

Waterloo Region Street Gang Prevention Project

Project Summary

In September 2009, the collaborative Street Gang Prevention Project received \$3.8 million from the Government of Canada's National Crime Prevention Strategy.

The current project partners include:

- John Howard Society of Waterloo Wellington
- Lutherwood
- Reaching Our Outdoor Friends (ROOF)
- St. Mary's Counselling
- Waterloo Regional Police Service
- Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council



Together, these organizations also form the *Project Advisory Committee*.

This project aims to decrease gang activity in the Waterloo Region by addressing the conditions that give rise to gang involvement and related crimes in our community. The project will provide support for 60 youth per year (and their families) between the ages of 13 and 24, who are gang-involved or at risk of gang involvement. There will also be a community education component that aims to reach 750 community members annually, many via current neighbourhood organizations and networks.

The overall goals of the project are:

- To assist youth in effectively exiting gangs
- To identify and assist youth at highest risk of entering gangs

The project is comprised of three phases that will take place over 3.5 years.

Phase 1: Community Needs Assessment

This phase will clearly determine how many youth in the Waterloo Region are gang-involved or are at risk of joining a gang as well as where most of the gang activity is located. Five priority neighbourhoods will be engaged in gang prevention efforts. An integrated and coordinated action plan for the Waterloo Region will be developed using the results of the needs assessment.

An evaluation framework will monitor the progress of the project throughout its duration and contribute the knowledge mobilization efforts of the National Crime Prevention Centre.

Phase 2: Community Treatment

A range of interventions to support youth and their families will be developed and implemented by the project partners who will form a community treatment team. Social, educational, therapeutic and addiction focused interventions will be provided to participating youth through a multi disciplinary team approach. These activities will also include opportunities for employment and meaningful community engagement. Youth currently involved in gangs will be assisted with an exit strategy including life skills and employment training.

All activities and services will utilize a “wraparound” approach because the complexity of the issues facing youth who are gang involved or youth at risk is beyond the capacity of any one system alone. Youth who enter the program will be well connected to formal and informal services that will support the youth in staying apart from gang culture(s). This tailored service approach, coupled with the relationship between the Case Managers/Clinician and the youth, are anticipated to be the strongest motivators for youth to remain in the program.

Youth will also be recruited and trained, on an annual basis, as mentors/leaders to work with other youth and to assist in the delivery of the project.

Phase 3: Community Mobilization

Project staff will work with the five priority neighbourhoods in order to boost youth resiliency to street gang involvement with a focus on opportunities such as recreation and mentorship. Each of the five neighbourhoods will have a part time staff to build new and build on existing relationships between residents and formal and grass roots services. Staff will work with community residents in raising awareness about gangs and gang crime prevention with the goals of increasing the capacity to help youth resist gang involvement in priority locations across the region.

The communities and services in Waterloo region have a long and rich history of collaboration and innovation. Project partners are excited about taking on the task of preventing youth gang crime before it happens and being part of building the knowledge base of what works, what doesn't and what is promising in crime prevention.

The significant financial contribution from Public Safety Canada will go a long way towards reducing crime, victimization and fear of crime. For overall project questions or to connect with project partners, please feel free to contact the office of the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council at www.preventingcrime.ca.

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