were almost 4,000 year-round residents, with a substantial number of the population of school age or younger. There is approximately an 85 percent unemployment rate among the adult residents. It appears that few identifiable monies are placed into community based youth and justice programs that could be used to target gangs and gang members, in the four First Nations communities studied.

### **Prevention-Based Programs**

One of the most frequent suggestions received during the course of this research project from the individuals interviewed was that they would like to see specifically education-based youth programs introduced into First Nations communities. The educational system was consistently mentioned as an appropriate site from which to implement such programs. While a large number of programs have been implemented, researchers have found that it is not easy to introduce successful prevention-based programs; yet recent evaluations of programs have revealed some positive impacts a number of years after these programs have been introduced. According to Virgil and Yun (2002), prevention programs should be introduced when children are eight or nine years of age.

Despite the difficulties in designing and implementing successful preventive-based programs, a number of them have been introduced. One such program was the Montreal Preventive Treatment Program, designed to prevent antisocial behavior among low socio-economic boys aged between seven and nine and who had previously engaged in disruptive behavior during kindergarten. The 'trainers' followed a program emphasizing coaching techniques, peer modeling, self-instruction, reinforcement contingencies and role building. The program was found to be successful in terms of reducing delinquency and less substance abuse as well as less gang involvement when the boys were 15 years old (Tremblay et al., 1996).



Perhaps the most successful preventive program is Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) for both boys and girls. G.R.E.A.T. is a cognitive-behavioral, low-intensity program primarily delivered to 12 to 15 year-olds. Taught by uniformed law enforcement personnel over a 13-week period, the program gives students information about the dangers and problems of gang related involvement. This program included components that include social skills development, refusal skills training and conflict resolution skills. Esbensen et al. (2001) conducted a longitudinal evaluation of G.R.E.A.T. in the United States and reported that the program has long-term effects. While the evaluation found that reductions in gang membership and youth crime were not statistically significant, positive results were found for five outcome measures: reduced victimization, more negative views about gangs, improved attitudes toward the police, more pro-social peers, and less risk seeking.

Another gang prevention program, the Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach Program developed and implemented by the Boys and Girls Club of America, has been found to be effective in reducing gang involvement. In this program, youths identified as 'at-risk' by school teachers, social service agencies, and police and probation personnel participate in a five part program: character and leadership development; education and career development; health and life skills; the arts; and sports, fitness, and recreation programs. Each of these core areas has a number of programs: for example, the area of life skills includes: enhancing communication skills, problem-solving techniques, and decision-making abilities. Evaluations of this program have found reductions in some gang and delinquent activities, more positive adult and peer relationships, higher successes in school and more productive out-of-school activities.

### **Intervention-Based Programs**

Most intervention-based programs are based on the assumption that most children

are invited to join a gang between the ages of nine and twelve, confirming what was told to us during this project. Most gang research has shown that joining a gang is a gradual process, with about two years elapsing between the first invitation to join and full gang membership. As a result, it is recommended that intervention programs first be introduced to youths between the ages of nine to thirteen (Virgil and Yun, 2002). Curry et al. (2002) and Decker and Lauritsen (2002) write that there are four opportunities to intervene successfully with youth gang members. The first is when the youth is socially involved with gang members but is not yet a member. The second occurs when the youth is arrested for the first time, while the third is after the individual's arrest for a property offense but before they commit a violent crime. The final opportunity happens when a youth (whether a gang member or not) experiences a violent event (especially as the victim). The most successful programs in the intervention stage involve parents and/or mentors (G.R.E.A.T. and the Boys and Girls Club of America have such components in their programs).

### **Suppression-Based Programs**

According to Virgil and Yun (2002), suppression efforts should target youths between the ages of thirteen and twenty. Probably the best types of suppression programs for reducing gang behavior are found in community policing initiatives, an integral component of the community justice approach, which will be discussed later.

Another type of suppression program involves gang injunction procedures, whereby selected gang members face arrest unless they refrain from engaging in specified activities such as hanging around schools, carrying pagers, visiting certain locations. This is seen as an effective and innovative mechanism to combat organized street-level type of gang activity as well as to reduce the amount of impact a gang has upon any particular community. Maxson et al. (2005), in their evaluation of civil gang injunctions in five sites in the United States, reported that civil gang injunctions (coupled with police patrols) had a positive impact on gang activities in the areas studied. There was a reduction in gang activity as well as less intimidation of local residents by gang members.

In addition, it was found that residents had a greater willingness to engage with the police in crime control efforts and that community members developed stronger bonds.

One potential suppression strategy on First Nations communities is banishing gang members from the community for a specified period of time. Banishment is a traditional response reflecting a respect for the community and the preservation of core community values. Penalties can be harsh: the maximum punishment can be permanent removal of an individual or family from a community. Banishment can be used as a deterrent against offenders as well as parents and guardians of youths who are involved. A case involving banishment recently occurred in Manitoba in an attempt to control violent activity by gang members on the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, located near The Pas. In this community, as well as the surrounding communities, the RCMP compiled a list of gang members. Responding to complaints about fighting, the RCMP investigated and reported to the Band Council that a number of these incidents involved individuals whose names were on the list of gang members. The Band Council warned the individuals in question to desist from these activities, but they continued to engage in violent behavior. As a result, the Band Council decided to banish the two individuals in question from the community.

### **Community-Based Approaches**

A number of individuals we talked to indicated that they preferred the introduction of culturally sensitive, community-based programs over any other type. Some of these individuals also said that such programs must be community-controlled; indeed, one of these individuals indicated he did not feel the any outside agency (e.g., the RCMP) had any place in such programs. Despite the agreement that the community itself must be the site of a combination of any programs, it is widely agreed that no one single response will be effective in dealing with gangs, whether community-based or not (Spergel and Curry, 1993). The most promising approaches appear to be balanced, coordinated responses that combine suppression style activities with other types of programming, such as intervention and community mobilization (Fearn et al., 2001).

One popular and successful comprehensive and interrelated gang prevention, intervention and suppression model developed to date is the Gang Violence Reduction Program. This program, created by Spergel and Curry (1990, 1993) has been implemented with positive results in a number of sites within the United States (National Youth Gang Center, 2001). One of these programs was implemented in a largely Hispanic low-income and working class area of Chicago. It targeted mainly older (seventeen to twenty-four year old) members of two of the area's most violent gangs: the Latin Kings and the Two Kings. These two gangs account for approximately 70 per cent of serious gang activity in the area. The intervention was designed to target and provide services to gang members involved with the gangs, rather than focusing upon the gangs as groups.

The program integrated two coordinated strategies: (1) graduated sanctions and (2) intensive interventions. Graduated sanctions programs were given to violent or potentially violent youth gang members, and imposed by probation officers and the police. At the same time, a wide range of social services and opportunities were provided for the targeted youth, in order to encourage their transition to legitimate behavior. The program was operated by a coordinated group of police officers, probation officers, community youth workers from the targeted area, and a community organization specifically established to support the project. The community program was composed of concerned community residents including representatives from local religious groups, youth service agencies, the locally-elected city politician's office, and local citizens.

Based on a comprehensive evaluation, the results of this program were positive (Spergel and Grossman, 1997; Spergel et al., 2002). The success of this program was attributed to the coordinated team approach used by the various agencies and groups. According to the Illinois Criminal Justice Association Authority (1999, 4) "the cohesive team approach was probably at the heart of the project's success in reducing gang activity, particularly gang violence." Favourable program outcomes included lower rates of serious gang violence among the targeted gang members. In addition, the coordinated agency and group approach was found to provide more effective among the violent youths, while youth workers themselves were found to be the most effective approach when dealing

with less violent individuals. This program has been implemented a number of times across the United States in recent years, with positive results reported from a number of the sites.

### **Community-based Interventions: Spergel and Curry's Typology of Interventions**

During the late 1980s, University of Chicago social scientists surveyed 254 criminal justice and community agencies as well as schools in 45 American cities (Spergel and Curry, 1990). In their survey, they identified two major types of cities, based on the extent of the gang problem in the area. Chronic gang problem cities (e.g., Los Angeles and Chicago) were described as having gang problems for decades, while those cities defined as 'emerging gang problem cities' (e.g., Las Vegas) have experienced gang activity over a much shorter time span. The distinction they created is important when considering the effectiveness of the various strategies used to deal with gang activity.

In their survey, Spergel and Curry discovered that the type of strategies used in these cities to deal with problems associated with gangs could be grouped into four broad areas, which they referred to as (1) community organization, (2) social intervention, (3) opportunities provision, and (4) suppression or law-enforcement actions. These were the most common type of actions employed to deal with gang activity. According to Spergel and Curry, they represent virtually every known type of method being used currently as well as in the past. They also commented that these four categories are likely to be the dominant types used in the future.

#### **Community Organization**

This approach focuses upon the enhancement, modification or changing of relationships among various groups and organizations within an area (in their study, a city) in order to deal better with various gang-related problems. They found that the respondents to their survey used the term "networking" to refer to this specific strategy. Essentially, such an approach involves cooperation among various community organizations in order take

advantage of their various skills and knowledge and to try to avoid duplication of services. This strategy involves efforts to combine all available resources in order to solve what is a community problem involving all citizens, not just those directly impacted. Spergel and Curry identified such activities as mobilizing the community, building community trust, educating the community, involving the schools, and involving parent groups in community groups.

### Social Intervention

Social intervention is defined as the attempt “to change the values of (gang members) in such a way as to make gang involvement less likely” (Spergel and Curry, 1990: 296). This approach includes some common methods that have been used for many years in an attempt to deal with youths. Traditionally, these efforts included less successful activities such as youth outreach programs and street-level counseling. As a result of the failures of these types of programs, social interventions involving much broader types of programs were introduced. Among the most common types of social interventions identified by the respondents were crisis interventions, programs involving role models for youths, inter-gang mediation efforts, referrals for services, gang member counseling, drug use prevention and assisting members to leave gangs.

### Opportunities Provision

This strategy attempts to provide jobs, job training and education, particularly for the most at-risk youth gang members. Spergel and Curry (1990, 297) described various efforts, including attempts “to stimulate the development of new and improved schools, special training and job programs, and business and industry involvement in the social and economic advancement of people, including and targeting gang youth.” Specific strategies include assisting youth prepare to enter the job market, job training, and assisting youths who are experiencing school-related problems (such as mentoring programs).

## Suppression

The term 'suppression' is used by Spergel and Curry to describe a variety of law enforcement strategies, including the creation of specialized gang units, special prosecution efforts, special legislation targeting gang activities, and the development and implementation of information systems that attempt to keep track of gang members. This strategy also involves civil law actions, such as using the civil law to keep certain people away from certain places on a First Nations community (such as a school), away from certain individuals or groups of individuals (such as school aged children and youths) or from the community altogether.

Spergel and Curry were interested in which of the strategies listed above were most commonly used and which were perceived (as opposed to assessment by empirical means). They found that the effectiveness of a strategy varied according to whether the respondents lived in a chronic or emerging gang city. In emerging gang cities, the perception held by the respondents was that the most effective strategies were the community organization efforts. Ranked second in effectiveness was that of opportunities provision, with social intervention and suppression ranked third and fourth, respectively. From a statistical viewpoint, only the community organization strategy was found to be statistically significant.

In comparison, the perception of most effective methods found in chronic gang cities were within the opportunities provision, with community organization ranked second. Suppression activities were ranked third and social interventions were ranked last. From a statistical standpoint, only the opportunities provision was found to be statistically significant.

What became clear to Spergel and Curry was that if communities rely only on suppression efforts, the gang problem will not be reduced to any significant degree, regardless of whether the area is a chronic or emerging gang city. Organizing

communities and providing opportunities for at-risk youths appears to be one of the most promising strategies.

### **Components of Successful Community Strategies/Programs**

Research in the area of community involvement has covered such a wide area of programs dealing with gang activities and gang members that researchers are now able to assess, with some degree of accuracy, what makes a program successful. In addition, researchers have explored whether or not successful programs have certain components that set them apart from those programs that aren't successful.

Successful prevention programs have several key components, all of which have been identified by numerous researchers (e.g., Huff, 1990). These include:

1. A need for communities to face up to a gang problem.
2. Problems should target medium- to high-risk individuals with intensive, multifaceted approaches focusing upon the development of social skills (e.g., conflict resolution) and addressing the values, beliefs, and attitudes that reinforce antisocial behaviors.
3. Alternatives to gang activities have to be offered, such as recreational programs and after school programs.
4. Programs should be held within the community itself, with a special focus on families and schools, thereby allowing youths to 'bond' with these institutions.
5. The staff of any program should be well-trained, skilled individuals.
6. Some programs should be linked to developing job skills.
7. The goals of any program instituted should be specific and culminate in some type of award (such as a certificate of participation).
8. Directors and leaders must realize that relapse is inevitable, and that working with youths involved with gangs is a process, and not a series of isolated episodes.



## **Restorative and Community Justice**

During the research for this project, particularly in the area of policy responses, a number of individuals talked about the need for restorative and community justice programs. These individuals included police officers as well as community leaders and members. The terms ‘restorative’ and ‘community’ justice, as seen by these individuals, were used as distinctive or separate categories that should be introduced and permanently established within First Nations communities to deal with Aboriginal organized criminal activities.

Both justice programs share the element of community participation and empowerment. The underlying idea is that communities are strengthened when community residents have more chances to interact among themselves, create personal relationships, and exercise informal social control.

### **Restorative Justice**

To state it briefly, restorative justice is all about relationships — how relationships are harmed by crime and how they can be rebuilt to promote recovery and healing for people affected by crime (Pranis 1998). A key idea of restorative justice is the notion of process rather than of outcomes. The victim, offender and community are equally important in face-to-face meetings and all must agree on offender’s responsibilities. Outcomes are usually similar to those ordered by criminal justice agencies, such as community service, restitution, apologies and the like. According to Marshall (1996, 37), restorative justice can best be defined as a process in which all the parties with a stake in an offense come together to resolve collectively how to deal with its aftermath and implications for the future.

Core restorative justice ideals imply that governments should give their monopoly over responses to crime to those who are directly affected by it, specifically the victim, the

offender, and the community. The goal is to restore the offender, the victim and the community and to rebuild the broken relationships in a process that allows all three groups to participate. Restorative justice is based on a set of values promoting the healing, repairing of harm, caring, and the rebuilding of relationships among the victim(s), the offender(s) and the community. It is important to note that these types of programs encourage equal roles to the victim(s), the offender(s) and community residents. Most restorative justice initiatives are community focused and involve community participation. It should be noted that the RCMP policy of community justice forums is a particular type of restorative justice program (family group conferences is another type of restorative justice program), allowing local detachments and individual RCMP officers to develop trust and meaningful relationships between themselves and the community.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice first evolved from a concern for victims to its current concern with crime as a rupture in relationships. It attempts to restore victims and communities, heal relationships, and build communities. Practices of restorative justice include face-to-face meetings of individuals (e.g., offenders and victims and their supporters) in community justice forums, as well as community development. Restorative justice programs aim to alter existing social relationships that can lead to crime. A key component of restorative justice has been its use of volunteers. Community members play key roles in the restorative justice process, and it is believed that their involvement strengthens both the community as well as the commitment by participants to the final outcome.

Restorative justice is based on personal discussions, communication and consensus. Victims, offenders, and the community meet to find restorative programs to a crime, to express their opinions and feelings, and to decide on the appropriate consequences. The process of arriving at the consequence is more important than the consequence itself, since it is often the same as the ones used by the criminal justice system, such as restitution, community service, letters of apology and counseling programs.

If cases are sent to a restorative justice-based program, the offender must admit responsibility, and the victims, offenders and other participants have to agree to participate in the program. In addition, any outcomes have to be agreed upon by all the relevant parties. Evaluations of such programs have consistently reported high levels of satisfaction, agreement and completion: rates of 75 per cent or more among the participants are not unusual.

There are numerous reasons why a shift to restorative justice programs can assist in the prevention of gang activity. First, these programs are considered to be a better and more consistent way to approach crime and criminals as opposed to approaching this problem on a reactive/incident based type of response. Second, well-designed and situated programs are likely to have lasting effects upon all the participants involved as well as within the host community. Third, many offenders prefer to enter into the traditional criminal justice system where they do not have to participate, can say nothing and serve the penalty without thinking about the impact of their actions. Restorative justice makes them face their victim(s), consider the consequences of their actions, and answer to numerous community residents who are trying to understand why they committed the offence in the first place. Fourth, restorative justice empowers both individual citizens and the community, allowing them to achieve a sense of ownership and control of the problems facing them. Fifth, those individuals who committed the offence in question remain in the community, where their actions can be evaluated by those who were involved in the process. Sixth, it allows a stronger working relationship to develop between the RCMP detachment and the local community, hopefully leading to the development of a greater amount of trust.

### **Restorative Justice Practices**

Studies of restorative justice programs have tended to focus on the issues of completion rates and satisfaction levels, that is, how often agreements are reached and completed and whether or not the participants are satisfied with the process, the agreement and each other's behavior. Other issues, such as whether or not the rates of recidivism and/or fear

of crime actually decline, are occasionally discussed. Two major types of restorative justice programs—community justice forums and sentencing circles—are considered to be highly relevant to the prevention of gang—related crime in First Nations communities. These are briefly summarized below. However, both of these programs do not focus specifically upon gang-related activity. It is hoped that through the creation and development of both of these programs there will be more community involvement, leading to a reduction in overall criminal and disorderly acts, including those involving gang members.

Both programs can easily be implemented by the RCMP and other police services. In fact, the use of one such program (community justice forums) is already a policy of the RCMP and other police services across Canada. Such programs could become standard mechanisms leading to crime prevention-based measures for dealing with the gang situation in local communities. In addition, the utilization of these programs potentially assures that members of police services can be involved as willing participants, thereby able to discuss gang-related issues on a regular basis with community members. These types of restorative justice programs should be considered as possible preventive measures in reducing gang activities within First Nations communities.

### Community Justice Forums

The strength of community justice forums as preventive measures is twofold. First, forums involve a large number of family members as well as members of the community taking collective responsibility over offenders and ensuring that the offenders complete their agreement. As such, community justice forums may be effective in creating positive community involvement, rebuilding relationships between community members as well building trust between them and the RCMP, and hopefully preventing gang-related activities. Second, it allows for the development of trust between the community and local police services, as this approach generally involves official criminal justice agencies to organize and facilitate the forums.

There are at least three benefits to introducing community justice forums in a community. First, they are presented as a chance for the victims, offenders and community members to become empowered and subsequently deal with broken relationships (Maxwell and Morris, 1993). When people establish personal connections in these forums they are less likely to disappoint or harm someone. Offenders are less likely to break the victim's and the community's trust by violating their agreement.

Second, members of the community can become involved by being trained and used as coordinators within community justice forums. This allows the members of communities themselves to make decisions about whether or not certain individuals should be allowed to participate. One benefit of this approach is that they have to become knowledgeable about the certain facets of the criminal justice system, and to take at least some responsibility for the quality of life within the community.

Third, community justice forums allow for the offenders, victims and communities to participate in 'Aboriginal friendly' terms, meaning that they begin to interact with the local police personnel on a constant basis. One benefit of this is the building of trust between the community and the police, as well as giving the members of the community a certain degree of independent decision-making power.

### Sentencing Circles

Sentencing circles have a long history in the prairie provinces (Green, 1997). In fact, much of the case law concerning the operation of sentencing circles has been the result of issues related to sentencing circle cases in Saskatchewan. All three prairie provinces allow a variety of different types of sentencing circles by establishing sentencing protocols between Aboriginal communities and the provincial governments. The most recognized is Hollow Water, located in Manitoba (Green, 1997). In its first decade, 107 offenders, charged with crimes from breaking and entering to second-degree murder, completed the Hollow Water program. Only two of these individuals who participated in

the Hollow Water program re-offended, less than a 2 per cent recidivism rate compared to a recidivism rate of up to 36 per cent for similar offences outside of the community (Blackwell, 2003).

Sentencing circles are started after an agreement (or protocol) is negotiated and signed between the provincial government and a First Nations community. Not all First Nations communities have or want such a process, but the benefits to First Nations peoples are numerous. In essence, they are a major mechanism allowing for the empowerment and development of communities. Similar to community justice forums, sentencing circles allow for community involvement in certain types of crimes, allowing the members to deal directly with the offenders. In addition, this process empowers the community residents, giving them a certain degree of decision-making powers with the police, while the members of other criminal justice agencies are still able to participate.

### **Community Justice**

One theme was current throughout our research as we talked to community members: community justice was seen as the significant mechanism for dealing with gang members and gang-related activities in the Aboriginal communities we visited. A consistent theme that emerged was the belief that gangs were a community responsibility, and that culturally appropriate techniques were needed to remove people from gangs and to keep people within the community (as opposed to sending them to provincial and federal correctional facilities located in Southern Manitoba).

During our visit to the Island Lake Tribal Council area, one member of the community spoke publicly to all members present at the annual Tribal Council meeting. Four statements made by this individual perhaps best summarize many of the feelings and thoughts held by other individuals we interviewed; (1) that gang members should be dealt with by tradition-based community justice systems, (2) that the members of communities need to make their own decisions concerning the best ways to proceed with this issue within their own community, (3) that the work has to involve culturally sensitive tactics

and strategies, and (4) that the community already has individuals with the skills and training to deal with the dimensions of this particular issue. These thoughts were reaffirmed by members of the RCMP who had many years of first-hand experience working among the Aboriginal peoples and First Nation communities in Northern Manitoba.

Community justice is based on the idea that crime is a social problem attacking and corroding the quality of life in communities. When put into practice, community justice programs redefine the role and operation of criminal justice agencies. Rather than simply focusing on punishing, deterring, or rehabilitating individual offenders, all local as well as outside criminal justice agencies should broaden their goals to include the prevention of crime and solving community conflicts. To facilitate a community-based style of justice, operations should be conducted within local communities. In addition, citizen involvement, in the form of community consultative groups with the police and other criminal justice agencies, should be encouraged and semi-autonomous community Aboriginal-based programs should be developed. Local residents should be entrusted to deal with local issues.

Some confusion may exist as to the exact differences and similarities between restorative and community justice approaches. This confusion largely arises because both share certain elements, most notably community participation and empowerment. While certain areas of overlap do exist, there are important differences, however, separating the two areas: as we noted above restorative justice evolved from a focus on the victim while community justice is based on the idea that crime is a social problem undermining the quality of life in communities. As such, community justice redefines the role and operations of criminal justice agencies. Rather than focusing purely upon victims, community justice supports the idea that the traditional criminal justice agencies (e.g., the police) should broaden their mission to include preventing criminal activity and solving neighborhood conflicts. As well, any formal criminal justice agency operations should involve local communities and encourage citizen involvement. The assumption is that

collective participation in crime prevention and community activities reduce crime and disorder directly, and increased social interaction and control do so indirectly.

While the core elements of community justice differ from those of restorative justice, both share the commitment to community empowerment and participation. Both hold the idea that communities are strengthened when people have more chances to interact, create personalized relationships, and exercise informal social control. Restorative justice programs should include programs that are community focused and based upon citizen involvement, while community justice programs need to include restorative justice elements (i.e., victims, offenders and communities).

### **Theoretical Foundations of Community Justice**

Community justice approaches share a fundamental premise: crime is viewed not only as an incident, offender or case that needs to be processed but also as a social problem that affects life within the community. Instead of focusing upon suppression by law enforcement personnel, criminal agencies should find ways to develop and implement crime prevention – whether this involves building communities through citizen involvement and/or actions or through the provision of family, school, or neighborhood-based skills programs or services, activities that become an essential component of the activities of the various categories of the criminal justice system.

#### **Community Empowerment**

The goal of community empowerment is to improve relations within communities and to increase public trust and satisfaction with criminal justice agencies. The most common rationale given for community justice is community empowerment and participation. It is believed that by organizing communities into participating, collective crime prevention entities, crime, disorder and fear are reduced. Community empowerment is also believed to reduce crime, disorder and fear by increasing social interaction, which leads to stronger social solidarity, which in turn leads to more informal social control within the



community. In order to achieve community empowerment, criminal justice agencies work together with residents and community groups in solving crime-related problems.

Many believe creating positive, caring relationships and strengthening families are the best mechanisms to build communities and prevent crime – and criminal justice agencies should find avenues to do this. The goal “is to engage as many citizens as possible in building a better community” since “people who share a strong sense of community are far less likely to violate the trust of others.”

Community empowerment suggests that criminal justice agencies should change the way they interact with the public, learn to listen to ordinary citizens and work together with local people to prevent crime and solve crime-related problems. Ideally, the role of local community residents should include involvement in problem-solving and decision-making processes, such as deciding upon priorities for local crime prevention strategies.

### Broken Windows

The idea of ‘broken windows’ is an important foundation of community justice. This approach assumes that minor disorders, if left untouched, will increase the fear of crime, decrease informal social control, and increase crime. Social incivilities (e.g., public drunkenness, loitering individuals, panhandlers) and physical incivilities (e.g., vacant buildings, litter, abandoned vehicles, graffiti) contribute to the deterioration of communities. As a result, programs have been developed which target nuisance or quality-of-life programs. Supporters of the broken windows approach believe that high levels of disorder and incivilities are associated with high levels of criminal activity. Such a belief has become a central premise of those working within the area of community-based programs such as community policing.

## Problem Solving

This component of community justice was first proposed by Herman Goldstein to assist the police in 1979. His focus was upon a situational approach aimed at either reducing opportunities for crime or increasing the risks of apprehension. Examples of problem solving are many, including identifying patterns of offending, patrolling certain places at certain times, organizing neighborhood crime prevention programs such as block watches, and enforcing violations of the civil law. However, a problem developed with this approach; namely that symptoms were frequently, but erroneously, defined as causes.

Community justice, however, has attempted to overcome this difficulty by assigning a broader meaning to problem solving. This has led to two notable developments in the area of problem solving. First, it led to a cooperative effort (sometimes referred to as a 'partnership' approach) to develop a close working relationship between criminal justice agencies and other governmental agencies as well as local communities. The partnership approach recognizes that the criminal justice system, by itself, cannot handle all the issues and conditions associated with illegal activities. Second, it assumes that incidents are symptomatic of more general problems and programs need to be developed to address those problems that underlie criminal activities.

## Catchment Area

A catchment area in community justice refers to the idea that criminal justice agencies have to be administered at the local level. "Community control" of any particular program refers to programs being administered and operated by community members instead of by professional caretakers working within the context of state agencies. By operating catchment areas, community justice initiatives have accomplished three goals: (a) moved programs into the community instead of removing the offenders into the provincial jurisdiction level of operations; (2) created significant flexible and individualized programs relevant to community members; and (3) allowed community

members to ‘control’ (through protocols with local governments) and develop various aspects of the programs deemed more relevant to the needs of the community.

## **Community Justice Practices**

### **Community Policing**

Perhaps the most common practice of community justice found throughout North America is community policing, since it has been introduced within most police services. Community policing approaches offer more progressive and effective intervention and suppression tactics and strategies. Community policing has been called “the only viable way to confront the gang problem” (Trojanowicz et al. 2002, 246). Community policing can produce positive effects in neighborhoods where gangs exist, by creating disincentives for individual gang members to engage in those actions that will lead to possible criminal prosecution. This approach also has the benefit of being able to involve coordinated multi-agency approaches that feature prevention, intervention, and suppression of gang activity and members at the same time. The police can take a front line approach in terms of suppressing the most violent and/or most criminal of gang members while, at the same time, being an influential member of coordinating committees involving other criminal justice agencies and community groups focusing on other important issues in the control of gangs: creating and sustaining intervention programs for ‘non-core’ gang members as well as prevention programs designed to deter youths from joining gangs in the first place.

One example of how community policing can be used in a progressive manner to deal with gangs is found in Columbus, Ohio. Two researchers developed this approach— one (C. Ron Huff) was a gang researcher involved in the development of this approach while the other (K. Schaefer) was the commander of the Strategic Response Bureau of the Columbus Division of Police. Huff and Schaefer (2002) developed a three-pronged police approach in Columbus. First, the police have to enlist community support. They must

“reach out” to engage community groups and representatives in a discussion and analysis of the gang problem. Second, the police must not focus upon individual gangs, gang members and criminal activity, but rather on the community context. According to Huff and Schaefer (2002, 141), “(s)hifting the focus to neighborhoods expands the scope of police actions to include the disorder, fear and declining quality of life that often result from (and help sustain) the presence of gangs.” Third, the police must recognize the importance of tactics and strategies other than what the police themselves can provide. Huff and Schaefer state that the “police must begin to see themselves as *part* of the solution rather than *the solution*.”

In order to implement this program, the Columbus Police created the Strategic Response Bureau in which community liaison officers are teamed with investigators and enforcement personnel. These individuals work with the community groups to identify and assess problems. Information is then passed on to investigators and street-crime personnel. The Strategic Response Bureau is assigned to geographic areas, permitting teams to collaborate on community-specific problems. The teams place strong emphasis upon accurate, timely intelligence about gang activity and on targeting habitual gang offenders. Huff and Schaefer report that the Strategic Response Bureau was successful in targeting violent street gangs that were responsible for a large number of gang-related homicides and other types of violent crimes.

Another example of community policing being used to develop an intervention program against gangs occurred in Reno, Nevada (Trojanowicz et al., 2002). Faced with an expanding gang problem, the Reno Police Department established a Community Action Team. The first thing the Community Action Team did was to gather intelligence about the gangs as well as their members. In addition, members of the team also visited correctional facilities in the area to gather more information about gangs from incarcerated gang members. Once information was collected, it was entered into a gang information database.

From there, the members of the Community Action Team attempted to identify two types of gang members: (a) the most violent and (b) those most involved in criminal activities. They found that most of the gang-related crime was committed by 10 to 15 per cent of the city's gang members. From here, the police decided to approach the issue on two fronts. First, a Violent Crime Task Force was formed to target those individuals who were identified as being involved in the greatest number of criminal activities. Second, they created a community awareness program including a brochure giving information about gangs. When police officers encountered gang members, they would speak with their parents and give them a copy of the brochure. Another initiative in the community awareness program involved the creation of neighborhood advisory boards to provide feedback to the police about any gang-related problems. The result of these activities was that the police received high levels of public support for their efforts.

The Community Action Team also started an intervention program. The officers operated a bicycle repair shop that employed neophyte gang members to repair bicycles to get them out of gangs. Once the bicycles were operational, they were given to needy children. As a result, some of these individuals were offered jobs from local businesses.

The members of the Community Action Team also created a program called the Gang Alternative Partnership. This program was created to coordinate the efforts of the various public and private agencies involved in some way with the issues of gangs. This partnership became a coordinating agency in the sense that it became the single source of information to the community and, as a result, started to coordinate the prevention and intervention strategies of the participating agencies.

One of the strengths of community policing initiatives in the area of gangs has been their ability to “develop comprehensive programs that cut across a variety of fronts” (Trojanowicz et al. 2002, 246). The idea of coordinating a number of agencies to prevent, intervene, and/or suppress gangs has proved to be popular in community policing. The Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team (TARGET) program in Orange County, California, represents one such approach. It was originally developed to focus on current

gang members, as well as the whole gang, with suppression actions. TARGET consists of teams of police gang investigators, probation officers, a deputy district attorney and a district attorney investigator (Capizzi et al., 1995). Its goal was to reduce gang-related criminal activity through three strategies: (1) selective incapacitation of the most violent and repeat older gang members in the most violent gangs; (2) enforcement of probation controls (graduated sanctions and intensive supervision) on younger, less violent gang offenders, and (3) arrests of gang leaders in areas identified as “hot spots” of gang activity. An evaluation of the TARGET program shows it has been successful in producing a sharp increase in the incarceration of gang members, and a 47 per cent decrease in gang activity over a seven-year period. It has also reduced the overall gang crime in a targeted “hot spot” to near zero (Kent et al., 2000).

The RCMP’s community policing service delivery model (CAPRA) gives a wide array of tactics and strategies needed to better represent and serve the needs and interests of citizens within a designated community. It must be recognized that community empowerment, citizen participation, and community partnerships are necessary policies if the RCMP are to develop long-term, successful gang reduction programs.

### **Community-Based Justice Programs**

Community-based justice programs have the potential to take control of and successfully deal with community problems. Many of these programs reported to date focus on their structures, processes and accountability. From an Aboriginal perspective, judging the success or failure of community-justice programs within First Nations communities is not solely achieved by using recidivism rates. While they are important, recidivism rates by themselves only tell us one side of the story: that someone has been caught by the authorities, not that they were progressing toward a healthy lifestyle (Proulx, 2003). Instead, community justice programs also look at the qualitative context of the offender. According to Proulx (2003, 33) “healing takes a long time with many relapses before it is complete.”

The impact of such programs was illustrated during this project at one First Nations community. In this community, one individual related that both he and another individual were instrumental in forming a youth group called 'peacekeepers.' Working with the assistance of the Band Constables, youths received identifying clothes (i.e., T-shirts). Over just a short period of time, a large number of youths had apparently volunteered and had become enthusiastic participants. Some of these volunteers were affiliated (although not core members) in some way with gangs. Charged with keeping the peace in the community, the members reportedly took their activities seriously. On numerous occasions the members of the 'peacekeepers' confronted gang members at parties in private residences and at social gatherings in the community, ending their activities before any altercation occurred between individuals, and breaking up social activities where illegal substances were being used. Despite the success of this group, it was disbanded after a few months, apparently as a result of the lack of support from community leaders. This anecdotal information indicates that there can be considerable support among community members for dealing with issues that are facing the community, including the control of gang members and gang-related activities. Throughout the criminological literature, there are numerous reports of community-based projects starting and having significant positive impacts on the local communities.

Roche (2002) reports on the Community Peace Program in South Africa. These programs involve a peacemaking process and peace building. In the peacemaking process, the members of a peace committee assist community members resolve their conflicts, while the peace-building process focuses upon the reasons underlying the conflicts (e.g., poverty, substance abuse) in these communities.

Peace committees practise what is known as 'informal' justice in the sense that they are removed from any formal connections with the existing agencies of the formal criminal justice system. As a result, these committees receive very few of their referrals from the formal criminal justice system. Most of their referrals come from community members themselves who request the services of the peacemaker committees in an

attempt to resolve conflicts, most of which involve individuals seeking repayment of an outstanding debt, but serious crimes (such as attempted rape and domestic violence) are also heard.

One benefit of the peace committees is the speed at which they can hear cases: most of them are held within five days of the offence and/or complaint. Other signs of peace committees' potential ability to assist communities include widespread community support. Roche (2002, 518) states that these committees have "successfully involved local communities." According to Shearing (in Roche, 2002, 521), a broad cross-section of community residents become involved with the process: 58 per cent of the participants are women and 12 per cent are youths, while 65 per cent of the facilitators are women. Still another benefit of peace committees is that the majority of any monies (e.g., fines) collected as part of the final decision, is used within the community. Roche (2002, 525) reports that 30 per cent of the monies is used for community projects (e.g., building and maintaining playgrounds) while another 30 per cent is used to fund micro-enterprises within the community.

## **Conclusion**

Gangs are prevalent in urban and rural Aboriginal communities. Policy makers have to be aware of differing structures of gangs to ensure that they will be able to deal with the full extent of such groups.

Community-specific strategies for dealing with gangs and gang members should be based on detailed assessments of local gang problems. This assessment should be a part of each community's larger assessment of its crime problem wherever gangs exist. This could be achieved by the RCMP working with the community — through the proper implementation of their community policing model (CAPRA) — where they have the responsibility for policing Aboriginal communities. The positive results of such an approach have already been documented (Bangs, 1996).



For optimal effectiveness, a community needs a continuum of prevention, intervention and suppression programs that are culturally specific and parallel the developmental stages from childhood through adolescence. Programs and services need to be designed to help prevent the onset of problems that can possibly lead to gang involvement. Juvenile justice programs in the community are also needed, especially for those individuals who are considered at risk and marginally involved with gangs.

Many effective and promising prevention, intervention, and suppression programs and strategies are available as possible options that communities should consider in selecting the gang interventions they wish to implement. Communities should avoid the prosecution and incarceration of youth gang members whenever possible, since this response carries with it the unintended consequence of possibly increasing local gang problems through the return of gang members upon their release from incarceration.

Multiple interventions, when linked together on a continuum, hold much more promise than piecemeal approaches. Such an approach enables communities to address multiple risk factors for gang membership and to intervene at different points in an individual's development. A combination of prevention, intervention, and suppression programs can successfully address gang members and control gangs as a whole.

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